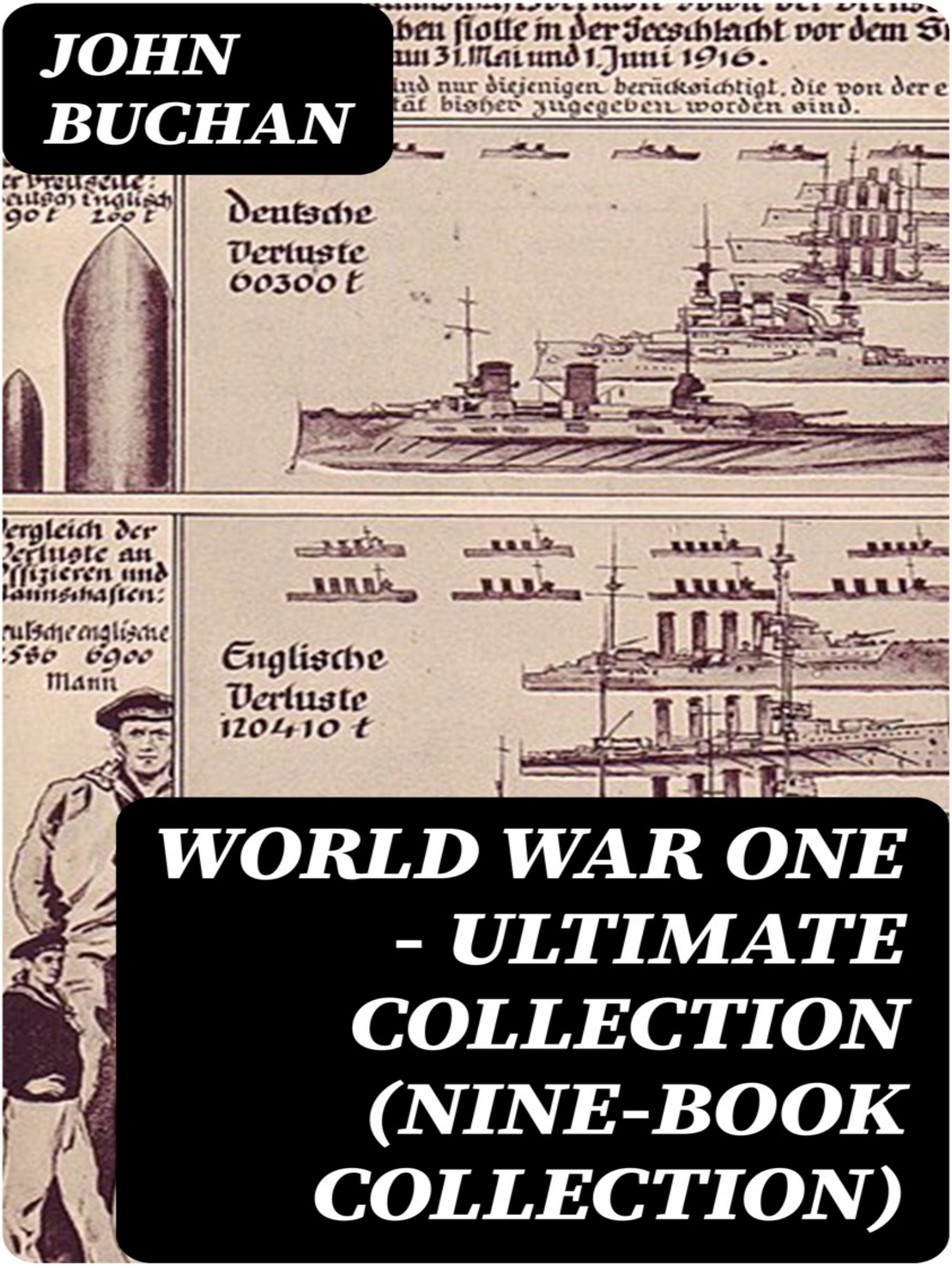

JOHN BUCHAN

WORLD WAR ONE - ULTIMATE COLLECTION (NINE-BOOK COLLECTION)

John Buchan

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Table of Contents

DAYS TO REMEMBER: THE BRITISH EMPIRE IN THE GREAT WAR

Table of Contents

Table of Contents

PART I.
INTRODUCTORY.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I.
THE CAUSES OF THE WAR.

Table of Contents

It is never easy to fix upon one cause as the origin of a great war, and the war of 1914 was the outcome of several causes combined. For twenty years there had been growing up in Europe a sense of insecurity; the great Powers had become restless and suspicious of one another, and one Power, Germany, was seriously considering the possibility of some bold stroke which would put her beyond the reach of rivalry. Germany, since her victory over France in 1870, had become a very great and rich nation; she had spread her commerce over the world; and she was anxious to create an empire akin to those of Britain and France. But she began the task too late in the day; she could succeed only at the expense of her neighbours. The ambition of Germany was, therefore, one perpetual source of danger.

