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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK OVER THE FRONT IN AN AEROPLANE,
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Corrections in the text are indicated by dotted grey lines under the corrected word. Hover the cursor over the underlined word and the original text will appear.

For a complete list of corrections, please see the [end of this document](#).

OVER THE FRONT
IN AN AEROPLANE

RALPH PULITZER



OVER THE FRONT IN AN AEROPLANE



[See page 2

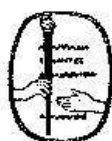
**"A FEW SECONDS LATER THE TWO GREAT PROPELLERS
BEGAN TO FLASH ROUND"**

OVER THE FRONT IN AN AEROPLANE

**AND SCENES
INSIDE THE FRENCH
AND FLEMISH TRENCHES**

BY
RALPH PULTZER

ILLUSTRATED



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TO
 MY WIFE

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OVER THE FRONT IN AN AEROPLANE

[1]

I

A FLIGHT TO THE FIRING LINE

PARIS, *August 13th (Friday)*.

I have just returned from a unique visit to the front. This afternoon I flew in an army aeroplane from Paris to the fighting lines, skirted these lines for a few kilometres, and flew back to Paris.

We made the round trip without a break.

I am indebted to the quite exceptional kindness of the French Foreign Office and of the French War Office for this flight. No other civilian has been allowed to ascend in a French army aeroplane at all, and as for visiting the front in one, it has apparently been undreamed of. Poor Needham went up in a British military aeroplane, but what he saw and felt were buried with him.

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I received definite word yesterday evening that at four-thirty this afternoon I would find a military motor at the door of my hotel; that it would take me to the great aviation station in the suburbs of Paris, and that at five-thirty o'clock a double-cylindered battle-plane would set flight with me.

Everything ran like clockwork. At five o'clock I was shaking hands with the Captain of this most important aviation station, and he was explaining to me just how, day and night, his aeroplanes guarded Paris from German air attacks.

At five-thirty o'clock I was struggling into a heavy leather suit which I put on over my regular clothes and a heavy padded helmet which was carefully fastened under my chin by a buttoned flap and also an elastic band.

A few minutes later I was climbing sinuously into my seat in the front of the aeroplane while my pilot wormed his way into his seat a few feet behind me. A few seconds later the two great propellers (or rather tractors) began to flash around. With a snap and a roar the battle-plane started slowly forward, gained in speed till we were running along the big field like a racing automobile, then suddenly the people standing around dropped away from us as if on a gigantic express elevator leaving one standing on the upper floor of a skyscraper, and in a moment more the earth had become a strange and placid panorama with which we had no connection or concern.

[3]

On and up, on and up, we flew, headed straight as an arrow for the closest portion of the battle-front, ninety kilometres (about fifty-four miles) away.

As the vast crazy-quilt of numberless shades of green and brown rolled slowly below us I had time to pay more attention to my immediate surroundings. I sat in the front, or observer's seat, of a great new French biplane which the English call a battle-plane, and the French call an "avion de chasse," or "hunting aeroplane." They call their smaller single-motored machines their "avions de réglage," or "regulating aeroplanes." But these great biplanes they fondly call their hunting aeroplanes, for with them they hunt the Taubes and the Aviatiks of the enemy, and they tell me

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that their enemy usually gives them a wide berth.

I found myself sitting in a little cockpit strapped to a comfortable seat. A few inches in front of my nose was the breach of a heavy machine-gun whose muzzle projected over the bow of the fuselage. At each side of my seat, under my elbows, were coiled long belts of cartridges for the machine-gun. In the floor of the little cockpit, right in front of my feet, was a little glass window through which I could watch the ground passing directly (though some thousand feet) underneath. Just behind this window, in the floor under my feet, was a little metal trap-door. By straddling my feet I could open this, for the purpose either of taking vertical photographs or of dropping bombs. Only the three long, shell-like bombs which generally hang in straps to the left of the observer had been removed, as had also the Winchester rifle which hangs to his right.

I could get an uninterrupted view of the scenery across a space of about four feet right ahead. Further to right and left the view flickered curiously through the lightning-swift twirling of the propeller-blades. "Don't stretch your head out in front to either side," had cautioned the aviation Captain before I left the earth, "or you would certainly get guillotined." I craned my neck gingerly round to look beyond me. In another little cockpit about four feet aft sat the pilot. I could see his face peering over the edge through a low windshield. Past his head on each side I got a view of the country we were leaving behind.

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This happened to be a farewell glimpse of Paris. It stretched vaguely away, bathed in the late afternoon sun and yet shrouded in heavy haze and smoke, a sort of bird's-eye Whistler.

Now feeling the air becoming distinctly colder, I looked ahead again. For a time we had been flying at 1,000 metres. Now we gradually climbed to 2,000 metres. The outrunners of the clouds began to drift by in wisps of what seemed like mist. Below, the earth looked like the display of a carpet-merchant's dreams. Square carpets, oblong carpets, long strips of carpets, carpets of light green, of dark green, of every intermediate shade of green; carpets of fawn color and of brown, thin carpets and carpets of wonderfully thick pile, plain carpets and carpets with symmetrical designs in light brown dots (several thousand feet nearer those dots would have resolved themselves into homely haycocks).

[6]

Now the carpets stopped as we sailed over a forest of dense dark green with little mirrors stuck in it, which, when looked at through my field-glasses, proved to be not the tops of greenhouses, as I had at first imagined, but big lakes.

And now the wisps of mist became banks of fog. As we still climbed on upward through these white banks the earth could only be seen in isolated dark patches. Higher and higher we climbed, till finally the earth was entirely veiled by the clouds below us. At a height of 3,000 metres, or 9,900 feet, we straightened our angle and on an even keel headed away toward the front. It was a magnificent sight. We were flying along in a clear belt between the lower and the upper clouds. Below us stretched an unbroken white ocean of these lower clouds. The sun was just high enough to shed its slanting beams along the surface of this snow-white sea. Above us were the lowering masses of the higher clouds.



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"BELOW US STRETCHED AN UNBROKEN WHITE OCEAN OF THESE LOWER CLOUDS"

In this lonely world of our own we flew forward at 130 kilometres (80 miles approximately) an hour. The air was very thin and cold, but for some reason there was no rush of wind against my face. If I moved my head to right or left I could feel the wind from either propeller, but in the middle it was relatively calm. The air felt very thin to breathe and I had to swallow constantly to keep clearing my ears and the tubes back of my nose.

[7]

On and on we flew, until finally I felt, instead of hearing, a violent rapping. Turning my head, I saw the pilot hammering with his right fist on the deck between our cockpits to attract my attention. He grinned amicably and opened his mouth wide. I could see he was shouting at me,

but could not hear the faintest sound over the roar of the propellers. He pointed to the whiteness below us a little to the right. Then he wrote an imaginary word with his forefinger on the deck between us. I could not read it upside down. I opened my leather coat, and with the cold instantly biting into my chest, hauled out my notebook and pencil and stretched them out to him. He shook his head and indicated that he could not take both hands away from steering. So I buttoned up my coat again in some perplexity.

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Then, without abruptness, with a certain sickening majesty, the aeroplane stood on its head and swooped down onto the surface of the white sea below us. As it swallowed us we began to spiral rapidly around as though we were tobogganing down a giant corkscrew. As we went on down through this white nothingness I became very dizzy. The propellers had slowed 'way down and I thought the engines had failed, and that we were either falling 10,000 feet or making a forced descent. But the pilot sat still back above me, so I did likewise.

Suddenly we spiralled violently down through the bottom of the cloud into sight of the earth again. Instantaneously the engines broke into their old roar and the aeroplane stopped pointing straight down and assumed a steep slant. If any one ever heaved a sigh of relief I did it then.

I felt the rapping behind me. Looking round, I saw the pilot pointing down at the earth, ahead and to our right. I shook my head. Then, as we careened downward, he stopped his motors for a fraction of a second, and in the sudden deafening silence he shouted out, "The front!"

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Here, if my hopes had materialized, I should be able to give a most striking picture of a battle as seen from an aeroplane. But honesty compels me to say that any one who wants to get a good clear view of the front had much better go there on the surface of the earth, and not through the air.

In the first place, it takes quite a little time and trouble to discern the lines of opposing trenches even when you stand on a quiet observation post with a General painstakingly pointing and explaining, by the help of landmarks, just where they run. Here, though we were now only 1,000 metres (about 3,300 feet) up, we were racing along the front at 80 miles an hour, and all my friend the pilot could do was to point here and there frantically. So among the maze of white lines I saw running below me through the hazy atmosphere, some which I took for trenches were undoubtedly roads; some which I took for roads were equally undoubtedly trenches, while only a few, by their zigzagging, could I unhesitatingly have guaranteed to have been trenches.

In the next place the roar of the engines totally drowned out all the reports of the guns which were going off below us, and the explosions of the shells, which are such a striking feature of the front.

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To make matters still more undramatic there was no battle going on at the precise moment when we shot downward out of the clouds, but only a rather languid artillery exchange. Even a regulating aeroplane which was sailing around directly below us and about half-way down between us and the earth, correcting the fire of some batteries, was having an exceptionally peaceful time of it. We could look down and see plainly the red, white and blue circles of France painted on the tops of its planes, but there were none of the customary woolly little white clouds of German shrapnel bursting round it during the few seconds that it remained in sight.

Furthermore, the guns right below it and us were so cleverly concealed that they were quite invisible. The only signs of its being a front at all were the bursting shells from the French batteries. These little puffs of smoke in the hazy distance the pilot spotted unerringly, but he had a discouraging time pointing them out to my unaccustomed eyes as we raced along.

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So this, I fear, is all that any one visiting the front by aeroplane would have seen this afternoon. Possibly had we hung around longer we might have seen more, but the pilot and I both had important dinner engagements in Paris, and the sun was getting very low. We therefore reluctantly swept around and, leaving the silver band of the Aisne behind us, started for home.

We kept low, not over 1,000 metres, so that the landscape was very clear and interesting. First we passed over the city of Compiègne, where I had lunched with Dr. Carrel only three days before to the accompaniment of an artillery obligato. Then right over the big, dark green Forest of Compiègne where I tried but failed to locate a château I had visited with Mme. Carrel. Then on and on over a further entrancing exhibit of parti-colored carpet fitting together at the edges as snugly as any completed picture-puzzle.

Before long we reached Senlis, where I had stopped on my way to Compiègne the other day to take snap-shots of the streets of houses gutted by the Germans during their brief occupation before the battle of the Marne. Passing over Senlis, we dropped lower, so that I could get a clear bird's-eye view of the havoc. Then on and on, without incident, till the smoke of Paris came in sight, and on and on again, till I looked down through a thousand yards or so of space on the aviation field from which I had started just one hour and twenty-five minutes earlier.

[12]

Suddenly the motors stopped, the aeroplane keeled over onto the tip of its left wing and, pivoting round on it, we began our dizzy spiral descent. First on one wing-tip, and then on the other, we corkscrewed dizzily down. First the whole surface of the earth would swiftly fly up, revolving as it came, and slap me on the left side of the face, then, a fraction of a second later, the same revolving surface would heave swiftly up to slap me on the right side of my face. This double spiral descent is certainly by all odds the dizziest proceeding that was ever devised by man.

Finally, with a swoop which I made sure would carry away most of the chimney-pots of the suburb, we made a beautiful glide and alighted on the grass of the aviation field as smoothly as a

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canoe launched from a beach into a quiet lake.

Here one would think our day had ended, but there was one very vivid thrill left.

As the aeroplane came to a stop a mechanic came running up, carrying a pneumatic wheel. He spoke a few sharp words to the pilot, and the latter asked me to get out quickly, saying that he would return and explain some of the details of our flight a little later. So I scrambled out, the machinist scrambled into my place, carrying the pneumatic wheel, and with a rattle and a roar the aeroplane rolled across the field and leaped into the air again.

I joined some aviation officers and asked what was the matter. They pointed to a machine a few thousand feet above us, and explained that in leaving the ground that machine had lost one of its pneumatic wheels. The aviator was ignorant of this, and, unless warned in time, would, on trying to make his landing, turn turtle and get killed. My pilot had gone up to meet him in the upper air and by waving the wheel at him indicate his predicament, so that he could land on the left wheel and tail of his machine. [14]

"Unless he understands before he lands he is a dead man," said the officer. This really was a dramatic spectacle—the one aviator soaring on guard high in the sky in complete unconsciousness of the death that awaited him; the other, climbing nearer and nearer, then circling round and round in narrowing circles. Finally, the first machine started down.

"He understands," said some one.

"No, he doesn't," said others.

"Get the ambulance ready," ordered the aviation Captain, and the engine of the motor-ambulance began to chug with a most sinister effect.

We all stood perfectly powerless and watched the machine spiral down. As he made his glide, men stood in the field waving spare wheels at him to insure his understanding. But no. Instead of landing tilted to the left on his sound wheel and tail, he made his landing leaning over a little to the right where the wheel was missing. As it touched the earth the great machine buried its nose in the ground, its tail rose and rose till it stood perpendicular, and then fell forward in a somersault, so that the plane was lying on its back. [15]

"He's finished. Get the ambulance," ordered the Captain.

We all started at a run across the field toward the motionless aeroplane, the motor-ambulance following close on our heels. As we got to the wreck a figure crawled out and began to swear fluently at not having been warned in a way that a sane man could understand. How the aviator escaped will always remain a complete mystery. But his escape made a happy climax to the thrilling ending of an unforgettable afternoon.

II

 [16]

HOW THE FRONT IS VISITED

When the average newspaper-reader reads the average war correspondent's excellent stories from the firing-line, his ideas are probably vague indeed as to how the correspondent reached that very elastic zone known as "the front."

