

THE VETERAN

JULY 1923

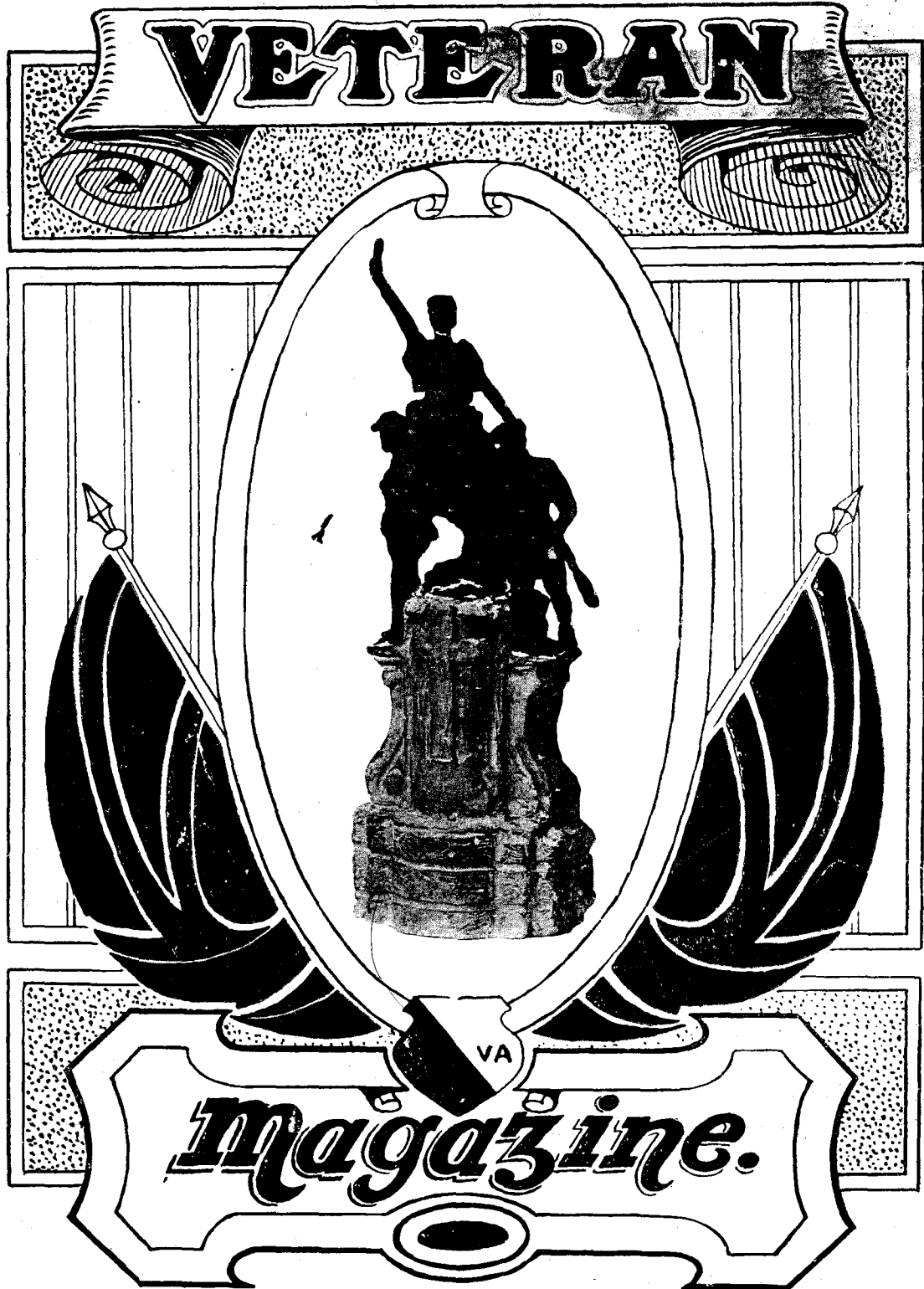
YPRES TO THE SCHELDT

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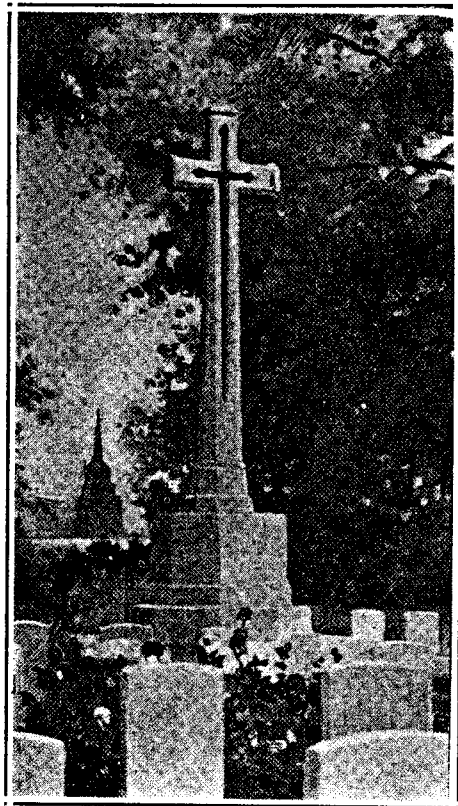
TO YOU WHO HAVE LOST

I know! I know!—
The ceaseless ache, the emptiness,
the woe,—
The pang of loss,—
The strength that sinks beneath
so sore a cross.
“—Heedless and careless, still
the world wags on,
And leaves me broken . . . Oh,
my son! my son!”

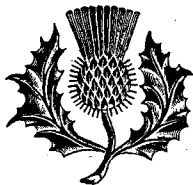
Yet—think of this!—
Yea, rather think on this!—
He died as few men get the chance
to die,—
Fighting to save a world's mor-
tality.
He died the noblest death a man
may die,
Fighting for God, and Right, and
Liberty;—
And such a death is Immortality.

“He died unnoticed in the muddy
trench.”

Nay,—God was with him, and he did not blench;
Filled him with holy fires that nought could quench,
And when He saw his work below was done,
He gently called to him,—“My son! My son!
I need thee for a greater work than this.
Thy faith, thy zeal, thy fine activities
Are worthy of My larger liberties;”—
—Then drew him with the hand of welcoming grace,
And side by side, they climbed the heavenly ways.



