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## British Eagerly Seek Out Foe at Battle of Fricourt

Maddened by War Frenzy Yorkshire Men Rush Enemy Lines and Add Another Glorious Chapter to British History—In Face of Fierce Machine Gun Fire British Troops Rout Germans and Capture Many Prisoners—Many Pathetic Tales are Told of Young Men Who Became Mad from Shell Shock—And Stranger Stories Are Told as a Result

(By Philip Gibbs in London Daily Chronicle.)

With the British Armies in the Field, July 18.—Now that there is a momentary lull in the great battle I want to write something more than I have done about the men who fought in the first assault and about those other men, who are going up into the firing lines.

There is something strangely inhuman in the aspect of a battle watched from the edge of its furnace fires, or even as I stood watching it within the crescent of the British guns. Battalions move forward like ants across fields and one cannot see the light in men's eyes nor distinguish between one man and another. The individual is merged into the mass, even when one sees any men moving through the smoke and vapors of the great bombardment, but the man is there with his separate soul, with his single will power.

The human side of battle is the great sum of different personalities, passing through abnormal emotions, stirred by strange excitement, doing incredible things, suffering yet, in many cases, unconscious of their own agony. In this war, and in this latest battle, I have seen the quality of manhood uplifted to wonderful heights of courage beyond the range of normal laws, and these British soldiers, fine and simple men, went forward to the highest terrors with such singing hearts that one can hardly keep a little moisture from one's eyes when they go passing on the roads.  
They were on the roads today, thousands of them. It was hot, and they were tired, so tired that when "halt" was called, they just dropped limp upon the wayside grass and lay there propped up by the heavy packs behind them.

But in a little while they were sitting up, whistling and joking as if these were summer manoeuvres with blank cartridges on both sides. They picked wild flowers and put them in their belts and caps, red poppies and blue cornflowers, and when the word came to march again they went forward toward the front with a fine, swinging pace and smiling faces under sweat and dust. Yes, they know what battle means.

I went today again among the men who fought at Fricourt. Some of them had come back behind the lines and outside their billets; the divisional band was playing, but not to much of an audience, for of those who fought at Fricourt in the first assault there are not large numbers left.

The officers who came around the village with me had a lonely look. After a battle, such a battle as this, it is difficult to keep the sadness out of one's eyes, so many good fellows are gone, but they were proud of their men. They found joy in the fact that the men had done gloriously. They had won their ground and held it through a frightful fire. "The men were topping," said one officer.

There were a lot of Yorkshiremen among them who fought at Fricourt, and it was these I saw today. They were heroes with other north country lads of one of the most splendid achievements of British arms. I suppose that when the tale is written—not now, but later—it will thrill generations of English hearts. Heroes they are, but also simply Yorkshire fellows with a broad country burr, saying, "gotten" and "tooken," and ordinary lads who were not made by God, I guess, to face the hell fire.

They had come through it after three days of it hardly scratched, by miracle of chance, but it was not so long ago that they had washed from their eyes a vision of things too terrible to see, or regained quite the steady old grip on life which had made them sure of themselves. Some of them were still shaken when they spoke to me. Their words faltered, now and then queer looks came into their eyes, but on the whole they were astoundingly calm, and had not lost their sense of humor.

Was Mad, Said One Soldier.  
Of the first advance over No Man's Land, which was 150 yards across to the German front line trench, some of these men could remember nothing. It was just a dreadful blank.

"I was just mad at the time," said one of them. "The first thing I knew I found myself scrambling over the German parapet with a bomb in my hand. Dead were lying all around me."  
But a Sergeant there remembered all. He kept his wife about him

The Yorkshire boys went through the barrage of bombs, hurled their own, worried through broken parapets and over masses of tumbled earth, and fought single fights with the big Germans.

Parties bombed their way down the sunken roads. Those who fell, struck by German bombs, shouted: "Get on to 'em, lads," to the others who came up. In bits of earthwork German heads looked up, while German faces, bearded and covered with clay, like dead men risen. They put up trembling hands and cried the word of comradeship.

"Well, that's all right," said a Yorkshire Captain. "We've got the crucifix, and meanwhile our guns are giving us the devil."

The British gunners did not know the crucifix trench was taken. Some of the British shells were dropping very close.