Another danger was her nervousness, which frequently accompanies ambition. There was an alliance between France and Russia, and a growing friendliness between Britain and France, and Germany feared that her rivals were combining to hem her in and put a stop to what she considered her natural development. Russia had fallen very low after the war with Japan, but was rapidly recovering both in wealth and armed strength. France was making strenuous efforts to increase her army, so that she should not be at a disadvantage as compared with the far greater population of Germany. Britain had no ambitions of conquest; her aim was the peaceful development of her Empire. But that was an oversea Empire, and she required a large navy; and the size of this navy seemed to Germany to be a menace to her future.

The result was that in the summer of 1914 the rulers of Germany had decided that some great effort must soon be made; they must put their land in such a position that for the future it would have no cause to dread the aggression, or even the rivalry, of other Powers. If they delayed too long they feared that the growing wealth of Russia and the increased military strength of France would make such an effort for ever impossible.

On June 28, 1914, the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, the heir to the Austrian throne, was murdered, along with his wife, in the little Bosnian town of Serajevo. Austria had long been jealous of the movement towards unity among the Slav peoples in the Balkans, with Serbia at their head, and she believed, or pretended to believe, that the murder had been connived at by the Serbian Government. Germany, for reasons of her own, was equally desirous to see the power of the Balkan states diminished. She had a grandiose design of extending her influence eastward through Constantinople to the Persian Gulf, with Turkey as her ally or her tool, and planting a German outpost on the flank of our Indian Empire; and a strong Serbian kingdom, or a union of Slav peoples, would effectually bar the way. With the approval of Germany, therefore, Austria sent an ultimatum to Serbia, demanding certain concessions which would have made Serbia no longer a sovereign state. Serbia, while willing to grant most of the demands, was compelled to refuse others, and Austria promptly declared war.

Russia now interfered in support of Serbia, and mobilized her armies on her southern frontiers. Every attempt was made by the statesmen of Western Europe, and notably by the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, to limit the quarrel and to persuade Austria to listen to reason. Germany, however, had no desire for a peaceful settlement. She induced Austria to refuse all mediation, and presently, after a peremptory request to the Tsar to demobilize, she declared war upon Russia. Russia and France were allies,

and war with France followed naturally within twenty-four hours.

The position of Britain had become extremely difficult She had no formal alliance with France, but in her own interests she could not allow her nearest neighbour to be crushed, and the balance of power in Europe to be entirely changed. Britain had never seriously considered the possibility of a European war, and was extremely averse from interfering in a quarrel in which she had no direct concern. She might well have hesitated till it was too late to act with effect, or have blundered into some foolish compromise with Germany.

The situation was saved by Belgium. The German scheme of attack on France was based upon a sudden invasion from the north, and for this a march through Belgium was essential. The neutrality of Belgium had long before been guaranteed by all the great Powers, but Germany argued that her necessity must override the law of nations, and demanded a passage through Belgium. This was refused. The invasion of Belgium accordingly began on Sunday, the 2nd August, and this outrage determined the policy of the British Government and the British people.

On Monday, the 3rd August, Sir Edward Grey announced that the fleet and the army had been mobilized, and that Britain proposed to defend with the sword her treaty obligations to Belgium. That evening an ultimatum was sent to Germany demanding her immediate withdrawal from Belgium; next day we were at war with Germany. On the same afternoon the German Imperial Chancellor made a speech defending his violation of Belgian neutrality. "He who is threatened, as we are threatened, can have but the one thought—how he is to hack his way through." The German Government had believed to the last that Britain would remain neutral, and her entry into the conflict for a moment dashed their zeal for war. "The British change the whole situation," the Emperor told the United States Ambassador.

"An obstinate nation! They will keep up the war. It cannot end soon."

Britain had no great military force to throw into the balance, such as the armies of France and Russia. Her small regular army was little more than a garrison for her Oversea Dominions, and her Territorial Force was intended for home defence. But Lord Haldane, when Secretary for War, had foreseen the possibility of a Continental struggle, and had prepared plans by which an Expeditionary Force of about 100,000 men could be placed on the Continent of Europe in a very short time. This force was, for its size, probably the most expert army in the world. It took its place on the left of the French line, and, though small in comparison with the mighty levy of France, it was fated to play a leading part in the first decisive battles.

Behind the regular army was our second line of defence, the Territorials, nominally 300,000 strong. But it was very certain that as soon as war was declared the whole manhood of Britain would be called upon, and that many hundreds of thousands of young men would be eager to serve. Lord Kitchener was appointed Secretary for War, and under his direction recruiting began. Before Christmas nearly two millions of our men were under arms.

But Britain's main weapon was her navy, which was by far the strongest in the world. After that came her wealth and her great manufacturing capacity, by which she could supply the munitions of war required both for her own forces and for those of her allies. If her navy could dominate the seas, then her commerce would go on as before, while that of Germany would cease, and her troops and those of her allies could be moved about the world at her pleasure. "He who commands the sea," as Francis Bacon said long ago, "hath great freedom."