He probably pictures the military authorities extending to the writer a magnificently sweeping invitation to witness and immortalize their armies in battle. In his mind's eye he sees the journalist equipping himself with automobile, shelter-tent, sleeping-bag, canned food, medicine-chest and revolver—with everything, in fact, necessary for the hardships and emergencies of campaigning. This visionary correspondent then sallies forth from the luxury and security of Paris (let us say), sitting by his chauffeur, military map in hand, directing the course of his high-powered car to that section of the front where the General Staff has informed him that a critical battle is to take place. Arrived there, he watches an infantry charge capture the enemy's trenches; then, leaping into his waiting motor, speeds away to another portion of the line, which he reaches according to his schedule, just in time to observe a particularly interesting bombardment of the enemy's lines by a battery of heavy artillery. He is called away after a time by the necessity of covering several miles more in order to watch the defenders of a front trench repel an enemy attack. He may lunch with a General, if he happens to drop in at headquarters just as lunch is served, or he may have to share a soldier's frugal meal in the darkness of a bomb-proof. After attending an aeroplane duel, having a chat with the Generalissimo of the armies, inspecting the consolidation of a few hundred yards of trenches just taken from the enemy, watching the explosion of a mine, interviewing a fresh batch of German prisoners, with whom a punctured tire almost causes him to miss his appointment, and observing the methods employed by the Red Cross in collecting the wounded under fire, he is overtaken by night after a busy day, and sleeps in his shelter-tent before making up his mind which particular army he will visit the following day. [17]

It is a thrilling and romantic picture. But how sadly distant from the truth. [18]

The war correspondent does not buy himself a motor, because if he did he would not be allowed to use it. All he buys himself is a railway ticket. When it comes to motoring, he is packed with an assortment of fellow-correspondents into military autos specially assigned by the army

authorities.

He does not buy a shelter-tent or a sleeping-bag, because at a certain scheduled hour every evening the staff-officer who has him and his colleagues in tow will lead him into an excellent hotel in some large town or other and assign him to a comfortable bedroom engaged ahead. He does not buy canned provisions, because before going to bed the officer buys him an appetizing dinner, follows it up with a good breakfast the next morning, and at lunch-time introduces him to a courteous General, or, at a pinch, to another hotel-keeper, by one or the other of whom he is supplied with a prearranged and excellent lunch.

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He does not buy himself a medicine-chest, because he is always within shouting distance of enough medical talent to treat a whole city.

He does not buy a revolver, because it would be gently but firmly taken away from him if he did.

If he is sensible, he does not even buy himself binoculars, for the officers by whom he will find himself uninterruptedly accompanied will be glad to let him use theirs, and though he may not look so picturesque without them, he will be much more comfortable if he has any hands-and-knees work to do.

Finally, he will not have a word to say as to where he wants to go or what he wants to see, for that has all been settled in advance.

It is true that different Generals vary greatly in the risks that they will allow correspondents to run with their respective armies. Some feel that if a correspondent wants to take chances that is his own affair so long as he does not unduly endanger the life of a valuable staff-officer along with his own. Others feel personally responsible for the safeguarding of visitors, whether the visitor is willing to take chances or not.

[20]

But these variations merely affect the more or less dangerous details of the trip, not the programme as a whole, which is quite rigid.

In the beginning of the war a few men, like Alexander Powell in Flanders, and Robert Dunn in the retreat from Mons, were actual knights-errant of the pen and wandered or whirled where they pleased, and saw what happened to come their way.

But on the western front, at least, that is all dead and gone.

The activities of war correspondents have been thoroughly regulated, systematized, standardized. Just what the correspondent is to be permitted to see at the front is deliberately considered and arranged in advance. The authorities decide what fights are fit for him to see just as painstakingly as chaperons used to decide what plays were fit for débutantes to see. He, together with the six or eight other journalists who are to make up the party, is placed in the hands of a military duenna who guards his every move from the time the admirably organized tour starts, until he is again safely delivered back in Paris. The precise duration of the trip, the precise route to be taken, the precise place at which each meal is to be eaten, the precise room in the precise hotel in which each night is to be spent, the precise General to be met and trench to be visited, are all inexorably fixed in the schedule of the trip.

[21]

The only phenomena which the general staffs cannot predetermine are the activities of the aviators and the course of the enemy's shells and bullets. Hence, the only spontaneous adventures in store for correspondents, which may come unexpectedly, at any moment, are the whirring of aeroplanes overhead, their shelling and their duels and the sudden passing or arrival of enemy projectiles, from tiny bullets up to enormous "Jack Johnsons."

Even this element of surprise can be avoided in the case of a small minority of visitors who I understand prefer to limit their researches at "the front" to the hospitals, supply-trains, motor-repair organizations, encampments of reserves, and similar objects of interest, which lie some twenty kilometres behind the trenches and yet really are sufficiently a part of the front to be known as its rear.

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The front has a second category of visitors besides the war correspondents of whom I have been writing—"the distinguished strangers." These do not come to the front for the purpose of writing about what they see, and are for this reason, as well as because of the courtesy which it is desired to show them, allowed considerably more latitude, although they, too, are kept religiously away from any part of the lines where real trouble is expected.

I myself was fortunate enough to be invited to visit the French and Belgian fronts in a sort of dual capacity. Having pledged myself not to go on to Germany, and to write nothing about anything that was shown me in confidence, I was given a special trip, instead of going with one of the regular "journalists' parties," which certainly have an unromantic resemblance to Cook's Tours. I was thus enabled to visit certain advanced trenches where larger parties, in the nature of things, could not go, and was shown things which had not previously been shown to correspondents. But the organization of my trip resembled that of the average correspondents' tour closely enough to enable me to describe its details.

[23]

In Paris in a rather small room on the second floor of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, at a methodically cluttered writing-table, on which one of the oddly-shaped French telephones lapses into occasional silence, sits a slender, suave, well-groomed Frenchman about forty years old. He

has a glossy dark moustache, large and pensive dark eyes, a nicely deprecatory manner, and a beautifully conciliatory smile. He chats to his visitor in excellent English, if English be required, and smiles at him this almost tender smile. He is Monsieur P—, the war correspondents' Czar. He is the absolute ruler of their destinies. For it is he who picks and chooses among their waiting numbers, and decides to which to accord the privilege of a place in one of the parties which leave about every two weeks for a two- or three-day trip to the front.

When an eager newspaper man has come over all the way from California, let us say, for such a trip, has waited in Paris a month or six weeks for such a trip and has seen colleagues favored above other men start off with enthusiasm and return with hauteur from such a trip, the transcendent importance of Monsieur P— in that craving correspondent's eyes verges on the pitiful. [24]

When you think of this hungry horde of newspaper men collected from the ends of the earth on this one assignment, receiving curt cables and telegrams every few days from their papers asking where their stories are, all as suspicious and jealous of each other as prima-donnas, each trying to "put over a beat" on the other, and each terrified lest some other "put over a beat" on him, you can perhaps imagine that Monsieur P—'s official duties do not constitute a sinecure.

Behind the back of Monsieur P— they grouch; before his face they grovel. They try on him all the arts and practices of their profession, from bluff, through blandishments to supplication. And Monsieur P— sits and smiles at them with tender sympathy and gives them their trips fairly and squarely without fear or favoritism. The room echoes with their pleas and protests, the telephone buzzes with their wheedlings and reproaches; but Monsieur P— deals out even-handed justice among them and never turns a hair. There is probably not an hour of the day or night that some war correspondent in any language from English to Japanese is not calling down very horrible curses upon this autocrat's head. And yet they all cherish for him the most sincere affection and respect. [25]

I myself was fortunate enough to be introduced to Monsieur P— within a couple of hours of reaching Paris, my special trip to the front having already been arranged for the following morning. Its machinery was the same as that of the regular trips. Monsieur P— got out an official printed form of military pass for war correspondents. My photograph was pasted on its cover. I was asked to write my signature on the next page, which was devoted to this trip. There were several more pages for possible other trips. On this first page was written the name of Epernay, the city behind the front to which I was to go by train the following morning. It was specified that the trip was to last three days. The name of the staff-officer who was to accompany me was written in, and subsequently his signature was appended. The whole thing was signed, stamped by Monsieur P— and handed over to me to carry with me on the trip, to be handed back to him immediately upon my return, and to be used again should I later make other trips. [26]

Then the staff-officer who was to be my chaperon came in and we were introduced. In private life he happened to be a prince. In the army he was at present plain Captain d'A—. Incidentally, he proved to be a fine fellow and a very pleasant companion.

Following his instructions, I was at the railroad station the following morning at eight o'clock, together with Lincoln Eyre, whom I had been permitted to invite on the trip. I presented my military pass to the ticket-seller, who scrutinized it closely before selling me a railway ticket to Epernay. It is the rule in France that correspondents must pay for their railway tickets themselves, so that the Government cannot be accused of paying their way for propagandist purposes. After you reach the front the military authorities furnish army motors, and themselves take care of your meals and bedrooms. [27]

On the train was one of the regular personally conducted correspondents' caravans, consisting of about eight correspondents. There were three Americans, a couple of Frenchmen, a couple of Scandinavians, and, I think, a Russian. Their cicerone was a very tall staff-officer who looked slightly worried by his cosmopolitan responsibilities. Their party was going on to Verdun.

After a comfortable two-hour trip we got out at Epernay. There we were met by Captain F—, a staff-officer belonging to the General Staff of the 5th Army, which we were to visit. Thus Captain d'A—, from the Staff of the Paris War Office, had general responsibility for the trip, while Captain F—, who also was to accompany us, was responsible for the detailed military arrangements during our stay with the 5th Army.

Captain d'A—'s orderly (who before mobilization had been the wealthy young proprietor of a steamship line to South America) having taken our bags to the hotel, where we were to return to spend the night, we immediately started off on our schedule.

The ground plan of my three-day trip was planned to give me a condensed view of all the component parts of a French army of five army corps, or about 200,000 men, from the rear up to the front trench. [28]

We accordingly began with the Motor Transport Repair Corps, situated in Epernay, consisting of 1,000 men and 14 officers, including 3 doctors. It kept in up-to-the-minute running order the 1,500 motor vehicles of the army corps which occupied the front 20 miles before us.

The Captain who showed us around had been technical supervisor of the Rochet-Schneider Auto Company and had, together with all the other mechanical experts, been mobilized directly into the present work. He answered my surprise at the number of soldiers employed in these peaceful labors by explaining that two soldiers at work in the rear for every three soldiers fighting was the regular formula.

Epernay, being the centre of the champagne industry, most of the military repair garages had been located in the great wine storehouses. It was odd to see soldiers repainting grim wire-cutting autos rubbing elbows with peasant women busily wrapping gold-foil round the heads of fat quarts of famous vintages.

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"Yes, they work together," smiled the Captain; "and it is not so incongruous as it looks. For the champagne was a good ally of ours during the battle of the Marne. It made enough casualties among the Boches to have an appreciable effect on the course of the battle. When we chased them out of here the broken bottles looked as though there were no more champagne left in the world. But as a matter of fact, so enormous are the quantities stored hereabouts that the German inroads were relatively slight."

It was remarkable how much we were able to crowd into an hour's inspection. Great meat-lorries, each carrying enough fresh carcasses to stock a city butcher-shop, secured ventilation yet guarded their contents against flies by close-meshed steel netting instead of solid sides. But to protect the meat from dust science had had to bow to nature, for to the netting in its turn were attached pine boughs which admitted air while excluding dust more efficiently than any artificial contrivance. Enormous repair-lorries were each a perambulating garage fully equipped with machinery for repairing broken parts or making new ones. Some of these lorries ran on their own power. Others were towed along by a big motor. In either case they made their own power to run their repair machinery, and their own brilliant electric light by which to work at night. They had almost hermetically sealed curtains to keep the light from leaking out, for in mobile war they are often called upon to do their work in sight and range of the enemy. But the trench warfare has rooted them to the spot for a weary time.

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"But wait!" said the Captain. "When the advance begins just watch us keep up with the procession."

There were autos with a steel frame running from the radiator, overhead to the back seat, this frame having razor-edged knife-blades attached. In open warfare while scouting along strange roads these were useful in shearing through any wires which the thoughtful foe might have strung across for the decapitation of speeding visitors.

There were uninteresting-looking big gray ammunition-lorries, ambulances, post-offices on wheels and hundreds of ordinary autos for the use of officers, messengers, etc.

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I was informed that the life of the average car in active service was very far from being as short as was popularly supposed. "Why," said the Captain, "we have many cars coming in which have been working hard for eleven months, and now for the first time are compelled to come in for repairs."

I noticed with what fastidious care all the cars were painted and varnished. "Yes, that is the way we apply psychology to motor-repair work," chuckled the Captain. "Experience has taught us that when a soldier is given a beautifully finished car to run he takes pride in it. And he not only keeps the outside well cleaned, which greatly postpones the date when it must come back to us for doctoring, but he also bestows much more care on his motor. So it is not only æstheticism which prompts that beautiful finish. But talk about æstheticism, here is a real example of it."

He showed me a car from whose front lamp-brackets some artist had wrought in iron two very beautiful palm fronds.

"The man sacrificed much leisure time to making those branches from sheer love of his art and of the beautiful. The French people are like that, Monsieur."

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Having eaten a sample of the good bread and most excellent Irish stew which constitutes the soldiers' lunch, we returned to the hotel for our own early lunch. Then I climbed into one military motor with Captain F—, while Eyre installed himself in another with Captain d'A—, and at about 12.30 we started off for the front of "the front."





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**CAPTAIN D'A— AND THE AUTHOR. (STARTING FOR THE
FRONT FROM THE FRONT OF THE HOTEL AT EPERNAY)**

We climbed rapidly out of Epernay, up a long very steep grade, flanked as far as the eye could reach by vineyards, in which peasant women, old men and boys were busily harvesting the raw material for future "Secs," "Extra drys," and "Bruts." Our bellowing military motor-siren drove most of the heavy two-wheeled peasant's carts hastily toward the gutter to give us passage. Every now and then some cart's fantastic creakings would drown our clamor, and then as we finally forced our way past, the soldier-chauffeur would launch some terse but terrific imprecations at the driver. At the end of the ascent we cut loose along the broad turnpike which ran through a forest across the top of a wide plateau. Sprinkled all along the highway were uniformed "territorials" working at road repair.

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"It is of extreme military importance to keep all these lines of communication in first-class condition," explained Captain F—. "It is not so romantic to mend a road as to mend a trench, but it is just as necessary."

