

The Last 100 Days – Articles for the 10th Anniversary

The Last Hundred Days of the War

August 8, 1918.

0 *note in his War Diary.*
says Ludendorff, "August 8th was the black day of the German Army in the history of this war. This was the worst experience I had to go through."

after 3 weeks of battle and almost no rest -
The night of the 7th--8th, in the Somme country between ~~the Ancre~~ and the ~~gilt~~ Somme--~~xxxxxx~~ a broken wilderness fought over three ~~times before--~~ was damp and very quiet; and three hours after midnight a dense white

mist began to drift up the river valley. So thick was it that the infantry and tanks ~~waiting at their~~ jumping-off points-- (white tape-lines had been laid-out in places ~~a few hours~~

previously)--prepared to move entirely by prismatic compass. Voices muffled and came ghostly from ~~xxxxxx~~ a yard ahead; "xxxxxx" khaki uniforms were silvered by the mist, like ~~grotesque~~ in human shapes ~~xxxxxx~~ moving under a strange grey sea.

along staff
Here and there in the 20-mile xfront small knots of officers waited anxiously. Some days before ~~the~~ German raid had captured a Australian sergeant and some men; and if ~~the~~ in the cross examination ~~xxxxxx~~ the enemy had been given any cause for suspicion, their guns would open before zero, and smash the waiting assault.

4
Four o'clock. All silent. The chill vapour eddied and swirled; settled thick again. The ~~British~~ 4th Army, consisting of 14 divisions of English, Canadian, Australian, and American divisions, with a cavalry corps, had ~~xxxxxx~~ only at night, hiding by day; ~~the~~ empty train had gone north, ~~xxxxxx~~ observed by enemy observation balloons; the guns had not ~~xxxxxx~~ registered. Success depended on— Army was to operate between Montidier and Rpye, another 12 complete surprise divisions. Had these hundreds of the sands of men, and their

^{encumbrance}
immense mass of war material--^{score of} miles of transport lorries,
waggons, guns, etc--been entirely unsuspected?

4.15 hours. Silence. The Germans ~~1~~ were dug-in among half-ruined
steel-and -concrete
cornfields, many miles from their dreadful ~~Hindenburg~~ Siegfried
Stellung (Hindenburg Line) which they had left in the great
drive of March 21.

4.16 hours. ~~A~~ British and Colonial officers, ^{unfilmed exactly} ~~like~~ like their
men, stare fixedly ~~at~~ at their wristlet ~~watches~~ watches. Four minutes to
go! Still ~~1~~ silence, clammy cold grey mist. "Unearthly silence",
thought many.

4.20. The mist flickers; becomes soaked with light; burdened with
the steel glaciers of shells which scrape away every other
sound from the ear. The bubbling brightness ^{is overcome} ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~
by the earth on fire, and men moving slowly ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ behind walls of
smoke
and spouting flame. They move on, and on, leaving few dead and
wounded. The mist grows thinner, and vanished in sunshine; and
miles behind the enemy front lines tanks are lurching, surprising
division and corps headquarters ^{stuffs} ~~at~~ at breakfast, and ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~
leaving their terrible visiting cards through walls, doors,
and windows.

"Gap", longed for
At last ~~the~~ a real ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ by the cavalry
slow, dreary
during four ~~long~~ ~~many~~ years; but where is the old Kitchener's
Army that dreamed of these things? For two years the wreckage
of ~~that~~ its hope has lain on this very Somme battlefield. The
War has lasted too long.

Well, people in England were much cheered. Last night the Premier
announced in the Commons the destruction of 150 U Boats; and
tonight, August 8, 1918, they read of the break-through, with
13,000 prisoners and 200 guns taken by the 4th Army (Rawlinson's).

The Last Hundred Days of the War

-11-
10 August 1918.

The battle of Amiens is slowing up; many of the tanks working with English, Canadian, and Australian troops are shattered and ^{lying out} in the flattened cornfields, burnt out; the infantry is tired, and ^{haggard with sleeplessness} heavy with want of sleep. The ~~enemy~~ ^{Gerry} has been blowing up his ~~ammunition dumps~~ ^{ammunition dumps} all the previous night; and ^{he is} ~~is~~ back at the old trench systems he held at the beginning of the battle of the Somme in 1916.

However, ^{our tired men} ~~we~~ go forward again today. With the ^{being to} ~~Canadians~~ ^{the Canadian} ~~orders being issued late, the hour of attack has been~~ ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ altered, and it ^{calls} took place in broad daylight without smoke

screens. The tanks suffer, twenty three out of forty three ^{from field guns} ~~receiving direct hits~~ ^{the others, slightly hit, churn their way through the} ~~the~~ grass-grown trench systems of ~~the~~

at Calverley, 1916, with their maze of trenches and subsided dugouts ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ ^{the rusty} ~~the~~ ^{wine and willow springing out of old parapets - ideal defensive ground. That's little} ~~any~~ prevented any chance of a rapid advance in the face of ~~the~~ ^{cross-fire of thousands of machine guns, & the battle dies down.} the sweeping ~~fire~~ ^{reserves are} of machine guns.

