

# THE BATTLEFIELD OF LOOS.

## SMASHING FORCE OF ARTILLERY.

## TRIBUTE TO BRITISH GUNNERS.

## THE NEW HOPE.

From JOHN BUCHAN.

BRITISH HEADQUARTERS, SEPT. 30.

I have to-day had the privilege of visiting the battlefield of Loos. Let me describe its elements. A low ridge runs northward from the Béthune-Lens railway to the high ground south of La Bassée. It sends off a spur to the north-east, which is the Hill 70 of the *communiqués*. In the angle between the two lies the village of Loos. The German first position was along the crest of the western ridge; their second was in the hollow just west of Loos; their third runs to-day through Cité St. Auguste and along the slopes to the north.

To reach their old front trenches one leaves the Béthune-Lens high road near the houses called *Philosophe*. In front is a long easy slope so scarred with trench lines that I can only compare it to the Karroo, where tussocks of grass are sparsely scattered over the baked earth. Only in this case the earth is white. The coarse herbage springs from a light chalk, and the sand-bagged parapets are further patches of dull grey. Looking from the high road, the sky-line is about a thousand yards distant, and beyond it rise the strange twin towers of Loos, like the rigging of a ship seen far off at sea. The place is not very "healthy"—no hinterland is—but, though the shelling was continuous, the trenches were fairly safe.

### PLOUGHED UP REDOUBT.

Beyond the old British front trench you pass through the *débris* of our wire defences and cross the hundred yards of No Man's Land over which, for so many months, our men looked at the enemy. Then you reach the German entanglements, wonderfully cut to pieces by our shell-fire. There our own dead are lying very thick. Presently you are in the German front trenches. Here, in some parts, there are masses of German dead, and some of our own. This is the famous Loos-road Redoubt, a work about five hundred yards in diameter, built around a tract from Loos to Vermelles which follows the crest of the downs. It is an amazing network, ramified beyond belief, but now a monument to the power of our artillery. It is all ploughed up and mangled like a sand castle which a child has demolished in a fit of temper. Fragments of shell, old machine-gun belts, rifle cartridges, biscuit tins, dirty pads of cotton wool are everywhere, and a horrible number of unburied bodies.

But the chief interest of the Redoubt is the view. The whole battlefield of our recent advance is plain to the eye. Below, in the hollow,

Beyond the old British front trench you pass through the *débris* of our wire defences and cross the hundred yards of No Man's Land over which, for so many months, our men looked at the enemy. Then you reach the German entanglements, wonderfully cut to pieces by our shell-fire. There our own dead are lying very thick. Presently you are in the German front trenches. Here, in some parts, there are masses of German dead, and some of our own. This is the famous Loos-road Redoubt, a work about five hundred yards in diameter, built around a tract from Loos to Vermelles which follows the crest of the downs. It is an amazing network, ramified beyond belief, but now a monument to the power of our artillery. It is all ploughed up and mangled like a sand castle which a child has demolished in a fit of temper. Fragments of shell, old machine-gun belts, rifle cartridges, biscuit tins, dirty pads of cotton wool are everywhere, and a horrible number of unburied bodies.

But the chief interest of the Redoubt is the view. The whole battlefield of our recent advance is plain to the eye. Below, in the hollow, lie the ruins of Loos around the gaunt tower. Beyond is the slope of Hill 70, with the houses of Lens showing to the south-east of it. North, one can see Hulluch and the German quarries, and further on St. Elie and Haisnes, hidden in a cloud of high explosives, and west of them the site of the Hohenzollern Redoubt and the ill-omened slag-heap, Fosse 8. It is that sight rare in this present war, at least in the northern section—an old-fashioned battlefield. It is all quite open and bare and baked. The tactical elements can be grasped in a minute or two.

And, to complete the picture, the dead are everywhere around one, high explosives and shrapnel boom overhead, the thrash of an airplane's propeller comes faint from the high heavens, and up towards Fosse 8 there is a never-ending mutter of machine-guns. Only living soldiers seem to be absent, for, though battle is joined two miles off, scarcely a human being is visible in the landscape.