—JOHN OXENHAM.



9th Division



9th Division

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From Ypres to the Scheldt

By CAPT. C. S. FROST, M.C.



YPRES! Martyred Ypres! What memories the name recalls! Once a city, peaceful and prosperous, since a mass of indescribable ruins wrought by war's cruel hand, and now a lasting memorial to countless allied heroes who fell in its defence.

To the soldier "Ypres" meant not necessarily the town alone, but often the Ypres salient, and very few British battalions escaped the "joys" of this sector. The Royal Newfoundland Regiment visited the area on four separate occasions; Railway Wood in 1916, Steenbeck and Broembeck in 1917, Passchendaele during the early part of 1918, and "the final advance" in the fall of the same year. This narrative deals with the operations of the Regiment during the last phase as seen from an individual's viewpoint only, for the writer could not attempt to recount the experiences of the battalion as a whole.

PREPARATIONS.

The great German offensive on the Western front in March 1918 followed by the thrust north of Armentieres a month later, had caused heavy casualties in the British ranks, and some few battalions who could not find reinforcements immediately were temporarily withdrawn to the reserve areas. "Ours" was among this number, and we were sent to Montreuil to Guard G. H. Q. The arrival of new drafts from the depot, and the constant and hard training at field work, soon fitted the battalion for more important duties, and the orders to again proceed to the advanced area were received with great delight.

The usual procedure prior to moving forward was methodically carried out. Kit was inspected, box respirators examined, iron rations issued, Lewis Guns tested, and of the hundred and one other things necessary to fit a battalion for the line, each received its proper attention.

French troop trains are not exactly the last word in comfort and speed, and it accordingly took us seven hours to reach Esquelbecq, a distance of 70 kilometres from the entraining point, Boulogne. On arrival it was learned that the battalion would be attached to the 9th Scottish Division, and at first considerable disappointment was felt, because

REGIMENT

we could not again join our old comrades the 29th, but after becoming acquainted with the Scotties, the change was heartily accepted by all ranks.

The firing line was reached by easy stages, until on the 20th September, we found ourselves in the familiar old spot a thousand yards in front of Ypres.

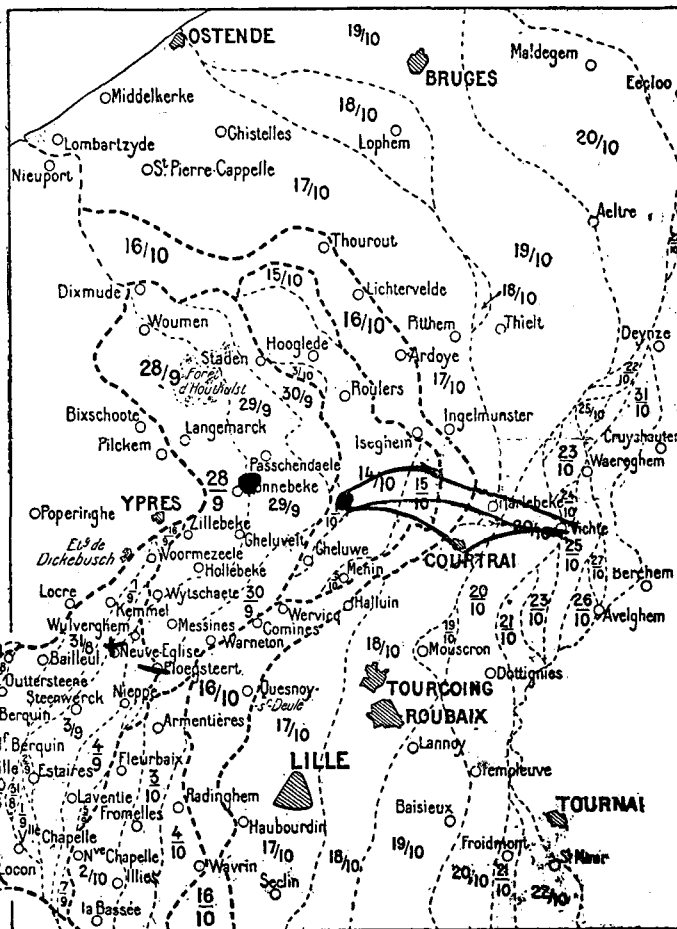
Strange to say we occupied the very trenches known as the "X" line that we ourselves had dug in August and September, 1916, although they had been meanwhile battered beyond recognition. And the enemy held Railway Wood, also a former abode of "Ours." Good old Railway Wood, I shall never forget it. For three hard months our battalion laboured here, digging and rivetting trenches, constructing breastworks, and erecting barbed wire entanglements. As often as the Bosche would destroy our defences we would still replace them. Even then no wood remained, only a very few stumps—chiefly shell-holes and water. Later on in 1917 during the Passchendaele push, Railway Wood became a back area, and the Australian "heavies" occupied this waste of rusted wire, mud and shattered stumps. Still later in 1918 the line was withdrawn to the outer defences of Ypres in order to conform with the retirement which took place on the right.

So the advantage lay with those of the battalion who were there in 1916, and consequently knew the ground, because direction is a prime factor in the success of any attack, and so difficult to maintain when every single landmark has been blotted out of existence.

Every man realized that the battalion had been brought to this front for no mean purpose. The offensive operations of the Allies in France were meeting with considerable success, which compelled the German high command to reinforce his troops on that front at the expense of his divisions in Flanders. The British Intelligence Department was fully aware of this, and it was thought that a surprise attack on

a large scale in Belgium, would have the effect of ousting the Bosche from the Channel ports, and very probably deal him such a critical blow that he would be forced to sue for peace.

Another winter in the trenches was not looked forward to with enthusiasm and do you wonder then at the soldiers' eagerness to participate in an offensive that would bring the war to an abrupt and successful



The Allied Victory offensive, August-October, 1918. Where the lines are shown, indicates the approximate advance of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, which advance terminated at Ingoyghem, near Vichte.

conclusion?