Germany was prepared for a war which she had always foreseen, and had the greater strength; but if the Allies did not suffer an early defeat, their strength was certain to grow

with every month, while that of Germany must decline. But if the Allies were thus to grow in power they must be able to maintain free communications with the outer world and with one another, and for this they must rely on the supremacy of the British fleet.

In the very first days of war events happened which proved that the German Emperor was right in dreading the entry of Britain into the struggle. The British Empire overseas awoke to action like a strong man from slumber, and there began an epic of service which was to grow in power and majesty up to the last hour of the campaign. No man can read without emotion the tale of those early days in August, when from every quarter of the globe there poured in appeals for the right to share in Britain's struggle.

The great free nations of the Empire—Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand—prepared to raise and send troops, and the smallest Crown colonies made their contributions in money or supplies. India, whom Germany believed to be disloyal, at once agreed to send two infantry divisions and one cavalry brigade, and all the native rulers and princes placed their resources at the King-Emperor's call. Almost every Indian chief offered personal service in the field.

This rally of the Empire aroused a sense of an immense new comradeship which stirred the least emotional. The British Commonwealth had revealed itself as that wonderful thing for which its makers had striven and prayed—a union based not upon laws and governors, but upon the deepest feelings of the human spirit. The effect of the muster was not less profound upon our ally across the Channel. No longer, as in 1870, did France stand alone. The German armies might be thundering at her gates, but the ends of the earth were hastening to her aid, and the avenger was drawing nigh.

CHAPTER II.
A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF THE WAR.

Table of Contents

Germany had foreseen and prepared for just such a conflict as now began, and was able to put into the field in the West larger forces than those of France and Britain combined. These forces were also better trained and better supplied with transport, artillery, and machine-guns. Her plan was to defeat France and Britain in the first month, and then to turn her main armies against Russia, for she assumed that Russia would be slow to mobilize her gigantic numbers. But if the first attack on France should fail the situation would be changed, and Germany would be compelled to fight on two fronts at once, the East and the West.

If the conflict was protracted Germany would lose the advantage of numbers, for then the greater united manpower of the Allies could be trained for the field, and if the British navy continued to rule the seas those new armies could be supplied and moved at the Allies' will. Moreover, though Germany could produce most of the necessaries of life and the apparatus of war within her own borders, yet the Allied control of the sea would cut her off from certain vital kinds of war material.

The Great War falls therefore into three stages. At the start Germany, with the advantage of surprise and long preparation, embarked on a war of movement in the hope of immediate victory. She failed in this, and the campaign then became a siege in which the Allies sat round her entrenched stronghold. That vast stronghold embraced half of Europe and part of Asia; it could produce most things that it needed, and carry on its normal life. Brilliant sallies were made, which more than once nearly dispersed the besiegers; but, nevertheless, for three and a half years the

Teutonic Powers were as the garrison of a beleaguered city. Then came the short, last stage, when the outworks of the fortress crumbled, and the Allies pressed in and forced the garrison to surrender.

Germany began the war with Austria as her ally. Within three months she had been joined by Turkey, and by the end of the first year of war Bulgaria mustered on her side. The Allies at the start were France, Britain, Russia, Belgium, Serbia, and Japan; in May 1915 Italy joined them, and in August 1916 Rumania. Before the end Portugal and Greece, among the European Powers, were added; the United States of America joined in April 1917; and in the last year of the war there were altogether eleven Powers in Europe, Asia, and America on their side. The main battles were fought on the Continent of Europe, and the main belligerents, from start to finish, were the European nations. The accession of America, however, was vital for the Allied victory, as it counterbalanced the failure of Russia, which, after the revolution in March 1917, rapidly went to pieces and dropped out of the fighting line.

Before telling of any special incidents of the great struggle it is desirable to have before our minds a general bird's-eye view of the whole war. Germany's first plan of an immediate conquest was defeated by France and Britain at the First Battle of the Marne in September 1914. She made a second attempt upon the shores of the English Channel, which was foiled before Ypres in November of the same year. After that her policy was to stand on the defensive in the West and to aim at the destruction of Russia. In this, during 1915, she nearly succeeded. The Russian armies were driven out of Poland, but they established their line during the autumn, and Germany's ambitious strategy had once more failed.

In 1916 the Allies were ready for a combined advance, Germany was aware of their policy, and tried to anticipate it by her great attack on Verdun in February of that year—a

battle which was fiercely contested for months, and finally ebbed away about midsummer. By that time Austria's attack on Italy had also failed and the Allied advance begun. The Russians won great successes in Galicia, and the British and French on the Somme dealt the German armies a blow from which they never really recovered. In Rumania, on the other hand, Germany had a temporary success; but by the close of 1916 it was clear to her commanders that unless some miracle happened the war would end with an Allied victory during the following year.

