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Graphic Description of Hun Attack on Douaumont Fort

French Guns Mow Down Germans as They Advance in Solid Form.—Singing, Groaning and Explosions, All Mixed Together, Produced a Noise Truly Infernal.—Germans Find Themselves in a Trap Like Rats, at the Mercy of the French Guns.

PARIS, March 1.—An officer stationed in an artillery observation post near Douaumont gives the following account of the German assault on that position:

"Our post dominated a deep ravine which the Germans had already tried unsuccessfully to cross. Lost in the depths of the gully, their infantry could neither debouch from either end nor mount to the assault of the crests. Toward the end of the night their artillery received orders to trench our positions with shells so they could be taken. The whole region was the object of a frightful bombardment, while the summit which barred their route was the particular target of their gunners.

"Unceasingly their shells, of all calibres, fell in front of our position and burst with a terrific roar. The air was filled with hundreds of projectiles, crossing each other in all directions, and their whistling and singing and groaning and explosions, all mixed together, produced a noise truly infernal.

Calm as Though in Theatre.

"From time to time an aerial torpedo passed with the noise of an enormous automobile at full speed. All of these engines of destruction were concentrated on a space of less than ten kilometres. Their explosions came from all sides in the midst of clouds of smoke, earth and pulverized stone that ended by covering the earth as with a thick fog. Nevertheless, in the midst of this hell we saw below us a French soldier standing entry in a hastily-erected shelter and as calm as though he was in a theatre. Sometimes he was half covered with earth, thrown over him by an exploding shell. Sometimes he disappeared completely in a cloud of smoke when a shell exploded very close. When he reappeared he was as tranquil as though nothing had happened, holding his glasses to his eyes and telephone in hand. These politics have solid nerves. Suddenly an enormous explosion made the earth fly around our position. A huge shell dug a fantastic crater in front of us. Our telephone wire was broken, cutting our communication with all our batteries. A soldier crawled out on his stomach to repair the break.

Death Had No Terror for Him.

"He advanced slowly in the midst of exploding torpedoes and shells. It seemed impossible that he could escape death. All the world believed that the German artillery was making a grand effort before the final assault. The mitrailleuses were unchained on all sides. The German expenditure of ammunition passed all imagination. Never has there been such a bombardment since the beginning of hostilities. Our soldier going to repair the wire was enveloped on all sides by explosions. He sheltered himself as best he could in craters made by shells. At last he gained the point where the wire was broken and repaired it, then sheltered himself in a trench dug by a mitrailleuse and waited for the storm to pass. Little by little the German fire relaxed. It was the supreme moment. Smoke, white dust made by earth and snow pulverized by shells, slowly dissipated.

An Awful Spectacle.

"Before our eyes was a frightful spectacle. A little distance in front of us there had been some supporting trenches. Nothing remained of them. They had been absolutely levelled. Here and there rose vestiges of a parapet, while as to barbed wire entanglements, it was impossible to discover a trace of them. All had been cut down or disappeared under the earth of exploding shells thrown on them. The earth was as flat as though there had never been such a thing as a cannonade. One could believe himself on ground freshly ploughed and harrowed ready for planting crops. Down in the ravine some black masses began to move over the white mantle of snow which was there undisturbed. They were German infantry advancing in close ranks to debouch from the ends of the trough, while others sought to gain the crests by direct assault.

Vision Becomes Infernal.

"It is our moment to act. Word went through the telephone to our batteries and the dance commenced.

The vision becomes infernal. Down the crests between the two crests, and on their slopes several regiments spread out, but the gaps between them were constantly filled by the arrival of fresh elements. We could hear a long whistle over our heads. It is our pilot shell. It falls fairly in the midst of the German soldiers. We telephone that the range is good. Then it is a deluge of shells which burst in the enemy's ranks. The position of the Germans is critical. With our glasses we can see some of them flying, while others, covered with earth and blood, seek to shelter themselves behind the wall of death.

First Wave Wiped Out.

"The first wave was wiped out. There were piles of bodies on all sides. But already a new wave appears, which tries to make head against the rain of steel. It cannot advance. It gives ground.

