

French Attack on Somme Greatest Human Effort in History, Says Williams.

AMERICAN BEHIND ALLIED LINES
WRITES OF AMAZING ARRAY OF
RESOURCES FOR OFFENSIVE
WARFARE.

Germans Driven from Air and Out-
manned in Big Guns—Witness of
Verdun Attack Lacking in Careful-
ly Planned Offensive of French and
British—Over Five Hundred Miles
of Railway in Operation Connecting
With Factories Covering Hundreds
of Acres.

By WYTHE WILLIAMS.

Paris, Aug. 5.—All this week I have been with the French Army on the Somme as a guest of the Great General Staff. The second anniversary of the war I passed on the battlefield near the centre of the great offensive. It was the first time during the war that a correspondent accredited to the French has been officially permitted to witness an action so intense and on so gigantic a scale.

At the battle of the Labyrinth over a year ago I was the first neutral special correspondent to visit the Somme, and with extraordinary facilities combined with good luck I was able to get a better view of the operations than any civilian up to the present moment. It was by far my greatest experience of war. As a spectacle it was superb, overwhelming. If any American has the idea that France has been bled white at Verdun and must now depend on the Allies to win, it should be quickly forgotten, for what I saw on the Somme is the greatest human effort in all history. The French army today is better, stronger, and greater than ever it was. I necessarily confine all my remarks to the French army only.

GREATER THAN VERDUN.

It is not necessary to go back of this war to compare human efforts. This French effort on the Somme will become bigger than the Marne, bigger than Arras, bigger than Champagne, bigger than Verdun. And, after viewing it from all sides, studying it from every angle of understanding, I am certain that it is only just beginning. Why I say it will prove greater than anything that has happened in this war is based upon the absolute feeling that settles upon one the moment one gets with the army, and which keeps getting stronger every minute. On all my previous trips to the front I have had another feeling, a feeling that while I was with an unbeaten army, an army that was undisciplined and hopeful, yet it was an army that was only holding Germany after all. This time the feeling was so strong it amounted to positive conviction that this army knew that it was winning—that when the offensive on the Somme is over, Germany will be finally and thoroughly whipped.

What impressed me most about it is its steady grinding, its awful implacability and, at the same time, its deadly precision. Verdun, with all its horror and its grandeur, had an ele-

ment of wildness about it that one notices an utter absence of on the Somme. At Verdun the Germans attacked time after time with blinding fury, while the French held with the same sort of courage that often bordered on despair. At that time the German correspondents spoke of the clockwork precision of their assaults, and they firmly believed that the Hohenzollern triumph would come at that point. But the French put the clockwork out of order, and Verdun can only stand out now like Pickett's charge as the high-tide mark of German aggression. And now the French tide of triumph is only mounting on the Somme.

SCENE OF DEVASTATION.

At present the Germans have retired a short distance to keep their feet out of the wet, but just as slowly, almost as imperceptibly but quite as surely as the tide of the ocean itself that wave of blue uniforms is advancing steadily forward, bringing death and destruction to everything living and inanimate in its way. It is true, tides mount to their high mark, then recede, but I venture the opinion, based on words that have been said to me by a general who knows, and on what I have seen, that when the tide of this advance reaches its limit the receding wave will be the victorious French army marching home.

Although the salients formed by the advance into the German lines permit an enfilade of artillery fire behind the new trenches that is dangerous for careless visitors, we left our automobile well in the rear and walked across the conquered ground to a plateau before which was the panorama of the entire action. Far to the north we could see the British fire at Pozieres, nearer were the fragments of Pricourt, Hardecourt and Frise. Just to our left a few blackened stumps marked all that was left of Hardecourt. German shrapnel constantly exploded over the ruin. Behind us lay the dust of what had been the village of Bequincourt and Dompierre. We had actually to be told that villages once existed on that leprous looking ground. It was only dust with a bit of rubble here and there and all discolored to a brownish yellow by the picric acid from bursting shells. To our right was Estrees. Behind it the flames leaped high from the burning chateau of Denicourt, then being vigorously shelled by the French. Directly before us was Peronne.

We walked a little way across the fields to see what remained of the line of German trenches. There was nothing. I had seen ruined trenches before. At the Labyrinth I saw results of artillery fire that then seemed appalling, but they were small compared to what I saw now. Then the artillery fire only destroyed the upper crust, and the top of trenches craved in. On the plain of Santerre we found deep-down under ground shelters ripped to pieces by shells. And the ground all about was the same sickly brownish yellow from picric acid.

We walked further on. Our guide

said it was a village—a village of considerable size. He pointed to a heap of tortured-looking rubbish. "The church," he said. "It was a fine old chapel, of the fourteenth century."

AN UNRECOGNIZABLE TOWN.

I asked, amazedly, if we were walking over the ruins of a town. Like ruined trenches, I have seen cities even when there is not a single house which remains intact, but, nevertheless, some semblance of urban formation remained. There were walls, big piles of debris, also streets and sidewalks. Of this town, however, not a single thing remained. We could not even follow the line where the main street had been. There was not a scrap of any object from which one could recognize what it had been before.

While we were visiting the exterminated town the artillery fire began growing heavier. We went back to a vantage point on the plateau. From the extreme right, where the chateau was still blazing in toward the centre, a distance of several kilometres, the French were concentrating their fire for an infantry attack. It was the famous curtain of iron in full action—the first time it was ever seen by any correspondent. Although through the entire afternoon there had been bombardment of the entire front, especially intense on this particular sector, all the destructive forces were now unloosed.