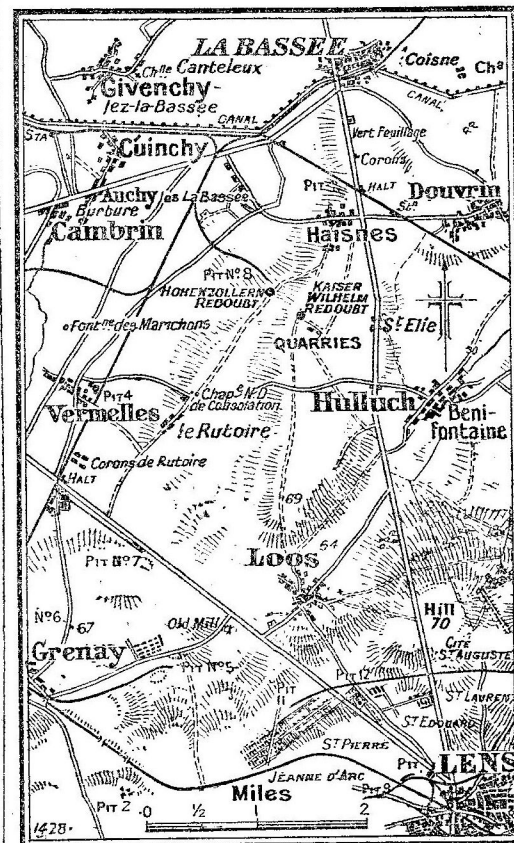
### HIGH SPIRITS OF OUR MEN.

I came home late this evening through a wonderful scene. A clear blowing autumn sky was ending in a stormy twilight. Far off in the sky a squadron of airplanes glimmered like white moths against the sullen blue. Battalions were marching down from the trenches, khaki and tartan alike white with chalk mud from the rain of yesterday. They had none of the haggard, weary look of most troops in such circumstances, but laughed and joked and had a swagger even in their fatigue. Other battalions, very spruce and workman-like, were marching off. They are stout fellows to look at, these soldiers of the New Army. Interminable transport trains choked all the road, so that one had leisure to study the progress of the thick rain clouds from the west through the skeleton webs which once were cottages.

At a certain Corps Headquarters where I had tea there were many odd relics. I saw the alarm bell which had once hung in the Loos-road Redoubt. I saw, too, a strange fragment of steel which fell a long way back from the front, and which could belong to no German type of shell. It looked like a piece of a burst gun, but where it came from heaven alone knows. Among the captured German field guns outside the chateau was a Russian machine-gun, which must have been taken on the Eastern front. That little gun had seen life since it first left its factory in Odessa.

Everywhere in our troops there seems to be the quickening of a new hope. You can see it, too, in the civil population. The inhabitants of the towns behind the front have seen too much of war, and have grown apathetic. But the other day they lined the streets and cheered the

## THE BRITISH BATTLE FRONT.



elements can be grasped in a minute or two. And, to complete the picture, the dead are everywhere around one, high explosives and shrapnel boom overhead, the thresh of an airplane's propeller comes faint from the high heavens, and up towards Fosse 8 there is a never-ending mutter of machine-guns. Only living soldiers seem to be absent, for, though battle is joined two miles off, scarcely a human being is visible in the landscape.

HIGH SPIRITS OF OUR MEN.

I came home late this evening through a wonderful scene. A clear blowing autumn sky was ending in a stormy twilight. Far off in the sky a squadron of airplanes glimmered like white moths against the sullen blue. Battalions were marching down from the trenches, khaki and tartan alike white with chalk mud from the rain of yesterday. They had none of the haggard, weary look of most troops in such circumstances, but laughed and joked and had a swagger even in their fatigue. Other battalions, very spruce and workman-like, were marching off. They are stout fellows to look at, these soldiers of the New Army. Interminable transport trains choked all the road, so that one had leisure to study the progress of the thick rain clouds from the west through the skeleton webs which once were cottages.

At a certain Corps Headquarters where I had tea there were many odd relics. I saw the alarm bell which had once hung in the Loos-road Redoubt. I saw, too, a strange fragment of steel which fell a long way back from the front, and which could belong to no German type of shell. It looked like a piece of a burst gun, but where it came from heaven alone knows. Among the captured German field guns outside the chateau was a Russian machine-gun, which must have been taken on the Eastern front. That little gun had seen life since it first left its factory in Odessa.

Everywhere in our troops there seems to be the quickening of a new hope. You can see it, too, in the civil population. The inhabitants of the towns behind the front have seen too much of war, and have grown apathetic. But the other day they lined the streets and cheered the tattered remnants of a battalion returning from action. And you can see it most of all among the French. The great news from Champagne—of the charge of Marchand's Colonials, of the brigades that have gone clean through all the German lines and are now facing open country—is reflected in a brighter eye and a stiffer bearing even among those clear-eyed and upstanding men.

FRENCH SOLDIERS' SONG.

To-night, I passed a knot of French soldiers in their new horizon blue, and they were singing some marching song, from which I caught the word "Prussians." Perhaps it was the old song of the men of Dumouriez:—

*Savez-vous la belle histoire  
De ces fameux Prussiens?  
Ils marchaient à la victoire  
Avec les Autrichiens.*

A famous general is reported to have said, with a pardonable mixture of metaphors, that, if the French once got their tails up, they would carry the battlement of heaven. Let us hope that, for our incomparable Allies and for ourselves, "the day of glory has arrived."