The Tank Corps ^{banks} ~~were~~ used up; and the machines and their crews are fought almost to a standstill. After an average of three hours ^{in a closed tank,} in action ~~all~~ men began to suffer from a severe headaches and giddiness, and most from sickness, a high temperature and heart disturbance. (The popular films ~~XX~~ ^{ten years later did not} show the realities of ~~action~~ ^{did the fighting} ~~action~~: that is why those who went through it ~~sit~~ ^{sat} quiet and still and ^{angrily} ~~visibly~~ ^{ed} hopeless while the young cheer and ^{laugh} ~~laugh~~ ^{about them} ~~laugh~~.)

Today there have been many "dog-fights" in the air. 48 enemy machines have been destroyed, and 17 driven down out of control. 50 British 'planes failed to come home; and ^{even down the night tonight} ~~the nights in the~~ ^{life was} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~squadron messes~~ ^{more} more hectic than usual... ^{for tomorrow...} ~~the~~ ^{Highly important are} ~~the~~ ^{very} very disturbed.

Today at the conference of The German Great General Main Headquarters ~~were~~ ^{very} very disturbed.

3

The Last Hundred Days.

Henry Williamson

18 August, ~~1928~~: 1918.

This morning, being a Sunday, our troops attacked up north, in the Ypres district.

~~Yesterday, a Saturday,~~

~~Yesterday~~, a later day,
Owing to the difficulty of bringing up guns over the half-broken
country ~~gained~~ ^{many were sent forward} ~~the enemy~~ ^{the Germans during the}
~~last week~~, the attack planned for 15th August ~~into the old~~
~~Somme~~ country was cancelled. ~~The 6th Army~~

During the immense difficulty of buying up guns & ammunition

During the immense ^{war}
over the half-broken country lost & gained on the way during
the past week, the ~~further~~ proposed attack { the U.S. Army was
^{rebel} ^{stage} ^{who} ^{not} ^{with}

the past week, the ~~fourth~~ attack ^{these who had} cancelled, much to the relief I need ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{both British & German - were now made} ~~tactics~~ ^{was} ~~was~~ ^{be the} been "for it." Many of the ^{to} ~~the~~ ^{thought to} ~~who~~ ^{much} ~~the~~ ^{their} ~~the~~ ^{against} ~~the~~ ^{death,}

up almost
entirely 2

Young boys, ~~and~~ while most take physical exercise and I was
Thomas in England: and the ruthlessness of a schoolmaster I was
quite ^{not} to despair. Today Sunday, a searching not day, the read in
was to summer as the ^{same} summer, as usually called to that
new of the ^{past} most

make money -
Comic Ads -
During the last nine days, since the opening of the great market has departed
During the last nine days, since the opening of the great market has departed
During the last nine days, since the opening of the great market has departed

During the last year, the Par. has been successful in the Par. less than 27 of the 400
successful due to the enemy 13 divisions no less than 27 of the 400
engaged with its own 13 divisions and ~~4000~~ 27,000

engaged with us over 20,000
 enemies; has fallen ~~over 20,000~~ 27,000
 guns. ~~Killed~~ ~~wounded~~ the 4th My suffered
 (Ten years later history shows that the same number of
 casualties, while killing ~~over 2000~~ 2000-sun barrage, the
 the enemy. Re colossal blast of the vast ~~last~~ secret
~~and the~~ surprise of the photos &
 concrete line & tanks, & the expanding

For

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The Last 100 Days.

By HENRY WILLIAMSON.

Winner of the Hawthornden Prize for 1928.

Ten years ago this week there began at Amiens the series of terrific engagements that were to culminate in the final collapse of the German military machine. The "Daily Express" has asked Mr. Henry Williamson, who served as a soldier of the line, to describe from time to time in these columns the principal events of the last hundred days of the war.

August 11, 1918.

The great battle of Amiens is slowing up. Many of the tanks working with the English and Colonial troops are shattered and burned out. The infantry is tired, and lying out in the flattened cornfields alongside the numerous German dead "Jerry" has been blowing up his ammunition dumps during the previous night, before retiring to the trench systems he held at the beginning of the Somme battle in 1916. However, our tired men go forward again to-day. Owing to orders being issued late, the hour of the Canadian attack has been altered, and the assault takes place in broad daylight, without smoke screens from airplanes. The tanks suffer, twenty-three out of forty-three receiving direct hits from enemy field guns firing over open sights.

