

ON BELGIAN ROADS

Flow of Refugees Relentlessly Driven Eastward by Retreating German Armies

By GEORGE RENWICK

Amsterdam, Oct. 16. The roads from Brussels, Ghent and Antwerp are roads of misery and tragedy, so a number of travelers who have just crossed the frontier have told me. From Flanders and the Lille districts, they say, a great flood of refugees are pouring eastward, and the prospects are that Holland will in a few days be face to face with terrible scenes like those of the early days of the war, when exiles of the war streamed across her frontier.

The number of refugees cannot, of course, be actually gauged, but it is declared it cannot be less than a quarter of a million. These unhappy people, gray-bearded, women and children, with such belongings as they can take with them, have, one traveler tells me, turned Antwerp into a town of tragedy. The streets as well as the roads leading into it are choked with refugees.

In Antwerp, hotels, cafes and restaurants are filled to overflowing. People are sleeping on the floors of those places and thousands can find no better place in which to rest than the streets.

In Ghent, conditions are similar, and Brussels, too, is rapidly filling up. Great caravans of refugees are mixed up with their material, being driven relentlessly along by the Germans. The soldiers, it is said, are downcast and silent, while through the days of black misery which the refugees are experiencing one ray of hope shines making life bearable. The news spreads along of the heavy defeats which the German armies are sustaining.

U. S. First Army Takes Grandpre

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guns never before equaled and placed in natural positions of great strategic advantage. Pershing's men drove their wedge deeper into the Kriemhild line, taking and passing Juvin on the western flank of the wedge, cutting through the second-line wire of the St. Georges and Landres-et-St. Georges defense, and on the eastern flank of the wedge climbing the slippery slopes of Hill 259, lying west of Bantheville, and holding it against all comers.

All yesterday there was bitter fighting for possession of Bois Chailillon, which controlled the Taillefer farm. The German losses here were very heavy. The dark dawn which hung over the countryside was pierced many times every minute by the flashes of the innumerable cannon which we have massed back of our lines, sending messages to the wounded and decimated Germans over on the wrong side of No-Man's Land. The German artillery fire, smart in the morning, were down early in the afternoon. Just before 3 o'clock the enemy began heavy fire north of Cunel. Our artillery, taking up the challenge, hurled back two shells for one. In a bitter artillery duel which lasted three hours, our artillery proved superior to the German.

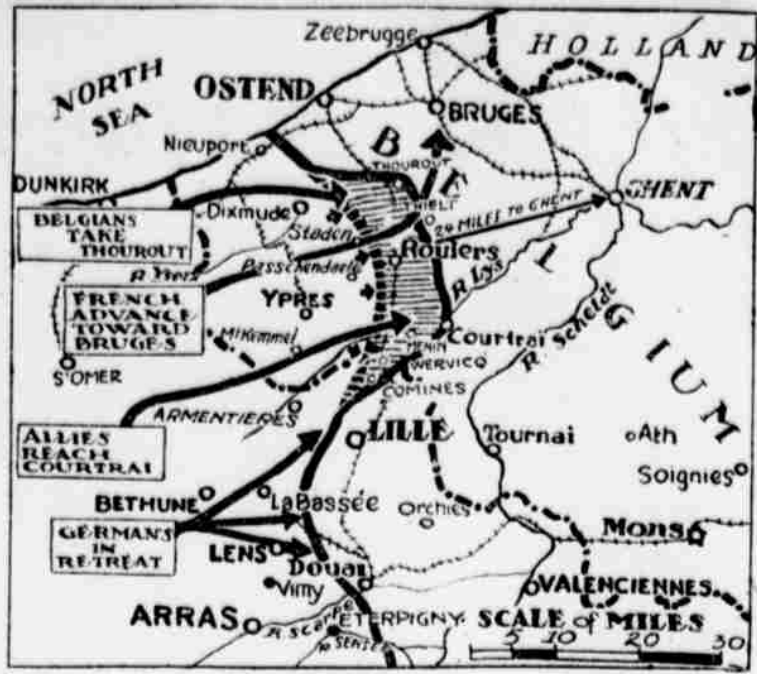
Airmen Do Yeoman Work Hampered by low-lying clouds and rain which made it most difficult to see, our reconnaissance aviators did yeoman work, flying at a height of 200 yards and keeping close tabs on the German movements.

A word should be said about German machine-gun nests. These, long built as part of the Kriemhild defenses, were made of masonry and steel. They were not only impregnable to rifle fire, but 75 shells bounced off them. In many cases without scoring damage. Even direct hits from 155s sometimes failed to put them out. About the only way to beat them was by surrounding.

When the top of a hill is crested with these pill boxes, the difficulty of advance becomes exceedingly great and they impose enormous costs when attempts are made to rush these positions. Germans in our hands seems imbued with the idea that the war is about ended. They believe an armistice is about to be signed, but their officers are preaching to them that they must fight their hardest to get the best terms for the fatherland. Their fighting is of a quality that which the German command could ask no more in the way of personal bravery or stamina. Enjoying the advantage of position they are making our advance peculiarly difficult. It has been explained that the German command pins a great part of the fate of the whole front on the success in holding back the American fighters.

We took additional prisoners yesterday, the Germans not surrendering readily, but generally fighting until no chance appeared to be left. A tribute should be paid to the heroism of the American boys fighting this battle, one of the bitterest of the war.

