

HISTORIC NARRATIVE OF FIRST CRITICAL STRUGGLE AT YPRES; WORCESTERS' HISTORIC CHARGE

British Officer Sends Ottawa a Detailed Description of Three Weeks' Battle in Which 100,000 Allies Stopped Half Million Germans, Saving Calais & Dunkirk --German Loss 250,000--British Alone Was 40,000

An excellent description of the first battle of Ypres—that historic struggle of last October in which an allied army of 100,000 men, mainly British, plied against half a million Germans checked the enemy, saving Calais and Dunkirk and probably the allies' cause as well—is given in a letter from a British officer, received by a member of the Government here a few days ago. It reads in part: "The fighting at Ypres has lasted for six months. It is still going on. The battle of Ypres lasted for about three weeks—from the 20th of October to the 11th of November. It began as an ordinary battle on a section of a front; it ends by drawing to it the attention of the bulk of the great German armies in West Flanders. I cannot hope to tell it to you in detail. Every hour was packed with incident and almost every hour was critical.

Shortage of Reserves.
"That was on October 20th. Clearly the immediate posts of danger were the extreme left between Bixchoote and Dixmude, and the right center around Zandvoorde between the 7th Division and Allenby's cavalry. But on the 21st the main attack was not at these points. It was delivered almost at the point of the salient along the front of the 7th Division against which the four new German corps were thrown. The Germans succeeded in piercing the center held by the 21st Brigade between the Royal Scots Fusiliers and the Yorkshires. The only reserves available were Byng's cavalry, and they were used to protect the left flank of the 7th Division which was in great danger of being turned. By and by they were relieved by the Second Division of Haig's first corps, and they were then brought to the right of the 7th Division to link it up with Allenby's cavalry on the Zandvoorde Ridge.

An Anxious Council.
"That night Sir John French had an anxious consultation with his generals. It was now clear that all we could do was to hold the thirty miles of the Ypres salient till General Joffre could send help. For that purpose we had the first corps, the left wing of the 4th corps, the 7th Division of the 4th corps, three divisions of British cavalry, De Mitty's 2nd French Cavalry Corps and Bidon's two divisions of French Territorials—all told perhaps a hundred thousand men, and some of the troops not of the 1st line. Against us we had the four German line corps, at least three of the old first line corps, several reserve corps, a number of Landwehr divisions of cavalry, in all not less than half a million men, and we knew of other corps moving up from the south. General Joffre told Sir John French that no assistance could come for three days.

Desperate Fighting.
"Next day, the 22nd, saw some desperate fighting. The Germans broke the line of Fitzclarence's 1st Brigade and drove the 1st Camerons back—the famous red tartans of Quatre Bras and Tel-el-Kebir. Some of them were shut up and isolated in a wayside inn. The 7th Division at the point of the salient had a number of jags in its line like the teeth of a saw. Next day we made a great effort to straighten our front. Major-General Mulfin who had done brilliant work on the Aisne led the Royal West Surrey, the Northampton and the King's Royal Rifles in an attack on the trenches that the Germans had won from the Camerons. He liberated the captive Highlanders at the Inn, won back our trenches and took 600 Germans prisoners.

Prussian Guards Fall.
"Next day, the 24th we received the first French reinforcements, and the first division of Haig's Corps was moved south to support to the front at Ypres between the 7th Division and Allenby. On that day the point

of the salient gave way at last. The gallant Wiltshires were driven in and suffered severely, and the Germans entered the famous Polygon Wood. Happily, however, they seemed unable to follow up their achievement. This happened throughout the whole battle. Repeatedly they pierced our line, but once through their initiative was exhausted. We might attribute this to the rawness of some of the Prussian Guards. It seems to point to a defect in the regimental leadership, for which we had cause to be devoutly thankful.

Household Cavalry Charge.
"On the night of the 25th a great enveloping attack was made on the salient held by the 20th Brigade at Krusek. The Germans broke through, but a counter-attack by the 2nd Scots Guards relieved the position. The attack was renewed in force just before the dawn, and the Scots Guards were pushed back with terrible losses. All morning the battle continued to rage around Krusek, a critical place, for if the salient were broken the enemy would gain possession of the Zandvoorde Ridge. The situation was saved after midday by a brilliant attack by the Household Cavalry in which the Blues especially distinguished themselves.