The remainder, stiflingly hot with petrol fumes, so that the crews have to breathe through the mouthpieces of their box-respirators, churn their way through the grass-grown hummocks and hollows of old trenches and subsided dug-outs, among rusty wire tangles, and willows springing out of old shell holes.

The reserves are exhausted; tanks and their crews have fought to a standstill. After an average three hours in a tank in action men begin to suffer from severe headaches and giddiness, sickness, and heart palpitation.

To-night in the squadron messes life is more hectic than usual; drink and be merry, for to-morrow—as enemy machines have been destroyed, 17 driven down out of control. Fifty British airplanes are missing.

At the enemy Main General Headquarters to-night it is reported that the reserve German troops hurrying up by train and lorry are being greeted with cries of "Black-leg!" by the German soldiers trickling away from the battlefield.

Meanwhile the haggard, bloodshot, lethargic British and Dominion troops are relieved; in long, dogged strings they slouch away from the line, thinking only of sleep, sleep, sleep; slouching on, anywhere, anyhow, bent under rifles and equipment, puttees down over boots, feet swelled and shapeless, tottering with fatigue.

The Last Hundred Days.

With The 4th Army.

By HENRY WILLIAMSON.

Winner of this year's Hawthornden Prize.

August 13, 1918.

Owing to the immense difficulty of bringing up guns and ammunition over the half-broken country gained from the enemy during the past week, the proposed attack by the 4th Army on Thursday morning was cancelled, much to the relief of those who had thought themselves "for it."

Many of the new drafts to the infantry—both British and German—are made up almost entirely of young boys, who think too much of their homes; and while most have fortified themselves, before coming out, against the idea of death, the ruthlessness and enslavement of war make many give way to despair.

To-day it is scorching hot on the old Somme battlefields, where they lie out in shallow trenches that are cut through the two-year-old wreckage of 1916. The platoon officers read in "Comic Cuts"—as the corps summaries are invariably called—that during the last nine days, since the opening of the most successful British push so far, the 4th Army has driven the enemy back to a depth of 12 miles; has engaged with its own 13 divisions no fewer than 27 of the enemy's; and has taken over 20,000 prisoners and 400 guns.

* * *

The colossal blasting power of the 2,000-gun barrage, the surprise of the vast secret concentration of troops and tanks, the comparatively unfortified enemy positions, and the war-weariness of the Germans accounted for this reversal of the usual casualty ratio—for until the last hundred days it was the French and British who lost two men for every one German.

This afternoon the news came over the field telephones and "buzzers" that a small attack by troops of the 3rd Army south of Baillieu was entirely successful. The village of Outterterne and several fortified farms—their cellars made into pill-boxes of ferro-concrete with roofs a yard thick, and splayed with slits in the walls for machine-guns to fire through—near the railway line have been taken.

The enemy lines were pierced to a depth of 1,000-2,000 yards on a four-mile front. Merville, one of the towns taken in the big enemy drive in the spring, is expected to be evacuated during the night.

The remnants of one of the battalions coming out of this "small" action were given an issue of lime-juice instead of rum. The remarks of the "footloggers" do not appear in any of the war histories, although it was officially stated that "the spirit of the troops is excellent."

nor laid in a cutting in the chalk — we not only
carefully registered, but were blocked ~~with~~ ^{by} ~~the~~ ^{the}
~~with~~ anti-tank stoppages ~~made~~ of the well-known
Hindenburg-line pattern — ^{set close together} lengths of rail ~~made~~
2 ^{or more} blocks

& rising diagonally at large concrete blocks.

rising diagonally out of huge concrete blocks.
^{At once} ~~Immediately~~ whistling 2/3 sec & earth clattered about the
 tanks, & within a few minutes ~~thirty~~ seven tanks were ~~smashed~~
 & ~~in fire~~ in flames. ~~Destroyed~~ But if the German
 smashed & ~~in fire~~ in flames, the British planes and
 gunners could at last see the tanks, the bombs & machine-gun fire
 see the gunners, & drive at them with bombs & machine-gun fire.
~~It lasted~~ It lasted until the afternoon, when
 memory - losing

The fight continued & lasted until many of the tanks' crews became unconscious and memory - losing in the great heat; ~~that~~ ^{and in others the ammunition} succeeded the hands, & of among the guns, sometimes exploding. Many wheels were ~~wrecked~~
unhitchable, ~~and so~~. A line of the railway was gained at 2000 p.m.; and

By nightfall the line of the railway was gained ~~at~~
almost entirely, with several villages & 2000 prisoners; and
preparations for the main attack ~~of~~ ^{on 25th} were being speedily
completed. ~~all~~ ^{most} roads & tracks were thick
with ~~preparation~~ ^{preparation} men and mules & engines for the
main assault in two days time.

