

## YPRES ONE OF THE FINEST STORIES OF HEROISM IN THE HISTORY OF BRITISH ARMY

**Superiority of Tommy Atkins Over His Enemy Proved — German Infantry Dared Not Meet British, but Depended on Heavy Guns, High Explosives and Deadly Gases — Many Heroic Acts Marked Three Weeks Battle.**

The most interesting account of the great battle of Ypres, which has yet reached America appeared in the London Morning Post of May 24th and was written by "A Special Correspondent at British General Headquarters."

It reads as follows: When the battle of Ypres can be written in detail it will yield one of the finest stories of heroism and endurance in the history of the British Army. It is a story of sacrifice and dogged resistance against overwhelming odds, of fragments of battalions refusing to abandon seemingly impossible positions; of individual acts of courage which cannot be surpassed, and the success of a series of "forlorn hopes" which checked an over-confident enemy and saved Ypres. Above all, it is the story of a "soldier's battle," a battle fought under new conditions, which demanded all the initiative and self-reliance of the men who held the salient. The horrors of gas and the greatest bombardment yet experienced failed to demoralize them, and they went through the seemingly endless chase of a new foe of battle coldly determined and undismayed.

In this way the second battle of Ypres which began on April 22, and lasted for nearly three weeks, was a British victory, although the shortness of the campaign may make it look like a defeat. It again proved the superiority of the British soldier over his enemy. Whenever the German infantry attempted to storm it was invariably thrown back, and only the employment of a vast number of heavy guns and the expenditure of an almost incredible number of high explosive shells, in addition to the use of gas, saved the enemy the strip of ground which has been added to their line east and northeast of Ypres.

At no time did the Germans attempt a great infantry attack. Whenever their infantry came forward in the usual close formation our troops buried them back again demoralized. They advanced without spirit, depending wholly on their great howitzers, and refusing to press forward when they saw men dropping on every side. Whenever our trenches were occupied it was only after a concentrated shell fire had practically obliterated them from the line.

### The Gas Experiments

Apparently the Germans had not anticipated that their gas cylinders would play such an important part in this offensive. They experimented with the French along the Yser as they had already experimented in the Artois, where the new weapon was a failure. It was not until they realized the havoc created in the French trenches that they decided to extend this mode of attack, with the result that the Canadians were "kissed" early on Saturday morning, the 24th.

A thirty minutes bombardment, beginning at 2.30, preceded the opening of the gas cylinders against the Canadians. Then, the thick green mist came rolling over the broken ground from the enemy's empty trench, and looked like vapour rising from a marsh, and the wind was strong enough to carry it rapidly towards the parapet of the Canadian line. One battalion had time to load and fire two rounds through the screen of gas before it came pouring over the sandbags, penetrating into every crevice of the dug-outs, and choking the men who lay there. It was so thick at first that objects three feet distant were hardly recognizable.

Then the Germans tried one of their futile infantry attacks. While howitzers of every calibre and trench mortars raked the Canadians, the enemy's infantry could be seen massing in front of their trenches. When they came on—half-heartedly and with some of the men holding one arm in front of their faces—they were literally mown down by the waiting Canadians, who, although nearly blinded and suffocated by chlorine, still fired determinedly. The 8th Battalion, the Winnipeg Rifles, known as the "Devil's Own," stuck to its trench, although many men were unconscious, and there they remained all day, although ill and heavily shelled.

A Territorial battery which defended the Canadian front was left in a wood, it being impossible to bring up the horses in time. The men remained with the guns until the Germans were only a few yards away, firing repeatedly, and, at the last moment, retiring with the breech blocks.

This was the beginning of the furious bombardment which pounded the Ypres salient for nearly three weeks. The next morning, Sunday, the enemy turned every available gun on the British position, and shells of all sizes from 37 inch to the sausage-shaped cylinders fired from minewerfers poured a deadly enfilading fire into the entrenched infantry. There has never been anything like it. Officers who have had great experience of bombardments tell me that they could not have imagined such an extraordinary spectacle as that witnessed on the plain east and north-east of Ypres, during the last week of April, and first eight days of May.