"We were now on the eve of the chief struggle. Let us see how our line lay. On the extreme north of Bixchoote, were the French territorial, from Bixchoote to Zandvoorde were two divisions of the French 9th corps. Then came the French 3rd corps. Then came the first corps resting its right on the Gheluvelt cross roads. From Gheluvelt east to Zandvoorde was the 7th division. From Zandvoorde to Klien Zillebeke were Byng's Cavalry, and south of that Pulteney's 3rd Corps. The 7th Divisions, and the 3rd Cavalry Divisions were now placed under the command of Sir Douglas Haig.

Stark Carnage.
"On the 28th there was lull, a dangerous lull which heralded the storm. Very early on the morning of the 29th we knew the enemy's intentions, for we managed to intercept a wireless message. It was the beginning of the sternest struggle of the campaign in the west. The great battles of the world have not uncommonly been fought in places worthy of so fierce a drama. The mountains looked upon Marathon and Thermopylae, Marengo and Solferino and Plevna; mighty plains gave dignity to Chalons and Bородино; the magic of the desert encompassed Arabele and Omdurman; or some phantom of weather, tent strangeness to death, like the snow of Austerlitz, or the harvest moon of Chattanooga. Ypres was stark carnage and grim endurance, without glamor of earth or sky. The sunless heavens hung low over the damp fields, the dripping woods, the mean houses, and all the sour and unsightly land. It was such a struggle as Lee's stand in the wilderness, where amidst scrub swamps ragged soldiers of the Confederacy fought their last battles.

The German Wave.
"About 6 o'clock on that Thursday the wave broke against the centre of the 1st Corps at the point of the salient on the Gheluvelt cross roads. The 1st Division was driven from its trenches, and all morning the line swayed backwards and forwards. We held our ground until about two o'clock, when the enemy began to yield, and then before dark we recaptured the Krusek Ridge and re-established much of our line.

Kaiser on the Scene.
"Next day, Friday, the 30th, the chief attack was on the Zandvoorde Ridge, held by Byng's Cavalry. After a tremendous artillery bombardment we had to evacuate the ridge and fall back a mile to the ridge of Klien Zillebeke; on the north. This

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was obviously our last stand, for if we were pushed off the Klien Zillebeke Ridge, Ypres must fall. Sir Douglas Haig brought up all the reserves he could, including Canon's famous 4th Brigade. We know now that the emperor was with his men and had told his Bavarians that the winning of Ypres would settle the fate of the British First Corps, which would have been wholly isolated and destroyed. But the peril at Klien Zillebeke was not all. Further south Allenby's Cavalry had been driven out of Hollebeke and had fallen back to St. Eloi and Messines was in imminent danger.

70 Left Out of 1,200.
"Next day came the crisis, Saturday, the last day of October. Very early in the morning of the attack developed in great force against Gheluvelt village. North of it the 1st and 3rd Brigades of the 1st Division were driven back, and the 1st Coldstreams were almost wiped out as a fighting unit. The headquarters of the 1st and 2nd Divisions were shelled. General Jonax and General Munro were wounded and six of their staff officers were killed. The falling back of this part of the line left the 7th Division in a desperate position. The Royal Scots Fusiliers stuck to their trenches and were cut off and destroyed. This battalion, which had landed in Flanders over 1,200 strong consisted now of 70 men commanded by a junior subaltern. On the right the 2nd and 4th Brigades under Bulfin just managed to cling to their trenches. On Bulfin's right a French division under General Moussy had a desperate struggle to keep the line intact towards Klien Zillebeke. If all tales be true he succeeded in doing it by a counter-attack of every man he could collect, his own escort dismounted with silver helmets and cavalry boots and sabers. It was Bruce's camp followers at Bannockburn over again, or the charge of Sir John Moore's ambulance men in the retreat at Corunna.