The first few days in the trenches were occupied in making a thorough reconnaissance of the position. Patrols were sent out with the view to ascertaining the strength and disposition of the enemy, compass bearings were taken, and officers and other ranks alike made themselves familiar with the barrage maps and aeroplane photographs. Each

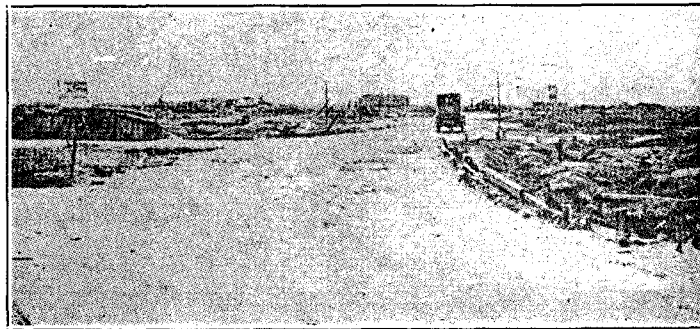
night the artillery strengthened the number of their guns by several hundred and all branches of the service went about their duties with a remarkable coolness and precision. Special care had to be exercised however in camouflaging the preparations for the impending attack from the enemy's observation, as the success of this operation depended entirely upon the element of surprise.

A new experience for the Regiment was the employment of dogs for messenger work. Carrier pigeons had been used on previous occasions and many of us had seen the training school for dogs near the "bull ring" at Etaples, but hitherto we had been somewhat sceptical of their practical usefulness. This was soon dispelled, however, when a message was fixed to the collar and they were seen to make a bolt for Head

with a violence hitherto unknown. When—Great Heavens! What a concussion, the very ground trembled beneath our feet, and the intense darkness was simultaneously transformed into blinding light. Was it an earthquake or had the enemy exploded a mammoth mine in No Man's Land? It seemed as if a thousand thunder storms had concentrated overhead, so deafening was the roar and so startling the flashes.

The British had spoken, and harshly, with renewed confidence and a fresh determination. The guns pounded the enemy front line system of trenches with relentless force and telling effect. Never in the history of the regiment was the spirit of the troops so buoyant; everyone felt that the long looked for opportunity was at hand. Trench fighting had been indulged in for three years and an unsatisfying type of warfare it was. Two

hundred yards gained with as many casualties, had been the order of the day, with the exception of a few major operations such as Cambrai, in which the area captured extended to several kilometres in depth. Was this attack really to be something worth while, or would it too lose its weight and fall again into trench warfare as so many previous attempts had done? There was something uncanny about the Ypres salient, that desolate waste; simple a tangle of barbed wire,



Vindictive Road, Passchendaele, which formed the peak of the Ypres Salient.

Quarters immediately upon being released from the front line.

THE INITIAL ATTACK.

Orders were received on the 27th September to the effect that the British and Belgians would attack on a 60 kilometre front on the morning of the 28th. Much to our surprise and delight we found our old friends the Worcesters of the 29th Division on our immediate right, so we knew the safety of that flank was assured at the outset. It was arranged that the Belgians who occupied the line on the left of the 9th Division should commence their bombardment at 2.30, a.m., with the aim of distracting the enemy's attention from the front occupied by the 9th and 29th, so that the attack of these two Divisions would be entirely a surprise. The Belgians must have had an enormous supply of guns and ammunition at their disposal, as for three hours their bombardment continued uninterruptedly and

screwposts, angle irons, broken rifles and corpses, all overgrown with weeds. After years of fighting and casualties numbering in hundreds of thousands, none of the offensive operations had really been successful. All ranks realized this and yet at the same time I believe every man felt confident that the spell had at last been broken.

The barrage rested on the German front line for only three minutes, when it lifted 100 yards, this being the signal for the troops to advance. The 9th Scottish Rifles on the right and the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers on the left formed the attacking wave, with the Royal Newfoundland Regiment in close support, our right flank resting on Hellfire Corner. The creeping barrage moved 100 yards every three minutes, with a halt of three minutes every 500 yards. From all appearances the enemy was completely taken by surprise, having in many cases discarded their kit, and even their rifles.

The Bosche officers usually carried a supply of good cigars, and it was not long before our boys were treating themselves to a smoke. Our task was an easy one this first day of the final drive, as the support troops were not required, and companies merely had to maintain direction and keep in touch with the attacking wave.

Occasional bags of prisoners dribbled through to the rear, which was a sure sign that the Scotties were meeting with success. A drenching rain soaked everybody and hindered progress somewhat. Casualties were slight—an odd group knocked out by a shell, and a few with “cushy” bullet wounds.

We kept to the left of “Y” Wood, Bellewaarde Lake and Glencourse Wood, over the

baffled all attacks, had now been penetrated to a depth of six kilometres. The night was cold, and sleep only visited a few of the most hardy, as wet clothes and unappeased appetites are not conducive to peaceful slumbers.

KEIBERG RIDGE.

The attack on the 29th proved to be entirely unlike any operation in which the Regiment had previously been engaged. From the outset the Battalion was faced with disadvantages on all sides, which were only counteracted by the sheer tenacity of the troops. For some untold reason, orders were late in arriving at Battalion H. Q., with the result that the attack was already in progress before companies could reach their allotted positions. There was not time to explain the purpose of the attack to the N. C. O's and men, in fact orders were indefinite and brief. “Take up positions at D.28 and J.4, south of Zonnebeke, ‘B’ Company on the left in liason with the Belgians, ‘A’, on the right, ‘C’, in the centre with ‘D’ in support, and march on a bearing of 102°; zero will be 09.00 and there is no time to be lost.” What was the objective? All previous orders of this sort had named an objective. But nobody knew, simply—“March on a bearing of 102°.” Here at least was an opportunity for individual initiative. Fully half of our men were untried troops, having received their baptism of fire only the previous day.

There was little or no artillery support, but the 27th Bde, through whom we passed endeavoured to form a smoke barrage with rifle grenades, which however proved useless. As soon as the battalion crossed over the ridge and proceeded to advance down the forward slope, we were heavily shelled with H. E. and Shrapnel, and a little farther on were enfiladed with machine gun fire. One platoon was completely wiped out and casualties along the whole line became numerous. The Belgians were held up on the left by heavy firing from Keiberg Ridge, and prospects were anything but rosy. The one bright spot of all was that everybody seemed so cool, not a trace of excitement was in evidence. Orders were given by platoon commanders to ad-



Destroyed German Pill Box which held out to the last at the attack on Keiberg Ridge.

