

World War One News



Lest We Forget.

Monthly News from Home & Abroad



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February 1916

The year 1916 witnessed two of the most notorious battles of attrition in the Great War, resulting in thousands of casualties for both the Allied and German Armies on the Western Front.

German Attempt to Break the French Army

The Battle of Verdun (21st February - 18th December 1916) was the longest battle in the First World War, lasting for almost a year. The battle took place in the sector of the fortified town of Verdun on the river Meuse. Lying in the middle of a salient Verdun had a citadel fort at its heart and was surrounded by a ring of forts on the high ground of the northern and eastern banks of the Meuse. The town had been saved from German occupation in the Battles of the Frontiers in autumn 1914. The German Chief of Staff, General von Falkenhayn, decided to attack Verdun, which had become a symbol of defiance and national pride to the French people. Falkenhayn's intention was to launch a long drawn-out, large-scale offensive against the sector in order to draw the French to defend it at all costs, and which would ultimately bleed the French Army of all of its strength.

The opening bombardment began on 21st February and lasted for 21 hours. The infantry offensive was launched by the German Fifth Army with one million men against a French force of about 200,000 men. Within three days the Germans had advanced almost four miles, had captured Fort Douaumont and the French-held Woeuvre plain to the east of the Verdun salient. The French Commander-in-Chief, General Joffre, decided to hold Verdun at all costs, placed General Pétain in charge of the sector to reorganize the defences and save the situation. The stand made by the French over the following months into the autumn and winter of 1916 became legendary. The battlefield became known as "the mincing machine" to the French troops, but they continued to hold out and Verdun was never captured. The road from Verdun to Bar le Duc was the only road from the Verdun sector into the French rear areas. Every day this road was filled with lorries passing each other every few seconds taking supplies up to the battlefield and taking wounded out of it. It became known as "la Voie Sacrée" (the "Sacred Way") and, like the whole of the battlefield sector at Verdun, the role this road played in the battle is treated with reverence by the French nation. Casualties at the close of the battle amounted to over 400,000 German casualties and over 540,000 French casualties, many thousands of whom were killed.

BORTH. Good News. There was great excitement on Monday night when a wire was received to say that The Liner "Appam" had reached a U.S.A. port, for on that day the ship had been practically been given up as lost with all on board. The last news received of her was on the 16th of January, when one of her lifeboats had been picked up on the coast of Madeira in a damaged condition. Since that date the family of Mr J. L. Williams, Auckland; 1 House Borth, who was a passenger on board had been in great suspense and anxiety awaiting further tidings. Last Monday they had given up all hopes and feared that the ship and all on board had been lost, and no one left to say what had happened. Then came the telegram to say that ship with all her passengers had safely arrived in America thousands of miles away from where the last tidings of her had come. It seemed almost too good to be true. Steps were taken by the Rev R. Mackenzie Williams, his brother, to phone to the owners at Liverpool to verify the news and in an incredibly short time back came the answer confirming the good news. Mrs and Miss Williams, who had borne up well under the strain, were overjoyed to learn that their son and brother who had been given up as lost was safe.