That miracle happened, in the form of the Russian revolution in the spring of 1917. Thereafter Germany was able to get rid of the war on her eastern frontier and to throw all her strength against the West. During that spring and summer she staved off the French and British attacks at Arras, at Ypres, and on the Aisne, and in the autumn of 1917 she was ready to begin her own offensive. Her first blow was directed against Italy, whom she drove back fifty miles from the Isonzo to the Piave, with immense losses. In March 1918 she struck her great blow in the West. With a large superiority in men and guns, she attacked the British at St. Quentin, and forced them to retreat almost to the gates of Amiens.

It was a success, but only a limited success, and with this last stroke her energy began to ebb. Foch was now Commander-in-Chief of the Allies, and with great skill he maintained a stubborn defensive till such time as he had gathered strength for a counter-attack. Meantime the new armies of America were arriving in France at the rate of 10,000 a day. In July Germany struck her last blow on the Marne in a frantic effort to reach Paris. That blow was likewise warded off, and three days later the Allied counter-offensive began.

Then in a series of great attacks all the prepared German defences were broken down. By the early days of October Turkey and Bulgaria had been defeated in the East, and the

surrender of Austria followed before the end of the month. Finally, on November 11, 1918, Germany herself was forced to sue for an armistice in order to save her armies from destruction. An armistice was granted, but its terms involved an unconditional surrender to the will of the Allies.

The episodes contained in the following chapters have been chosen as examples of the achievements of Britain and her Oversea Dominions in the Great War. They are notable episodes, which stand out from the day-to-day routine of the fighting. They are exploits, each of which materially contributed to Germany's defeat. But the qualities which they reveal in the men who shared in them were not confined to those men; they are typical qualities, and were possessed in no less degree by hundreds of thousands of men who fought in obscurity, but whose unrecorded service was equally the cause of victory. A war is won not only by the shining deeds of the few, but also by the faithfulness of the many, though it is the brilliant deeds which stand out most clearly in the world's memory and become the symbols and memorials of all the unrecorded faithfulness.

Most of the chapters belong to the attacks during the time of siege warfare, for it was by those attacks that the heart was taken out of the enemy. But we must not pass over the marvellous story of how Germany was reduced to a state of beleaguerment, and why she did not succeed in her first plan and win in a war of movement. The reason of this was a great battle, in which France played the chief part, but in which the small British army had also an honourable share. Before we begin our record, then, let us look at the stand on the Marne which wrecked the first hope of a German victory in the war.

CHAPTER III.
THE TURN AT THE MARNE.

Table of Contents

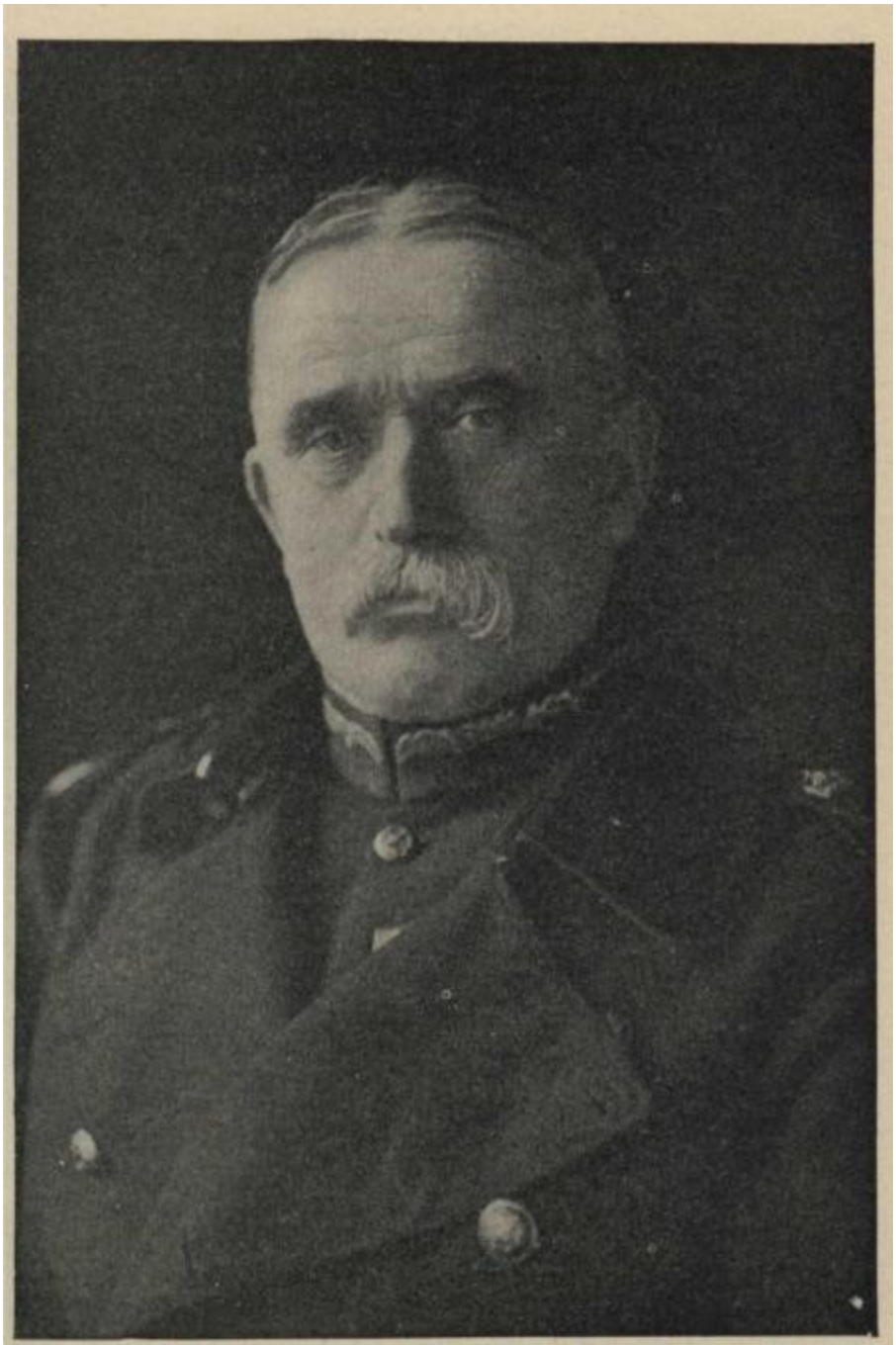
Germany, as we have seen, began the war in the West with larger forces than those of France and Britain. She had also prepared definite plans of action, most of which she had managed to conceal from her opponents. General Joffre, the French Commander-in-Chief, was aware of her main intention—to outflank the French left wing by a drive through Belgium; but he did not guess how strong the enemy right wing would be, or how wide its wheel. His own plan was to strike first, and to attack the enemy's left and centre in Lorraine and in the Ardennes, where he supposed the German front would be relatively weak.