Nine hundred shells of large calibre fell on one small field by two hours. "Lampers" sailing across the

sky "with a noise like a tram" burst around the trenches at least every fifteen seconds. "Shell-trap Farm," a group of ruined buildings on the north-west of the salient of which more will be told presently, received 117 shells in forty minutes. Ordinary field batteries "grouped" their projectiles on one occasion, and the result was a smoke and dotted with flame.

### Hope of a Fight

There was nothing to do but to sit tight and endure it day after day. The men crouched hard against the side of the trenches, as best they could, or sheltered in the dug-outs. Frequently they were called to dig their comrades from piles of earth and overthrown sandbags. Acid fumes filled the air; the "stink shells," as one form of projectile is called, choked their lungs with gas, which, although not as deadly as that sprayed from cylinders, sufficed to weaken them. Yet they "stuck it."

Whenever the news was passed along the trenches, that another trench attack was impending, fresh hope was raised that the Germans meant to fight. The battalions which were holding a position on the extreme right of the northern face of the salient, actually got out of their trenches on one occasion, and cheered when they saw the enemy preparing for a bayonet rush.

"Come on, you blighters," they shouted, "give us a chance to get at you!" Every German who was within fifty yards of the trenches were killed; the others fled.

Not a single German infantry attack got home. One officer has told me how he watched them repeatedly forming up on the Grafenstafel ridge, a few miles east of Ypres, and how they drove them. The solid mass lumbered across the riddled fields until our men could distinguish every frightened face and then, as great gaps were blown in the line, it wavered and was broken.

The occupants of the shattered British trenches watched these hesitating advances contemptuously. It was clear that the German infantry had no stomach for suddenly falling flat and trying to burrow into the soil with their hands. When a man fell dead or wounded, a comrade would use his body as cover. Some of them even dragged two or three helpless men in to a heap and then crouched behind this impromptu shield.

Many showed abject terror. One middle-aged Wurtemburger ran blindly during the charge of his battalion, until he nearly reached a trench held by the North Somerset Yeomanry, then knelt down and said his prayers. Men were dropping all around him.

The Somerset waited until he finished his prayers. After several infantry attacks had been repulsed with heavy losses, the enemy would resume their howitzer pressure. You could imagine the fury of the German Staff expressed a sudden spurt of shelling. They threw away tons of ammunition as though animated by blind rage.

### Men Against Guns

The inevitable result was to blow up our trenches. Our men had to fall back, and the German infantry would advance to the destroyed position. Then the shattered British battalions would charge furiously and drive the Germans back to their own line. Again they would charge, and again they would be blown out. So the unequal struggle went on, day after day. It was a contest of flesh and blood against a gigantic machine of men and guns. Whenever men met men, we won. Whenever the curtain of red hot shells was dropping across our front, no living thing could pierce it. Shells, shells, shells—that is the story of the second battle of Ypres.

Gas did not play a decisive part in the operation after the first attack on the Canadians. There were subsequent attempts at gassing, but none of them succeeded like the first, even though the men at that time were without the means of combating it. They know the deadly nature of this new peril, but it never demoralized them.

### There Were Many Heroic Exploits Due to Attacks by Gas

During the night of the 21st the Lancashire Fusiliers, and Essex held a line which was suddenly enveloped in clouds of this poison. The Lancashire Fusiliers suffered most, although some of the Essex battalion were also incapacitated. A man of the former regiment, named Lynn, was in charge of a machine-gun. When he saw the thick mass of vapour drifting towards his trench he jumped on the parapet without a respirator, and played his machine-gun on the gas and the German trenches behind.

The gas swept over the Fusiliers, enveloping Lynn, who still worked his gun, although coughing and hardly able to see. The Germans were advancing cautiously beyond the vapour, and he poured a steady fire into them, still crouching on the parapet, still coughing and hardly able to see. The Germans were advancing cautiously beyond the vapour, and he poured a steady fire into them, still crouching on the parapet, still coughing and hardly able to see.