5th article.

Re Last Hundred Days.

23 August 1918.

This morning at 4.45 hours ~~the~~ ^{the night} ~~light~~ ^{light} ~~of~~ ^{of} the moon
above a thin ~~of~~ ^{on the} ~~clouds~~ ^{clouds} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~sunrise~~ ^{sunrise} of ~~a~~ ^a ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~place~~ ^{place} near
barage, and along a thirty three mile front - from
our position until the French near ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~place~~ ^{place} near
the Hindenburg line for Quénant & Bullecourt joined the
old Arras-Vimy defence of 1916 - the assault
opened with a hundred tanks, and men of the 3rd, 4th,
5th, and 6th Corps.

The German machine gunners defended their posts
with extraordinary heroism - they were always brave troops -
they fired their guns till the very moment when
by other ~~troops~~ ~~troops~~ weapons were cranked to
the earth by the attacking tank. The ~~guns~~ ^{very thick} ~~were~~ ^{cartridge in}
the belts feeding their guns ~~was~~ ^{held} a copper-sheathed steel-coiled
inlet, and the tanks were pulled all over and in many
places penetrated by those. As usual, many of the crews
became delirious in the terrific heat inside the tanks. In some cases the
every ~~most phosphorus~~ ^{phosphorus} ~~dreaded tanks~~ ^{dreaded tanks} ~~and phosphorus bombs,~~ ^{which filled the small}
~~which~~ ^{filled} ~~was~~ ^{little attack was.}

The Last 100 Days.

Tanks In Action.

By HENRY WILLIAMSON.

Winner of the Hawthornden Prize for 1928, who is describing on the appropriate tenth anniversaries the chief events of the last phases of the Great War.

August 23, 1918.

This morning at 4.45 hours the ghastly light of the moon waning over the stricken upland fields was flooded with a flickering false-sunrise, and along a thirty-three-mile front—from our junction with the French to the place where the Hindenburg Line from Queant and Bullecourt joined the old Arras-Vimy defence of 1916—the assault behind the barrage opened with a hundred tanks, and men of the 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th Corps.

The German machine-gunners defended their posts with extraordinary heroism (they were always brave troops), often squatting behind their guns and firing until the very moment when they were crushed to earth by the tank lurching upon them at four miles an hour. Every third cartridge in the canvas belts feeding their guns held a copper-sheathed steel-cored bullet; the tanks were pitted all over, and in many places penetrated, by these bullets.

* * *

As usual, many of the crews became delirious in the terrific heat inside the tanks; while in some cases the enemy drenched them with phosphorous bombs, filling them with smoke like cotton wool, which choked the breathing and burned throat and eyes.

The work of the contact airplanes was especially successful to-day. The messages and reports they dropped kept the wide straggling action in hand. The counter-work against the German guns (themselves countering the tanks) was also fortunate. The following report of an action fought by a counter-gun airplane came in towards evening: No. 73 Squadron.

At 1.15 p.m. batteries were observed unlimbering and coming into action near Behagnies. Twenty-four bombs were dropped and nearly 2,000 rounds fired at these batteries, causing the greatest confusion. Several limbers were overturned, and horses stampeded, and the personnel scattered in all directions.

All the objectives of the attack have been reached. The 4th Corps, in the centre, has pushed forward to Bihucourt and Loupart Wood (the few acres of charred and naked stumps on the hill blasted by the 1916 bombardments), while the 6th Corps has captured Evillers and dug in east of the Arras-Bapaume road.

The 5th Corps, helped by the 3rd, has pushed out its right, and established itself on the hills overlooking Albert. Five thousand prisoners and many guns have been taken.

The Last 100 Days.

"So Why Fight On?"

By HENRY WILLIAMSON.

Winner of the Hawthornden prize for 1928.

September 1, 1918.

This morning at 5.30 a.m. the Australian troops of the Sixth Brigade, after a short bombardment, stormed the village and hill of Mont St. Quentin, a mile north of Péronne, and took Anvil Wood.

Another brigade (the Fourteenth), leap-frogged through the Sixth Brigade, and, having mopped up a few machine-gun posts, entered and occupied Péronne. Only a small portion of the north-east suburbs of the town remains in enemy hands.

This is great news, for Péronne is the key that unlocks the river and canal defence for more than twenty miles, being centrally behind both; and also of the railway system that runs east of the River Somme. It means that the line of the Somme has been turned, and a German retirement to the Hindenburg Line is inevitable. Behind this line is open country.

