

# Descriptive Story of Battle At Soissons

Section Section of the Story Which Was Written at the Field Headquarters of an Unnamed German General.

BEFORE SOISSONS, Jan. 18 (by courier to Berlin, Jan. 20, via London, Jan. 21, 4:35 p. m.—NOTE: The following is the second part of a descriptive story of the battle of Soissons; the first part was sent in the night report of January 20. The delay in transmission occurred between Berlin and London.)

In the first section of the story, which was written at the field headquarters of an unnamed German general, the battle of Soissons was likened to the battle of Antietam, and the ground over which it was fought was described. Eight days of fighting had resulted in the French being driven from the heights, whence they had expected to launch a fresh offensive movement. The losses in these encounters were very heavy.—Associated Press.

The battle began January 8. A severe bombardment from field guns and heavy artillery was followed by a French charge. The Germans could not make an effective defense against this onslaught. The French with great dash carried part of the German positions, but by their success they dampened the vigor of their artillery bombardment, which could not be continued without endangering their own men.

The German guns in turn opened a heavy fire on the rearward communications of the French, preventing the bringing up of reinforcements. A desperate hand-to-hand struggle, on fairly even terms, raged for four days and nights in the valley and on the wooded spur crowned by the wrecked buildings of LaPierriere farm. Neither side was able to gain a decisive advantage.

General Von Kluck meanwhile was gathering his forces for a counterstroke, which came, not through the valley, but across the high plateau to the eastward, a large part of which

was held by the French. The surface of the plateau was crossed by row after row of deep trenches, each trench with a clear field for the fire of its guns.

It seemed impossible to conceive of troops successfully storming such entrenched positions. The Associated Press correspondent counted in some places five such successive lines of permanent French trenches, each with its entanglement of barbed wire supported on iron posts screwed into the ground. Pioneers might cut their way through the first entanglement before the general attack, but it was necessary for the others to make the advance across the exposed positions under fire. The attackers, however, were General Von Kluck's veterans, who after the famous dash on Paris, the battle of the Marne, and the retirement to the Aisne, had been remaining here in comparative inactivity since the middle of September.

They succeeded somehow in sweeping across the plateau, first to the center and then, on January 13, on the left or eastern flank, carrying trench after trench by storm in an uninterrupted and irresistible attack. By nightfall of January 13 they had driven the French from the plateau. On the following day they cleared the French from the valley below and drove them across the river. The victory was completed by an advance through the valley on that same day.

Earlier operations made this comparatively easy; in fact, many of the French had no alternative but to surrender as the only path of escape was commanded completely from the plateau above.

The correspondent reached the battlefield over the turnpike leading from Soissons, approaching by automobile as far as the village of Creuy, a scant mile from the French outposts which were the scene days earlier of desperate combats. The road is cut into the side of the hill between the plateau and the valley. The narrow margin of roadside on one hand, before the drop into the valley, had become one long cemetery. The Germans had interred their dead of past months in long rows and graves, each surrounded by a stone and wooden crosses telling sometimes of one, often of 20 or 30 or more comrades lying at rest beneath. On the opposite side of the road were entrances to numerous tunneled stone quarries. Driven several hundred feet into the hillside, within the quarries had been lodged German troops, the number in each cavern varying from a company to a regiment.

The village of Creuy itself presented a familiar picture of shell-wrecks and destruction. From the battlefield on the plateau above was unfolded a panorama of the precipitous sides of the Aisne valley and the French positions on the opposite hills. Soissons, in full view below, seemed startlingly close, with the towers of the cathedral and the Thirteenth Century Abbey emerging from the mass of stone houses.

A slight haze made it impossible to ascertain to what extent Soissons had suffered under bombardment. The battle field still is dotted with

## Germans Overcome by Fatigue Sleeping in Trenches During a Battle.



This is one of the most remarkable photographs of the war. It shows one of the dominant forces which have made this European conflict one of the most terrible of history. Fatigue is, in fact, the only path of escape was commanded completely from the plateau above.

to sleep except the few hours they may steal in the trenches while bullets fly above them. While little actual work is done at night the men cannot leave the trenches for fear of raiding parties. They must be ready at all times for battle. It has been said that half the French soldiers live

in a haze because they are dead tired, and Englishmen returning wounded have said the fatigue was absolutely impossible to describe.

