



"DEATH-TRAP" TRENCH: A SCENE ON THE AISNE THE EFFECT OF A GERMAN "COAL-BOX"



Among the last batch of wounded to arrive home are a number of men from the East Yorkshire Regiment, who occupied what was known as "Death-Trap" Trench, near the village of Marnes, for two days and nights, and were exposed to a murderous enfilading fire for practically the whole forty-eight hours. The trench covered an important position, and had at any cost to be held. Private Eric Kneale, who was one of the many wounded in the trench, supplied the material from which this picture was drawn. "The noise and din," he told our artist, "were terrific, and the 'coal-boxes' (German howitzer shells) seemed to be coming from all directions, and they'd got the range, too. We lost a most of men in that old 'death-trap.' I got through, but was hit when we left, after the Germans found they couldn't get us out. I never want another job like that."

DRAWN BY S. H. VEDDER FROM MATERIAL SUPPLIED BY PRIVATE ERIC KNEALE



“Death-Trap” Trench: A scene on the Aisne

This image appeared in the British weekly paper, “The Graphic”, on 19 October 1914 about a month after the first trenches were dug along the Aisne river.

The artist was not there but the caption tells us that he based his drawing on the eye-witness accounts of Private Eric Kneale who fought on the Aisne.

The title refers to a German “coal box” which was a shell fired by German artillery (big guns) that exploded with a blast of thick black smoke.

1. What signs can you see that the trench has been dug recently and quickly?
2. How far does the image match the description given by Lt Paterson, the officer in the South Wales Borderers on 16 September 1914?
3. How far does the image match the drawing in the War Diary of the Royal West Surrey Regiment on 16 September 1914?
4. Are you surprised that the image shows British soldiers being injured and dying in a “Death Trap” trench?