

CAURES WOOD DEATH TRAP IN WHICH GERMANS WERE SLAUGHTERED BY HUNDREDS

Graphic Account of One of the Most Dramatic Episodes of the Great Battle of Verdun

DECEIVED BY STRATEGIC BRITISH RETREAT
TWO THOUSAND OF THE ENEMY WALKED
INTO TRAP AND BLOWN TO PIECES AMIDST
SHATTERED TREES OF FATAL WOOD AT
VERDUN.

The following graphic account of one of the most dramatic episodes in the great battle of Verdun was related by a Verdunois, who himself heard it from a young French officer. It is written by B. St. Lawrence in the "World Magazine."

"Courage! We'll never allow the Boches to get through. Cheer up! They shall never get your town. Vive Verdun et les Verdunois!"

Thus, in a hundred and one different ways, did the brave poilus, marching with admirable entrain towards Verdun, instill hope into our downcast hearts.

We were on our way, the civilians of Verdun, to Paris and elsewhere, in battle-trucks and military wagons—a painful journey, in bitter cold and snow which would have been almost unbearable but for the sight of those merry-hearted troops, swinging along in the daylight on the road bordering the railway, and at night sweeping past us in trainloads after trainloads in the direction of the town which, shattered by shot and shell though it was, we still pictured in our hearts as home.

There were long waits in the darkness at wayside stations or on sidings, whilst the saviours of France went forth to battle, but wherever possible we found help and encouragement. At the larger gares warmth and creature-comforts were in readiness to cheer us on our way. The waiting and refreshment rooms were crowded with railway officials, charitably disposed ladies, and military officers, all of them eager to do something to ameliorate our lot, and at the same time to hear the latest news from the front.

I was fortunate in making the acquaintance at Chalons of a young officer, Lieutenant Marcel R—, who was able to tell me a good deal about the battle of Verdun, or, more strictly speaking, a singular episode in it. Vague rumors of the "Coup of the Caures Wood" had already reached my ears, but it was not until I met Lieutenant R— that I heard all the dramatic details, in the planning and execution of which he himself had played a part, though a minor one.

"Eh bien! How have you been getting on at Verdun lately?" he began by asking me. "I was quite sorry to have to leave the battlefield and go on mission, to Paris. But I shall be back there tomorrow. Shall I find a soul left?"

"Only Pere Francois, the marchand de vin of the Rue Nationale," I replied. "He alone remains of the three thousand inhabitants. We left him standing at the door of his wine-shop which he said he would not abandon for all the Boches in creation."

"He plays his part, without a doubt," replied Lieutenant R—, with a laugh. "It was at Pere Francois's that we celebrated the coup of the Caures Wood, and I shall never forget his enthusiasm when we told him the story."

"I envy him the privilege," said I. "Might I hope to hear you repeat it, if there is time before the trials start?"

"Mais certainement! This is what happened. But I must begin at the very beginning. The setting for the episode I have to describe is indispensable."

And Lieutenant R— proceeded to tell his story as follows:

We were in the early days of the battle, but sufficient had already happened to make it clear to every one of us that at last we were face to face with a big affair. The German High Command had decided on a step which we welcomed most joyfully—to stake it all on a vain endeavor to regain the confidence which the public in Germany has fast been losing, not only in the military party, but also in the Hohenzollerns themselves. The roar of the guns was so deafening that we had to stuff our ears with cotton-wool or any material we could find to deaden the dreadful sound. The ground shook under the shock of the exploding shells. But neither the sounds which came to us, nor the sights which met our eyes as we looked down upon the ever-advancing masses of men in grey-green uniforms, had the slightest effect upon our nerves. Judging by my own feelings, we were all supremely uplifted. It seemed to me that we had been preparing all our lives for that one glorious day.

"Come on, come on, grey-green battalions, let us bite deep into your flesh! It matters not what cowardly means you adopt; poison-gas or squirters of flaming liquid are all one to us, for you will never succeed in getting through. Come on, like animals to the slaughter! Those who succeed in escaping the arrosage of the 'twenty-fives' will find that Rosalie—the bayonet—is waiting for them." Such was the savage hymn which my men were singing in their hearts as we defended the Bois de Caures.