This photograph shows the Germans on the Russian border, suffer the same way. It was taken during a battle at Darkehmen on the Pregerapp river, a tributary of the Pro-

gel, which runs past Koenigsberg. Near the riflemen on guard may be seen the hole by which these soldiers will enter their dugout from the trenches if shells begin to burst over them. When artillery fire is continued for hours these men must live huddled in the mud and foul atmosphere of their holes in the ground.

corpses by the hundreds, principally of French soldiers who fell during their hasty retirement from the trenches. They had to cross open fields under artillery and infantry fire and death overtook some as they ran. The positions of the bodies show that most of the French retired fighting, although some fell on their faces as they were stumbling toward the rear. Some lie sprawling on their backs, faces to the sun, occasionally with heads pillowed on knapsacks, showing that death was not instantaneous and that perhaps a last service had been rendered them by fleeing comrades. Three or four had managed to draw from their pockets packages of black French cigarettes for a final smoke. More of the bodies lie with heads turned toward the abandoned French trenches, rifles by their sides or often still clenched in the stiffening hands.

At the edge of the plateau, just over its brink, lay a long line of dead men. They had turned for a last stand against the advancing Germans and met death. They made no attempt to rush down the declivity to temporary safety. The bayonets on all their rifles were fixed, and in a number of cases the chambers of their pieces still held exploded shells. Two or three rifled were found with stocks broken off, and the grip, evidences of severity of the hand to hand fighting.

There was little feeling of horror or revulsion at the sight of these hundreds of corpses; their very number took away the impression of human slaughter. They seemed like figures in a huge panoramic painting of a battle. The human note, however, often came out when one was told of the contents of the letters found in knapsacks or grasped in the hands of the dead. It was the duty of the intelligence officer in the party with which the correspondent traveled to glance at such letters for the sake of military information they might contain. But of this there was little. Far often he found letters from home, with sentences about the health of the children and reference to little presents and delicacies on the way to the soldier. There often were expressions of anxiety for the safety of husband or father and always the hope for the end of "this terrible war," and the safe return of the loved one.

It was necessary to walk with precaution over the battlefield as abandoned hand grenades were sown thickly, ready to explode at any moment from a careless footstep. German burial parties collected thousands of the weapons, which are square boxes of explosive bound to wooden handles 18 inches long.

Most of the captured cannon had been removed from the battle field, the German captors being anxious to send them in and receive the reward given each unit making a capture. But in the ravine of Lamonec, on the eastern extremity of the battlefield, there still were six guns, which the French had not been able to remove. In time a detachment of German artillery experts was busy completing the interrupted task of transferring this heavy artillery to wheels for transportation to the rear.

While the captain in charge was exhibiting his prizes and explaining that they were 15-centimetre coast defense weapons, calling attention at the same time to the stores of ammunition also taken by his men, the French suddenly opened fire on these guns and on the road to the rear of them. Evidently they had concluded that an attempt would be made to remove them, and knowing their exact location, they were able to make it warm for the German artillerymen engaged in this task.

This fire was the signal for the opening of a further general bombardment all along the line. It was the first activity since termination of the battle three days before. The return to the automobiles through the approaches to the

trenches was a most difficult and exhausting. The trenches themselves and the approaches afforded complete protection against the shrapnel fire, but their bottoms were a mass of sticky clay in which one's feet sank at every step from 15 to 18 inches. Plodding through miles of such trenches had been the daily task of thousands of soldiers engaged for four months in this tortuous warfare on the north bank of the Aisne.

RISKING POSSIBLE SEIZURE STEAMER PASSES OUT TO SEA (CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE)

her crew is American except for a few Spanish and Scandinavian oilers. Sir Courtenay W. Bennett, British consul-general in New York, when the sailing of the Wilhelmina was brought to his attention today, declined to discuss the case.

