

Occasionally a sniper's rifle rang out or a shrapnel shell burst harmlessly overhead.

It was the usual lull before the storm. For at ten minutes to nine o'clock without any warning hell broke loose. The detonation from being stunning grew absolutely overwhelming. It did not come from one part, but from the whole length of the opposing line opposite the Canadian Third Division. For the next hour or two, dazed men groped about in the storm, unable to hear any word of command from their officers, clutching their rifles, trying to save the surrounding earth from engulfing them, waiting for what was to happen. The two generals attempting to reach the communication trench found their retreat cut off.

At the outset it appears that no shells, or very few, fell into the front trenches and the machine gunners and trench-mortar men held to their posts. But behind our front line a high wall of descending steel, screaming, crashing, exploding, emitting clouds of noxious smoke, shut off chance of escape by the communication trenches and all hope of support and succour from the reserve trenches in the rear. Moments passed that seemed hours and then the iron and steel missiles began to rain down and explode in the front line, scattering death and destruction. Nothing could live for long in such a tempest. The sides of the trenches began to crumble and fall in. Yet by a miracle our men held on, darting from one devastated section to another for refuge.

Beginning with HOOGHE, which was held — 600 yards of front — by the men of the Royal Canadian Regiment, there came a fifty yards gap in the line, low-lying sodden ground which was undefended — it being thought it might prove a trap for the Germans; then came the section of front held by the Princess Patricia's, which included the embowed hollow known as the 'Appendix' (only forty yards from the German trenches) and the Loop. On their right were the Canadian Mounted Rifles, who defended a portion of SANCTUARY WOOD and ARMAGH WOOD.