"It's time for a red light," said a Yorkshire Captain. He had a bullet in his ribs and was suffering terribly, but he still commanded his men. A red rocket went up high through the smoke over all this corner of the battlefield.

Somewhere it was seen by watchful eyes in the smoke or by some flying fellow. The British guns lifted and shells went forward, crashing into the shelter wood beyond.

"Good old Germans!" said a Sergeant. "By God, they're playing the game today."  
But other men had seen the red rocket above the Crucifix trench. It stood in the sky like a red eye looking down upon the battlefield. The German gunners knew that the British were in the Crucifix trench. They lowered their guns a point or two shortening their range, and German shells came crashing to the earth on either side.

"And where do we go next, Captain?" asked a Yorkshire boy. It seemed that he felt restless where he was. The captain thought the shelter wood might be a good place to see. He chose ten men to see it with him and they were very willing.

With a bullet in his ribs (it hurt him horribly) he climbed out of the Crucifix trench and crawled forward with his ten men to the wood beyond. It was full of Germans. At the southwest corner of it was a redoubt with machine guns and a bomb store. German bombers were already flinging their grenades across to the Crucifix wounded. The Captain said that ten men were not enough to take the shelter wood. It would need a thousand men, perhaps, so he crawled back with the others.

They stayed all night in the Crucifix trench, and it was a dreadful night. At 10 o'clock the Germans opened an intense bombardment of heavies and shrapnel and maintained it at full pitch until 2 o'clock the next morning. There were 900 men up there and in the neighborhood. When morning came there were not so many, but the others were eager to get out and get on. The Yorkshire spirit was unbeaten; the grit of the north country was still there.

Lonely Soldier in a Wood.  
Queer adventures overtook the men who played a lone hand in this darkness and confusion of battle. One man whom I met today, true Yorkshire with the steel in his eyes and the burrs in his speech (it was strange to hear the Saxon words he used) rushed with some of his friends into a birch tree wood which was not captured until two days later. There were many Germans there, but not visible. Suddenly the Yorkshire lad found himself quite alone, his comrades having escaped from the death trap, for the wood was being shelled (for I saw it myself that day) with intense fire from the British guns. The lonely boy, who was machine gunner without his gun, thought things were pretty "thick" as indeed they were, but he decided the risks of death were less if he stayed still than if he moved.

Presently, as he crouched low, he saw a German coming, he was crawling along on his hands and knees and blood was oozing from him as he crawled. A young Yorkshire soldier, who was badly wounded, passed him at a little distance in the wood. The German stared at him, then he raised himself, though still on his knees, and fired at the boy with his revolver so that he fell dead. The German went on his hand again to go on with his crawling, but another shot ripped through the trees and he crawled no more. It was fired by the man who had been left alone—the young man I saw today.

"I killed the brute," he said, "and I'm glad of it."  
The British shells were bursting very fiercely over the wood, slashing off branches, and ploughing up the earth. The lonely boy searched about for a digout and found one. When he went down into it, he saw three dead Germans there and sat with them for more than eight hours, while the British bombardment lasted.

There was another lad I met who was also a machine gunner and alone in the battle zone. He was alone when fourteen of his comrades had

been knocked out, but singlehanded he carried and served his gun from one place to another all through the day and part of the next day, sniping odd parties of Germans with bursts of bullets. Another sturdy fellow I met came face to face with a German, who called out to him in perfect English, "Don't shoot, I was brought up in England and planted food for Bradford City."

"By Jove, I know your face, old man. Weren't you at the Victoria Hotel in Sheffield?"  
It was a queer meeting on the battlefield.

"One of the grimmest things I heard was told me by another Yorkshire boy. A German had surrendered, and then suddenly, as this lad approached to make him a prisoner, he pulled the detonator of a bomb and raised it to throw.

"I put my bayonet right close to him so suddenly that he was terrified and forgot to fling his bomb."  
"Then a queer kind of look came into his eyes. He remembered the blooming bomb was going off. It went off and blew him to bits."

"That is war, and the men who have told me these things have seen it. But because it is war they go through to the last goal with a courage that does not quail. The men of this division next day took the shelter wood and Fricourt, and captured many prisoners.

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