In consequence of the presence of mind shown by our troops, the Germans never profited by their gas attacks. Many men, driven out by the fumes, charged back through them again, and reoccupied the trench after it had been vacated.

The height of the wall of gas varied, but it appears to have been at least seven feet above the ground. Sergeant W. Cooke, of the Dublins, had a curious experience. He was hidden on the roof of a farmhouse snipping Germans with great success, when the gas swept over the ground below. He was untouched. Later he came to earth, and the remaining fumes made him dizzy.

"It's not healthy down here," said Sergeant Cooke, and he climbed back on the roof, where he was constantly under fire.

During his vigil at this post Cooke killed a patrol of ten Germans, who were crawling down a trench, shooting one after the other. Then he jumped down, ran along the trench, and captured the lieutenant in charge, bringing him back with his hands in the air and his face purple with rage.

Then gas was felt for a considerable distance behind the front trench. One brigadier came out of his dug-out long after a gas attack, and the fumes affected him. A number of men who passed through the gas zone after the vapour had been partially dissipated, suffered from the effects at the time, but two or three afterwards went into hospital with a temperature of 103.

Commanding officers and surgeons alike worked hard under fire to revive the victims of gas. Captain Chipley, of the 6th Middlesex, found about fifty men of his company gassed during the bombardment on the morning of the 25th. He went to each in turn and succeeded in reviving them with handkerchiefs soaked in water. Lieutenant James, the doctor attached to the 2nd Seaforths (a civilian who served with the regiment in South Africa, although suffering from the gas himself, worked throughout May 2nd, the day his battalion suffered all the effects of the gas, and the morning of the 4th, when he collapsed, and was put in an ambulance with some of his own patients.

I have had charges through gas described by eyewitnesses. The 7th Yorkshire and Sherwood Rangers, sent to take a trench cleared by gas, dashed headlong through the fog, and came to the goal unhurt. In the language of one officer, "they simply sidestepped the gas." The brigadier who afterwards went through "this thin of the gas" in order to be near his men was very ill, but refused to go back.

It was difficult to get the men to abandon trenches even when necessary. The 5th Welsh Fusiliers were exposed to a galling fire from two sides, but their commanding officer kept sending back cheery messages something like this: "Our right is being turned, but we are quite comfortable."

And later: "I have two machine-guns in my rear, but we can hold on without trouble. Think it better to wait until dark. When the remnants of this gallant battalion fell back on the second Verloenhoeke line, it had few surviving officers unhurt, and no non-commissioned officers. The fragments of companies were mostly commanded by lieutenants.

Here is the story of the Durham miners, who helped the Canadians on the Grafenstafel ridge. They were unused to trench work, and by no means seasoned troops, yet when called on in the middle of the night of April 24, to relieve the Winnipeg Rifles, they performed a difficult task with the steadiness of veterans.

They were the 8th Durham Light Infantry, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Turnbull, who is known as "the miners' friend." They were sent to Verloenhoeke at eleven p.m. and attached to a regular brigade, which made the attack to relieve the in-

creasing pressure on this portion of the salient. The enemy were only 300 yards away.

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Equally gallant was the work of certain Northumberland Territorial battalions during the bombardment of the 26th-27th. They attacked St. Julien on the afternoon of the 26th, and after advancing steadily isolated parties of the 6th Battalion got 250 yards forward of the first line, and occupied some small trenches which the enemy had abandoned. These they held until dusk, when they retired to the first line. Brigadier-General Riddell, who was in command of these operations, was killed about half past three. He was on his way to a farmhouse in order to get in closer touch with his men, and while walking along a exposed road was hit by a rifle bullet.

When one battalion of the King's Own was blown from its trenches and Lieutenant-Colonel Martin, the commanding officer, had been killed, Captain Weatherhead, the adjutant, collected a few survivors—"not more than ten," said one of them—and stacked back through the blinding smoke to the support trenches in the hope of driving the Germans out of the firing line. They got within thirty yards, when the adjutant and eight men were killed by a gas shell, the fumes of which nearly suffocated the others.

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