Frezenberg Ridge at Dead Mule Farm, and finally on the Passchendaele—Zonnebeke Ridge at Polygon Racecourse and Polygon Butte—our objective. Positions were consolidated and although wet and uncomfortable, the troops were advised to get all the rest possible, because the morrow was to be “our day,” and every ounce of energy would be required to carry on.

The rain had transformed the battlefield into a quagmire, and the light guns and ration limbers which should have immediately followed the infantry were not able to get forward, consequently the rations were hours late in arriving. Notwithstanding this all ranks were in excellent spirits, for the Bosche defences which for three years had

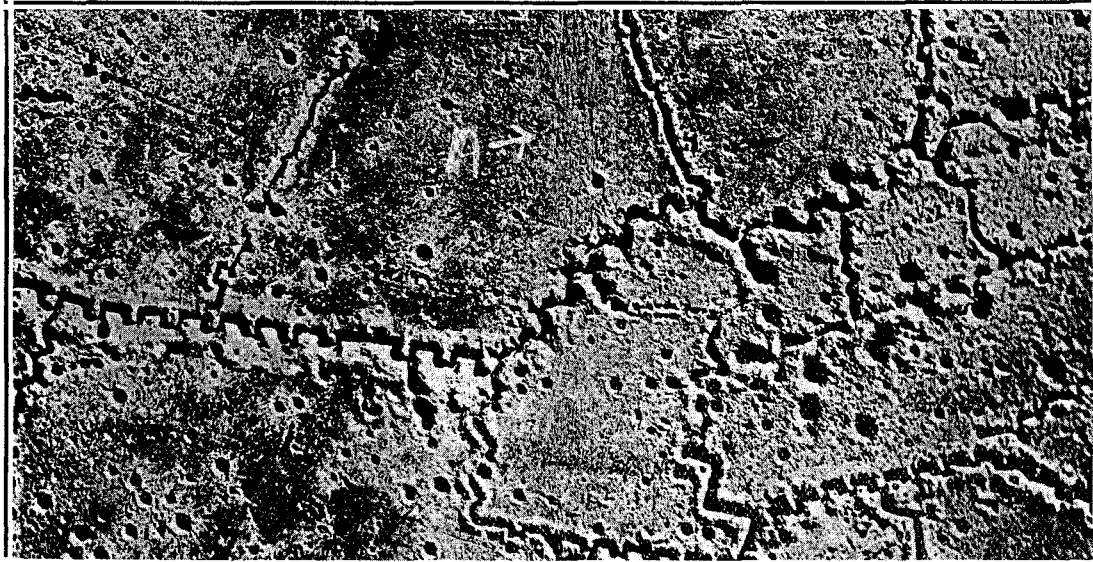
vance in short rushes by two's and three's under cover of each other's fire. The troops behaved splendidly, although platoons suffered heavily, and the issue was in doubt for a considerable period. The valley was reached and efforts were then directed towards Keiberg, which seemed to contain a beehive of machine guns.

Just at that moment the advance was completely held up by a 6 inch gun a few hundred yards in front firing with open sights, and supported by machine guns, which caused dreadful havoc in our ranks. This would have ended disastrously had not the situation been suddenly reversed by the initiative and daring of one of our youngest

as well as the right flank of the Belgians to again move forward.

Fighting became more general all along the line, and each section of our troops had its work cut out in ridding the immediate front of snipers and occasional nests of machine gunners. All had been too fully occupied to trouble about compasses and maps and we were in some doubt whether proper direction had been maintained, in fact most had forgotten for the moment the one order of the day "March on a bearing of 102°."

The advanced platoons were making good progress climbing the ridge and had nearly reached the crest, when they were startled



Section of enemy trenches after a heavy bombardment. At point (a) will be seen the effect of shrapnel fire on the wire entanglements, which clearly demonstrates the scraping action necessary for the successful cutting of such wire.

subalterns, assisted by his orderly and a Lewis Gunner. Undaunted by enemy fire, they were seen to leap forward from mound to mound, until further cover was not available. Here the Lewis Gunner trained his deadly weapon upon the enemy positions with such accuracy that many of the Bosche were killed outright and the remainder endeavoured to beat a hasty retreat. But it was not to be, the sub and his two men were upon them like a flash and dealt with them at close quarters, the cries of the Hun being intermingled with the British parade ground slogan "In-Out-On-Guard." This fine example of individual heroism proved instrumental in allowing the advanced companies

by a long row of Bosche helmets projecting over a rough trench not many yards in front. Little fight was left under the helmets, however, and as our troops dashed forward, a show of hands and cries of "Kamerad" were spontaneous. Fritz appeared somewhat nervous at the sight of these brawny thick-set specimens charging with fixed bayonets, but he hoped in vain if he thought to avoid the inevitable by dashing towards the Belgian lines. All were made prisoners—but in the Newfoundland way. This unexpected stroke of luck put the troops in excellent humour and they were almost too keen to press onwards. In a minute the top of the ridge had been reached where sharp fighting

took place in the ruins of a farm which the enemy had reconstructed into a pill-box. In a few minutes, however, this stronghold was cleared and Keiberg Ridge was ours.

In the first part of the day casualties had been heavy and we had lost many of our best. The battalion had every reason though to feel proud of its achievement, because Keiberg was considered to be a particularly strong position, and later the Regiment received due credit for its capture. The following extract is taken from the War Diary and refers to this engagement:—

“It was reported by the artillery that “the road was so blocked with German “dead after this fight that all traffic was “held up for some considerable time.”

A breathing spell was indulged in while the flanks came up in alignment. “C” Company reported that 2nd Lieut. Duley had been seriously wounded, and as it proved later fatally. He was one of our youngest and most promising officers, beloved and respected by all, a leader in the training days and a lion in the fight.