Ludendorff has announced that this "Siegfried Stellung" is impregnable. It consists of a system of deep trenches in the chalky uplands, with thousands of ferro-concrete machine-gun shelters proof against all but direct hits of the heavier shells; and entered by the shafts from dug-outs ten to fifteen yards underground. Belts of rusty barbed wire, seventy yards wide in places, and half-concealed by withering autumn grasses, protect every trench.

* * *

The cellars of cottages and farmhouses in the villages lying within this zone are almost solid with iron and concrete, splayed for criss-cross machine-gun fire. At its strongest part the Hindenburg Line is seven miles deep; its mightiest defence is the Canal du Nord from Havrincourt Wood to Moeuvres.

During the past month the British Army in France has taken 57,318 German prisoners and 657 guns. In a fortnight the enemy has been driven back over fortified country which took more than six months of 1916-17 to clear.

Many think that it is now full-stop to our advance, and another dreary winter before the Hindenburg Line; but up north Bullecourt and Hendecourt, powerful cores of machine-gun defence, were taken to-day.

Nearer Arras, the Canadians have been lying down in the fields all the afternoon, resting before an attack on the Wotan Switch line, which is to be assaulted at five o'clock to-morrow morning. If the Wotan falls, the war may end in 1919, for we shall be within striking position of the main defences of the Hindenburg Line. While nearly all our soldiers are worn-out, the German troops are dispirited. Every German deserter says the same thing: Germany has lost the war, so why fight on?

6th article

Last Hundred Days

27 August 1918.

Today the German Army group ~~station~~ ^{commanded by} Von Boehm, ~~staken~~ ^{staken} ~~by~~ ^{ceased} ~~cease~~
~~For~~ ~~the~~ ~~German~~ ~~continue~~ ~~their~~ ~~withdrawal~~ ~~to~~ ~~the~~ ~~Don~~ ~~south~~, ~~on~~ ~~the~~
~~continue~~ ~~their~~ ~~withdrawal~~ ~~from~~ ~~the~~ ~~old~~ ~~battlefields~~ ~~&~~ ~~the~~

~~Scandinavia~~ ~~the~~ ~~old~~ ~~battlefields~~, ~~&~~ ~~the~~ ~~Schnee~~ ~~rising~~ ~~land~~
~~up~~, ~~under~~ ~~the~~ ~~ceaseless~~ ~~hostile~~ ~~allied~~ ~~attacks~~, ~~while~~, ~~two~~
~~ground~~ ~~which~~ ~~years~~ ~~ago~~, ~~was~~ ~~which~~ ~~heaved~~ ~~up~~ ~~&~~ ~~rotated~~ ~~away~~, ~~again~~ ~~&~~

~~again~~ ~~known~~ ~~as~~ ~~the~~ ~~"Blood~~ ~~Ball~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~Somme"~~ ~~At~~ ~~night~~ ~~the~~ ~~only~~ ~~it~~ ~~is~~
~~eastern~~ ~~sky~~ ~~battlefields~~ ~~are~~ ~~strangely~~ ~~quiet~~ ~~at~~ ~~night~~: ~~or~~

~~the~~ ~~occasional~~ ~~crack~~ ~~of~~ ~~a~~ ~~machine~~ ~~rifle~~, ~~and~~
~~stuttering~~ ~~bursts~~ ~~of~~ ~~machine~~ ~~gun~~ ~~fire~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~wilderness~~. ~~There~~
~~is~~ ~~no~~ ~~line~~ ~~of~~ ~~flares~~ ~~soaring~~ ~~up~~, ~~to~~ ~~drift~~ ~~down~~ ~~slowly~~,

~~spreading~~ ~~a~~ ~~pallid~~ ~~greenish~~ ~~wavering~~ ~~light~~ ~~as~~ ~~the~~ ~~fall~~; ~~there~~ ~~are~~
~~no~~ ~~gun~~ ~~flashes~~ ~~below~~ ~~the~~ ~~horizons~~, ~~no~~ ~~chromatic~~ ~~whining~~ ~~&~~ ~~buzzing~~ ~~of~~
~~heavy~~ ~~shells~~. ~~Jerry~~ ~~is~~ ~~'pulling~~ ~~out~~, ~~leaving~~ ~~rearguards~~ ~~among~~ ~~the~~

~~the~~ ~~long~~ ~~grass~~, ~~the~~ ~~rusty~~ ~~are~~ ~~to~~ ~~move~~ ~~up~~ ~~and~~ ~~down~~
~~and~~ ~~fire~~ ~~after~~ ~~from~~ ~~a~~ ~~many~~ ~~hours~~, ~~to~~ ~~give~~ ~~the~~ ~~impression~~
~~that~~ ~~his~~ ~~trenches~~ ~~are~~ ~~fully~~ ~~held~~.