By rights we ought now to have started our routine of courtesies by calling on General Franchet d'Esperey, commanding the 5th Army, the first of whose five army corps we were about to visit. For the amenities of a trip to the front require that in theory the stranger should pay his prearranged respects to all those in command from the General of the Army, through the General of the Army Corps, down through the General of Division, to the Colonel of the Regiment he happens to be visiting. And practice in this matter sticks uncommonly close to theory. Charming though it is to meet these courteous, highly intelligent and often illustrious men, it is impossible not to feel that the amount of time devoted to such visits of ceremony is quite out of proportion to the very limited time allowed the average visitor to the front. It is not the actual ten or fifteen minutes spent in conversation with these hospitable gentlemen which eats up the time, but the fact that meetings with some of the busiest men in the world are necessarily definite appointments which must be very punctually kept. And four or five such appointments in the course of a day at places scores of miles apart necessarily tear that day to pieces.

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However, General Franchet d'Esperey had suddenly been called out to an inspection of a certain part of the front, so we skipped the engagement which had been made with him, and motored on to call on the General in command of the Army Corps with which we found ourselves. In the *salon* of a small château we were introduced, and conversed pleasantly for a few minutes. Then he assigned one of his staff-officers to accompany us to an observation point on the edge of the plateau from which he could give us a sweeping view of many miles of the front, and point out the interesting topographical features and the course of the trenches.

I was thus simultaneously accompanied by Captain d'A—, the staff-officer from the Paris War Office, by Captain F—, the staff-officer from the 5th Army, and by the staff-officer of the Army Corps.

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Having explained to us the "lay of the land" and incidentally pointed out to us the sizable crater of a shell which a few days earlier had come within twenty yards of putting a definite end to this particular observation point, the last officer bade us good-bye. We climbed back into our motors, and made the steep, winding descent from the plateau, and raced over the long, straight road so well known to motor tourists of peaceful days, which leads to where in the distance the low roofs of Rheims can be seen, like some muddy tide washing the foot of the craglike cathedral. In Rheims, which the enemy had considerably stopped shelling an hour or so before our arrival, we had to go to the headquarters of the Colonel in Command. He was out, but had left a Major with instructions to show us to X—, a village about a kilometre from the outskirts of Rheims and immediately touching on the front trenches. We left our motors near the edge of the city and walked to where down the street ran a deep narrow ditch lying open, waiting for its sewer-pipes. "Climb in," said the Major. "Here's where the communicating trench begins." In we climbed and were led by the Major along a zigzag kilometre of trench until, fifteen minutes later, we climbed out again in the main street of X—. There the Major introduced us to the Captain at the moment in command of the battalion occupying the village. He became our guide through the

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rest of the afternoon, which we spent in the front trenches, and which is described in the following chapter.

Thus the War Department from Paris had notified the General Staff of the 5th Army that I was to make a three-day visit to that army. That General Staff had arranged a complete programme and had notified the staffs of the various Army Corps which I was to visit. The first of these Army Corps Staffs had decided that I was to visit the front before Rheims, and had so notified the Colonel. The Colonel had decided which particular portion of the front I was to visit before Rheims and had so notified the Captain. And the Captain in turn had made up his mind which specific trenches I was to visit, and conducted me through them. [37]

Thus far my programme had been more interesting but just as rigid as that of any of the correspondents' tours.

At the end of the afternoon in the trenches a minor example arose of the advantages which my special trip conferred.

As we returned to our motors in the outskirts of Rheims, I told d'A— how keenly I wished to see the Rheims Cathedral.

"It is not on the programme," he answered; "but if you want to see it you certainly shall. It will get you back to Epernay pretty late, instead of at the hour arranged for, but that will not matter."

So we rolled through the streets of Rheims, where of the 110,000 original population 20,000 still live and carry on their daily life. The greater part of the city showed no signs whatever of the constantly repeated bombardments which it has sustained, save for the blocks on blocks of houses closed and with windows boarded up. But when we entered that portion lying to the east of the cathedral and toward the enemy, we passed through the fleshless skeleton of a city. The house walls generally stood intact, but through the gaping windows one could see the nothingness that lay behind, where great shells had plunged downward through the roof, sweeping the whole interior, floor by floor, down into the cellar; or where smaller shells had gutted the interior by fire. Every now and then we would see a street completely blocked by a great barrier of rubble, where a whole house had been plucked out bodily from between its neighbors by some monstrous explosion and smashed to pieces on the pavement as you would smash an egg on the ground. [38]

Then we came out into the great square before the cathedral, and looked up at its cliff-like façade.

I heaved a sigh of relief. I seemed to be looking at the same incredible beauty that I had looked at just over a year ago, when the world was still at peace. It is true that half the great rose window was empty of glass; that here and there stood statues headless or with chipped and mutilated limbs. But in the vast profusion of carvings on the façade these were almost lost. Gradually, however, the full tragedy bore in on me.

Have you ever seen an exquisite cameo face congested by drunkenness or disease so that it remains but a blurred and subtly bloated semblance of its former loveliness? If you have, you will know what has befallen the façade at Rheims. It stood away from the German guns so that not a shell hit it. But Fate and inefficiency left it covered with scaffolding which caught fire, and the towering blaze licked and licked so furiously at every sculptured angle, line and curve that in a few hours all those keenly chiselled outlines which the centuries themselves had only faintly mellowed, became flabby, blunt and indeterminate. One used at times to gaze at the façade through half-closed lids, so that no exquisite detail should distract from the swimming, hazy glory of the whole. That glory it still possesses, but to those who knew it in its earlier unmarred splendor it seems to stand, straining aloft, in patient martyrdom. A heavy barricade, built at a distance of some twenty yards, prevented entrance or even a close approach. As we stood counting the shrapnel scars on the horse of Jeanne d'Arc, which ended the myth that this statue had come through the whole bombardment miraculously untouched, a little girl approached with a basket full of pieces of colored glass. These she offered for sale as fragments of the priceless stained glass of the cathedral. It required no expert to see that they were pitifully spurious. Thus huckstering makes pennies out of tragedy. [39]

We departed silently, and leaving Captain F— to return to his headquarters for the night, we were quickly speeding through the twilight on our way back to Epernay. [40]

III

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IN THE FRENCH TRENCHES

WITH THE 5TH FRENCH ARMY, *Aug. 3 (via Paris)*.

On the anniversary of the last day of the world's peace, the 365th day of the war, I stood in the darkness of a very advanced front trench.

A short section where I stood was roofed and bomb-proofed. Through a row of very narrow rifle-slits came little beams of daylight that rested in flecks on the white, chalky back of the trenches and were thrown up very faintly against the logs of the trench roof.

Very dimly, I could gradually make out a narrow plank standing-platform running along below

the slits. A card was tacked to the wooden frame of each opening, bearing the name of the particular soldier to whom that opening belonged. Above each slit hung (or could hang) its owner's rifle in slings from the roof.

Every few yards, set in little recesses dug out from the back of the trench, stood fat bottles. They contained chemicals with which to soak the soldiers' mouth-coverings if attacked by poisoned gas. [42]

The trench was nearly empty of men. But at the loophole nearest me stood the rigid figure of a soldier. His legs were invisible in the darkness. His body showed up vaguely. His face was brilliantly lighted by the thin blade of light through the rifle-slit. He stood silent and motionless, his eyes intently focussed out into the sunlight.

I looked through the next slit, through a spider's web of barbed wire, between stunted black posts, across two hundred yards of green grass and wild flowers, at another tangle of posts and barbed wire with a narrow furrow of white chalky soil running along just behind it—the German trenches.

Not a living thing was in sight in the sunny loneliness. There was silence except for the crack, crack, crack of striking bullets from inaudible German rifles. I looked back at the face of the "guetteur," the watcher. His eyes, fixed on the narrow white line, were puckered with intentness, but his lips were parted in an easy, good-humored smile, brightening a face young, clean-cut, alert, calm and very patient. [43]

He seemed to symbolize the spirit of the new France, the France of endurance, of determination, of buoyancy, of patience, the stoic France that can keep silent and motionless, the France that can stand in the darkness undismayed, watching and waiting till the moment comes to leap up and out into the light.

Early that morning, from the window of a château on the edge of a high plateau, a young staff-officer had shown me the great plain of Champagne stretching away to the low hills on the horizon. Miles away lay Rheims, made to seem squatty by the cathedral which towered in its midst.

Across the green fields of the panorama, over swelling hills, disappearing into dark woods, reappearing at the other end, I saw two tiny lines of white like the aimless tracing of a child's slate-pencil on a slate. They ran on across the landscape, now drawn boldly forward, now swerving with indecision, now zigzagging with perplexity. Sometimes the child's pencil had slipped and made short little lines at right angles. Sometimes the pencil had made three or four short starts parallel with each other before it finally got under way. Sometimes it had made a regular little maze of lines. But always the two white scratchings on the slate were drawn on and on till, wavering but always close abreast, the trenches of the two armies disappeared into the far distance. [44]

Through powerful glasses the officer showed me little puffs of smoke floating up from the sunny, silent, peaceful landscape. They were from the exploding shells. To the right I saw a high cloud of smoke rising lazily into the air out of some woods. It was a house in the German lines fired by French shells. And, though the little puffs of smoke were only here and there on the landscape, everywhere I could see through the glasses the microscopic figures of peasants working busily in their fields, bringing in the harvest. Many were soldiers helping out, but very many were old men, boys and women. Again the scene seemed symbolical.

Behind the soldier watching in the bomb-proof were the innumerable tiny plodding figures, undaunted by the abrupt little puffs of smoke, doing their patient share toward bringing in the harvest. [45]

In the château itself as I went down-stairs I passed a bedroom door with "Seine Koenigliche Hoheit" written across it in white chalk. The Duke of Brunswick had slept there at the high tide of the German advance. His staff had had their names chalked across various other doors, but few of them remained.

One by one they were being gradually scrubbed off. It was explained to me that these chalk marks were particularly hard to remove from wooden doors. But with patience it is being done.

The trip which I was taking to the French front had been most kindly arranged for me by the French Government as a special trip for my particular benefit. It had the advantage of enabling us to go into portions of the advanced trenches, where the larger parties could not go for fear of precipitating shelling by the Germans.

Our party consisted of a staff-officer from Paris, a staff-officer from army headquarters, Lincoln Eyre, whom the authorities had allowed me to ask along—and myself.

After leaving the château we got into two elephant-gray army motors with Remington carbines swung on their dashboards. The military chauffeurs tore along the road, which was in easy range of the German artillery, but which for some reason never was shelled. [46]

As we whirled along we passed a variegated procession of vehicles. Now a high peasant cart carrying home the harvest; now a military motor-cyclist; now a motor-ambulance, with a pair of white feet showing through the back, and the wounded man lying on a stretcher slung from the roof by four straps to reduce jolts to a minimum; now a motor full of officers smoking cigarettes; now a cavalryman exercising an officer's mount.

Finally we stopped about a kilometre from a little village, which must be nameless. On leaving our motors we walked a little further along the road and then climbed down into a trench. This

was about six feet deep and three feet wide, the bottom and sides of white, chalky soil. We pursued a serpentine course, but there was method in its meandering, for a straight vista of trench leading toward the enemy would be a splendid hunting-ground for bullets.

We had not gone far when I heard a sound like a boy cracking a toy whip. "A bullet striking near us," explained an officer ahead of me. [47]

I found it almost impossible to tell the difference between the report of the French guns and the explosions of German shells. An officer told me that their time-table nickname for French gun reports was "départs" (departures), while that for the German shell explosions was "arrivées" (arrivals).

Of course if either gun or shell explosion or both is very near to you you can easily tell the difference, if there is enough of you left to tell anything.

We walked on with the toy whip cracking at every other step and "départs" and "arrivées" inviting guesswork as to which was which. We passed soldiers in shirt-sleeves, deepening and widening a communication trench. It was rather difficult to squeeze past them, but this very definitely emphasized the wonderful terms of discipline, yet the democratic friendliness, existing between the French officers and the men. The officers talked to the men intimately and placed their hands on the men's shoulders affectionately in squeezing by. The men answered the officers easily, without restraint, but all stood at attention and smartly gave the salute, which they regarded as a dignity and not a degradation—a marvellous combination of discipline and democracy. [48]

We finally climbed out of the trench at the first house of the little village, or rather of what had been a little village, for it was, on close view, nothing more than the aftermath of an earthquake. In actual fact it reminded me vividly of the walk I had taken through the remains of Messina after the last great earthquake.

Before entering the village I stood in the road looking through my field-glasses at a German war-balloon to my left. "Come along, come along," shouted one of the officers. "If you stand there you'll start the Germans shelling. You're in plain sight of them." Needless to say I came along.



We walked through the shattered village, which the Germans shelled religiously every day, until we came to the remains of a church. Climbing in over the ruins we saw that there was one corner where miraculously enough a few yards of floor and a few yards of roof had escaped being shelled to pieces. There the altar had been set with about ten chairs crowded in front of it. There mass is still held every Sunday for the benefit of the sixteen inhabitants who still persisted in staying in the village. [49]

These must indeed be solemn little services, for the Germans are far from being Sabbatarians when it comes to shelling this particular church.

Going on, we stopped in front of what was a house for one story and a skeleton from there up. It looked as if nothing less than a squirrel could get up to its rooftree, and nothing larger than a cat could conceal itself behind any of the shreds and tatters of its roof. Nevertheless, up there was the observation-post which I was about to visit. We entered and found some soldiers cooking meat and potatoes on a smokeless stove. One of them was amusing himself prancing around the place on a pair of child's stilts.

Following instructions, I climbed up a long ladder, which led to two rafters—the sole survivors of the second floor. A few planks had been stretched between these. From them another ladder ran up to a small patch of attic floor which, marvellously intact, nestled around three sides of a brick chimney under the fragment of the roof. Arrived there, I carefully lifted a little leather curtain, hung over a hole in the roof, and squinted cautiously down upon the German lines. [50]

The French trenches were practically hidden by the houses of the little village, so that the first thing I saw was a belt of barbed wire, and an unostentatious little white line, which marked the advanced German position. Look as closely as one could, it was impossible to detect the slightest movement, yet it was from this innocent-looking little line that the bullets were imitating toy whips. I wedged myself into the chimney to get a view of another side and then climbed down.