"Rosalie" did her work well, I can tell you, when the Boches came to close quarters. The snow-decked ground in front of us, furrowed as though by a Titanic plough, was covered with bodies. However, as they still came on in serried masses, it was decided that a retreat to the defences which had been prepared many weeks before was necessary. Full of confidence, and knowing that this slow retreat would enable us to kill more and still more Germans, we made our preparations.

But first of all, let me locate the Wood of Caures, though it may be superfluous to do so in the presence of an inhabitant—perhaps a native—of Verdun. It is situated to the north of your town, and is one of a number of woods and forests which are visible as dark masses of foliage to anyone standing on the heights in the immediate neighborhood of Verdun, or better still, if the observer be seated in an aeroplane. The eyes of our gallant air-men were constantly fixed on the Bois de Caures, which lies between the Bois d'Haumont and the Herbe Bois, on the Bois des Fosses, which is due south of where we were and on the Forest of Spincourt, which was to our east. These precious collaborators kept us constantly informed as to the movements of the enemy. Every few hours they brought in their reports to the Headquarters Staff, whence came the order that, in conjunction with the remainder of the line, we were to fall back.

"The move is to be made tomorrow—towards evening," Captain Peyron told me in the afternoon. "But I understand from Chief Engineer Moreau that we're to prepare a little surprise for the Kaiser's crack troops. We've got to hold the wood like grim death until everything is ready. Moreau and his staff of engineers have been out all day in the wood prospecting, and the sappers must be already at work."

At nightfall I learnt a little more from one of Moreau's assistants, Lieutenant Chabert, a former brilliant pupil of the Ecole des Arts et Metiers, who, owing to his deep knowledge of electrical science, has on countless occasions rendered invaluable service. He is one of those men who can turn their hands to anything in the scientific line. He staggered into our dug-out, dead-beat, after ten hours of feverish and continuous work with the sappers, and before throwing himself down to sleep had just strength enough to mumble, "See that I'm called as early as possible, mon ami, will you? I've got hundreds of yards of wiring to see to yet. Dieu merci, we've still got a day before us!"

I promised to wake him at five sharp and, envying him his sleep, immediately went in search of Sergeant Fleury, to delegate him to carry out the duty entrusted to me in case—one never knows what the fortunes of war may bring about—I were prevented from doing it. By the time I had found the sergeant the moon had risen over the battlefield, and if I live to be a hundred I shall never forget the sight. Our machine guns were still firing two hundred rounds a minute on the German formations. As the enemy approached through the ravines round Flabas and Azannes they were enfiladed, and the deep clefts in the hills were positively filled up with dead. Then, towards the early hours of the morning, came a lull. The re-

truce was doubly welcome; it gave us both time to breathe and behold the work we had done. A ghastly spectacle indeed was revealed as our searchlights swept over the battlefield.

When the dawn came the lull continued—at least, till noon, when we had once more to face the hammer-blows of the Kaiser and the Crow's Prince. I called Chabert at the appointed hour. "After a great stretch and a yawn, he went off like a giant refreshed to his work along the human moles of the Caures Wood. About noon, Moreau came to hold a consultation with Captain Peyron, under whose immediate orders we were, but he was in such a hurry to get back to his sappers and electricians that he had not time to say more than:

"Bonjour, R—; see you later. All goes well!"

The satisfied expression on his face told me that without words. I did not meet either him or Chabert until after the retreat; and, to tell you the truth, we were so busily engaged in keeping back the Germans until it suited our purpose to let them come on en masse that I almost forgot about the "little surprise" which Moreau, Chabert, et Cie, had announced to me through my chief.

When evening came, the gradual blow back to more advantageous positions began. I shall not go into the details of a strategic retreat with which you yourself must be almost as well acquainted as myself, but simply state that we evacuated the Caures Wood and got away to the high ground in the neighborhood of the Bois de Fosses, where Peyron, Moreau, Chabert, Sergeant Fleury and myself calmly awaited the impending catastrophe which had been so skilfully and rapidly prepared for the oncoming enemy. The Bois de Caures, in the gathering darkness of night, stood out like a huge black mass against the sky.