He was wrong, for he had under-estimated the number of trained divisions which Germany could place at once in the field. His attacks were repulsed both in Lorraine and in the Ardennes. At the same moment he found that the German right wing, sweeping round through Belgium, was double the strength he had expected. He hurried up troops to meet it, but at Charleroi his Fifth Army was beaten, and the British on its left were compelled to retreat along with it. The result was that on Monday, August 24, 1914, all the armies of the Allies were falling back from the northern frontiers. The men did not know what had happened; but, weary and bewildered, they kept their discipline. That the retirement was achieved without serious losses was a proof of the stoutheartedness of the armies of France and Britain.

Joffre was now compelled to make a new plan. He had to find reserves, and these would take time to collect; he could not get reinforcements brought up to his armies in time, so the armies must fall back to the reinforcements. For nearly a fortnight the retreat went on. Notable exploits were

performed by every army, and the record of the retreat from Mons contains the fine defensive battle fought by the British at Le Cateau. The Allies lost heavily in the retirement, but it enabled them to reach their supports, while the enemy had weakened his strength by his long advance. On the 4th September the Allies, who at the start had been outnumbered, were now slightly more numerous than the Germans.

On that day, the 4th September, Joffre halted the retreat. He was now ready to turn and strike back. The enemy forces lay in a huge arc 200 miles wide and 30 deep—from the eastern skirts of Paris to Verdun. On the German right was Kluck, who had led the great wheel through Belgium, and next to him in order towards the east were the armies under Bülow, Hausen, the Duke of Wurtemberg, and the Imperial Crown Prince. Beyond the Meuse lay the detached German left wing, under the Crown Prince of Bavaria, threatening Nancy. The German plan was for Kluck to turn the left, and Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria the right, of the French line, while their centre broke the French centre in Champagne.



FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH
(EARL OF YPRES).
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FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH
(EARL OF YPRES).

The Allies had been forced into a difficult position. From the south of the Marne their line extended to Verdun,

consisting of the British Army under Sir John French, and the armies of Franchet d'Esperey, Foch, Langle de Gary, and Sarrail; while facing the Bavarians at Nancy were the armies of Castelnau and Dubail. In the meantime a new French army, the Sixth, had been formed, and this, under Maunoury, lay on the extreme left, covering Paris, and was thus in a position to threaten Kluck's right flank and rear. Joffre's new plan was to strike hard with his left, on the flank of the invader, and for this purpose he had gravely thinned the rest of his front so as to strengthen the forces of Maunoury and Franchet d'Esperey. It was a great hazard, for if the Bavarians forced the gate of Nancy the French right would be turned, and if the German centre broke through the weak French centre the battle would be lost, whatever happened on the French left.

It was one of the moments of crisis on which the world's history depends. The captains who were to win the war for the Allies were all in the field—Foch with an army, Haig with a corps, Pétain and Mangin and Allenby with divisions. Joffre told his men that on the coming fight depended the salvation of their country, and every private in the ranks felt the gravity of the hour. France was fighting on the old ground where, long centuries before, the Hun invasion had been rolled back by Theodoric the Visigoth, and the spirit of her men was kindled to a flame.