We now left the village and walked into the open advanced trenches. The most remarkable thing was their utter desolation. We walked for a hundred yards at a time, past scores and scores of rifle-slits, without seeing a man. An officer explained that troops are not permitted in the open trenches during the daytime, to save them needless loss from the shells, which each side all day long, in a desultory way, threw into the open trenches of the other. [51]

The men stayed down in the shell-proof shelters all the day and manned the trenches at night, when attacks are most feared.

It seemed as if the Germans could easily rush these trenches before the men could be called out to meet them, but along the sides of every trench ran one or two telephone wires. Apparently one quick order would have these front trenches lined with men. We came to one of the points nearest the German lines, from where the German trenches seemed a mere stone's-throw. From there French soldiers used to crawl out and fraternize with the Germans, between the lines, but that is now forbidden.

We next came through a covered trench to a covered grenade section. Here a table stood against the outer wall. It had three lines of sockets in it, one ahead of the other. The soldiers fastened grenades to the muzzles of their rifles, shoved the muzzles up through the protected slit in the roof, rested the butts in one of the three sockets, which gave three different ranges, and pulled the trigger. If there is a premature explosion they are saved from its effects by the muzzle being above the roof. [52]

We continued on into a long section of the covered front trench, where the rifle-slits have wires stretched across them about three inches from the bottom. The soldiers must stick their rifles out under the wire, which prevents their overshooting in the night. These covered trenches are roofed with logs and covered with two or three feet of earth. They are proof against ordinary shells, but not against heavy artillery.

When that starts bombarding, the men climb down into excavations, fifteen feet below the level of the trenches, and wait there until the storm is over.



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**THE AUTHOR IN A FRONT TRENCH NEAR RHEIMS.
(THE GERMANS ARE ABOUT THREE HUNDRED YARDS
BEYOND THE WIRE ENTANGLEMENTS)**

Soon we came to a black little underground chamber. An officer gave an order and a brilliant ray of light shot in through an aperture in the wall, near the low roof. This aperture was some three feet from one side to the other, and only about six or eight inches from top to bottom. It had been opened by dropping a hinged steel shutter which was worked by a wire running over a pulley. The aperture was just above the surface of the ground outside. In the little room stood a machine-gun with its wicked-looking muzzle just flush with the opening. The gunner showed us how, by swinging the gun from side to side, he could play a stream of bullets through the wire entanglements, a foot or two from the ground. [53]

At regular intervals we passed watchers, some standing in the covered trenches gazing through the slits, some lying out above the open trenches behind steel shields, and some using periscopes—all depending on the location of the trench.

Looking into such a periscope one would swear that he was looking straight out through a loophole. There is not the slightest sign of looking at a reflection in a mirror. We walked bent double through an extremely long pitch-black tunnel in an advanced position where some of the officers themselves had never been, and then started back through the open trenches.

At one point a lot of Germans had been buried. Sometimes a shell explosion does a ghastly bit of disinterment, but I saw nothing unpleasant on this occasion. At another point above the heads of each side of the trench stood two shattered ammunition-carts. The Germans shelled this place pertinaciously, believing that the carts were guns. [54]

At another point we walked under a framework of wood, covered with barb wire resting on two transverse timbers stretching across the top of the trench. A rope hung down from one of the transverses. If the enemy broke into the trench the defenders, by pulling this rope, could drop the barb-wire contrivance into the trench, thus blocking it.

Finally we got back to the village. I had asked how the sixteen inhabitants made a living. An officer replied that they sold eggs and milk to the troops. I asked out of what they produced the milk and he replied, "Very certainly out of a cow." As an answer to my polite scepticism I was taken to see the cow. We walked down a little street where I was told that the Germans were directing most of their shells. They fortunately were napping while we walked through. We suddenly turned into a gateway, and there in the middle of this wreck of a village was a barnyard with chickens clucking, a horse tied to the wall, and three cows. [55]

And on a stool by one of the cows sat an aged woman making the milk hiss down into a tin pail. There she sat, shells sailing to and fro over her head, with the "départs" starting and the "arrivées" bursting. There she sat and rocked with hearty laughter at the story of my scepticism, and went on effectively proving her existence by her cow by the extraction of that very milk which was sold to the soldiers. We left the old lady surrounded by what seemed to her to be all the comforts of home, and a few steps further were introduced to the Mayor of X—.

It was a smiling, bland old man who greeted us most genially. Apparently he had not a care in the world as he stood courteously making conversation. It seemed to me that the humble old woman milking her cow, and the Mayor entertaining visitors to what was no longer his village, were further symbols of the spirit of a nation which was not easily destined to decadence and downfall. Leaving the Mayor, we entered the cemetery. There we were looking at the graves of two German officers, two French officers and seventy French soldiers when an "arrivée" burst with a louder report than we had as yet heard, followed by a deep noise. [56]

"What's that?" I asked.

An officer replied, "That's the metal fuse which at the moment of explosion flies off through the air. You can only hear that when the explosion is pretty close. You can certainly say now that you

have been under shell fire."

We went back to the end of the village furthest from the Germans and entered the headquarters in one of the few houses still in fair preservation. There the officers in command of the village opened a bottle of champagne in our honor and we stood around drinking each other's health. At that precise moment an unusually loud salvo of French artillery went off by way of a salute to the toast.

On the way back through the communicating trenches, we saw an attempt by the German guns to bring down a French aviator, who was flying above us. The latest development of fire regulation by aviation is that the Captain of the battery himself goes up in an aeroplane and sends his corrections on aim down to his battery by wireless. This Captain had his four "seventy-fives" hidden near our communication trench. Every time they went off their report was so violent that I could not help jumping. [57]

The battery Captain was sailing around overhead and the German gunner was letting drive at him with what looked to us to be pretty bad shots. I could see the aeroplane wheeling in the air and hear the distant reports of the "départs," wait an appreciable time and then see the burst of white flame high up in the sky, followed by little puffs of smoke.

"That's a wretched shot," said I, as one shell burst over our heads, far behind the aeroplane.

"Yes, a bad shot for an aeroplane, but a good shot for us," Captain F— replied.

I was standing with my head away back, looking straight overhead. "Come, move on, move on, or you'll catch some of that on your face," warned Captain d'A—. I obediently moved on and, sure enough, a couple of seconds later he picked up a strictly fresh shrapnel ball which had just fallen into our trench out of the sky. In the mean time the Captain up in the air had corrected his guns, so that they were hitting whatever they were shooting at, and he sailed away to the rear, while his battery became really enthusiastic and went off with a series of tearing crashes, which kept me jumping all the way to the end of the communicating trench. [58]

There I climbed out with my ears full of the "seventy-fives" violent reports, the distant explosion of their shells, the distant reports of the enemy's guns, the "crack, crack, crack" of the rifle bullets and the occasional sharp whistling of one overhead.

But my mind was full of the soldier watching and waiting, of the peasants harvesting between the smoke puffs, the laughing old woman milking the cow, of the genial Mayor extending his ruined hospitality, and of what little things like these should bring to pass in the future of France.

IV

A TYPICAL DAY'S TOUR

The morning after our trip to the front at Rheims we got up at seven o'clock after a good night's sleep in the comfortable hotel, and by shortly after eight were ready to start.

But here came a hitch in the smoothly running mechanism.

The evening before, on our run back to Epernay, Eyre and I had noticed the exhilarating abandon with which our soldier chauffeur slung his car along. We supposed that was the traditional method in which military cars were run. We christened our driver "Barney Oldfield" and commented jocosely on his various close squeaks. We noticed that Captain d'A—, who in the front trenches had been absolutely imperturbable, did not seem wholly at ease, but kept on leaning forward and muttering, "Mais doucement! doucement!" through the front window. We thought, however, that this was mere consideration on his part for our inexperienced nervous systems. [60]

On this following morning he declared to us that our chauffeur was evidently a veritable maniac besides being an execrable driver, and that nothing would induce him to ride behind "Barney Oldfield" again. Shells and bullets were all in the day's work, but he'd be switched if he would have his neck quite superfluously broken by an imbecile like that.

He therefore, with our cordial approval, had sent round to the auto-repair department for a sedater driver. But it was apparently against the regulations to keep the same car if we changed chauffeurs, and it was as hard to get another car in this headquarters of cars as it is to get fresh milk on a cattle-ranch.

So we fretted politely for the best part of an hour before the new chauffeur drove up. This delay haunted us for the rest of the day.

We motored over the same road we had covered the day before till we got near Rheims again. There, at about ten o'clock, we met Captain F—, who had been cooling his heels for an hour. I transferred myself into his motor and we started off to inspect some batteries. [61]

First, of course, we had to present ourselves to the General in Command of the next Army Corps which we were to visit. We reached his headquarters after half an hour's run and found him an interesting and agreeable man of the world. He was much upset by the death the day before of a Lieutenant of engineers. It appears that this Lieutenant had been in command of a sap that was being run under the German trenches in order to explode a mine. The Germans had

counter-sapped, broken into his tunnel, and exploded a mine there. He had recklessly crawled down his sap and had not returned. Then his Colonel crawled down the little tunnel after him, first taking the precaution to have a rope tied on to himself. The soldiers at the French end of the tunnel paid out the rope till it suddenly stopped. Then, as there was no more movement, they became alarmed and, hauling in the rope, dragged the Colonel back in a senseless condition. The Lieutenant had reached the neighborhood of the exploded mine and had been overcome and killed by the unescaped gases of the explosion. The Colonel in his turn had been overcome, but had been hauled out in time to be revived.

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It was strange to see how this loss was taken to heart by a General who must in the past months have had to receive reports of deaths by the thousand.

We motored on and about eleven o'clock were ushered into the headquarters of the General of Division whose batteries we wanted to see.

The other Generals had greeted us in the luxurious *salons* of châteaux, sitting near writing-desks holding a few papers, but without any token of the military work on which they were engaged. This General was housed with his staff in an old shooting-box. The room in which he welcomed us had large-scale maps on its walls, and engineering plans on its tables. The General himself was a splendid type of French officer, remarkably young, wiry, snappy, keen as mustard. When the war began he had been a Lieutenant-Colonel and had gone up the ladder by leaps and bounds.

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He said he would begin by himself taking us to an observation-point at the top of a high hill, whence we could follow the whole sweep of front from about the point where it had yesterday run out of our sight, on for many miles to the Aisne and well beyond it.

Up the hill we went at about as fast a walk as I have ever used on a stiff up-grade. Beside me, setting the pace, went the General in his baggy red riding-breeches, his tight-fitting black tunic, his well-polished black-leather puttees and shapely boots. As we climbed at top speed he talked a steady and most interesting stream. I began to listen for any symptoms of the pace affecting his breath. But not a bit of it; on he walked and on he talked. It was a hot day and the sweat began to drip off of me in spite of my cool khaki clothes. But the General in his black-cloth tunic and red breeches remained as cool as a cucumber. By the time we legged it over the crest of the hill I would have been willing to back him in a walking contest against any one of the twenty thousand men in his division.

Now we walked along a level path through woods till we came to an open space on the hillside.

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The General stopped abruptly. "Don't go further here," he snapped out, "the Germans might see us through their glasses. They've got them constantly trained on this hill to try to locate my observation-post. They have not struck it yet, though the other day they happened to drop a shell not far from it which killed two of my officers."

So we retraced our steps a short distance and took another path which avoided the open place on the hillside.

Finally we reached the observation-post, carefully screened by an artificial bower of pine boughs. Maps were tacked on a rude table, while a big telescope stuck its muzzle surreptitiously out between the boughs.

The young General pointed out the two white trench lines pursuing each other league on league across the face of the summer landscape below us, now abruptly approaching, now coyly withdrawing from each other in their deadly courtship. He ran swiftly over the various features of interest: That white scar on the slope down yonder was where the French had recently exploded a great mine under the Germans. Particularly bloody fighting had been going on at that point. Those roofs in the hollow the other side of that little hill were the village of Bery-au-Bac, which so frequently appeared in the official communiques as the scene of desperate attacks. Over there beyond the canal in that angle between it and the Aisne for perhaps half a kilometre there was a complete gap in the trench lines which were popularly supposed to run uninterruptedly from the North Sea to the Alps. Still further over yonder the hostile trenches approached each other so closely that one of those houses had one end occupied by the French and the other by the Germans.

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"Over there," said the General with a sweep of his hand and a shake of his head, "occurred one of the great misfortunes of the battle of the Marne. Our troops there had hurled the Germans back across the Aisne and clear back over those hills. But the French troops over here more to the left had had their advance checked by the retreating Germans. Now those troops to the right were so far ahead that they had lost touch with the ones to the left. Had they been veteran troops they could easily have manoeuvred the backward troops up into line with themselves, and had they done this, with the Germans forced back beyond that line of natural defense, the Craonne plateau positions would have been turned and there is no knowing how far the German retreat might have been compelled to continue. But alas! they were green troops, and when they had waited and found that the troops to their left were not linking up with them they fell back from their precious territory to form a line with their fellows. And that is why we are here to-day."

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The General then led the way some little distance to another underground observation-post to be used in case of a bombardment.

A flight of steps led down into it. It had a good many feet of solid earth above it, and consisted of two rooms with two bunks covered with pine boughs in one, and two camp cots in the other for the General himself and his artillery aide. It was well stored with water and provisions, and here

the General, in case of a sustained bombardment, could remain in relative security for days on end, observing the effect of his own artillery fire or of any infantry attacks he might direct, and sending his orders out by telephone. It will probably be asked how he could do much observing from a cellar several metres under ground. The answer is that the second of the two rooms had a sort of window about a foot high and running the whole length of the wall, which opened out through the side of the hill. It was covered by a heavy steel shutter which could be partly or entirely swung up by a pulley arrangement, and through this crack in the hillside the whole sector lay in perfect view.

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Climbing out again, we ventured a hint or two as to how interested we were in batteries. But the General himself was intensely interested in an intricate system of subterranean passages which his Chief of Engineers was building to connect up the observation-post with other points, and he took the very human view that the technical explanations of the Engineer which were so absorbing to him must necessarily be equally enthralling to us.