~~Re~~ ~~some~~ ~~old~~ ~~direction~~ ~~of~~ ~~Bahama~~ ~~and~~ ~~glow~~ ~~eastern~~ ~~sky~~ ~~is~~ ~~lit~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~
~~a~~ ~~glow~~ ~~with~~ ~~reddish~~ ~~light~~ ~~up~~ ~~until~~ ~~the~~ ~~reddish~~ ~~glow~~ ~~which~~ ~~is~~

~~seen~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~zenith~~, ~~burning~~ ~~dumps~~. ~~Sometimes~~ ~~the~~ ~~glow~~ ~~threads~~ ~~to~~
~~the~~ ~~zenith~~, ~~before~~ ~~settling~~ ~~down~~, ~~rising~~ ~~again~~. ~~Tuesday~~, ~~Thursday~~,
~~trouble~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~sky~~ ~~before~~ ~~settling~~ ~~down~~, ~~rising~~ ~~again~~. ~~Tuesday~~, ~~Thursday~~,
~~forty~~ ~~seems~~ ~~afterwards~~ ~~come~~ ~~the~~ ~~dull~~ ~~mumbles~~ ~~of~~ ~~exploding~~

~~miles~~ ~~away~~. ~~Re~~ ~~enemy~~ ~~is~~ ~~going~~ ~~far~~, ~~fully~~ ~~back~~ ~~on~~ ~~the~~
~~several~~ ~~line~~ ~~Quéant~~ ~~-~~ ~~lost~~ ~~of~~ ~~Bahama~~ ~~Bois~~ ~~de~~ ~~la~~ ~~Fort~~
~~Havincourt~~ ~~(~~ ~~the~~ ~~many~~ ~~face~~ ~~work~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~old~~ ~~to~~ ~~the~~ ~~air~~, ~~to~~

~~Corps~~, ~~as~~ ~~its~~ ~~resemblance~~, ~~for~~ ~~the~~ ~~lost~~ ~~of~~ ~~Person~~ ~~-~~ ~~Hav~~
~~the~~ ~~ace~~ ~~of~~ ~~shades~~)

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MANCHESTER EDITION.

The Last 100 Days.

BREAKING THROUGH...

By HENRY WILLIAMSON.

Winner of the Hawthornden Prize for
1928.

September 26, 1918.

All is now ready for the great effort to break through the German armies in the West. Four convergent and practically simultaneous attacks are to be launched almost immediately.

The Americans are to attack west of the Meuse, in the direction of Mézières; the French, also against Mézières, in the Argonne; the British are to pierce the Hindenburg Line, between St. Quentin and the Senee, and advance on Mauberge; and an Allied force, under the King of the Belgians, is to attack in Flanders in the direction of Ghent.

All depends on the British attack on the Hindenburg Line. In the centre, where a threat to the enemy communications would immediately react on their defences elsewhere. Here, too, the German defence is the most highly organised. A canal, with immensely steep sloping sides, lies through most of the central position.

This morning the French and Americans launched their attack at dawn, after a three-hour bombardment. It was a complete surprise, owing to feint movements of troops and guns during the past week. The 1st Corps, on the left, stormed Vauquois, reached its objectives in the Aire valley, and went forward a little into the great forest of Argonne.

On the right the 3rd Corps crossed the difficult Forges brook, and got to its objectives; but the 5th Corps, in the centre, was held up early in the attack, and so Montfaucon remained in enemy hands, although the 3rd Corps was actually behind the town. Five thousand prisoners were taken.

The British and Colonial troops further north, waiting to begin their battles, hear the news of this attack with the news from Palestine and Salonika. The Bulgarian Army has "cracked," and is fleeing in what is practically a rout, 10,000 prisoners have been taken, and many guns; while in the Holy Land the Turkish armies are retreating in disorder, their communications cut, and many of their headquarter staffs out of touch with their commands; 45,000 prisoners have been counted, but there are many more straggling about; and much material from the thousands of dumps of ammunition and stores.

Late to-night a very heavy bombardment was opened on the Hindenburg Line, particularly on the wire and machine-gun shelters of the Canal du Nord, the positions of which have been learned chiefly from the wonderful mosaic-photographs taken by the R.A.F. The question worrying all is: Will the tanks be able to cross the canal? If not... Meanwhile the sky throbs with light, and the battalions slowly file up to their tape-lines.

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The Last 100 Days.

We Break Through The Line.

By HENRY WILLIAMSON.

Winner of the Hawthornden Prize for
1928, who is describing, exclusively for
the "Daily Express," on the appropriate
tenth anniversaries, the chief events of the
final phases of the great war.

September 29, 1918.

