

Our rage broke like a storm. Thousands must have fallen already. That was clear; and even though the shelling continued, it felt quiet, as though it had lost its imperative thrust.

No man's land was packed tight with attackers, advancing singly, in little groups or great masses towards the curtain of fire. They didn't run or even take cover if the vast plume of an explosion rose between them. Ponderous, but unstoppable, they advanced on the enemy lines. It was as though nothing could hurt them any more.

In the midst of these masses that had risen up, one was still alone; the units were all mixed up. I had lost my men from sight; they had disappeared like a wave in the crashing surf. All I had with me were my Vinke and a one-year volunteer by the name of Haake. In my right hand, I gripped my pistol, in my left, a bamboo riding-crop. Even though I was feeling hot, I was still wearing my long coat, and, as per regulations, gloves. As we advanced, we were in the grip of a berserk rage. The overwhelming desire to kill lent wings to my stride. Rage squeezed bitter tears from my eyes.

The immense desire to destroy that overhung the battlefield precipitated a red mist in our brains. We called out sobbing and stammering fragments of sentences to one another, and an impartial observer might have concluded that we were all ecstatically happy.

The shredded wire entanglements provided no obstacle at all, and we cleared the first trench, barely recognizable as such, in a single bound. The wave of attackers danced like a row of ghosts through the white seething mists of the flattened dip. There was no one here to oppose us.

Quite unexpectedly, the clatter of machine-gun fire rattled at us from the second line. I and my companions jumped into a crater. Another second, and there was a fearsome crash, and I sprawled on my face. Vinke grabbed me by the collar, and twisted me round on to my back: 'Lieutenant, are you hurt?' There was

no sign of anything. The one-year volunteer had a hole in his upper arm, and assured us in groans that the bullet had lodged in his back. We tore the tunic off him and bandaged him up. A smooth furrow showed that a shrapnel shell had struck the lip of the crater on a level with our faces. It was a miracle we were still alive. It seemed the enemy were more obdurate than we'd given them credit for.

Others by now had overtaken us. We plunged after them, leaving our wounded man to his fate, having put up a piece of wood with a white strip of gauze hanging from it as a sign for the wave of stretcher-bearers that would follow. Half left of us the great railway embankment of the Ecoust-Croisilles line loomed up out of the haze; we had to get across that. From built-in loopholes and dugout windows, the rifle and machine-gun fire was pattering at us so thickly it was like having a sack of dried peas emptied over you. They could see what they were doing too.

Vinke had disappeared somewhere. I followed a defile, from whose sides flattened dugouts gaped. I strode along furiously, across the black opened ground that the acrid fumes of our shells seemed to cling to. I was quite alone.

Then I saw my first enemy. A figure in brown uniform, wounded apparently, crouched twenty paces away in the middle of the battered path, with his hands propped on the ground. I turned a corner, and we caught sight of each other. I saw him jump as I approached, and stare at me with gaping eyes, while I, with my face behind my pistol, stalked up to him slowly and coldly. A bloody scene with no witnesses was about to happen. It was a relief to me, finally, to have the foe in front of me and within reach. I set the mouth of the pistol at the man's temple - he was too frightened to move - while my other fist grabbed hold of his tunic, feeling medals and badges of rank. An officer; he must have held some command post in these trenches. With a plaintive sound, he reached into his pocket, not to pull out a weapon, but a photograph which he held up to me. I saw him on it, surrounded by numerous family, all standing on a terrace.

It was a plea from another world. Later, I thought it was blind chance that I let him go and plunged onward. That one man of all often appeared in my dreams. I hope that meant he got to see his homeland again.

Doc 2 SIDE A

From the left, where the resistance seemed to be weaker, some men came running up and were almost within hand-grenade range of the defenders. I covered the final yards and tumbled over some wire right into the trench. The British, under fire from all sides, abandoned their position and the machine-gun, and fled across to the other position. The machine-gun was half buried under an enormous pile of brass cartridges. It was steaming and red-hot. Stretched out in front of it lay my adversary, an athletic-looking Englishman with one eye put out by a shot to the head. The colossus with the big white eyeball against his smoke-charred skull looked gruesome. As I was almost fainting with thirst, I didn't hang around but went looking for water. A dugout entrance looked promising. I put my head round the corner, and saw a man sitting at the bottom, fitting bullets into a belt over his knee. He seemed to have no idea that the situation had been transformed. I calmly levelled my pistol at him, but instead of squeezing the trigger, as common sense dictated, I called out: 'Come here, hands up!' He jumped up, looked at me wildly, and scampered into the back of the dugout. I threw a grenade after him. The dugout probably had a further entrance, because a soldier came round a traverse and observed laconically: 'He won't be doing no more shooting.'

At last, I managed to find a canister of cooling-water. I gulped down the oily liquid, slushed some more into an English canteen, and handed it to comrades who suddenly filled the trench.

As a curious footnote, I should like to mention that my first thought on forcing my way into this machine-gun nest concerned the cold from which I was suffering. All my life, I've had a tendency to throat inflammation; therefore, when I pressed my thumbs under my jaw, I was pleased to note that the vigorous exercise I'd taken had - like a sauna - helped me sweat off this latest bout.

Meanwhile, the right-hand machine-gun nest and the defenders of the defile sixty yards in front of us were still putting up a grim fight. The fellows really were giving it everything. We tried to aim their own machine-gun at them, but didn't manage that; instead, as I was trying that, a bullet whizzed past my head, brushed the Jager lieutenant who was standing behind me, and finished up giving a private a very nasty-looking wound in the thigh. A light machine-gun crew had better luck setting up their weapon on the edge of our little semi-circle and began raking the British from the flank.

The troops attacking on the right took advantage of the distraction we provided and attacked the defile head-on, led by our still-intact 9th Company under the command of Lieutenant Gipkens. And now from every shell-hole figures poured forth, swinging rifles and chasing with a fearsome hurrah towards the enemy position, from where defenders emerged in great numbers. They started running away with their arms aloft, to escape the initial fury of the first wave of shock troops, in particular that of Lieutenant Gipkens's orderly, who was rampaging like a berserker. I observed the confrontation, which took place just beyond our little earthworks, with rapt attention. Here I saw that any defender who continued to empty his pistol into the bodies of the attackers four or five paces away could not expect any mercy when they were upon him. The fighter, who sees a bloody mist in front of his eyes as he attacks, doesn't want prisoners; he wants to kill.

The captured defile was lined with weapons, uniforms and supplies. Dotted all about were dead men in grey and brown uniforms, and groaning wounded. Soldiers from all different regiments were standing together in a thick knot, all shouting and chattering at once. Officers pointed out to them the continuation of the dip, and the heap of fighters, gradually, with surprising indifference, started moving forward again.

The dip ran up into higher ground, where enemy columns appeared. Occasionally stopping to shoot, we advanced until we