Finally we started back across the hilltop toward where my imagination conjured up serried arrays of great guns frowning at the enemy.

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On the way we stopped to inspect the telephone central which connected up the observation-posts with all the batteries behind and the trenches in front, and for that matter, with Paris or any other part of France.

In a low log hut, its roof and walls protected by several feet of sand-bags, a soldier sat at a large switchboard with a telephone receiver strapped to his head. As we stood for a moment watching him a bell tinkled. He stuck the small peg into one of the multitudinous little holes.

"Allo! This is Number 15," he said in a low voice, then listened intently to some message.

"All right," he said at its conclusion. Then turning half round on his stool he saluted and reported:

"Mon General, Number 19 reports that a Boche aeroplane has passed them and is coming over us."



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**"WE WERE COMPLETELY ABSORBED IN WATCHING THE SOFT
LITTLE CLOUDS PLAYFULLY DANCING ALONG AHEAD OF
THE LAZILY DRIFTING AEROPLANE"**

"Telephone our guns to fire at him, and warn Numbers 11 and 12 to prepare for his coming," ordered the General, and as the soldier stuck his pegs in and gave his telephone messages we hustled out to see the excitement. Sure enough, we had hardly got out when we heard a distant whirring, and high up in the air saw an aeroplane floating our way.

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"Keep under the tree! Keep under the tree!" warned the General sharply. "If he sees us all standing here, and gets away, he will report this as an important point and it will rain 'marmites' for days to come."

So he, his staff-officers, Eyre and I grouped ourselves under a big tree and stared up at the approaching aeroplane through the gaps in its branches.

"Whang!" A "soixante-quinze" exploded violently in the woods close by, and I jumped equally violently.

"Whang! Whang! Whang!" came three more shots in extremely close succession.

"You've got a whole battery shooting, haven't you?" I remarked.

"Oh, no! There is only one gun located just there. It does not waste time in firing, does it?" smiled the General. "Our 'soixante-quinze' field-guns can shoot twenty-five shots a minute."

Other guns in the immediate neighborhood took up the chorus, and, looking through our glasses, we could see little soft white cloudlets puff into being all around the aeroplane.

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But he kept sailing calmly on.

A little further off in the woods came a staccato rat! tat! tat! tat! like a boy drawing a stick along a picket fence.

"There goes one of our mitrailleuses at work on him."

We were completely absorbed in watching the soft little clouds playfully dancing along ahead of the lazily drifting aeroplane, when the General's voice brought us back to earth.

"Come! Come! We must hurry or we shall be late for lunch. I did not realize how late it was."

I looked at him in horror. What! Forsake the sensations of this moment for such a thing as a lunch! Any one of those gentle little white puffs might transform the aeroplane into a hurtling mass of flame. Lunch!

But the General was entirely sincere and very positive. From his point of view Boche aeroplanes could be shot at any hour of the day, but lunch was an event which took place only once in the twenty-four hours. Lunch was the recognized symbol of hospitality; aeroplane shellings decidedly were not.

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As we reluctantly followed him through the woods he may have noticed my disappointment, for he remarked:

"It is highly improbable that you would see anything more than you already have seen. They are very difficult things to hit, you know. As a matter of fact, we were doing most of our shooting in front of him rather than at him, so as to head him back. But he evidently has his nerve with him, for he has kept right on and got away from us. Listen! Our guns have stopped, and there are the guns I telephoned to at Number 12 taking a shy at him."

As we hiked along at the General's favorite pace Captain F— diffidently suggested:

"And the batteries, mon General, in which this gentleman was much interested. I suppose there will be no opportunity to see them?"

"Oh, there is really nothing interesting about them, as they are not firing to-day. The pieces are scattered all over the hillside in the woods, and the crews are having their lunch. But as a matter of fact our route home takes us right by one 120-millimetre gun and we can have a look at that."

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Walking down the rear slope of the hill, we came upon a party of soldiers, apparently out for a picnic, eating their lunch on a rustic table, with pine branches over their heads and fragrant pine needles under their feet.

They jumped to attention.

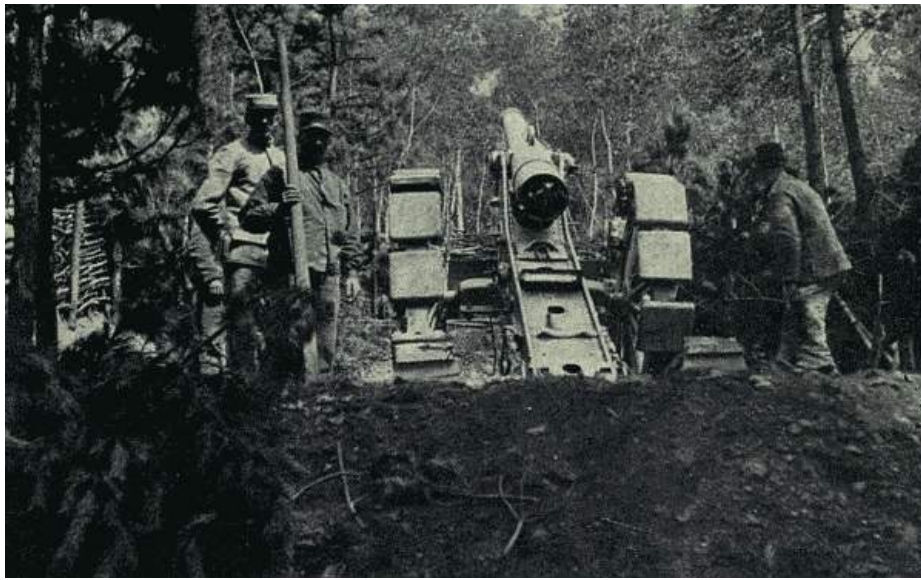
"Show us the piece," said the General to their non-commissioned officer.

The groups of soldiers hustled over to a big object bundled up in tarpaulins, which stood a few yards off. Stripping off the coverings, they showed us a heavy field-piece standing on treadled wheels with its muzzle pointed apparently aimlessly up the green-wooded hillside at some clouds which floated in the blue sky just above the hill-crest.



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"AS WE HIKED ALONG AT THE GENERAL'S FAVORITE PACE"



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"A HEAVY FIELD-PIECE STANDING ON TREADLED WHEELS"

"That gun," explained the General, "is aimed at the village of —, about eight kilometres distant, behind the German lines. Their reserves have to pass through the village to reach the front; so whenever we hear that they are bringing up their reserves we start this gun shelling that little village. Usually an important village is shared by several guns, but that village is the particular property of this gun.

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"Show the gentlemen how it works," he ordered. The artillerymen leaped into position, swung open the breach, lifted a heavy shell, and thrust it into the chamber.

"Careful there; don't shoot it off!" exclaimed the General, and added to me, "There's no use damaging our own French villages more than is indispensable."

As tenderly as a thoroughbred is blanketed after a race the big gun was bundled up again by its crew, and, leaving them to resume their picnicking under the pine-tree, we strode away to the shooting-box and the lunch.

And a very excellent lunch it was to which the General, some eight of his staff-officers and our party of four sat down in the dingy old dining-room of the shooting-box.

"You certainly mobilized an excellent chef," laughed Captain d'A— as we reached the entrée.

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MENU

du 1^o Août 1915

DÉJEUNER

Hors-d'oeuvres
Oeufs pochés à la Rossini
Tournedos grillés à la Bouchère
Pommes frites
Pigeons rotis
Haricots verts à l'anglaise
Crème au chocolat
Compote de pêches
Dessert

With white wine mixed with water to drink during the lunch, champagne served in the French fashion with the dessert, and cigars, coffee and liqueurs to follow, the commissariat department undoubtedly deserved congratulations.

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The conversation was of course not for publication, but one passage I think I can repeat without fear of violating confidence.

"Why did not Von Kluck march on Paris when he had the chance?" I asked the officer who was sitting on one side of me.

"I will tell you," he replied. "In the 1913 'Kriegsspiel' [great manœuvres] in Germany the theoretical invasion of France by the attacking armies was precisely the same advance as in actual fact they made the following year. In the maneuvers Von Kluck commanded the right wing precisely as he did in the actual invasion. In these maneuvers he came to a point in his advance

where he had to choose between attacking Paris and swinging past Paris in pursuit of the enemy. He decided to attack Paris. The verdict of the board of generals who were judging the maneuvers contained the severest kind of arraignment of Von Kluck for having violated the cardinal principal of German military strategy by allowing a mere geographical point to divert him from the one paramount object of German generalship—the enemy's army. We actually possess a copy of this official reprimand, for 'tout s'achète' (there is nothing that money will not buy), you know. Now when little over one year later Von Kluck in actual warfare came face to face with precisely the same choice of alternatives, with the previous year's censure still stingingly fresh in mind, he ignored Paris and followed the enemy army."

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Luncheon over, we bade the splendid young General and his staff good-bye, and motored quite a distance to visit one of the French field hospitals. The wounded, after having first aid applied in the trenches, were brought here in ambulances, where their wounds were thoroughly dressed or operations performed. When there was a great rush of wounded those capable of standing the journey were shipped on to base hospitals as quickly as possible to make room for the new cases. During the last few months, however, there had been so little hard fighting on the section of the front which this hospital served, that many of the wounded had been kept there for weeks and some for months. The big rooms on the ground floor of the large country house in which the hospital had been located, had been converted into wards for the wounded privates, while the bedrooms on the upper floor were reserved principally for officers.

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It was curious to hear the deprecatory tone in which the Chief Surgeon regretted that he had no freshly wounded to bandage or operate on for our benefit. In fact from the front hospitals to the great base hospitals of Paris the surgeons are all alike. They cannot keep a professional note of regret out of their voices when explaining that very few wounded have come in of late, nor a professional note of encouragement when they understand an important action is soon to be fought which will again fill their cots with "cases." It would be an outrage to hold this attitude against these splendid men. If they had not become impregnated by their professional point of view toward the horrors of their work, they would all long ago have been in madhouses.

Our whole progress through the hospital was a strange conglomeration of pathos and farce. For the Surgeon in Command, on our being introduced to him, stated that he was the proud possessor of an orderly who spoke the English tongue "à merveille." Our staff-officers politely indicated to him that our own French, though not perhaps up to Comédie Française standards, was no mean thing, and would render his explanations entirely comprehensible to us. But these hints were of no avail. The accomplishments of his linguistic prodigy must not be wasted. So the orderly was produced and turned out to be master of the most grotesquely unintelligible English that I have ever listened to.

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As we passed between the lines of cots, each with its still figure huddled under its gray blanket, as we were followed about by the wondering gaze of the many eyes which look so incredibly large in the wasted faces of the wounded, we had to listen to the explanations of the Chief Surgeon, and then lend our ears to the burblings of the orderly exteprting them for our benefit. Even when we stood in the modest little graveyard where those who had died of their wounds were buried we were torn between tears and grins by the attentions of the excellent man whom, I am ashamed to say, Eyre and I had christened "the pest," and by the embarrassed writhings of our staff-officers who spoke such excellent English that they thoroughly realized the situation.

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Having spent perhaps three-quarters of an hour in the hospital, which, judged by the somewhat unexactng French standards, seemed efficiently run, we departed for the first impromptu engagement of the day—the studies of a class in grenade-throwing, which met not very far from the hospital, and which I have elsewhere described in detail.

After an hour devoted to this exceedingly interesting experience, we were whirled away to a distant appointment with another General of an Army Corps. He led us to the flat roof of his headquarters, from which at some distance he pointed out a third installment of the trenches continuing from about the point where they had that morning run out of sight, and from that point stretching along the Craonne plateau, nearly to Soissons.

Having terminated a fifteen-minute meeting with this extremely courteous General, the next number on our programme was the inspection of an aviation "esquadrille" or squadron.

On our way, however, we stopped unexpectedly to look at a most beautiful new anti-aircraft "seventy-five," a gun numbers of which the French had just completed and were bringing to the front. As I was not allowed to photograph the gun even from a distance and was enjoined to regard its details as absolutely confidential, I can only say that, mounted on its own motor, it could travel along the roads at forty kilometres an hour; that it could be in action within one minute and a half after coming to a stop, and that the way the turning of a couple of little cranks which a child could whirl made the heavy muzzle swing, and mount, and cut figure eights in the air, was something wholly incredible.

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We listened to a technical but most interesting exposition by the Artillery Captain of the most up-to-date methods of firing at aeroplanes, including the progressive and retrogressive systems, and then sped away to the aviation field some ten or fifteen kilometres distant. We found the aviation squadron on a very large field near the top of a gradually sloping bare hill, comfortably installed, the machines in their great hangars, the aviators in their small tents. The whole organization was especially adapted for mobility. In one hour, at need, the field would have left on it not a man, a stick or a shred of the encampment. Hangars and tents would be careering along some highroad, neatly folded in the big aviation lorries that stood handy, mechanics would be sitting on the box seats or have their legs dangling over the tail-boards, while pilots and

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observers would waft themselves more comfortably by air to their new camp site.

The Captain of the "esquadrielle" showed us, with quite pardonable pride, his "avions de réglage"—planes carrying no bombs or machine-guns, but equipped with wireless, which are used to correct the fire of artillery, and his "avions de chasse" or hunting-planes equipped with bombs, a machine-gun and a Winchester carbine. Some of these had the pilot sit behind and the observer in front operating the machine gun over the bow. Others had the pilot in front and the observer behind, in which case the observer, standing up, operated the machine-gun over the head of the pilot. Finally he showed us a splendid new Caudron biplane having two independent motors and two traction screws in front, so that if either motor were put out of business the plane could continue flying on the other.

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I was so enthusiastic about this machine that the Aviation Captain turned to me and asked casually, "Would you perhaps like to go up and take a 'petite promenade' in the Caudron?"

Would I? It did not take me many fractions of a second to impress on him that I certainly would. But here Captain d'A— demurred. It was, he said, absolutely forbidden that any one should go up in army aeroplanes except aviators on military duty. Those were the strict army regulations. He was quite right and entirely justified in his attitude. But Captain F—, who was a good sport and had become quite a chum of mine, said, "Oh, let him go up. After all, the Swiss Military Attaché went up the other day. I'll take the responsibility." And as he was in immediate authority while we remained with the 5th Army, Captain d'A— good-naturedly shrugged his shoulders and let it go at that.

