THE SECOND BATTLE OF YPRES



Figure 1: Liverpool Scottish soldiers behind a disguised field gun. Fyfe, Frederick Alexander, 1915, black and white photograph, FYFE FREDERICK ALEXANDER COLLECTION, Imperial War Museum, https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205092588

April 22, 1915

Winds at Ypres shift to blow from the Northeast. At 5:00 pm, 180k kg of Chlorine gas is released by the German army from the frontlines. 20 minutes later, German soldiers follow the gas across no mans land. The gas makes first contact with Algerian and other French Territorial soldiers. Those who encounter the gas either flee or are asphyxiated. Just before midnight, the Canadians make two counterattacks, though a lack of extensive support prevents them from reclaiming their old lines.

April 23- May 4, 1915

The French and British attempt a counterattack, though it is hampered by delays, poor intelligence, and even poorer planning. While some strategic objectives were claimed, none were held. Fighting would continue like this until May 4th, with the British making small gains but being held back by delays and poor communication.

May 4-25, 1915

Following the initial fight in the first days of the battle, there were two more major engagements, first at Frezenberg Ridge and then at Bellewaarde Ridge. The battle at Bellewaarde Ridge would be the last gains the Germans would make in the area for over two years. By the end of month of fighting, there were over 35,000 Germans and 60,000 British casualties.



Figure 2: Captain Charles in Ypres Square. Unknown, 1915, black and white photograph, LANYON OWEN MORITMER COLLECTION, Imperial War Museum https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205306206

The Second Battle of Ypres was not the first instance of gas warfare during WW1. The French and German armies had been utilising gas weapons in the form of gas grenades and shells in late 1914. The use of chlorine gas, as well as its method of delivery, was suggetsed by the renowned German chemist Fritz Haber.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie,
In Flanders fields.

John McCrae, "In Flanders Fields"

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