JUST before dawn this morning the 1,600 guns which for two days have been "plastering" the German defences before and along and behind the Scheidr

Canal between Holnon and Vendhuie quickened into barrage fire, and the assault on the strongest section of the terrible Hindenburg Line began.

We can scarcely hope for success. In some places the canal is dry; in others it is filled with stagnant water six feet deep. Between Le Carolet and Heticourt it goes under a sloping hill for several miles, between the valleys of the Rivers Scheidr and Somme.

Hidden under cupolas the Germans wait for our men to advance in the grey mist of this autumn morning.

Their red and green and golden-rain rockets soared up above the mist when the barrage fell like the Niagara Falls upon their positions, and their own artillery behind the canal, in concrete pits, put down the counter-barrage.

No news came in until nearly eleven o'clock. Then we learned that the 9th Corps had met with much success. The 1st Division, advancing south of the bend in the canal at Bellenglise, had established a flank facing south-west from Gricourt to Le Troquey tunnel. And, almost incredibly, the 40th Division, which had the hardest task of all, had actually crossed the icy waters of the canal at Bellenglise on their rafts and lifebuoys of kapok hair; and, holding their Lewis guns and rifles above their heads, they had crawled out and rushed the German trench system west of the canal.

Messages began to come in from the contact patrol airplanes. We learn by 3 o'clock in the afternoon that the 46th Division has gone on and has broken through the Hindenburg Line to a depth of three miles, and taken over 1,000 prisoners and seventy guns, at the small cost of 800 casualties!

Then the 32nd Division, leap-frogging through them, has completed the capture of the Beaufort reserve line, and by nightfall has taken 800 more prisoners and twenty guns.

It is marvellous news; but, unfortunately, the other divisions have not been so successful. North of Bellenglise, where the canal went into the side of the hill, the American division met with early disaster. Machine guns were "mowing them down in swathes" below the hill when their tanks came to deal with the "nest."

Late in the afternoon the 3th Division succeeded in reaching the Hindenburg Line at Nauroy, but the Third were held up on the uncured wire.

Nevertheless, the Hindenburg Line is breached, and at last we are in sight of what we have hoped for since that bitter winter of 1914—"open country and the Germans on the run."



Hindenburg.

The Last 100 Days.

TOWARDS THE ARMISTICE.

By HENRY WILLIAMSON.
1928 Hawthornden Prize Winner.

October 27, 1918.

THIS evening the bridging preparations for the great Italian drive on the Piave were continued against the Austrian armies.

The British troops of the 10th Army, commanded by Lord Cavan, opened the "push" three days ago by crossing the main channel of the Piave river in small, flat-bottomed boats punted by special Italian troops (pontieri), and driving back or capturing the enemy outposts on the long shoal island of the Grave di Popodopol.

The general attack should have followed the next day, but the river rose during the night several feet, swirling down at seven miles an hour; and the bridges, by which half a million men and their transport were to cross, could not be thrown across the yellow flood.



Lord Allenby.



Lord Cavan.

Last night the engineers at the eleven selected crossing points moved out with their pontoons and bridging gear. The 12th and 10th Armies completed theirs successfully, but on the 8th Army front only two of the seven sets could be established. This morning the bridge-heads on the Austrian bank were made firm, and Cavan's army went forward two miles on a front of four miles, capturing nearly 6,000 prisoners.

The other armies were unsuccessful. The long, heaving bridges of the 8th and 12th Armies were shot to pieces, and floated away down river, men, animals, and machine-guns with them. The utter failure of the corps on the right wing, which had been detailed to advance in the direction of Vittorio Veneto, has deranged the plans of the whole battle.

The G.O.C. 8th Italian Army, who has the general direction of the attack, decided this afternoon to detach the 18th Corps from his reserves, and to pass it under the command of Cavan's 10th Army. Immediately the movement orders were issued; and towards midnight the fresh troops began to cross over the sound bridges, with the object of pushing north and clearing the front of the troops who are held up.

On the Palestine front the last fighting of the war took place to-day. During the last five weeks the British armies under Allenby have moved forward 360 miles, destroyed the Turkish armies, taken 80,000 prisoners, 350 guns, and 800 machine-guns.

In France the battle of Tournai-Valenciennes-Courtrai is slowing up, and 10,000 prisoners have been counted. We are now before the great forest of Mormal, for which a "push" which might be the last set-piece of the year, is being prepared for next week.

Within three weeks (November 14) the Americans are to attack in the direction of the fortress of Metz, in overwhelming numbers; if successful, the war may be over—we believe—by the spring.

The Last 100 Days.

SICK OF THE WAR . . .

By HENRY WILLIAMSON.

October 31, 1918.

AN amazing thing has happened: a thing that the rank and file and the regimental officers of the Allied Armies on the Western Front have given up hoping for during the past two and a half years. Within a week of a "Z" day, the enemy front has been broken, his armies flung into rout, and his Commander-in-Chief has asked for an armistice.

