

# TELL OF BRITISH ERRORS AT LOOS

Letters Received Here and Else-  
where Say Fatal Blunders  
Were Made.

## BLACK WATCH SACRIFICED

The Camerons Also Practically  
Annihilated—Letter from a  
Black Watch Captain.

Special to The New York Times.

BALTIMORE, Nov. 8.—A letter received here seems to indicate that the famous Black Watch regiment was practically annihilated in the battle of Loos on Sept. 25, owing to an error of the British Generals. This was the engagement in which "Johnny" Poe, Princeton football star, Baltimore clubman, and soldier of fortune, fell. He was in the front line in a desperate charge.

S. Johnson Poe, a lawyer of Baltimore and brother of John Poe, received the letter from a captain of the Black Watch. The letter, the name of the writer of which is withheld by request, reads in part:

"For four days previous to Sept. 25, Loos and the neighborhood had been heavily shelled by our guns, morning, noon, and night, and there were forty-one enemy batteries located in and around the village. The enemy were given no rest during this time, and it must have been a terrible time from their point of view.

"The battalion went up from the trenches from the billets at Mazin-Barge on Friday afternoon, Sept. 24. It was a long, tedious job, and the last company did not report as being in position in the trenches until nearly 2:30 A. M. on the morning of the attack. The commanding officer and I started, above ground, shortly after the first company had moved, and reached a small dugout in a communicating trench somewhere about 7 o'clock. He and I divided the night into watches.

"At 5:05 A. M. Sept. 25 a message came to the dugout that the 'zero' hour, that is, the time the gas was to be started, would be at 5:50 A. M. So I woke the commanding officer. It was cold and raining heavily, with a soft wind from the west, but not nearly strong enough to blow the gas into the down trenches.

"The intense bombardment and the gas started at 5:50 A. M. punctually. I never heard such an infernal noise in my life. Every gun within miles seemed hammering above our heads, but the curious part of it was that very little reply came from the German batteries. We knew the reason of this afterward.

"Just before the attack was launched the Germans sent some gas shells over. One dropped in the neighborhood of our dugout, which made things rather unpleasant, but we managed to put on our smoke helmets and get out in time.

"At 6:30 o'clock our first line left the parapet. I had left the commanding officer in the dugout, and had gone up to see that all was started correctly. I must say the men went marvelously well. They were cheering, laughing, and joking as they went up and passed our wire entanglements. Our casualties started directly we showed ourselves.

"The enemy's machine guns got to work, and our men began to drop right and left, but they never wavered for one single second. On they went, line after line, just as if they were on parade. There was no sensational charging; they kept touch in distance and marched solidly across the 'hayfield,' men and officers dropping right and left. Seven officers were killed within fifty yards of us. Scott Pearse and Stirling were wounded quite close to me as I was sitting on the parapet talking to the men as they went over. I went to Stirling and did what I could for him and got him down into the trench.

"Just at this time the Colonel came up. He looked worried and told me that Harvey, the Adjutant, had been shot by his side about five minutes before. I went out in front of the wire and got hold of Scott Pearse, dressed him as well as I could, and brought him back, with the help of a man, and then the commanding officer and I started out with, I think, the fifth line. By that time our first and second lines were well over the German trenches, and we had very little machine gun fire to cope with, but the German guns then began to work. They had evidently been keeping their men well under cover during the intense bombardment, because as we crossed the historic hayfield literally a rain of shells of all nos fell around us.

"Just after we had crossed the first German trench we met Colonel Wallace of the Gordon Highlanders, full of

praise for the way the Black Watch had made the charge.

"As we were advancing toward Loos village from this point we saw in the distance a huge crowd of men in fours coming along on the left. This turned out to be 500 or 600 German prisoners who had given themselves up to the Seaforth's in the trenches to the north of Loos, and just as we were watching them, I heard the scream of some high explosive shells coming along, so I dragged the commanding officer into the small German trench close by to take cover should they alight near.

Got "Good Dose of Gas."

"Sure enough, they did. Within fifty yards of us five of them went off, and I was just going to take a deep breath of relief when I got a good dose of gas, which was lying in the trench, and very unceremoniously I dragged the commanding officer out of the trench just in time to prevent him from getting what I had—a most unpleasant experience.

"We reached the boundary of the village about 7:50 and waited there in the hope of receiving some message back from the battalion, as this was the point which we had arranged that messages should be sent to. We waited here some little time, I think about a quarter of an hour, wondering why messages were not coming back.

"We knew afterward that the reason why messages did not come back was that all officers by this time were either killed or wounded; and it should be made a point in future that all ranks should know where the commanding officer is to be found.

"Eventually we determined to push on, and went up what is known as South Street. The village was in a terrible state. Scarcely a house was left standing. Communication trenches ran up every street connecting with cellars, and these had been filled with Germans. They were filled with Germans as we passed, but they were all either dead or wounded. Our men had done the work exceedingly well, methodically working from house to house with bombs, never giving the enemy any rest, and throwing anything from two to six bombs into every house or room. We found a few men working up and down some houses in the village, but no Black Watch men were to be seen. They had all gone on.

"Just as we got to the end of South Street we met a wounded man of the Black Watch, who told us that the remains of the regiment were then on the slopes of Hill 70, so we pushed on through the village, picking up a few men of the Black Watch as we went. Five of them we found methodically throwing bombs into a small house near the church. They said they believed there were about a dozen Germans in it when they arrived, but I do not think there could have been one left alive in it when we got there.