A glance down the forward slope revealed a clear undulating country stretching before us, such a contrast to the devastated areas now left behind. Across the valley lay the village of Waterdamhoek, with smaller villages dotted about the country side. If only the allied armies would be successful in preventing the Hun from entrenching so that this beautiful country would not have to be sacrificed! Could it be done? Everybody wondered.

A brief conference of company commanders, and the afternoon advance was in progress. Prominent objects were singled out to march upon, the church spire at Dadizeele acting as a guide for the extreme right of the battalion. Several farms were captured with little opposition until the valley beyond had been reached; when all of a sudden we came under intense machine gun fire from several directions. Even worse than this was the appearance of an enemy aeroplane, which flew at a dangerously low altitude and literally showered our troops with machine gun bullets. The occupants of this plane must have borne charmed lives, for all the Lewis Guns of the battalion were trained upon them yet without result. During the next few days this same fellow visited us many times, he was conspicuous by the red coloured wings and was known as the “red devil,” but he always escaped unharmed, although

he sometimes swooped down hovering only a few yards over our heads.

In the height of this performance my tried and trusted runner was seriously wounded in the shoulder. All the morning he had carried messages to Battalion H. Q. through the heaviest fire, but not satisfied with this he voluntarily made another trip whilst on his way to the dressing station. He was later awarded the D.C.M., for his devotion to duty.

The “red devil” had evidently inspired the Bosche with renewed confidence for his resistance increased and the advance for the



Gullegem. Strake mit Kirche.

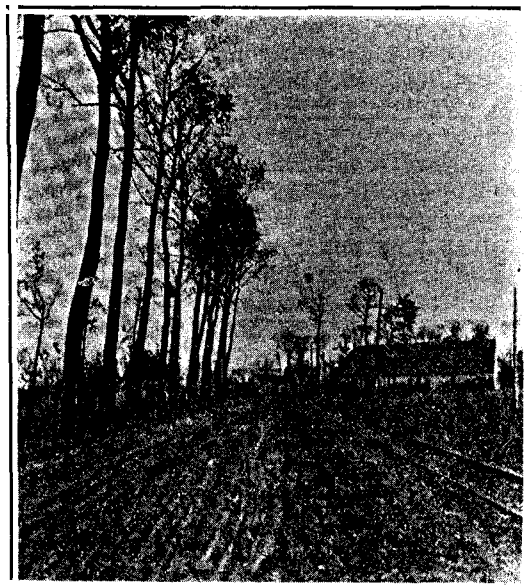
A street scene in Gullegem during its occupancy by the Bosche. During the final advance it was captured by the 9th Division, of which the Regiment was a unit, and later this same street was used to billet the Regiment.

time being was at a standstill. At this juncture a sad and most unfortunate incident occurred. Captain Rendell, M.C., O.C., “D” Company, was shot by a sniper and died immediately. He was the senior officer in the line at the time and the battalion could ill afford to lose a man of his calibre. Captain Rendell had been in the thick of the fight from the day we first landed at Suvla, and a more capable and highly respected officer was not to be found in the whole Regiment. His death was keenly felt by all ranks, but with a determination stronger than ever they resolved to “carry on.”

Repeated efforts were made to advance

but enemy machine gunners frustrated every attempt and inflicted heavy casualties in our ranks. Had we a field gun to support us or even a trench mortar, this resistance could have been overcome, but we were unassisted, being out of touch with the artillery due to the contact aeroplanes not having put in an appearance.

Finally our ranks became too depleted to risk a further attack on our own initiative, and a message was sent to Brigade H. Q. for reinforcements. Presently troops from the 26th Brigade were observed approaching over the ridge, at the sight of which the



Strake Dadizeele-Ledeghem.

The road between Dadizeele and Ledeghem which marked the jumping off point—starting point—of the Regiment during its successful advance on October 14th, 1918.

enemy lost heart and retired. We chased them for two kilometres with scouts and advanced guards posted in front to detect at once any unforeseen resistance.

How grand it was to forge ahead "into the blue" and to free ourselves from the grip of the Ypres salient. Waterdamhoek was given a wide berth for no sooner had it been evacuated by the enemy than their guns were pounding it to pieces. The villages of Strooiboornhoek and Slyphhoek were passed through, the former containing a number of orchards, and the troops lost no time in filling their haversacks with apples. Such a treat, and oh, quartermaster-sergeant what a change from plum and apple! Before dusk

the battalion had reached the outer defences of Dadizeele and Ledeghem and here unit commanders decided that it would be unwise to venture further in the absence of more definite instructions. Already our advance had exceeded the wildest expectations and rest was an important factor towards continued success.

Runners from Battalion H. Q. brought orders to hold the positions then occupied, while the Scots were to press on and endeavour to seize Dadizeele and Ledeghem.

The 30th September dawned cold and drear, followed shortly by torrents of rain. The 26th Bde. having succeeded in gaining a footing in Dadizeele and Ledeghem, our battalion was temporarily withdrawn to the Heulebeck valley, where the troops were sheltered as far as possible in ruined barns and farm houses. Conflicting rumours of the day's developments were circulated but nothing official was known. It later transpired that a battalion of the Scots had pushed their way into Rollegheemcappelle only to be driven back again to the northern outskirts of Ledeghem, where they entrenched along the railway track. The enemy had evidently been reinforced, for his resistance steadily increased which compelled our Corps Commander to adopt fresh tactics for future operations. This meant delay which, however, gave the flanks an opportunity of coming forward.

Our casualties thus far numbered 4 officers and 144 other ranks. The attack along the whole of this front had been an unqualified success and we knew that at this rate the oft predicted "Christmas in Germany" would be a reality in 1918.

A FORTNIGHT'S RESPITE.

Until the 14th of October the Royal Newfoundland Regiment took no active part in offensive operations, in fact, only local attacks were attempted during this period. On the night of the 1st we took over the front line from the 10th Royal Scots, with Battalion H. Q. occupying the station yard at Ledeghem. Companies sought cover wherever available, behind piles of gravel and railway ties, in cuttings, refuse pits and houses.