DRIVING FOE FROM FLANDERS



Most of them never lived much less than a week, and nights outdoors, in such climate, for which there is no counterpart in America. Rain and rain, soaking but rain, day after day, penetrating cold all the time, and no shelter, except holes in the ground and pig tents.

October 14—There had been nothing like an armistice today on the front of the First American army. Terrible fighting has been in progress since early this morning, between the Argonne forest and the Meuse, where the German command is exerting itself to the utmost to hold a twenty-five kilometer sector against the hammer blows of Pershing's fighting men.

Germans Retreat South of Lille

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The Aisne was crossed east of Grandpre, Landres and St. Georges were reached. Hill 288, west of Bantheville, is ours, as well as the Bois-Puillers, and most of the Bois-Forest, Romagne and Cunel are in our hands.

Just before dark aviators reported that the Germans were pulling back their artillery in front of our center. The advance is all the more significant, because captured orders gave the command to hold that line before the Americans at all costs.

The crossing of the Aisne was performed under great difficulties and with much bravado, but our engineers attempted to throw a bridge across the fifty-foot stream, but were halted by hand grenades thrown by German infantry trenches not more than two yards away.

This morning we put down a heavy artillery preparation on the foe positions east of Grandpre and got two bridges across. All day our engineers worked, repairing these crossings as fast as the German shells damaged them.

The Americans had much difficulty in getting over, and also on the river south of Bantheville, where the infantry was caught in a heavy machine-gun fire from the Bois Bantheville and Bois Rappe.

The fighting on our sector today was perhaps the bitterest of the whole front in the last three days. The reason of the German desire to hold back the American army is easily understood. Our sector between the Argonne and the Meuse is the key to the German line from west of Laon to the east of the Meuse. This means one of the vital spots of the whole front from the sea to the Moselle, because if the Allies can get through here much farther all German communication through Metziers will be interrupted.

Meziers Main Supply Line The Meziers railroad is the center of the foe lines of supply from Laon to the Meuse. The main line from Namur branches here with important branches to Laon, Reims and Sedan, each of which feeds numerous smaller railroad lines.

While Meziers is not directly north of the American army, our advance means that the foe will lose his supply lines at least on a third of the whole salient from the sea to the Moselle. This, of course, would force a retirement all the way along the line. Therefore the Germans believe they must hold back the Americans to avert a military disaster.

The fighting today took our troops into a large part of the Kriemhild line and put them up against heavy wire defenses. While cutting through they were heavily shelled with gas, especially in the region of Landres.

German infantry was seen today hauling back 77 field pieces. This is explained, perhaps, by the fact that the Germans are very short of horses, our gunners having killed a great many last week.

Clear Out Machine Guns There was bitter fighting leading into the Bois Bantheville, where the Germans had many machine guns. Our infantry was halted temporarily until the artillery could clear out these nests, and then made satisfactory progress.

Official War Reports

Headquarters American Expeditionary Forces, Oct. 15 (Delayed). Our troops today continued their attack on both sides of the Meuse, encountering stubborn resistance from a re-inforced enemy. East of the Meuse French and American troops have gained ground. West of the river the fighting has increased in violence, and our troops have made substantial gains, including Hill 259, which changed hands three times. We have broken the Kriemhild-Stellin line at new points, where our men closed with the enemy in a series of hand-to-hand encounters in which they took prisoners.

FRENCH Paris, Oct. 16. In the course of the night we made a little progress to the north of Sissonne and north of Astfeld-la-Ville. We stopped a violent counter-attack, strongly supported by artillery, in the region of St. Germainmont. The southwest of Reims we captured the village of Acy-Romance.

BRITISH London, Oct. 16. Our patrols gained ground slightly during the night in the Douai-Lille sector.

French cavalry has managed to get through the German lines. They have reached Lichtervelde and now are probably beyond that place. Elsewhere along the front other British forces are gaining ground, but their progress has been merely to straighten the lines and to carry out consolidating operations in advantageous positions.

Enemy defenses of great power were encountered during the day by the British. There were violent engagements of great depth and unnumbered pill boxes which had to be reduced.

There was an impressive scene at Reims when the square, and as a French major gathered the rescued civilians and German prisoners around a battered plane in the square, and as the shouts screamed overhead he played the Marseillaise.

"Did you ever hear that before?" he asked the people of the city. The civilians cheered themselves hoarse.

FRENCH WIN TOWN MILE FROM RETHEL

By the Associated Press

Paris, Oct. 16.—French forces here captured the village of Acy-Romance, within a mile of the important railway junction of Rethel, in the Champagne. The War Office announced today that the French have made some further progress to the north of Sissonne, while between Sissonne (east of Laon) and Rethel they resumed a violent enemy counter-attack near St. Germainmont.

Rearguard Actions

Everywhere the Germans are fighting rearguard actions with large numbers of men involved in the struggle. The battle is being fought in a continuous rain, which makes the fighting increasingly difficult. Troops storming ahead lose their footing in the ooze, some sinking in as far as their knees. The wounded returning from the front are plastered with mud. Retreat has been stormy and taken and the Belgians have captured Bevern Station. They are east and north of the Bevern Canal and are past Issegem.

The new gains have further turned the German lines both north and south of the area under attack, and the enemy retirement reported from the southwest in the result. Further withdrawals on a broad scale may be expected, unless the weather continues so bad as to prevent further advance. The enemy is showing signs of nervousness, and more fire and explosions are reported.

Latest reports indicate that the

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