Three days ago the combined Italian and British attack on the Austrian armies across the wide and flooded Piave was in danger of being disorganised owing to the destruction of the pontoon bridges. The British bridges, however, were kept intact, and across these the shock troops of the 18th Italian Corps passed by night and advanced with the British attack.

As the flood water swilled along in its bed more than a mile wide, so the Allied soldiers have swept through the Austrian defence.

The night before last the town of Vittorio Veneto was entered, and 33,000 prisoners were rounded up.

Last night the Austrian troops on Monte Grappa, which had hitherto held firm against many assaults, and had made eight counter-attacks, began to walk away from their positions.

The announcement from the Austrian command at ten o'clock that "in view of the discussions regarding an armistice between Germany and the United States, our troops fighting on Italian soil have been ordered to evacuate the occupied region," seems hardly adequate, especially as General von Webernau, commanding the Austrian 6th Corps, was already asking for an armistice.

To-day he and his staff, blindfolded, were driven in motor-cars to Villa Giusini, near Padua, and discussions were begun. The Allied War Council at Versailles, where the question of a reply to Germany's demand for an armistice is being discussed, has been notified.

Meanwhile the fighting continues, and the armies of the Dual Monarchy crumble away. The Italian 1st and 6th Armies are attacking in the Trentino; airplanes are bombing and machine-gunning the roads, for miles behind their "lines," which are littered with heavy guns, lorries, motor-cars and ambulances, dead horses, field cookers, and tractors.

So sick of war are the Austrians that in places they are not even bothering to set fire to their dumps. Over a quarter of a million prisoners have been taken already, and thousands of guns.

"The war is over," says the Austrian soldier, slipping out of the heavy equipment he has been carrying for the last four years. He fought while his friends were fighting; but no one can fight an avalanche.

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The Last 100 Days.

November 4, 1918

There Is Talk Of Peace . . .

By HENRY WILLIAMSON.

This morning at dawn the 1st, 3rd and 4th Armies attacked the German positions on a combined front of thirty miles, from the Sambre to the north of Oisy and Valenciennes. It is the supreme effort to break the enemy's power to continue fighting.

Within a few hours our troops had everywhere penetrated the enemy positions. In the south, at Catillon, the Sambre has been crossed at 8 a.m.; in the centre, the great Forest of Mormal, thinned here and there by German foresters during the past four years, has been penetrated; in the north the fortified town of Le Quesnoy, naturally protected by several streams lying parallel to our advance, has been surrounded by the New Zealanders.

The early morning was clear and starlit; but dense mist came up with the dawn, only thinning under the sun's rays at 8.30 a.m. The enemy barrage was heavy before the forest, with much gas; elsewhere it was inconsiderable. The country south-west of the forest, enclosed with thick orchards and quick-set hedges, made visibility difficult beyond fifty yards—the "fringed hem of the Mormal petticoat," as one African on connect patrol, bringing news of the success, described it.

French villagers state that the enemy in places withdrew a mile from their positions an hour before zero to escape our torrent of shells; in a number of instances whole companies were found, hiding and unarmed, waiting to surrender. Landreies, however, was taken only after a stiff fight. A German

pigeon loft (complete with birds) was captured in the town.

Ten thousand prisoners have been taken, and more than 300 guns. By this victory the German resistance has definitely been broken, and this evening their troops began to fall back on practically the whole battle front.

It is difficult to convey the weariness of our own shattered divisions. Since August 8 there have been ninety-six days of almost continuous battle. Every battalion is a ragged composite of drafts from all and every regiment.

About 2,000 tanks and armoured cars have been engaged since that sweltering August day when the tide turned; nearly 1,000 have been handed over to salvage. Of these, 313 have been "shot up" so badly that they had to be sent to central workshops, which have repaired and reissued 204. Only fifteen have been damaged beyond repair.

So "fall out" have the tanks worked that to-night there is not one available for further fighting. The Tank Corps is "bled white." A philosophical general remarked to me that this limb may indicate the state of the whole body of Mars, since the eastern sky is ruddy with the glare of dumps burning far away, a sign of general retreat which may quickly become rout; for Bulgarians, Turks and Austrians are "out of it"; revolution is raising its head in Germany; and everywhere the talk is of an armistice and peace.

It may be a question of days! The "boys" may be home for Christmas—leaving behind friends who are beyond the reckoning of days, but whom they will remember, in odd, still moments, all the rest of their lives.

These articles were printed in the *Daily Express* in 1928 and we are grateful for permission to reprint them here: also 'I Believe in the Men Who Died' from the previous item, and the articles in 'And This Was Ypres'.