In endeavouring to reorganize his positions, the enemy was evidently not sure of his ground, for in the early morning a Bosche party of one N. C. O. and three men walked straight into the station, as bold as if they were about to take the next train for Brussels. They carried, however, six days'

rations, snipers' rifles, revolvers and stick bombs, and their object was to establish a sniping post in the station, but fortunately we were there before them. Being in a communicative mood, they were speedily despatched to the Brigade Intelligence Officer.

A surprise awaited us on the 2nd when the enemy suddenly launched a counter attack, employing a large number of field guns and aeroplanes. The troops on our immediate left were forced to retire and the situation became somewhat precarious, until our left platoon boldly rushed out and succeeded in re-establishing the line. This platoon was highly commended for its prompt action by the Brigadier, who immediately appeared on the scene, having walked from Brigade H. Q. through a tornado of shell fire, reaching the front line unscathed. As the Bosche ad-



Ledeghem vom Kirchturm aus gesehen.
The town of Ledeghem, as it looked from the air,
before our victorious advance.

vanced to the attack our Lewis Guns got in some very effective shooting which completely frustrated the enemy's repeated attempts to reach our positions.

How many stories have been told of guides losing direction and leading companies and battalions into places that men were never intended to go. There is nothing that tries a soldier's patience more than tracking about aimlessly on a dark night following a misdirected guide. A man's vocabulary on occasions of this sort is truly voluminous. Having bid farewell to the shell-hole country, we did not expect to meet with this experience again, but fate willed otherwise. The 2nd Royal Fusiliers of the 29th Division relieved the battalion on the night of the 5th. Guides awaited companies at Potterijeburg where the road was left in

order to avoid shell fire. We had not been informed of our destination and so had to rely implicitly on the guides. The night was pitch dark and raining, the men were tired and in no mood for unnecessary tramping. Companies wandered on mechanically, each man close upon the heels of the man in front lest the Stygian darkness separate them. Through hedges, over ditches, across swamps, now climbing fences, now wading streams, this night march continued. Would it ever end? For hours we plodded on, and no wonder, the guides were hopelessly lost. One company finally found itself in a bog, every man up to his knees in mud, and straining every muscle to free himself from the barbed wire with which he had become entangled. A beck surrounded them and the only escape was to retrace their steps until firm ground was reached. Here a halt was called when scouts were sent out to try and locate the camp. Shortly before dawn, one of the scouts who had been a trapper in the north before enlisting, returned with the glad message that he had discovered a track leading to the bivouacs.

Each company had similar tales to relate. Headquarters who had suffered several casualties being the last to arrive.

The next few days passed quietly with only an occasional air fight to break the monotony. One evening just before sunset four German aeroplanes were seen approaching from the East apparently with the intention of destroying British observation balloons, seven of which floated in a row just over our bivouacs. Three British scout planes were soon on their track however, and were successful in intercepting three of the enemy, while the fourth was able to evade the British and dived towards Observation Balloon No. 1. The approach of the enemy planes had been so unexpected and rapid that there was not time to draw in the balloons, although as soon as possible this was attempted. Meanwhile the observer in No. 1 had jumped with his parachute and a few seconds later the balloon was in flames. Not satisfied with one the Bosche airman headed towards the second closely followed by the three British planes. No. 2 met a similar fate, the observer escaping with his parachute in the nick of time. The race was becoming interesting and although the Bosche was certain to be overtaken and brought down in a very few minutes, yet while he lived he was intent upon doing all the destruction possible. A third balloon

was seen to burst into flames followed almost immediately by a fourth. The British planes appeared to be only a few yards distant from the Bosche, but he headed for No. 5 and succeeded in igniting it also. This was the end, however, as a second later the Bosche plane was brought down and the charred remains of the brave airman were picked up a few minutes later a short distance away. The performance was witnessed by hundreds of our troops and all could not help but admire the bravery of this German pilot.

Advantage was taken of this temporary lull to re-equip and prepare for the next engagement. Battle stores were replenished and all necessary kit deficiencies were made good by the Quarter Master with the exception of iron rations. It was forbidden to consume iron rations without the C. O.'s permission, and company commanders were required to account for all deficiencies. Hungry soldiers often forget this order, notwithstanding that an endless amount of resourcefulness is needed in order to procure a fresh supply. On this particular occasion the Adjutant received the following memo from at least one O. C. company:—

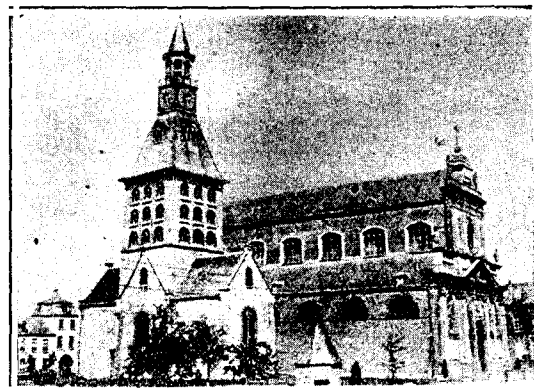
“To Adjutant “?” Coy.
 HAWA Company strength 135
 Iron Rations Deficient 135
 I certify that all of the above mentioned rations were eaten by rats.
 10/10/18

O.C. “?” COY.

The Army Corps news sheet which was published at irregular intervals, told of the importance placed upon this attack in Belgium. The armies in France were on the move, but should the divisions on the northern front be successful in driving the enemy out of Belgium, it was expected this would have a decisive effect.

Orders came on the 13th to proceed to the line that night and attack on the morrow. During the two weeks respite the Bosche had had an opportunity of concentrating artillery and bringing up reserves, so we were told to expect much stouter resistance than had hitherto been encountered. Just before dusk the battalion decamped and in single file followed the course mapped out for units located in that area. But not for long. These tracks had evidently been photographed by Bosche airmen, for no sooner had we crossed the Waterdamhoek-Dadizeele

road than a wicked shell fire greeted us. Fortunately the advanced company left the path instantly followed by the remaining companies in quick succession, and crossing and recrossing the tracks in snake formation, the troops wound in and out until all danger had passed. It appeared as if a Guiding Hand was directing the leading officer. No one is able to tell how we passed through that terrific barrage of shrapnel, H. E. and gas with only one casualty, but without a doubt had the regular route been followed, there would have been few left to tell the tale. Other battalions were less fortunate that night, several of the 9th Division suffering heavily and a battalion of the 29th losing a third of its strength. Although our unit was an hour late in taking over this was far better than having the ranks thinned out on the eve of a momentous engagement.