Position Seemed Hopeless.
"At two o'clock that afternoon the position seemed hopeless. The salient was broken, we had lost Gheluvelt, we had been bent back to the Klien Zillebeke Ridge, and there we were only holding on by our eyelids. Further south Allenby's Cavalry was in desperate straits, and it looked as if it was a matter of seconds till the defence of Ypres should crumble. If it did we must fall back twenty miles, and we could not stop there. The enemy would win to the channel, the Belgians and the French in the north would be cut off, and the fate of the allies would tremble in the balance.

Salvation of Ypres.
"At that dark moment help came, one of those amazing revivals in a fight where men find they have a few more ounces left in them, put it forth and win. The second division was on the left north of Gheluvelt and had suffered a little less than the others. Now by an enflading fire it checked the German advance on the left flank of the 1st Division. This enabled the left of that division and the right of the 2nd to combine in a counter-attack upon the German right. This movement was the most opportune in British history. It was one of those deeds in which a few hundred men save the empire. I rejoice to think that the honors fell to one of those homely English regiments of the

line, which have always been the line, which have always been the Worcesters, supported by our field artillery, swept down the highway and drove the enemy before them. Like Cole's Fusiliers at Albuera they came suddenly and unexpectedly upon the foe. There are no words for such an achievement unless we borrow those from the greatest military historian. "Then was seen with what a strength and majesty the British soldiers fight. Nothing could stop that astonishing infantry." With the bayonet they took Gheluvelt at about half past two. The movement spread like magic along the front, and by the evening the 7th Division and Bulfin's detachment had regained their old positions and Ypres was saved."

The fighting, the writer goes on to say, continued spasmodically until November 18, the British repulsing with counter-attacks repeated charges of the Kaiser's hordes. Then French reinforcements relieved the British troops after their stubborn weeks in the trenches. The weather had changed to a blizzard "and in the tempest the battle of Ypres died away."

A Soldier's Battle.
"The leadership of the corps commanders was beyond praise and on Sir Douglas Haig fell the heaviest task. At Ypres was, like Albuera, a soldier's battle, won by the dogged fighting quality of the rank and file rather than by great tactical brilliance. There was no room and no time for ingenious tactics.

The Terrible Cost.
"A price must be paid for great glory, and the cost of Ypres was

high. The German casualties cannot have been less than 250,000 for the three weeks' battle. The allied forces from Albert to Nieuport lost went over 100,000 men, and in the Ypres fight alone the British lost 40,000 at least. Whole battalions disappeared: 1st Coldstreams, 2nd Royal Fusiliers, 2nd Wiltshires, 1st Camerons. One divisional general, two brigadiers, nearly a dozen staff officers fell and 18 regiments and battalions lost their colonels. Scarcely a house famous in our history but mourned a son. Wyndham, Dawney, Fitzclarence, Wellesly, Cadogan, Cavendish, Bruce, Gordon-Lennox, Fraser, Kinnaird, Hay, Hamilton—it is like reading the death-roll after Flodden or Agincourt."

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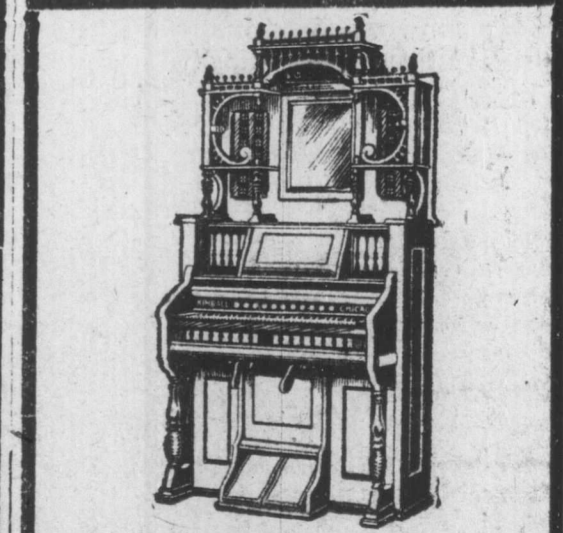
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