The First Battle of the Marne was won not, as many believed, by any single exploit, but by the faithful performance of its duty by each section of the long-drawn line. Let us look first at the French right flank in Lorraine. There the battle began on the 4th September, and three days later came the crisis when, by the slenderest margin, the enemy failed to break Castelnau on the ridge called the Grand-Couronné. The Kaiser himself was a spectator of the fight, for Germany had counted on forcing the pass; but by the 8th she had failed, and by the 9th Castelnau had firmly barred the gate.

The French centre, under Foch, Langle de Gary, and Sarrail, had a longer period of trial. Sarrail, at Verdun, was all but broken on the 8th, and was compelled to fall back to the west bank of the Meuse. All through the 9th and 10th the desperate struggle continued, and by the evening of the last day the French general was preparing for retreat. Suddenly, however, he found the attack ebbing, and by the 12th the enemy was mysteriously withdrawing. Farther west Langle de Gary had his worst moment on the 8th; on the 9th he received reinforcements which eased his position, and on the 10th he too felt the strange weakening of the enemy. The left centre under Foch had the sternest fight of all. He had against him the bulk of Bülow's and Hausen's armies, and on the 8th he found his flanks turned and his whole front split into gaps. Nevertheless he prepared to attack on the 9th with his last ounce of strength. All that day his centre and right were falling back before the enemy's thrust, but he still persevered in his purpose and marched the single division he could muster to the point where he thought he could strike with the greatest effect. The blow was never delivered, for on the evening of the 9th the apparently triumphant advance halted and ebbed. Like Sarrail and Langle de Gary, Foch, having resisted to the limit of human endurance, discovered that the enemy was miraculously disappearing.

The cause of the miracle was the doings of the French left wing. Joffre had hurled Maunoury on Kluck's flank and rear, while Sir John French and Franchet d'Esperey attacked in front. Kluck met the threat with vigour and resolution. He formed front to flank, as the phrase goes—that is, he faced round to what had been his wing—and in the three days' fighting all but defeated Maunoury. On the night of the 7th the outflanking French left found itself outflanked in turn, and its attack turned into a desperate defence. But on the 9th came salvation. Kluck's manoeuvre had left a gap of 30 miles between himself and Bülow, and into this gap were

pouring the British force and that of Franchet d'Esperey. Suddenly Maunoury discovered that certain villages in front of him were evacuated, and his airmen told him of enemy convoys moving to the north. At 1 p.m. that day Bülow began his retreat, and Kluck was forced to follow suit. Sir John French and Franchet d'Esperey had pierced the enemy front, and the retreat of the German right caused the retreat of all the German armies. They fell back to a line along the Aisne, through Champagne, and down the east bank of the Meuse—a strong line, which for four years was never really broken. But, none the less, it was a retreat.

The First Battle of the Marne may well rank as the greatest, because the most critical, contest of the war. It was decisive in the sense that it defeated Germany's first plan of campaign. She had hoped for a "battle without a morrow"; but the battle had been fought and the morrow was come. She was now compelled to accept the slow war of entrenchments, and to see every week bringing her nearer to the condition of a beleaguered city. The immediate cause of victory was Maunoury's flank attack, which opened the way for the British and Franchet d'Esperey. But without the daring strategy of Foch and the stubborn endurance of Langle de Gary and Sarrail—above all, without Castelnau's epic resistance at Nancy—the chance in the West could not have been seized, and the Marne might have realized Germany's hopes. It was in a sense the last battle of the old régime of war, a battle of movement and surprise and quick decisions; it was fought and won not by the army as a military machine but by the human quality of the soldier. In the last resort the source of victory was the ancient and unconquerable spirit of France.

PART II.
THE WESTERN FRONT.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER IV.
THE WORCESTERS AT THE FIRST BATTLE OF YPRES.