Harlebeke. Die Kirche.

The Church at Harlebeke, the spire of which was used by our troops, as a directional guide to march on, during the advance.

THE ATTACK IN THE FOG.

The battalion formed up north of the railway station at Ledeghem, “B” and “D” Companies in front, and “A” and “C” in support, with the 88th Brigade of the 29th Division on the right, and the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers of the 9th Division on the left. Preparations differed widely from any previous attack. The artillery were able to bring their field guns into position only two hundred yards to the rear of the infantry. No jumping off trenches were available, the advanced companies lying along the railway track and the support troops in open fields. For the first time in our experience machine guns were employed in the initial barrage. Orders were definite but not too elaborate.

Open warfare had suddenly thrust a responsibility on the shoulders of junior officers, which in the trench days was borne by higher ranks.

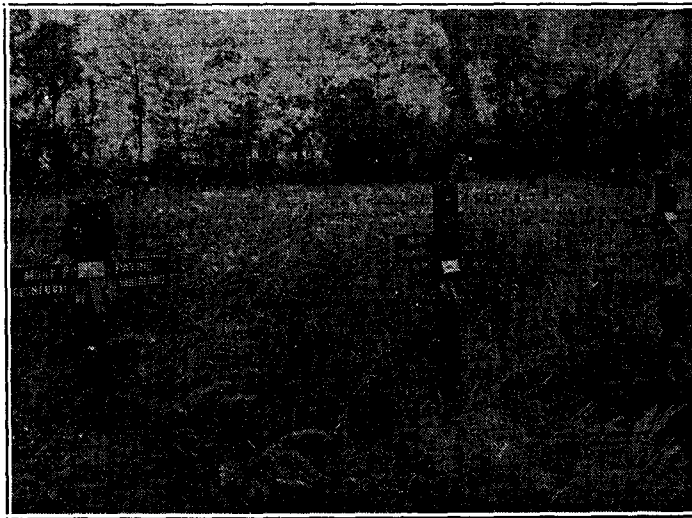
The barrage, consisting of two smoke shells to one of high explosive, opened with a fury at 5.15 a.m. Troops were in their usual cheery spirits, particularly after the rum ration had been issued. A most unfortunate incident occurred just before the signal to advance was given, when two premature bursts caught 8 platoon where they were lying and nearly wiped them out. At dawn, 05.30, companies were on the move. Three formidable obstacles faced us at the start, in the shape of three concrete pill-boxes each having a clear field of fire for 500 or 600 yards. Herein lay a danger to be reckoned with. Platoons had been told off to dash ahead and work around to the rear of the pill-boxes with the hope of silencing the machine guns before they had an opportunity of doing much damage. This was successfully accomplished and the defenders numbering from 15 to 20 in each pill-box were dealt with as the platoon commander saw fit.

Everything was working splendidly, our casualties were not heavy, until—Ye gods, what had happened!— It could not be the smoke barrage alone that suddenly screened what slight vision there was a moment before. At first we suspected the cunning Bosche of having perfected some devilish device that obscured the light of day, until a group of innocent looking Fritz's were stumbled over in the darkness. They were really terrified and then it was discovered that the thick atmosphere was caused by a heavy ground mist arising, intensified by the smoke barrage. London fogs are renowned for their density but nothing could ever compare with this. A yard distant an object was invisible, and connections were of course impossible. Only survivors can appreciate what we were up against. The battalion was automatically split up into groups of two or three, who managed to keep together by shouting. The advance could only be carried on at a very slow pace, each group working on its own initiative, the great dan-

ger lying in the possibility of groups out-distancing their comrades.

What proved a barrier to our advance was a death-blow to the Bosche. His chief weapon of defence was the machine gun, which could not be employed to advantage. A few of the gunners kept up a desultory fire but the majority ceased altogether and awaited developments.

What a relief to gain admittance to one of the many houses which lay in our pathway, where for a moment we were free from the smoke and fog! Several of them were filled with Germans, in others a machine gun and crew of five or six were found, while in nearly every house one or two of the "blighters" were stowed away in cellars.



Belgium Soldiers' Graves.

The utmost precaution had to be observed in entering these houses, because a group had no means of telling whether they were occupied by their own or enemy troops. When a house was bumped against, the troops would first break a window and shout "Newfoundland" or "Caribou," and if the familiar accent was heard all would be well; but if "Kamerad, Ya, Ya" came back, then few words would be wasted in enticing the occupants out, for if they hesitated—a bomb through the window, a hurried search for other windows, followed by more bombs, when it would be safe to enter and "mop up."

An officer and his runner actually fell over a machine gun manned by a couple of Bosche, one offering a bag of sugar cubes as

a ransom for his life. Germany short of sugar? Not then at any rate, for every Fritz captured carried a pound or two.

The unoccupied houses showed signs of a hurried exit, with breakfast still laid on the table; the coffee was acceptable to our troops but little else. The bread, a very dark coarse article of food was invariably sour and most indigestible.

In the meantime our barrage had ceased entirely, for the gunners were unable to determine the position of the infantry, and aeroplane reconnaissance was out of the question owing to the dense mist.

There was no shortage of machine guns with the enemy, every group being in possession of at least one. It was indeed a very

smoke was a most unusual one, and taxed the resources of all ranks to the utmost.

One officer, assisted by an N. C. O. and two men had collected together 66 prisoners and fearing some would escape forced them into a cellar. Here the N. C. O. and one of the men were detailed to guard the prisoners until the fog lifted when they were told to march them back to the Prisoners of War Cage. The N. C. O. was wounded en route, but later in the day the private returned with the following written evidence of due delivery:—

“Received from Pte. Pelley,
Nfld. Regiment.

66 O.R. Bosche
Cpl. Wigh

I/C Advanced Cage
P. O. W.

14/10/18 9th Div.”