So I hurried down with the Aviation Captain to his tent to put on a warm aviation suit, while the Caudron was prepared for our flight. As we approached his tent, a single-motored aeroplane took aboard its pilot and observer, its propellers whirred and roared, and it rolled casually away up the gradual slope, through a field of standing grain, till near the hilltop it took to the air as easily as a bird and spiralled up toward the low-lying dark clouds.

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In the Captain's tent I struggled into a heavy suit of black fur made like a suit of combination underwear, legs and body all in one piece, put on a pair of goggles and a heavily padded helmet, and emerged to meet the disappointment of my life. Down pattered some drops of rain, down spiralled the aeroplane which had just gone up.

"Too bad," said the Aviation Captain. "I can't send a machine up in the rain."

I pleaded with my staff-officers to wait here for an hour to see whether the rain might not stop. In vain. Even that good sport Captain F— was adamant. We could not possibly wait, because it would completely throw out a visit to a horse hospital, and an inspection of an army corps supply-train which were both unalterably fixed upon our schedule. We were very late already. We must be off.

Well, then, could we not return early to-morrow morning to get the flight?

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"Malheureusement ça ne peut pas se faire." (French euphemism for "No.") To-morrow morning I was slated for a visit to a base hospital which, including motoring there and motoring back, would consume most of the morning.

But I would infinitely prefer to go for a "petite promenade" in the Caudron than to inspect the most unique base hospital in the world.

Yes, they could understand that perfectly, but unfortunately the hospital was among "the arrangements" and the "petite promenade" was not. Personally they would throw the hospital overboard in a minute, but the matter was beyond their control.



So off we went, Captain F— full of sympathy and I full of sulks, and at about half past five visited what under other circumstances would have been an exceedingly interesting big hospital full of hundreds of sick and wounded horses. But I fear I was in no mood to appreciate the ingenuity and thoroughness with which the kilometre or more of hospital sheds had been constructed by the soldiers on a framework of poles, with wicker-work sides covered with a sort of adobe, and a sloping roof of thatched straw with little gables built here and there for the mere love of beautifying which is apparently ever present in the French race, whether at war or peace. [85]

On we went for another long run till we reached the enormous encampment of supply-wagons, which carry the complete supplies for three full days for one army corps. They had been there since the armies dug themselves in.

"We are not useful now," the Colonel in Command regretfully confided to me; "for almost all the supplies reach our armies by rail. But only wait till the advance begins. Then we shall show what we can do."

This great encampment which covered some square miles of countryside had begun as a bivouac and ended as a town. One walked down avenues and side streets solidly flanked by the huts which this army had built itself. They were all more or less standardized in building materials—wattled walls covered with clay, and thatched straw roofs. But there the uniformity abruptly ended. For these little houses had not been merely constructed by builders as they would have been in nearly any other country. This was France and they had been conceived by architects. And each house expressed the original conception of the soldier-architect who had designed it. [86]

No one who has not walked through this mushroom town or the many others like it can imagine the infinite variety of architectural forms which can be wrought in one-story shacks of wattle, clay and straw. The pliable wattle and clay lent themselves to effects which could not have been possible in stone, brick or wood. Extraordinary bays and alcoves, never before dreamed of by the Ecole des Beaux Arts gave light and shadow to long walls. Bas-relief and high-relief were done with spirit and often with fine art in the clay which covered the wattled walls, the thatched straw of the roofs was erected into strange gables, dormer windows, turrets and machicolations. Eccentric, grotesque many of these experiments unquestionably were, but they meant on the part of the tired soldiers hours and days and weeks of extra and unnecessary work, lavished, not for their creature comfort, not for their physical safety, but solely for their artistic satisfaction.

It was twilight when we took our leave and night had fallen long before we rolled into Château Thiery, whither Captain d'A—'s orderly had transported our bags, and where a very late dinner and comfortable beds were awaiting us. [87]

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A GRENADE-THROWING SCHOOL

WITH THE 5TH FRENCH ARMY, *Aug. 9.*

I have just returned from attending a soldiers' school of bomb-throwing. The military authorities permitted my presence as an exceptional favor, informing me that this is the first time such a privilege has been accorded a foreign civilian.

This particular school holds its classes in a large green field in a peaceful little valley, within long artillery range of the firing lines. No German shells, however, have hitherto distracted the pupils from their rather gruesome lessons, and I will not endanger their continued studies by giving a more definite description of the locality.

This school is attended by privates from each regiment, who spend four days at their highly explosive studies. Toward the middle of the field, about two hundred yards from one end and about three hundred from the other, was a section of open trench about twenty yards long and some four feet deep. This trench was about the usual three feet in width except in its centre, where for about five feet it was recessed back to a width of some six feet. This was where the French instructor stood and whirled his arms to throw the bombs. A couple of feet to the left of this recess was another recess, covered with a bomb-proof roof of logs and earth. [89]

Into this the instructor and his pupil sought refuge from the effects of the bomb explosion. As the explosion really is surprisingly violent and takes place at the longest only five seconds from the time the mechanism of the bomb is started, and at a maximum distance of thirty yards, the instructor and any one in the trench with him have got to be exceedingly spry in running under the bomb-proof in order to beat the bomb. There is, too, the danger of a premature explosion.

To make me feel more entirely at my ease, they told me that only a few days ago an officer of explosives brought a Colonel to see one of these demonstrations in another school, behind a different part of the line. As they came to the entrance of the trench the officer politely made way for the Colonel to enter the trench first. As the Colonel did so, the bomb exploded prematurely and killed the Colonel outright. [90]

About twenty yards in front of the trench was dug a shallow dummy trench to represent a German target. Some 150 yards further distant was set up a section of wire entanglements.

We found the 128 soldiers ranged in line a few yards behind the trench. At its edge I took my place with the Captain of explosives and three or four other officers. The infantrymen lined up two deep behind us.

In the open recess in the trench stood the non-commissioned officer of engineers, facing backward toward us. He was the instructor. At the order of the Captain he placed an innocent-looking satchel on the trench edge at his right elbow, plunged a hand into it and briskly plucked out, one after the other, eight different varieties of bombs. Picking them up, one at a time, he gave a terse lecture on the construction and method of operation of each.

The bombs were all fully loaded, and the explosion of any one of them would have sent a great many of us well on the way to the cemetery. I noticed in some of the officers, and undoubtedly in myself, a certain tenseness as the engineer nonchalantly illustrated within an inch or two of actuality how a percussion bomb would explode if brought in contact with the ground. [91]

In demonstrating the first grenade he adjusted around his wrist a loop with about eight inches of cord hanging from it. A heavy two-inch metal pin was attached to the end of the cord. Picking up a black spherical bomb slightly bigger than a baseball, he stuck the pin lightly into a hole in its side. The bomb was to be thrown with full force. In flying out of the hand it pulled itself free from the pin, causing a friction which ignited the five-second fuse. The pin of course remained behind, hanging to the cord, and was promptly stuck into another bomb. This bomb, being particularly heavy, could be thrown only fifteen metres by an average thrower and twenty as a maximum.

The second bomb was black and pear-shaped. It had a spring which looked like a nickel shoe-horn folded back tight against it. The pressure of the palm against the shoe-horn in throwing it released the spring and started the fuse, which, like all the rest, was set at five seconds. [92]

The third bomb was a can of white tin attached by two wires to a white deal handle. A nail was stuck into a hole in the can. The nail was hammered in by a sharp rap against the ground. ("If you try to knock it in against the palm of your hand it would hurt," explained our instructor.) The nail, driven in, started the fuse.

In the demonstration of this particular bomb our mentor was quite peculiarly realistic, bringing it violently down to within what seemed like the fraction of an inch of the ground.

The fourth bomb was black and round and was started by scratching the tip of a stiffly projecting bit of ignitable fuse against a black band of raspy material worn round the thumb of the left hand. The fifth bomb was lighted in a very similar manner against the side of an ordinary safety-match box. These five were regular grenades.

The sixth and seventh were incendiary grenades to set fire to wooden obstructions, etc. The one, in exploding, scattered the burning liquid to a distance of a few yards, the other set fire only to the spot where it burst. These were both large spherical bombs. Before being thrown kerosene was poured into them through a little bunghole, which was then stopped up. [93]

The eighth was an asphyxiating bomb. I cannot, however, be too careful in emphasizing the fact that this so-called "asphyxiating" bomb was not poisonous, like the German asphyxiating gases, but merely irritated the eyes, nostrils and throat, so that when thrown into a German bomb-proof it would force out the occupants. It left no ill after-effects.

Besides these there were two aerial torpedoes. One was shot out of an old-fashioned little mortar propelled by black powder. The other was bigger and more powerful, had a fin tail to keep its flight accurate and was fired out of a complicated little gun. As both this torpedo and its gun are new inventions, I am not permitted to give any closer details concerning them.

The Sergeant of engineers having completed his little lecture, with himself and his class still in this world, the soldiers and officers all withdrew to the end of the field, some 200 yards behind the trench, and there lay down on their stomachs. I got into the trench with the engineer, placing myself to his left in front of the entrance to the bomb-proof, and the demonstration in the gentle art of grenade-throwing began. He took bomb number one, stuck the pin at the end of the cord firmly into the hole, swung his arm back and let fly. [94]

Having seen the departure of the bomb, I ungracefully tumbled into the bomb-proof, with the engineer a close second. Once there, there was an appreciable pause. Then came an explosion, the violence of which really astonished me. I could distinctly feel the ground shake.

After giving the fragments which had been hurled our way plenty of time to come down on the roof, we stepped out into the trench again. The engineer next picked up bomb number three with the deal handle, hammered the nail home with one sharp rap against the edge of the trench and sent the grenade hurtling through the air.

The mechanism of the first bomb had not been put in operation until the bomb started on its flight. But the fuse of this third bomb started burning the instant he hammered the nail in, and was burning while he was whirling his arm preparatory to letting it fly. As it thus got a running start on us, we had only barely time to get under cover before the explosion took place. [95]

Next came bomb number four. The demonstrator adjusted the black band round his left thumb, took the bomb in his right hand and gave it a scratch.

He evidently had some doubts as to whether the first scratch had lighted the fuse, because after glancing at it he proceeded to give it a second scratch before throwing it.

I need hardly say that I had already made home base in the bomb-proof and was perfectly

satisfied to watch from there his second effort to get a light, which was crowned with complete success.

After watching the way these three bombs were started and thrown I now wanted to watch the rest of them explode. So after considerable discussion between the staff-officer who had me in charge and the officer of explosives as to just how much danger there was in the operation, we moved out of the trench up to the top of a little rise about fifty yards to the right, where we ensconced ourselves in some bushes. The soldiers were all kept at their original distances of 200 yards behind the trench. [96]

From my new position I got an excellent view of the engineer whirling his arm and letting fly; of the heavy black objects rushing through the air; of the accuracy with which they hit the dummy trench; of the lazy manner in which they rolled only two or three feet along the ground before coming to rest, and of the treacherous inertia with which each lay apparently as dead and cold as a piece of coal dropped by some passing coal-cart, while the second of time which possibly elapsed seemed like a minute at the least. Then came an amazingly instantaneous burst of lead-colored smoke covering a circle some forty yards in diameter, accompanied by an explosion of surprising violence. I could see no flash of fire at all.

Next came the new aerial torpedo fired from the new gun. (The old little mortar with the black powder was not used.) The new gun made practically no report in discharging the torpedo. It was beautiful to watch the slender fishlike projectile go sailing in a high and graceful arc up, up, up, against the sky and then down, down, down, until it landed just beyond the wire entanglements. But it really never did land, for it had a percussion device in its nose which exploded it on touching ground. This big torpedo had a reduced charge of explosive so as not to destroy too much of the field. Judging by the report of this reduced charge, the full charge going off must be the grandfather of all explosions. [97]

Next came the two incendiary bombs. One of these burst on contact, setting fire to the patch of grass where it landed. The other had a fuse which shot out a stream of golden sparks like fireworks before exploding. This bomb threw burning liquid in all directions, setting many fires in the grass for a radius of several yards.

Last came the asphyxiating bomb. It consisted of a sphere formed by five pieces of perforated iron held loosely together in a sort of disjointed shell by a little wire basket. Inside this openwork ball hung a small glass vessel full of acid. When the engineer threw the ball against the ground the five pieces of metal shell collapsed onto the glass, breaking it and liberating the acid, which made a wet splash on the ground. This acid in turn makes a gas which the French somewhat euphemistically call "gas timide." [98]

To show that this gas was not poisonous, like the German gases, we were invited to stand in a close circle right around the fragments of the bomb immediately after it had been thrown, with our heads bent over. We stood and stood, sniffing away, but could detect no gas of any kind.

"Ah," said the officer of explosives, "in the full open air like this our 'gas timide' takes longer to be noticed, but in an inclosed space it works very rapidly."

Hardly had he finished speaking when I began to notice a smell something like wood alcohol. At the same time my eyes began to stream with tears, my nose felt as though it was indulging in one long continuous sneeze, and I turned hastily away, coughing and sputtering and wiping my eyes, with an officer on each side keeping me active company.

"If that's a 'timide' gas," I remarked to one of the officers as we left the pupils to begin actual practice, "I'd hate to meet a fierce one."

VI

WITH THE BELGIAN BATTERIES

HEADQUARTERS OF THE BELGIAN ARMY,

LA PANNE, BELGIUM, *Aug. 30.*

Yesterday I spent a day with the Belgian artillery. In the morning at ten o'clock Commandant L —, who had me in charge, called for me at the very comfortable seaside hotel where I am staying. In his military motor we threaded our way through the streets of the town. These were jammed with thousands of Belgian soldiers enjoying their six days of rest before returning for three days in the front trenches (followed by six days in reserve and three days again in the front trenches). A cheerful, well-fed-looking lot of men they are, not smart, but husky-looking in their new khaki uniforms and greatcoats.