"Our fire is rectified and our projectiles begin again to cut wide lanes through the German ranks. The region is enveloped in a thunder of hursting shells with which is mixed the sharp note of the mitrailleuse firing from the crest, which the Germans seek to capture.

"Another German wave forms, which is more formidable and more furious. The Germans swarm like rats and come on despite our shells. Our hearts stand still. Will they succeed? No.

Heavy Artillery Speaks.

"At this moment our heavy artillery, which has not yet been in action, begins to fire in a manner truly terrifying. Huge shells in exploding throw great jets of flame on all sides. The ravine has become a veritable volcano. One cannot tell whether it is stones or men thrown into the air. Pieces of bodies now obstruct the gully and form a barricade before the Germans, who give way and seek to retreat.

"Their attack, extraordinary as it was in violence and numbers, has failed after terrible losses and our guns, little by little, lift their fire to the German batteries in the rear, which have been powerless to silence ours."

"Will Never Take Verdun."

A soldier who had been invalided home in the early days of the battle describes the passage of the German through the Village of Malancourt. As he spoke his voice carried the ring of absolute confidence.

"They will never take Verdun," he said. "Well sheltered, I watched the arrival of the boches at my village. They came in solid ranks, without word, loading and reloading their rifles without cessation. Our seventy-fives fell among them and then the mitrailleuses entered into action. I was no longer a battalion. It was a few staggered groups of men that one saw torn by a rain of shells and bullets, squeezing close against each other as though for mutual protection.

"On the border of Montfaucou, I saw one of these groups disappear at one blow as though they had been swallowed in a marsh. Our shells? What frightful work they did. Never will I forget those fragments of human beings that fell at my feet. Never can I forget that terrible picture."

Wavered, Halted, Disappeared.

"I followed the boche attack on Haumont and Semoigneux. The field of battle was lighted as though in full day by star shells. Black masses of Germans advanced, protected by their artillery, while ours remained silent. I imagined our men had been ordered to fall back. But finally our artillery began, and then the enemy ranks wavered, halted and disappeared. Our guns had waited until the Germans were in a little hollow all arranged for the massacre. What a butchery the Crown Prince had organized. In a little hollow, five hundred yards by fifty, there were the bodies of some two or three thousand German soldiers who will never see their Deutschland again.

"No, the Germans will never have our Verdun. They will break their teeth there. Some houses will be destroyed. That will end the fine affair. We, who know how to give our sons,

shall we weep for a few fallen walls? No. The thing for us to do is to make the beast pay dear for these wanton destructions."

Bombardment of Verdun City.

Another refugee brought to Paris the first story of the bombardment of the City of Verdun. Once before the Germans shelled the city, just to show they could, and for months they have been able to do so with the guns that had been brought up by the Crown Prince's army.

"Yes," he said, when questioned, "I come from Verdun. Everything left of my property I have in my bag." He smiled a little. "But that doesn't matter. The great thing is that though the Germans may shell the city they can never take it."

"The bombardment was a surprise for us in Verdun. We were so confident because those who had left the city at the time of the first bombardment had come back and business took its normal course. So we felt veritable astonishment when the first shells fell. "Sunday was quiet again, but Monday we had to accept that it was a serious affair. Do not imagine, however, that the streets were deserted. There were some men, chiefly old ones, who were desperately attached to the roofs, which had sheltered them all their lives. They were always full of indomitable hope. They remained as deaf to the official commands as to the prayers of friends.

"Weary, and held by the memory of the past, I decided to remain and went to the citadel, hoping to be told that all soon would be finished. The cannon began again, however, and ours replied with redoubled activity. All Monday night and Tuesday the bombardment continued.

"The military authorities worked ceaselessly that there should be food and shelter for all. Women and children were first thought of. There was no more of caste: no rich, no poor, no distinction of age, even women of aristocracy carried the modest packages of the very poor in arms already charged with babies. It was a veritable levelling of all. What a school war is. Wednesday night by little groups, we left what had been Verdun."

Pinch Will Soon Come.