The prisoners taken this day were chiefly of the 25th, 28th and 38th Bavarian Regiments, and a few of the reserve Prussian Guards, brought up only the evening prior to the attack. They seemed generally well fed, but eager to surrender when at close quarters. At this stage of the war, the Germans knew that a mere show of hands was no longer an adequate token of surrender, but that they must produce a souvenir, such as a watch, ring, compass, pair of binoculars or iron cross. The officers hated to part with their personal belongings especially the iron cross, but our boys were keen on souvenir hunting and not often had they an op-



Graveyard at Vichte, where five of Newfoundland's Warriors are buried. Those gallant men met death a few days previous to the Armistice.

fortunate thing for us that the mist prevented their using these deadly weapons. The farther we penetrated into enemy territory the more numerous the Bosche appeared to be, until it became very awkward for a group of only two or three Newfoundlanders to find themselves mixed up with an enemy group three times their number. It was not feasible to take them prisoners for the moment, because a man could not be spared to guide them to the Prisoners of War cage. On the other hand if no quarter were granted, a fight to a finish would probably ensue, and what chance had three against a dozen, all equally armed?

The only solution was to bunch the prisoners and force them along in the advance. In all, the situation created by the fog and

portunity such as this.

Shortly after midday a slight breeze sprung up, the sun shone out and the mist and smoke gradually disappeared. Then the real fighting commenced. Many groups found themselves well in advance of the battalion, and practically surrounded by enemy machine guns and snipers. Much stouter resistance was encountered, but every man worked to his utmost in order to enlarge upon the success which up to this point had been phenomenal. There was little cover available and Bosche field guns firing with open sights were causing fearful havoc in our ranks. The advance was held up east of Neerhof and Rolleghehcappelle while the battalion was endeavouring to bridge the

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Wulfdambeck. The enemy had the range perfectly, and section after section were wiped out, but undismayed the troops repeated their attempts and finally effected a crossing. They pushed on to De Beurt Farm at the top of the ridge, only to be again held up by a battery of guns firing from the direction of Drie-Masten. Artillery support was called for by the means of sky-rockets, but evidently the battalion was too far in advance of the guns for the signal to be heeded. Something had to be done and quickly, for should this withering fire continue the battalion would soon be annihilated.

It was here that Lieut. Burke, whilst in command of "A" Company, paid the supreme sacrifice. He was known to all as a most upright and gallant officer whose standard of living appealed to men, and made them think.

The situation had become critical but was saved by the initiative of a young officer, who gathered together the survivors of two platoons with the purpose of outflanking this troublesome battery. By clever manoeuvring they succeeded in working south of the ridge, and soon reached the valley be-

yond only a few hundred yards from the guns. Here the whole battery opened fire at point blank range.

The rest of the story is well known to Newfoundlanders. How two men dashed forward with a Lewis Gun to a point of vantage, whence they opened a murderous fire on the Bosche Gunners until their magazines were emptied—and how Private Ricketts doubled back for more ammunition, miraculously escaping the fire of four machine guns directed at him—his return, the capture of the guns and gunners, and the subsequent advance of the platoon—all of this is familiar to you. For this act of gallantry he was awarded the Victoria Cross, and his comrade's bravery won for him the D.C.M.

The battalion was now able to reorganize its line and press onwards towards Laaga-Kapel. Heavy machine gun fire from Steenbeck was soon encountered however, and just at that moment a mounted officer was seen galloping towards our lines from the right flank. It proved to be General Freiberg, V.C., D.S.O., our old Brigadier, who was visiting his front line as usual in spite of the machine gun fire. When within hailing distance he shouted "Who are you?"

*Erzählung des
Krieges in
Newfoundland*

Upon discovering we were Newfoundlanders he was heard to exclaim as he galloped away: —“Thank God, my left flank is safe, now for my right.”

As it turned out the 14th was not a brigade attack, nor a battalion, nor a company, platoon or section. It was each individual for himself, and as I firmly believe God for the British troops, till twelve o'clock at any rate; in the afternoon He might have given the Bosche a few hours, but we can certainly claim Providence up to midday on the 14th October, 1918.

Few aeroplanes were in evidence during this attack until late in the afternoon when a thrilling aerial battle was witnessed. As near as could be judged, about sixty Bosche machines flew over our lines towards the supports. As if by magic fully as many British planes instantly appeared which made the fight an even contest from the start. The infantry of both armies were so intensely interested in the outcome of the battle overhead, that for the time being the terra firma conflict was given second place. It seemed as if each British plane singled out an opponent and darted at him. Machine after machine burst into flames, some British, some German, from our position it could not be told which. For several minutes the battle raged, when the enemy realizing the futility of his purpose, suddenly turned tail and fled hotly pursued by the British, leaving the fields for miles around strewn with wreckage. Both sides lost heavily in this fight, but it was later reported that the German casualties nearly doubled the British.

Orders were received just before sunset to hold the positions then occupied and consolidate. Platoons and companies had become somewhat intermixed during the day, in fact even troops from other units had found themselves attached to our battalion when the mist cleared. None of the enemy were in sight and it was thought they had retreated beyond Steenbeck, but it soon turned out there were snipers still concealed in the houses nearby. “B” Company had finished reorganizing and the officers were discussing plans for consolidation when a shot was heard and Lieut. Taylor fell fatally wounded. Mere words could never express the sorrow felt by every member of the battalion when the sad news became known. This fearless soldier when Sergeant-Major of the battalion had won the Military Cross and D.C.M. for conspicuous bravery, and at

the attack on Keiberg Ridge only a few days before his death, he gained a bar to his M.C.

It seemed especially hard that so many of our best officers and men should be called, just when we were stepping on the threshold of victory.

The attack along the whole front had been a huge success for British Arms. An enemy document was captured stating that the German high command had ordered this line to be held at all costs, evidently with the intention of giving his right flank an opportunity of retiring from the coast towns, and his engineers time to complete the work of demolishing bridges and railways.

The battalion's captures that day were numerous, including 500 prisoners, 8 guns and 94 machine guns. Casualties were heavy. At roll-call next morning the battalion numbered barely 300 rifles.

[The crossing of the Lys and the advance to the Scheldt will be treated in a subsequent article, by the same author.—Editors' note].

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