"Alas!" an infantry Captain yesterday complained to me, "they are fine soldiers and have good uniforms, but we cannot get the men to look 'chic' in them like the British. Just look at those caps! They've pulled them and twisted them about to suit their ideas! Those caps a few days ago were 'chic' caps! And now, mon Dieu! look at them!" [100]

However, I confess I was not much interested in whether these privates were Belgian Beau Brummels or not. I had come to Flanders not to inspect them on parade, but to watch them work

on the firing line. There I found them scrupulously clean, very patient and wholly courageous, attributes which are more important than creased trousers, unwrinkled jackets and well-blocked caps.

Once free from La Panne, our motor made good time along the country road till we reached Furnes. There we stopped to take some photographs of the beautiful old Hôtel de Ville which the German shells that drop in from time to time have left practically undamaged.

From Furnes on we took the straight road to Ypres. The road was for a time quite congested with ammunition-wagons, ambulances, supply-lorries, etc. On our left we passed an encampment of mitrailleuse dog-teams; on our right a park of British armored motor-cannon.

We passed, too, long lines of trolley-cars packed with cheerful soldiers being brought back from the front for their period of rest, and with others going out to take their places. Thus the humble street-car has taken its place in the machinery of war. [101]

Soon we turned into another road which led us to the village of Lampernisse. Here we visited and photographed the ruins of the church. Not very long ago the Germans dropped a big shell into this church and killed forty-two chasseurs who were sleeping in it. They are buried in the graveyard in one big grave. Subsequently the Germans, believing that the steeple of the church was being used for observation purposes, kept on shelling it till they brought it all down, and incidentally wrecked what remained of the village.

From here on our movements must be shrouded in mystery, but ultimately at about 11.45 we reached a humble group of farm buildings, the headquarters of Colonel D—, commanding the artillery of the sector. We found him in a little bomb-proof telephone central built onto one of the farm buildings. With a Major and a Captain he was poring over very large scale maps spread on a table. Behind him a soldier sat at a telephone switchboard. From the outside a whole sheaf of telephone wires ran away, in various directions. [102]

My Commandant presented me to the Colonel and explained my desire to see some howitzers in action.

"Perfect!" exclaimed the Colonel genially. "We have just definitely located a German blockhouse in their defense system and at two o'clock this afternoon we are going to destroy it with one of our 150-millimetre howitzers. So if you will honor the Villa Beausejour with your company at lunch you can afterward watch the howitzer work."

The old farm-house had been euphemistically christened the Villa Beausejour by the Colonel's staff.

Inviting me into the bomb-proof, the Colonel then showed me on one of the large scale maps the whole lay of the land. Red lines indicated the Belgian intrenchments, blue lines the German. In the same way all over the map behind the red line the Belgian batteries were indicated in red, while the same held good in blue of those German batteries which the Belgians had managed to locate. Some of these latter were false emplacements. It was only when a little blue cannon was drawn behind the emplacement that an actual gun was indicated. [103]

The Colonel pointed out to me on this map the exact location of the Villa Beausejour, of the blockhouse which was to be destroyed, and of the gun which was to destroy it. He also showed me photographs of the German positions taken from Belgian aeroplanes. Taking one of these photographs and comparing it with a map, he explained to me how the map showed only one road leading to a certain spot, while the photograph showed a new second road leading to the same spot. This indicated the existence of a concealed battery at that place.

The telephone bell rang. "This is Number 12," answered the soldier-operator. He listened for a few moments and then told the Colonel that Headquarters wished him to send over an officer after lunch to cross-question the two German prisoners just captured for information which might be of use to his artillery.

"Tell them I shall do so," replied the Colonel.

As we had another half-hour before lunch, he deputed one of his officers to take me to a battery of 75's not far off and incidentally show me some of the shell-holes made in the neighborhood by the German "marmites," as the French and Belgians call the big high-explosive shells. [104]

A brisk walk brought us to the 75's, cleverly concealed in an artificial wood which had been transplanted bodily. The Captain in Command showed me the guns, and also a fine bomb-proof shelter which he had just completed. It was very much needed, as, in spite of the artificial woods, the Germans had roughly located his battery, and whenever any Belgian 75's in his neighborhood open up on the enemy they immediately cut loose on his battery. The whole surface of the fields for hundreds of yards around was pockmarked with shell-holes.

He showed me one of his guns where a curious thing had happened. A couple of days before a German shell had hit obliquely the steel shield of this gun and had glanced off through the left wheel, knocking the spokes out on its way. The shell had then entered the ammunition-caisson standing next to the gun, had there burst, hurling the heavy caisson bodily through the air to where its wreck landed upside down, and had not exploded its contents of shells.



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"COLONEL D—, COMMANDING THE ARTILLERY OF THE SECTOR"



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**THE AUTHOR IN ONE OF THE BIGGEST SHELL-PITS, WHICH WERE
TEN FEET DEEP AND TWENTY FEET IN DIAMETER**

After taking photographs of some of the biggest shell-pits, which were some ten feet deep and twenty feet in diameter, we returned to the Villa Beausejour and lunch. We sat down fourteen to lunch—the Colonel, ten artillery officers, the Chaplain, my Commandant and I. [105]

Lunch consisted of potato soup, paté de foie gras, vegetables, strawberry-jam pie, cheese and coffee. There was no wine to start with, but one of the officers soon came in with two bottles of white wine, which we all mixed with our mineral-water.

The talk ran mostly on the two German prisoners.

"I certainly hope we shall be able to find out from them just where that battery is that has been giving us all this trouble lately," exclaimed one officer.

"And those howitzers that I can't locate," from another.

"And where that body of troops to the right sleeps," from a third.

"Perhaps they'll know in which of those farms the German headquarters are," from a fourth.

It appeared that the prisoners were from German Poland. When the Belgian artillery had the day before driven the German troops into their bomb-proofs these two had seized the opportunity to crawl forward out of the trench, through the wire entanglements, across the open to a Belgian advanced listening-post, where they had surrendered. They were now at General Headquarters and had already given much valuable information, including the unusually large number of men who slept during the daytime in the blockhouse, and the presence in a certain farm of a number of German officers. [106]

A Captain of a battery of 75's who sat near me at lunch, was going to tackle the farm-house that afternoon with his guns. The Captain in command of my howitzers was not at lunch, as he was already on his way to his observation-post, situated at the extreme front, within 270 yards of the blockhouse. From there he was going to correct the howitzer fire, over some four kilometres of telephone line connecting his observation-post with his guns.

A good deal of the talk at lunch was devoted to anathematizing a certain general-staff officer who had charge of the uniforming of the army and, apparently, was bent on changing the new khaki caps of the officers from the British shape, which they all liked, to the French shape. [107]

A good story was told to illustrate the amazing efficiency of the German intelligence

department. One day when the army was being reuniformed in khaki, a certain regiment of chasseurs was ordered to leave their trenches right after dark that night to march to the rear for the purpose of having their new uniforms issued to them. An hour or two after they had received this order the Germans right opposite them hoisted a great placard above their trenches. On it was sign-painted:

"Good-bye, brave chasseurs! Run along to get your new uniforms at seventeen francs fifty apiece!"

Lunch being finished, my Commandant and I said good-bye all round and, with detailed directions, started on a half-hour's walk to find the howitzer battery. The Chaplain, in khaki, with an old black umbrella and a long fishing-pole, came along as far as the first canal. There, standing on a flat bit of embankment between two shell-holes, he placidly began to fish.

The artillery, which had been booming in a desultory way all morning, had of course stopped during the lunch-hour. For the artillerymen on both sides certainly keep union rules in laying off when the time for the dinner-pail comes round. If the noon whistle blew they could not be more punctual in dropping work. [108]

Now, however, the noon-hour was over and the guns again began to take up their monotonous bass drumming. For a full half-hour we walked, first along a deserted wagon-road, then to the left, along a path by the bank of a canal, past an artificial hedge here and an artificial grove of trees there. Some of these had batteries ambushed in them, others were shams to divert the attention of the German aviators and the fire of the German artillery from the real emplacements.

Finally, we came to a tall false hedge made of withered saplings wired together. In the lee of this hedge was a low flat roof, perhaps three feet above the surface of the ground, covered with a sprinkling of earth and boughs. Under this we climbed down into a cellar-like excavation about three feet deep, giving six feet of head room.

Here I first made the acquaintance of Julia. I found her standing with her back to me under the plank shelter, with only her exceedingly short and retroussé nose sniffing up at the leaden patch of threatening sky which showed between the forward edge of the roof and the top of the high false hedge in front. No one could well call Julia beautiful, but there was power in every line and curve of her. She was a particularly short-muzzled 150-millimetre heavy field-howitzer, and she had been christened Julia in chalk letters across the back of her thick steel shield by the members of her devoted crew. [109]

On her breech were engraved a crown and a big "C. I.," for she and her three sisters had been intended for Carol I., King of Roumania, before they were bought up by the Belgian Government. One of the four had exploded through trying to fire a 155-millimetre shell through her 150-millimetre bore, but the other three were doing fine work for their adopted country. On my way to my appointment with Julia, we had passed one of her sisters, called "Zoe," cowering up against the wall of a very disreputable old farm-house, hiding her humiliation in a hole in the ground under a plank roofing and a false hedge much like Julia's. [110]

Any one who thinks that nowadays he will see artillery ranged in imposing array, is doomed to disappointment. The artillery commander (especially of the heavier guns) goes around the countryside stealthily hiding one piece here, surreptitiously slipping another in there, always selecting the most separate and inconspicuous locations, much as a woman will wander around a hotel room stowing her pieces of jewelry here and there where the burglars will never think of looking for them. Only the burglars in the present case are hostile shells that make holes ten feet deep and twenty feet across.

Julia's crew consisted of a Lieutenant and eight men. The Lieutenant and seven of the men were grouped around the breech of the gun when I arrived. The eighth man squatted to the left by a field-telephone with the receiver held to his ear. Commandant L— introduced me to the Lieutenant, and then asked whether his Captain had reached the observation-post. The Lieutenant had not heard from him yet, but imagined he must get there any moment.

It began to rain hard, much to the vexation of the Commandant, who feared it would hide the blockhouse from the observer and put an end to the bombardment. [111]

"Oh! no," said the Lieutenant; "he's only 270 yards distant from it. He'll be able to see it all right."

On the board floor to the left, between the telephone and the front wall of the excavation, were piled twenty-five or thirty wicked-looking 150-millimetre high-explosive shells. They were conical in shape, about 2½ feet long and 6 inches in diameter, made of steel, with a copper band around them near the base, and a copper nose.

I started to lift one of them, and only succeeded at the second attempt. They weighed about 110 pounds apiece.

Stacked next to them were a corresponding number of hollow copper cylinders containing stiff little cream-colored children's belts, with eyelet-holes down the middle, coiled neatly inside them. Some of them had one coil; others two coils, one on top of the other; others three coils superimposed. These were the propelling charges for the shells, and were of three strengths according as one, two or three of the coils of cream-colored explosive were put in the copper shells. They were topped off with a heavy felt pad which fitted neatly into the cylinder. [112]

Meantime the rain came down in torrents and began to leak through the thin plank roofing in little streams which were very hard to dodge.

The Lieutenant showed us a bomb-proof which he had just begun to build into the earth wall of the cellar, behind the stack of shells. He was going to cover it with a concrete roof, pile a few feet of earth on top of that, then some sand-bags, and top the whole off with boulders, so as to make any shell hitting it explode at once on the surface, instead of boring half-way down before exploding. He was doing all this work with his eight men at night when they were not handling the gun. During the day they slept except when, as now, they wanted to disturb the sleep of the enemy. This bomb-proof was only meant for refuge when the Germans began bombarding him. The men's regular sleeping-quarters were a little to the rear.

And still the rain came down, the air became raw and cold, and the little waterfalls became harder and harder to dodge. But the man at the telephone squatted patiently by the wall, and his seven mates chatted placidly together in incomprehensible Flemish, switching instantly to French when answering any question the Lieutenant put to them. [113]

The Lieutenant explained how the gun was aimed, the sighting device showing a stake in line with a church steeple; only as there was nothing to be seen in front of Julia except an earth bank and ten feet of false hedge, it stands to reason that stake and steeple were behind her and appeared, not through a telescope as I had just stupidly thought, but as a reflection in a mirror—which is the way all well-conducted howitzers are aimed.

Finally, after an hour's wait the Lieutenant rang up his Major on the telephone and asked whether anything was amiss with the Captain. No; the Captain was only linking up a new telephone connection nearly four kilometres in front of us.

The Lieutenant pointed out a false hedge some hundred yards behind us.

"That is exceedingly dangerous for us here," he explained. "It is much too close to us. It should be at least 150 yards further removed. If it draws the German fire, as it is intended to do, that fire is just as apt to hit us as the false hedge. It was put up as a protection to another gun which was off there to the right, but it's a very uncomfortable thing to have near us, especially before we have a bomb-proof to crawl into." [114]

"Ting—aling—aling!" went the telephone bell. The soldier listened. "The Captain says, 'Are you all ready?'"

"Tell him 'yes'," replied the Lieutenant.

"Aim for 3,750 metres," repeated the soldier at the telephone.

The Lieutenant and a couple of his men busied themselves around the sight and elevating cranks of the gun. Another man removed a leather cap which had been fitted over Julia's nose to keep the rain out.

I was busy sticking cotton wool in my ears.

"The Captain says to say when you are ready and he will give the order to fire."

"All ready," said the Lieutenant, backing away from Julia and holding a thick white cord in his hand which ran from her to him.

"All ready," replied the soldier into the telephone. [115]

"Tirez!" ("Fire!") said he a fraction of a second later.

The Lieutenant's arm gave a jerk, the whole front of the shelter was a mass of blood-red flame, there was a bellow of sound, the barrel of the great gun ran smoothly three feet or so back into the cellar and then smoothly forward again. There was a rush of air around my legs.