WASHINGTON, Jan. 22.—It is understood here that Great Britain has not been consulted concerning the voyage of the American owned steamer Wilhelmina with a cargo of food from New York to Hamburg, Germany.

The state department has advised the charterers of their legal right to take the cargo to Germany, provided the food is not for the German government or army. Nevertheless officials believe the British government will not hesitate to seize this cargo, though the ship itself may be held free, thus precisely reversing the facts in the case of the Hamburg-American liner Dacia and her cotton cargo.

The British note of January 10 admits that foodstuffs should not be detained without presumption that they are intended for the enemy's armed forces or the enemy's government. But while expressing an intention to adhere to that rule, the British government added:

"We cannot give an unlimited and unconditional understanding in view of the departure of those against whom we are fighting from hitherto accepted rules of civilization and humanity, and the uncertainty as to the extent to which such rules may be violated by them in future."

This was accepted as a reservation of the right of the British government to examine into each shipment on its merits.

British Cruiser Watching FIRE ISLAND, E. I., Jan. 22.—Under the nose of a British cruiser watching at the gateway of New York the American steamship Wilhelmina, which sailed today from New York with a food cargo for Germany, passed out to sea tonight unmolested and laid her course for Hamburg.

The Wilhelmina dropped down the Ambrose channel at nightfall. Six miles to the eastward of Ambrose Lightship she sighted a two-funneled British cruiser with all her lights out. The Wilhelmina steamed on past the warship, which did not even speak the American. An hour later the Wilhelmina, driving through a thick snowstorm, was lost to view, while the cruiser contented herself with playing her searchlight upon several tramp freighters waiting for pilots.

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FRENCH DEFEATED IN TWO ENGAGEMENTS (CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE)

months ago, all efforts by the Germans to break down the Russian resistance seemingly having failed and the Russian attempt to drive the Austro-German forces back to Cracow having met a similar fate.

In the north, however, the new Russian offensive apparently has carried them well toward the German frontier, without meeting serious resistance. The Russian advance into Transylvania is reported checked by a large Austrian force in the mountains, while snow prevents the Muscovites going farther through the Carpathians, although they hold all the passes in readiness for the day when the weather will permit resumption of the forward movement.

No mention has been made during the last few days of the fate of the remnants of the Turkish armies which Russian reports previously said had been defeated in the Caucasus, but military men here believe the Russians, having use for their men elsewhere, have decided not to push on to Erzerum.

The Russian fleet, according to reports, still is busy in the Black Sea sinking Turkish sailing ships. This is taken as evidence that reports that the Turkish cruiser Goeben had been put out of action were not exaggerated.

UNITED STATES WILL BE FOURTH Will Drop From Third Place Among World's Sea Powers When Ships Are Completed

(By Associated Press.) WASHINGTON, Jan. 22.—The United States will drop from third to fourth place among the world's sea powers with the completion of all ships under construction up to July 1, 1915, according to the calculations in the navy year book issued today by the senate naval committee. France will move from fourth to third place, according to the official table.

With the outbreak of the European war information as to the naval programs of the belligerents was no longer available. The comparison is based on tonnage and the official table is as follows:

|               | Completed and building July | Completed and building July |
|---------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Great Britain | 2,157,850                   | 2,714,106                   |
| Germany       | 951,712                     | 1,298,577                   |
| U. S.         | 765,123                     | 861,987                     |
| France        | 688,840                     | 899,916                     |
| Japan         | 519,640                     | 699,916                     |
| Italy         | 285,460                     | 497,815                     |
| Russia        | 270,801                     | 378,818                     |

Will Send Cruiser Esmeralda. SANTIAGO, Chile, Jan. 22.—Chile has decided to send the cruiser Esmeralda to participate in the international parade at the formal opening of the Panama-Pacific Canal. The Esmeralda will take the place of the battleship Captain Prat, which originally was selected. The Esmeralda has been chosen because she is the fastest ship.

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