"What do you estimate the strength of the attacking force in our section to be?" I asked Captain Peyron.

"Two thousand odd," he replied, "and they have all of them fallen into the trap. As our men—ran away through the wood, they followed in masses, blindly and stupidly—les imbéciles! Not one of them will escape, Moreau!"

"Not a soul," replied the chief engineer. Then glancing at his luminous watch and turning to Chabert, he added, "One more minute, and we shall see what we shall see."

We kept our eyes fixed intently on the dark Bois de Caures. Someone, somewhere, was pressing a button; for all at once huge tongues of flame accompanied by a series of explosions which rent the cold night air, leapt into the sky. Simultaneously a mental vision must have occurred to every one of us, as it certainly did to me—a vision of hundreds upon hundreds of Germans, caught like rats in a trap, blown to pieces amidst the shattered trees of that fatal wood.

So ended the story of the "Coup of the Caures Wood" as related to me by Lieutenant R—. Hardly had he uttered the last words when the departure bell rang and we hurried away to the train which was to take us to Paris.

SNIPER WHO SHOT 201 GERMANS

Mr. Herbert Corey describes the psychology of the sniper in a remarkable despatch from France. He writes:

"He is welcome to his job," said the Canadian, "I don't want it." The talk had turned on a recent statement of an Australian officer that one of his men, named Singer, was personally responsible for 201 German deaths. Singer, it appears, is a sniper. He had trained his eye on those wide Australian plains where only a super-skilful rifleman can guess the range.

He used to hunt rabbits with a light rifle, and his theory was that a rabbit hit anywhere except in the eye was a disgrace to the shooter. Used to get quite heated up about it.

"I wonder," said the Canadian, "if he sleeps well nights. Two hundred and one Germans—that's some bag even for an Anzac."

In their Dreams. The talk wandered on. The Canadian said that he personally had slept well the night after he killed his first German. Green youngsters usually had difficulty that first night. Just excitement. Mostly they fought it all over again in their dreams.

Only—201! The Canadian repeated himself emphatically. That was some bag. The Canadians thought their snipers were the best little old snipers of the breed. But not one of them had broken into three figures.

"I know one of our snipers pretty well," said the Canadian. "His father is a preacher, somewhere in Manitoba. He's a quiet sort of chap. When he first went at the job the sniper slept well enough. The first German he dotted didn't bother him at all. Nor did the next half dozen or so Germans."

"It was only lately that he had been getting sort of screwy. Nowadays he clamps his jaws and holds on to the blanket when he goes to bed at night. Odd, isn't it? Just nerves."

"Funny about the first German," he continued. "My friend had located himself on the hill, where he could overlook one angle of the German trenches. He used to see this German passing by, Corporal, sort of, he thought. Red-faced guy, with whiskers. The kind of man you dislike at sight. Of course, it was no use shooting at a man in motion. He waited there patiently for some one to stop in this angle of the trench. At last this red-faced German did.

Fatal Letter. "What do you think? He pulled a letter out of his pocket and began to read it. Likely he thought he could not be seen by any one in his trench. That letter gave just the bull's eye the sniper wanted."

"It's wonderful when you come to think of it, hunting man and being hunted by him. Makes this big game stuff look like pocket billiards. There are so many things a sniper must consider."

"If the sun shines on your glasses it hellos your position to the lad on the opposite hill. If your bush gets twisted a little some one will drip a bullet through it on chance. A fellow has to pass a good many shots because—if you hit—the angle of fire would betray you. A sniper who knows his business may not fire more than once out of six chances. If he is the right sort that one should be in the blank, of course."

That is why my friend got so keen on the game," the Canadian said. "Lately he got so he can hardly sleep at all for thinking of it. He runs over the shots he has made and missed, and plans the campaign for the next day."

An elderly lady, walking through a village, heard the church choir singing and stopped to listen.

"What beautiful singing," she said to a man who had also stopped in a listening attitude.

But he was a naturalist, interested in the "song" of a cricket.

"Yes," he replied, "they do it by rubbing their hind legs together!"



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