"We called these and a few others and went on past the celebrated Tower Bridge till we arrived at the very east limit of the village, just below Hill 70, and there we saw the remnant of the Forty-fourth Brigade digging themselves in just below the crest of the hill. A message then reached us to the effect that the line had to swing slightly southeast in order to escape very heavy firing, and that our front line had actually penetrated into the German third line trench at one place, but that it had to leave owing to terrific machine gun fire, and that it was then digging itself in about the crest.

"I sent what available men we had, with the exception of the runners and signal men, up to reinforce our weak right, and there was nothing more to be done except to wait for news. Time after time our left advanced against the half-finished German work, and time after time they were driven back by the enemy's machine guns in St. August and St. Elle. I am quite certain in my own mind that the half-finished work on the hill was nothing more than a trap. It was not fortified in any way on the St. August side, but facing us it had in front a very strong wire entanglement. The result was that, although our men were able to penetrate into it time after time, it was open to an attack from the German side, and our men had in each case to fall back through the German wire.

Reinforcements Delayed.

"Matters remained like this, remnants of the Forty-fourth Brigade holding the slopes of the hill practically all day. Everything was at a standstill. No reinforcements came up, as we had been led to expect, and we did not know at what moment a German counterattack would drive us off Hill 70.

"As far as I personally was concerned my attention was mainly directed to our right. We were in a curious position. We could not see what was going on on the other side of this high slag heap. It seems now a perfect marvel that the Germans did not make some attempt to outflank us from the crasser, as the result of a counterattack with one company and four machine guns would have forced us off the hill at any minute of the day.

"About noon the commanding officer, who was then senior officer of the brigade, sent back an urgent note asking for reinforcements, and at 1:25 P. M. a message came to say that our guns

were then in their new forward position and that reinforcements were coming up. This cheered us up a little, but they were a very long time coming, and it was 4 o'clock before they appeared. Meanwhile the Germans repulsed all our attacks on our left and brought up a machine gun on our right with a view to enfilading our whole line, but, as I have said before, we foiled this and hung on by the skin of our teeth.

"About 3 P. M. two motor machine guns came up, and I was never more glad to see anything in my life. We sent one to our right near the crasser and one to the centre, and at 4 P. M. we saw the promised reinforcements coming up on our left, but none at all came to help us on the right, so our anxiety was doubled, as, of course, that was our weak point. If the enemy had only known that the right of the position was only held by, at the most, thirty men we should have been in a bad way.

"About half an hour after this a company of the supporting battalion had come up and we sent it to support the right. It was at 4 P. M. that the commanding officer decided to send a message asking that the Forty-fourth Brigade should be relieved.

"The whole brigade was then, at the most, I should think, 500 strong, this out of a force that left the trenches over 4,000 strong at 6:30 that morning. At 5 P. M. we got a reply to the effect that we would be relieved by the Sixty-second Brigade during the night. By this time things had assumed a slightly better aspect, for about this hour—that is, 5 P. M.—I saw a number of men dribbling across the crasser and joining the men on our right. These proved to be men of the London Division who had been held upon the other side the whole day. A fair number came up, and I then began to think that things were much better, but I still dreaded a strong counterattack during the night, and as time went on that dread grew worse and worse, for surely the enemy were not going to sit quiet after the hammering they had had.

"Their marvelous railway system would help them to bring up supports and reserves, and we, a few poor hundred, could hardly be expected to stand a really resolute counterattack. That time of waiting was, I think, the most trying I have ever experienced in my life. But, thank goodness, the enemy did not attack, and at about 1:30 A. M., after a certain amount of hesitation on the part of the commander of the Sixty-second Brigade, we, the remnants of the Ninth Black Watch, were relieved by half a company of the Northumberland Fusiliers. Just think—the remnants of a battalion who went into action over a thousand strong were relieved by half a company!

"We got our men together and marched back through Loos, too tired and anxious even to sleep, on Sunday, Sept. 26, at about 3:30 A. M.

"All the way through Loos and over the battlefield we were exposed to the fire of the enemy's heavy guns. They were shelling Tower Bridge and seemed to be wild at losing the village, and just shelled it out of pure cursed eas.

"On Sunday the commanding officer sent me where the Forty-fourth Brigade headquarters were to see what news of a move there was and where we were to go. When I got there the tale of grim disaster was poured into my ears. Of course, the bulk of it was untrue, but there was just that amount of truth in it, not only in the report I got, but in what I saw myself, to make it pretty serious. The less said of this the better. Still, the main cheering fact was that we still held Hill 70 and Loos, and the enemy, despite heavy counterattacks during the night and all that morning, had failed to drive out those who held the village and the hill."

Two Regiments Wiped Out.

From letters received in New York in the last few days it seems that both the Black Watch and Camerons were practically wiped out in the "great drive." The regiments were brigaded together and suffered the same fate, less than 10 per cent. of their number reporting for duty after the battle. It is said that the remnants of the regiments are now encamped about thirty miles back from the fighting trenches, resting and being recruited to their full strength. Owing to the strict censorship details do not reach this country. It has been indirectly stated, however, that there were several fatal blunders on the part of the English leaders during the great offensive.

The extracts from the diary of an Englishman printed in THE NEW YORK TIMES of Sunday contained the following:

"What valid reason can exist for not telling the story of the pipers of the Black Watch? There may be good reason for throwing the cloak of secrecy over the episode of the Twenty-third Division, which resulted in the Camerons being left without supports, and the following incident: The Camerons, on advancing to the German trenches on their front, captured 300 Germans, whom they left under a small guard. The Camerons went on, meeting no opposition for over a mile. Then the Germans who had surrendered, observing that no supports were following up the Camerons advance, turned on their guard, turned their machine guns on the Camerons from the rear, and, after shooting down the majority of them, compelled the surrender of the rest."