Table of Contents

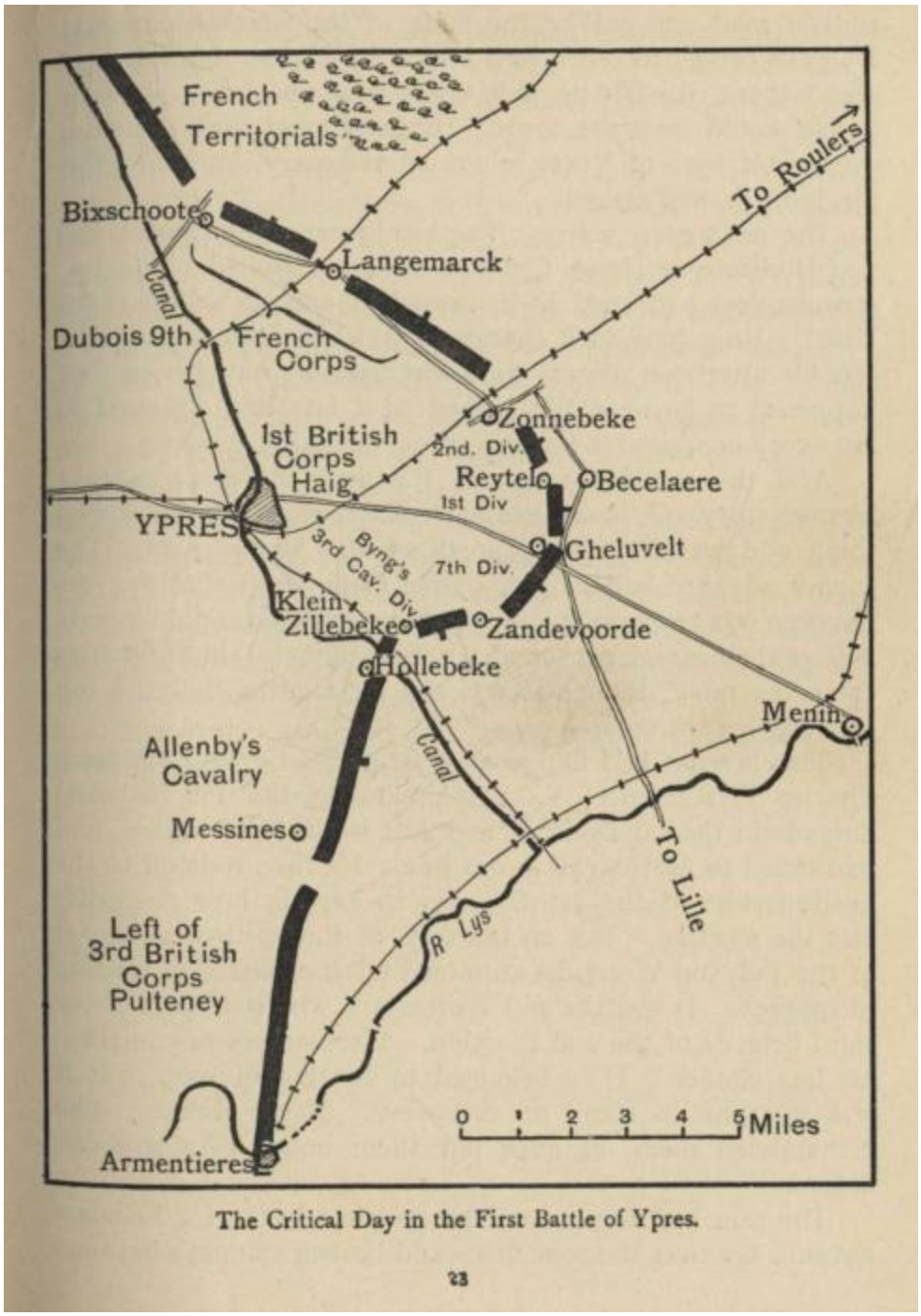
The Battle of the Marne defeated the great plan of the Germans, and their next object was to hold what they had won. The line to which they had retired was open to attack on the west, as was also that of the French, and hence there came a period of rapid movement on both sides, each attempting to outflank the other. It became a "race for the sea," and ended only when the entrenched lines on either side reached the Belgian coast. The enemy then attempted to break through the left of the Allied front, and to seize the Channel ports, so as to threaten the British lines of communication. He transferred large numbers of his best troops to the north; between Armentiéres and the sea he had a total of 402 battalions of infantry and an immense superiority of guns. Two hundred and sixty-seven battalions were all that the Allies could fling into the gap, and their cavalry were outnumbered by two to one.

Germany struck at various points; but being checked at Arras and on the sea-coast, she made her main effort in the last week of October against the British Army, which held the salient east of the city of Ypres. The battle, which is known as the First Battle of Ypres, began on the 21st of the month, and the crisis came on the 29th, when General von Fabeck attacked with a "storm group" of specially selected regiments.

On Saturday, the 31st October, after a furious bombardment, it seemed that the end had come. For eleven days our little army had been holding its own against impossible odds. At the point of the Salient, north of the

Menin road, lay the 2nd and 1st British Divisions, and south of them the 7th Division and Byng's cavalry. The men were very weary and their ranks terribly thinned. The 7th Division had fought for nearly two days on a front of 8 miles against forces of four times their number. The desperate character of the fighting was only fully known when the losses came to be reckoned up. That division had 44 officers left out of 400, and 2,336 men out of 12,000. The 1st Brigade of the 1st Division had 8 officers left out of 153, and 500 men out of 5,000. The 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers, to take one battalion, was reduced to 70 men commanded by a junior subaltern. That is the price which must be paid for fighting one against four. Major Bellenden in *Old Mortality* considered one to three the utmost possible odds, and "never knew any one who cared to take that except old Corporal Raddlebanes." At the First Battle of Ypres the British Army would have welcomed the Major's odds as a relief.

