



From the Front

February 1917



Conditions at the Front have changed quite dramatically since my last communication! We now have a new enemy: SNOW which is all pervading and personifies the severest winter in living memory. Underneath the ground is frozen solid, so much so that it is impossible to dig in new positions or even bury the dead.

There is an uneerie stench about the Front line as soldiers huddle around tiny paraffin stoves in an attempt to stave off the worst effects of the cold. Even the very uniforms they wear are frozen solid and the animal skin coats, sported by many give the men the appearance of Polar Bears. There is an odd silence about the lines as even the noise of the guns and the sound of exploding shells appears to be muted by this deep covering of a white blanket. One of the sounds which has persisted is that of the tramping of heavy boots in the bottom of the trenches where sentries carry out their lonely tasks. This gives great cheer to the British Tommies who realise that they are better clothed than their counterparts a few hundred yards away.

It is realised that this lull in already preparations are continuation of the struggle conditions improve. It is Haig is keen to launch



the fighting cannot last as being made for a as soon as the weather known that Field Marshal another “Big Push” to

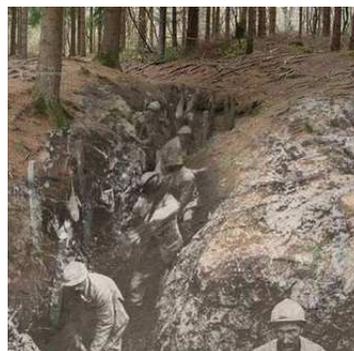
achieve the long awaited breakthrough and it is also realised that his greatest critic, David Lloyd George, is now the Prime Minister who will seek to curb the excessive loss of life experienced up to now. It also seems that the ever efficient L.G. is setting about controlling the production of munitions and foodstuffs to ensure adequate supplies for the Front Line and already committees have been formed to agree quotas from the farmers.

There is a feeling that already more consideration is being given to the troops and even assurances that the dead will be treated with the utmost respect and reverence and that steps will be taken to ensure the preservation of their memories once the conflict is over. A commission has been



established to ensure that new cemeteries are built and that the names of the fallen and the location where they fell will be carefully recorded for future generations. Known as the Prince of Wales Committee for the Care of Soldier's Graves its latest meeting was chaired by the Prince who has taken a lively interest in this subject. He clearly stated that: - "I am glad of the opportunity of being home on leave to meet the committee who will be entrusted with the graves of our soldiers after the War. I have been able to see something at the front of the reverent and efficient manner in which the work of the Graves Registration Unit is being carried out. Some 150,000 graves have now been registered and over sixty of the 400 burial grounds have been laid out and planted. I have seen for myself how beautiful these cemeteries look when the flowers are out"

It has been said that a French Soldier's life is in three parts, one part fighting, and two parts the digging, it now appears that the last two part are being put to the foremost as roads have been repaired, new ones built and even railway lines constructed to ensure that reach the troops in the There is even talk that the the gaps in the line to preclude surprise attack in the spring of



constant supplies will forefront of the struggle. French have plugged all a repetition of the last year, upon Verdun

where the Germans had almost reached their objectives before the defenders were even aware of their presence. It is only hoped that the High Command will have learned vital lessons from the carnage of last year and that more thought is given to the preservation of human life than has previously been the case. Not that anyone has a bad word to say about Field Marshal Haig as it appears the men would still follow him to the Gates of Hell and demonstrate the greatest respect for him.

To detract from this atmosphere of optimism there are concerns about the state of our Russian
Nicholas II was
the Front from
accompanied by
army are
it is still held
death of a
arms; that food



allies. In September last year the Czar forced to take command of his army at Grand Duke Michael. This is rumours that conditions within that precarious to say the least. For instance that troops often have to await the comrade before acquiring adequate is in such short supply that the soldiers

are often reliant upon raw turnips and carrots which they scavenge from the fields. There are also reports from Moscow about the influence being exerted by the mysterious Grigori Rasputin over the Czarina and the Royal family due to the strange illness which afflicts the Czarevich. This is said to be causing a



scandal amongst the nobility and of course uprising and revolution are no stranger to this country. Should this occur the result

will be disastrous for the Allies as it could lead to the Russian withdrawal from the War which would leave the balance of power overwhelmingly in favour of the Central Alliance. It is well known that Von Hindenburg would of course welcome such a situation as the German losses at Verdun last year have meant that they cannot launch an all



out offensive in the West as their battalions are still tied down in the East. Should his keen desire to knock Russia out of the War at the earliest possible moment succeed then this would mean he could utilise almost his entire forces against the Allies in the West.

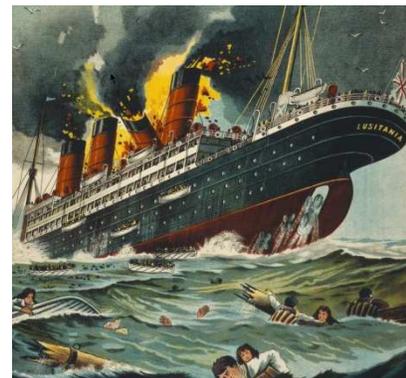


The only counter to this would be if the USA could be brought into the War and at the present times there appears to be a strong isolationist movement, led by President Woodrow Wilson, against such a move. However, there is growing concern even amongst this group concerning the effects that unrestricted submarine warfare will have upon the US economy. Germany had been conducting its navel offensive

through U boats since the commencement of hostilities in 1914. Both sides need open sea lanes to enable the import of



foodstuff, raw materials and munitions. The British were more effective due to the enormous strength of it Navy and because that Navy could operate throughout the oceans of the world due to the British Empire. The Imperial German Navy was mainly restricted to the German Bight and could only operate an effective blockade through the unrestricted actions of its submarines. Feelings about this position were aroused in the first instance due to the expected deleterious effect this would have upon trade and industry. Feeling strengthened with the sinking of the Lusitania on the 7th May 1915 and the Germans were forced to retreat from the policy of unrestricted warfare following the issue of three notes from President Wilson indicating that the only outcome of such a policy would be for America to enter the War on the side of the Allies.



However in February 1917 the Germans, facing starvation reconsidered their position and unrestricted U-boat warfare was resumed on the 1st of that month, Results and consequences are eagerly awaited by both sides.

Due to the let up in the fighting far fewer soldiers were kill during the three winter month. In December the total soldiers from Dewsbury who were killed was eight.