

## A German deserters war experience



About ten minutes we might have lain in the grass when we suddenly heard rifle shots in front of us. Electrified, all of us jumped up and hastened to our rifles. Then the firing of rifles that was going on at a distance of about a mile or a mile and a half began steadily to increase in volume. We set in motion immediately. The expression and the behavior of the soldiers betrayed that something was agitating their mind, that an emotion had taken possession of them which they could not master and had never experienced before. On myself I could observe a great restlessness. Fear and curiosity threw my thoughts into a wild jumble; my head was swimming, and everything seemed to press upon my heart. But I wished to conceal my fears from my comrades. I know I tried to with a will, but whether I succeeded better than my comrades, whose uneasiness I could read in their faces, I doubt very much. Though I was aware that we should be in the firing line within half an hour, I endeavored to convince myself that our participation in the fight would no longer be necessary. I clung obstinately, nay, almost convulsively to every idea that could strengthen that hope or give me consolation. That not every bullet finds its billet; that, as we had been told, most wounds in modern wars were afflicted by grazing shots which caused slight flesh-wounds; those were some of the reiterated self-deceptions indulged in against my better knowledge. And they proved effective. It was not only that they made me in fact feel more easy; deeply engaged in those thoughts I had scarcely observed that we were already quite near the firing line. The bicycles at the side of the road revealed to us that the cyclist corps were engaged by the enemy. We did not know, of course, the strength of our opponents as we approached the firing line in leaps. In leaping forward every one bent down instinctively, whilst to our right and left and behind us the enemys bullets

could be heard striking; yet we reached the firing line without any casualties and were heartily welcomed by our hard-pressed friends. The cyclists, too, had not yet suffered any losses; some, it is true, had already been slightly wounded, but they could continue to participate in the fight. We were lying flat on the ground, and fired in the direction indicated to us as fast as our rifles would allow. So far we had not seen our opponents. That, it seemed, was too little interesting to some of our soldiers; so they rose partly, and fired in a kneeling position. Two men of my company had to pay their curiosity with their lives. Almost at one and the same time they were shot through the head. The first victim of our group fell down forward without uttering a sound; the second threw up his arms and fell on his back. Both of them were dead instantly. A German deserters war experience, German Soldiers and Belgian Civilians, Nearly Buried Alive on the Battlefield, Into the Trap, In the Maw of Death, The Beginning of Trench Warfare, Friendly Relations with the Enemy

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