On that Saturday morning things had grown very desperate. The 1st and 3rd Brigades of the 1st Division were driven out of Gheluvelt, our line gave way, and soon after midday we were back among the woods towards Veldhoek. This retirement uncovered the left of the 7th Division, which was then slowly bent back towards the Klein Zillebeke ridge. The enemy was beginning to pour through the Gheluvelt gap, and at the same time pressed hard on the whole arc of the Salient. We had no reserves except an odd battalion or two and some regiments of cavalry, all of which had already been sorely tried during the past days. Sir John French sent an urgent message to General Foch for reinforcements and was refused. At the end of the battle he learned the reason. Foch had none to send, and his own losses had been greater than ours.



The Critical Day in the First Battle of Ypres.

Between 2 and 2.30 p.m. Sir Douglas Haig, commanding the 1st Corps, was on the Menin road watching the situation. It seemed impossible to stop the gap, though on its northern side some South Wales Borderers were gallantly holding a sunken road and galling the flank of the German

advance. He gave orders to retire to a line a little west of Hooge and stand there, though he well knew that no stand, however heroic, could save the town. He considered that a further retirement west of Ypres might be necessary, and with this Sir John French agreed.

The news grew worse. The headquarters of the 1st and 2nd Divisions at Hooge Chateau had been shelled. The two commanders had been badly wounded and six of the Staff killed. Brigadiers took charge of divisions, and during that terrible afternoon officers were commanding any troops that happened to be near. It looked as if fate had designed to lay every conceivable burden on our breaking defences.

And then suddenly out of the mad confusion came a strange story. A breathless Staff officer reported that something odd was happening north of the Menin road. The enemy advance had halted. Then came word that our 1st Division was re-forming. The anxious generals could scarcely believe their ears, for it sounded a sheer miracle; but presently came the proof, though it was not for months that the full tale was known.

This is what had happened. Brigadier-General the Hon. Charles FitzClarence, V.C., commanding the 1st (Guards) Brigade in the 1st Division, had sent in his last reserves, and had failed to fill the gap in our line. He then rode off to the headquarters of the 1st Division to explain how desperate was the position. But on the way, at the south-west corner of the Polygon Wood, he stumbled upon a battalion waiting in support. It was the 2nd Worcesters, who were part of the right brigade of the 2nd Division. FitzClarence saw in them his last chance. They belonged to another division, but it was no time to stand on ceremony. Major Hankey, who commanded them, at once put them under FitzClarence's orders.

The rain had begun and the dull wet haze of a Flanders autumn lay over the sour fields and broken spinneys between Hooge and Gheluvelt. The Worcesters, under very

heavy artillery fire, advanced in a series of short rushes for about 1,000 yards between the right of the South Wales Borderers and the northern edge of Gheluvelt. There they dug themselves in, broke up the German advance into bunches, opened a heavy flank fire, and brought it to a standstill. This allowed the 7th Division to get back to its old line, and the 6th Cavalry Brigade to fill the gap between the 7th and 1st Divisions. Before night fell the German advance west of Gheluvelt was stayed, and the British front was out of immediate danger.

That great performance of an historic English county regiment is one of the few instances in any campaign where the prompt decision of a subordinate commander and the prowess of one battalion have turned the tide of a great battle. It was the crucial moment of the First Battle of Ypres. Gheluvelt was lost, but the gap was closed, and the crisis was past. Eleven days later FitzClarence fell in the last spasm of the action—the fight with the Prussian Guard. He had done his work. Ypres was soon a heap of rubble, and for four years the Salient was a cockpit of war, but up to the last hour of the campaign no German entered the ruins of the little city except as a prisoner.

CHAPTER V.
THE CANADIANS AT THE SECOND BATTLE OF YPRES.

Table of Contents

The Salient of Ypres was to be a second time the scene of a heroic stand against hopeless odds. In April 1915 the front of the Salient was held by the French on the left, the Canadian Division and the British 28th Division in the centre, and the 27th Division on the right. On the 20th the Germans suddenly began the bombardment of the town with heavy shells. It was a warning to the British Command, for all their roads of supply for the lines of the Salient ran through Ypres, and such a bombardment must herald an attack on some part of their front.

The evening of Thursday, the 22nd, was calm and pleasant, with a light, steady wind blowing from the north-east. About 6.30 our artillery observers reported that a strange green vapour was moving over the French trenches. Then, as the April night closed in and the great shells still rained upon Ypres, there were strange and ghastly scenes on the left between the canal and the Pilkem road. Back through the dusk came a stream of French soldiers, blinded and coughing, and wild with terror. Some black horror had come upon them, and they had broken before a more than human fear. Behind them they had left hundreds of their comrades stricken or dead, with horrible blue faces and froth on their lips.

The rout surged over the canal, and the roads to the west were choked with broken infantry and galloping gun teams lacking their guns. Most of the French were coloured troops from Africa, and in the early darkness they stumbled upon the Canadian reserve battalions. With amazement the