The general bombardment seemed like rolling thunder, that never stopped completely, but when apparently it was about to die away into silence it would again spring up and reverberate over another portion of the valley. But now before us there was just a constant unending roar, thro' which one seemed to have a sense of heavy pounding. If one could imagine a giant stable in which 1,000 mad horses were all kicking against the stalls, while in the rafters overhead were 1,000 spitting, fighting cats, one might get some realization how the "rideur de fer" sounds. But even this illustration is inadequate, for it is one's inner sensibility rather than the ear that is affected most. The concentrated pounding seems to act directly on the brain and I could easily understand why men in the trenches often go mad.

A welcome relief to the roar of the heavy guns were the rapid crack of the near-by mitrailleuses and the sharp barks of the seventy-fives, which arose above all the tumult, and, as before, all along the line we could see the spurt of their fire in an unbroken flame.

DESTROY EVERYTHING.

What had just commenced on that sector was the same as had happened to the village behind us. The order had been given to destroy everything. So as we watched the human sacrifice was going up in the roll of smoke and the roar of guns. And it could continue so for hours. When it would be over the infantry would again advance "with their rifles over their shoulders." For the German losses have been so great and the French so small as to be one of the wonders of the war. The colonel of one regiment said to me:

"During the entire offensive I lost four men killed and fifty wounded. Those who were killed were careless." In the last great advance on Sunday the German losses were estimated at 10,000 against 700 French killed and wounded.

We did not watch the curtain of iron very long. A message came from the general commanding the division for us to clear out—and it was only by the mercy of God and the fact he did not know we were there that we had been neither killed nor excluded long before. We explained our identity to the messenger, who explained that the general recognized our credentials, but was merely interested in not having us there. He pointed to where the general and his staff had come to view the operations. I figured that we had a better place from which to see than he, but I was quite willing to go, especially as at that moment several shells came uncomfortably close.

We retired toward the rear along a new road built since the offensive began. I have already mentioned the precision with which the attack was being conducted. It never impressed me so much as during this walk. There would be horizontal strips of ground extending along both sides from the road averaging say, 200 yards in depth. These strips had once been successive German trench lines and the area of barbed wire entanglements. Nothing remained. The barbed wire barricades, the trenches, and underground shelters, all had

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been tossed and torn and pulverized. But beyond these strips nothing had happened. There it was still a beautiful rolling meadow, peaceful and undisturbed. The lines marking the end of the curtain of fire were as straight as if fenced off in advance.

GERMANS DRIVEN FROM AIR.

The proof is strikingly clear at the front of the manner in which the Germans have been driven completely out of the air. On previous trips I found the exposing air forces always fairly evenly matched, one side or the other sometimes showing a slight ascendancy. On this trip I saw only one German aeroplane, while great fleets of French machines circled constantly over the enemy lines. This one German aircraft, at the moment I saw him through my glasses was fleeing desperately for his life, pursued hotly on all sides.

Later I happened to notice flying very high a baby Nieuport machine, its pilot performing all sorts of antics in the air. I watched it for a long time through my glasses and was completely fascinated. The pilot would first loop the loop and then plunge straight downward on the nose of the machine. Following that he would be content to fly on the side or upside down for a few moments, following this usually with a wide volplane and another loop the loop. Later, I happened to mention these manoeuvres to the captain of an aeroplane escadron.

"Oh, that was so and so," he replied

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mentioning the pilot's name. "It was he who brought down that one German who crossed our line to-day. He was just celebrating his victory all to himself on his way home."

One afternoon on the front I counted twenty French observation balloons very close to the line. With the naked eye I could find no balloon on the German side, but finally with my glasses I found three, showing very vaguely in the far distance. I was told by an airman that whenever the German balloons observers now see the French machines they immediately take to their parachutes, for their own airman simply will not come out to give battle.

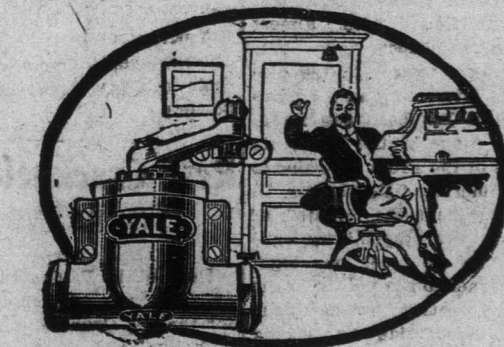
NOT TO SAVE—TO WIN.

Naturally I am not permitted to write anything concerning the number of French troops on the Somme. I may be allowed to say that up to now the entire action has been fought with a very small number of infantry, so complete has been the work of the artillery. Up to now no reserves have been necessary. This is not to be misunderstood as to imply that there are few soldiers there. On the contrary, there are enormous reserves, including the crack troupes de choc of the entire army that up to now have simply watched and waited for a greater offensive movement than has yet arrived. Among these are the Garde Francaise that has saved the day on so many battlefields of this war. Its next move will not be to save the day, but to win it.

All the activity behind the lines, road professions, movement of troops, numbers of munition and food canons, including a few Red Cross ambulances, I believe it a safe estimate is at least five times greater than during any previous offensive. All the roads from Amiens, which is the base town for both French and British, are one continuous moving line of motors, causing a constant cloud of white dust, almost as dense as the smoke of the battle line. All the main roads have been widened, so that there is a new road at the side exclusively for foot troops. In fact, the main roads are now one of the most interesting sights of the war.

Some further idea of the magnitude of the preparations may be gathered from the fact that over 500 miles of railroad were built and 1,800 wells were sunk in this particular region before the first attack began. But the greatest of all proof given us of the gigantic proportions on which

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