The question of the number of men engaged is a very uncertain one. The favorite basis of calculation for men is the Prussian lists of losses. But it is easy to calculate from them that Germany was beaten several months ago, yet she seems to have a considerable army still in the field. I believe that Germany still has all the men she needs for her daily operations, but I doubt very much if she has the men to extend her lines very far. Furthermore, I believe, that a little more of such work as she has been doing for the last month will make her begin to feel a pinch in men on the western front. In January, 1916, Germany tried six big attacks on the western front. Every one of them failed. In only one did she have even a slight success. Besides the big attacks there have been many minor attacks. Like the big attacks, the small ones have failed. Each of these attacks has cost men, and in the aggregate the German losses have been very large.

At this stage of the war Germany cannot stand continued losses in unsuccessful attacks. But more important is the effect on the morale of the opposing armies. German morale will suffer and the allied morale will gain, and that is equivalent to a large added loss in men for Germany and a relatively greater gain for the allies.

All in Favor of Allies.

The seven months for July, 1915, to February, 1916, wrought a great change on the western front, and it was a change all in favor of the allies," a military official pointed out to me to-day. "It was such a change that I am almost beginning to take stock in the theory that Germany is commencing to find her resources failing, and that the attack on Verdun is her last great stand, failing in which means that she is beaten, if not subdued.

"We began to hear that theory that German resources were failing put forward in the first weeks of the war. When the great recovery came for the allies after the battle of the Marne the extreme optimists, who were very strong in the lungs, said that the war would be over by January, 1915, because Germany could not last any longer than that—her resources would give out. The date was successively put forward to March, June, August and October, 1915. Since then no exact dates have been mentioned. Now I am almost ready to credit that Germany is beginning to feel the pinch in munitions, and perhaps in men, and that she realizes that one mighty blow must be struck before her prestige begins to wane. In other words, she must win now at Verdun or admit that her fine military machine cannot hope to conquer the superior and constantly growing power of the Allies."

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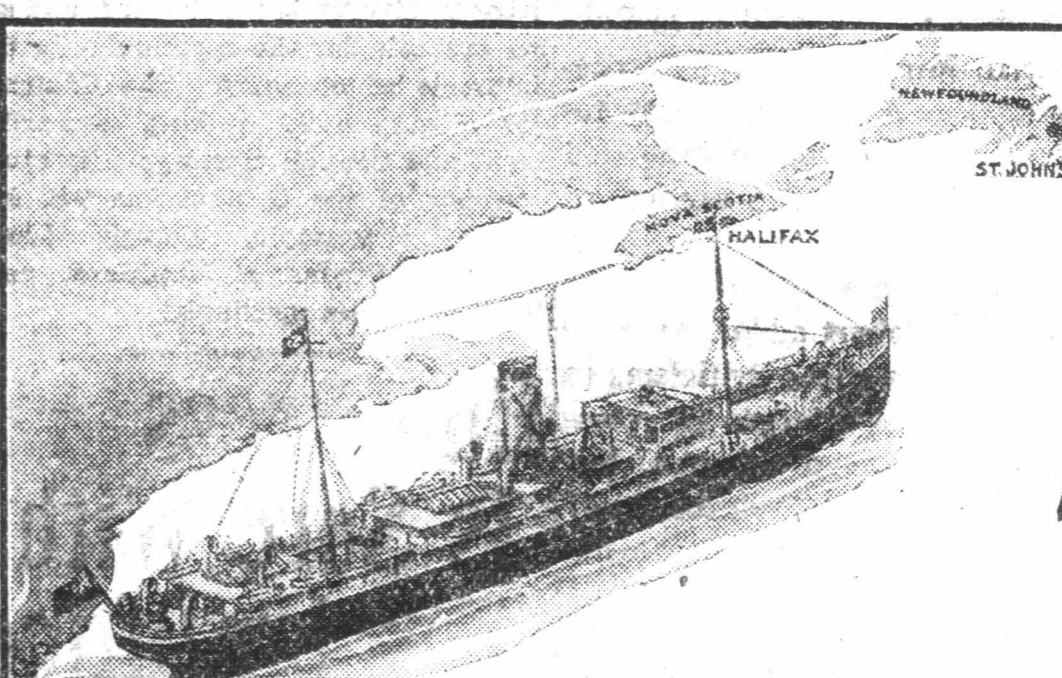
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