Almost simultaneously with the report I heard with one ear the telephonist say, "Coup parti" ("The shot has left"), while with the other I listened to the long-drawn wheeze with which the projectile mounted into the sky on its mountain-high trajectory. In the second which had meanwhile elapsed one of the artillerymen had swung open the breech of the gun, another had taken out the now empty copper cylinder and placed it on the floor to the right of Julia, a third had lifted a new shell and with the aid of the second had run it into the breech, and a fourth had slipped in a fresh copper cylinder containing a full charge of three of the little cream-colored tape-coils. Whereupon the first artilleryman had swung to and locked the breech again. [116]

"In eighteen seconds you should hear the shell explode," said the Lieutenant, taking his stand by the telephonist with an open notebook and pencil in his hands—"15, 16, 17, 18"—I finished counting. Boom! came the distant explosion.

A few seconds of silence.

"Plus 3," announced the telephonist, repeating an order from the distant Captain.

The Lieutenant made an entry in his notebook and simultaneously rattled off some figures like a football quarterback. The men worked over the sights and cranks, while my Commandant said to me: "That shot was too far to the right; plus 3 means five three-thousandths further to the left."

"All ready," said the Lieutenant.

"All ready," repeated the telephonist, and then:

"Tirez!" and again the twitch of the white cord, the blood-red flame, the roar, the slow, easy recoil, the diminishing wheeze, the "Coup parti," the eighteen seconds' silence, and the distant boom.

"Plus 4," sang out the telephonist, and there was a mechanical repetition of operations. "The observer corrected the first shot about ten metres to the left, and, finding that was not enough, corrected the second shot another fifteen metres to the left. They'll edge along like that till they reach the blockhouse, destroying the trench to right of it on the way. Then, when they've destroyed the blockhouse completely, if that does not take up all the day's allowance of shells, they'll expend the remainder on knocking out the trench to the left of the blockhouse. To-day's allowance for Julia is twenty shells, and probably she will use up most of them on the blockhouse to make a thorough job of it."

[117]

"Tirez!" came the telephonist's voice, and as the roar was succeeded by silence, my Commandant exclaimed to me: "Filons!" French slang for which the American equivalent is, "Let us beat it!"

As I reluctantly crawled up into the rain after having shaken hands with the Lieutenant, my Commandant explained that the Germans would undoubtedly begin to search the immediate vicinity with their artillery to try to silence the gun which was throwing the "marmites" into them. As we had the provocative false hedge right behind us and no bomb-proof to crawl into, I had to agree that he was prudent.

[118]

And so we "beat it" through the downpour, sliding around in the oily Flemish mud, while the German guns began to drop whole kitchen-loads of "marmites" into a poor wrecked village five hundred yards to our left, from which they evidently suspected that our shots had come.

As we slithered along, drenched to the skin, toward the "Villa Beausejour" and our waiting motor, we could hear the Captain of 75's letting off salvo after salvo at the farm-house of which the prisoners had informed him, while behind us Julia continued to explode at half-minute intervals. There was all the difference in the world between the dry short report of the big howitzer and the hollower, sharper, more penetrating explosion of the 75's.

To-day I learned from the Captain of the 75's that his first few volleys had set the farm-house on fire. A lot of soldiers had come running to put the fire out. His guns kept on dropping and scattering these until, with a series of loud explosions, the whole farm-house had blown up. It turned out that it was not an officers' headquarters, but an ammunition store-house.

[119]

As to our blockhouse, I understand that it was completely demolished, though whether or not it took the whole of Julia's twenty shells to complete the work I was unable to learn.

VII

[120]

IN THE FLEMISH TRENCHES

HEADQUARTERS OF THE BELGIAN ARMY,

LA PANNE, *Aug. 30.*

To-day I was given the opportunity of comparing the trenches of Belgium with those I had visited in France. It was a very interesting contrast.

Commandant L—, who still had me in charge, picked me up at my hotel at 10 o'clock in the morning. Proceedings were delayed while I insisted on taking a snap-shot of him in the nickel-steel skull-cap which he wore inside his khaki cap.



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**COMMANDANT L— IN THE NICKEL-STEEL SKULL-CAP WHICH
HE WORE INSIDE HIS KHAKI CAP**

More and more of the French officers are wearing these helmets, and he had just ordered his from Paris. It is an admirable protection, very tough, not at all heavy, tucked inside the sweatband of the cap and entirely invisible. If a bullet hits it straight point-blank it will, of course, penetrate and carry a piece of the steel helmet into the wearer's head with it. But a bullet hitting thus would be fatal anyway. While if the bullet is spent, or if it hits at an angle, the helmet will deflect it.

[121]

On the way to the trenches we stopped off at the Belgian aerodrome, where an Aviation Captain showed and explained to me the details of the Voisin and Nieuport machines, which were chiefly used, including the ingenious bomb-dropping mechanism and the wireless apparatus.

The Belgians certainly deserve the utmost credit for the way in which they have developed their air service from nothing at the beginning of the war to a highly efficient aviation corps. But for that matter their whole army has been reorganized on an admirable basis.

One must realize the shattered condition in which they were swept from Antwerp back to the very fringe of their country behind the Yser. One must realize that they are practically an army without a country. One must understand that when they get furloughs they cannot spend them with their families in their homes, getting comfort and encouragement. They either stay within sound of the firing or spend a bleak six days among the strangers of England or of Northern France. When all this is considered their material reorganization and the preservation of their *morale* in its present splendid shape is a remarkable achievement.

[122]

And let no one forget that if the British proudly saved the French by their retreat from Mons (which no one seems likely to be allowed to forget) it is equally certain that the shattered Belgian army humbly saved the British on the Yser.

Rolling along the straight highroad to Y— we passed the usual congestion of troop-filled trolley-cars, lorries, ambulances, farm-wagons, officers' autos and motor-cyclists. Our military motor was an excellent one, with the one fault that it seemed extremely difficult for the chauffeur to shift his gear from neutral into low speed, and he would frequently get hung up for several

seconds with the car at a standstill till finally he got his gears in mesh.

At one point we stopped to see an interesting manifestation of the newly developing art of war. A giant 12-inch British naval gun was mounted on a specially designed railroad truck. It stood on a railway siding, with its ammunition-car coupled on behind. A kind of crane stood ready to swing the huge shells from the ammunition-car to the breech of the gun. When some object was found worth firing 12-inch shells at, the engine backed up to the gun-truck with steam up. The track was cleared.

[123]

Then the great gun did its firing at the object, and forthwith was whisked away one, five or ten miles down the track out of danger of the German replies. This is what, officers seem agreed, will take the place of the antiquated fixed fortresses—miles of railway loops and sidings running behind artificial concealments or in semi-open cuts, with batteries of heavy fortress guns shuttling to and fro, firing and changing position constantly.

We motored on till we neared the point where the Belgian army ends and the French begins. Here we paid our respects to the General in command of the division we were visiting. He promptly asked us to lunch, and a very good lunch it was: Vegetable soup, some entrée which I could not identify, shoulder of mutton with potatoes and beans, cantaloupe, cheese and black coffee, with a choice between beer, claret and white wine to drink at lunch, a glass of champagne at dessert, and liqueurs with the coffee.

The conversation of the officers turned largely on what was happening to their friends and acquaintances in Belgium, about whom they heard by mail through Switzerland or Holland. One young countess aroused considerable discussion. She had been sitting in a street-car in Brussels with a Belgian friend when a German officer boarded the car. Her friend bowed to the officer.

[124]

"What! You bow to a pig like that!" cried the countess. Whereupon the officer had stopped the car and placed her under arrest. She had been given her choice between two months in prison or ten thousand francs' fine, and had paid the fine.

Certain of the officers held that she had been unpatriotic in not accepting imprisonment rather than help the German exchequer. Others felt she had done enough in insulting the officer and rebuking her friend. The talk dwelt, too, on certain other Belgian ladies who had compromised with their patriotism to the extent of taking up social relations with the invaders. From what I heard I feel sorry for these over-hospitable ladies when the Belgians are once more masters of their own country.

After lunch I began to feel more and more impatient to get started for the trenches, but I had already learned too much of etiquette at the front to show it. For the officers of all the armies feel that it is infinitely more important to prove to you that they can give you a good cup of coffee and a good cigar than it is to show you the most beautiful battle that was ever fought. They are, too, all alike obsessed with the very human fallacy that the little ingenuities and contrivances which they have devised for their personal comfort, safety or delectation must be of infinitely more absorbing interest to the visitor than the guns and the trenches, which to them are such an old and boring story.

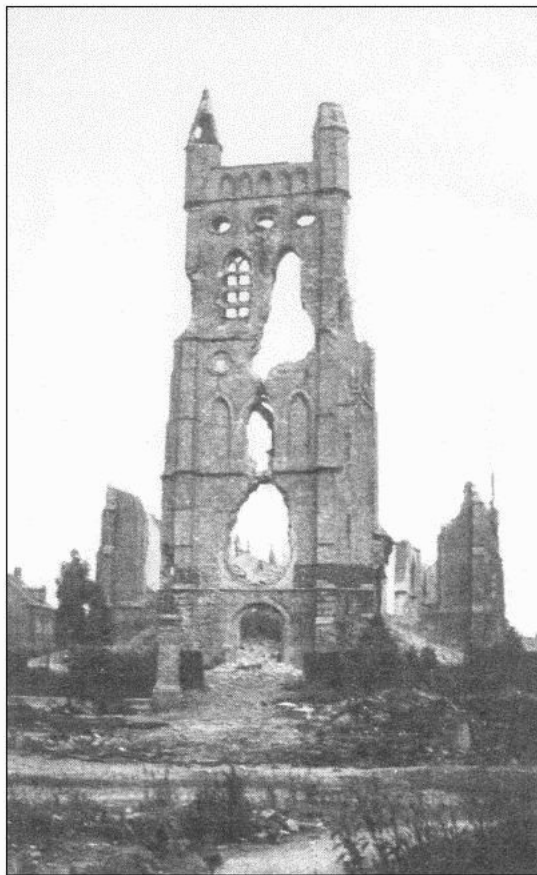
[125]

So now we had to admire the way one officer had had his sleeping-shack wall-papered, how another had invented some home-made shower-baths, how a third had had a genuine heavy wooden bedstead installed instead of a camp cot.

However, finally we made our adieus and motored away with full directions from the General as to how to meet him at 4 o'clock at an observation-post from which he was to witness an interesting bombardment. As it was then a quarter to 3, my hopes of getting into the trenches began to look slim.

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We were now motoring straight toward the front over a stretch of country which the Germans had been profusely bombarding. The road was full of holes where the Belgian blocks had been torn out by shells. We bumped over the shallower ones and dodged the deeper ones, but every now and then the chauffeur would miscalculate the depth of a hole and the car would come down on its axle with a prodigious thump. By shutting one's eyes one could easily imagine one's self taxicabbing along a New York side-street.



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**"THE CHAUFFEUR REACHED THE
OPEN PLACE BY THE CHURCH"**



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**ON THE SHATTERED CHURCH HUNG
THIS CRUCIFIX INTACT THOUGH
SURROUNDED BY SHRAPNEL HOLES**

The guns had, of course, by now resumed work after their lunch-time siesta and were

grumbling away at each other in great shape. Presently we came to a deserted village, which could be seen from some of the German artillery positions and which they shelled on the slightest provocation. The General had particularly told us to run through the village in a hurry, especially across the open place around the church. When we got safely out of the other end of the place, he had said, we might leave our motor and sneak back on foot to take photographs. This having been carefully explained to the chauffeur, he bumped us swiftly down the ruined main street, reached the open place by the church, where he had to turn to the right, came suddenly on top of a big, deep shell-hole, just dodged it by slapping on his emergency, and stood stock-still trying to get into first speed.

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The Commandant cursed and I swore, the Commandant's orderly sitting next the chauffeur shook his fist at the chauffeur, and the chauffeur shook one fist at his gears while with the other he wrenched and hauled at his lever.

There is no use denying that we were all equally nervous. Every instant we expected to see the first of a stream of shells explode near us. Finally, after the suspense had in reality lasted not more than six or eight seconds, the accursed low gear meekly meshed and we bumped off down the side-street, heaving deep sighs of relief.

Outside the utterly ruined village we left our car behind a clump of trees and walked back to take some photographs of what had been the church. Then into the motor and on again till we stopped at the cross-road which led directly to the front.

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Here we left our motor. The rain suddenly beginning to come down in sheets, we ducked into a ruined house whose roof some freak of the shells had allowed to remain quite intact. We were quickly joined by about fifty infantrymen who had been working at a reserve line of intrenchments in the fields outside. Here we all waited for ten minutes till the rain-squall stopped.

It may not be a particularly pretty subject, but I think it well worth stating that that mass of soldiers, packed into the small inclosed space, left the air as pure and untainted at the end of those ten minutes as it had been before they jammed their way in. I had noticed the same thing the day before during the two hours that I had spent by the howitzer with the nine men of the crew. There is no doubt about it that even the English—who of course originally invented and patented personal cleanliness in this world—will have to scrub exceedingly hard to keep up with the Belgians.

The rain having stopped, we slipped and slithered on foot along the byroad till we came to a prairie-dog village of bomb-proofs with soldiers' heads popping out of the little openings and then popping in again. Here we met a young First Lieutenant, who very kindly offered to show us the quickest way to the communicating trench, and off we marched.

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At this point we were just about half-way between the two opposing bodies of artillery. High in air, right above our heads, the shells of the two armies, hurtling along in opposite directions, met and passed each other on their way. These big projectiles in passing over us sounded exactly as if they were running along aerial rails. You could hear them rattling along these rails, bumping over the rail joints, banging over switches. It was a perfect illusion. By closing your eyes you could have sworn that you were standing under Brooklyn Bridge hearing the procession of street-cars, with silenced gongs, roll by at express speed overhead. First there would be a distant report, then silence as the shell rose, and then suddenly it would get on the rails, rattle up to the top of its grade, coast down the grade the other side and leave the tracks a second or two before the final explosion.

Some ten minutes later we were walking along a broad road, with the noise of exploding shells getting louder and louder ahead. Then suddenly a perfect swarm of bullets came chirping past us.

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"Just this little bit of the road is visible from the German lines," remarked the Lieutenant. "They are about 500 metres away from us here."

It must have been comical to see the way in which the Commandant, his orderly and I did an Indian war-dance down that road, all three bent double. The Lieutenant must have caught the contagion from us, for, as more bullets came by, zeup! zeup! zeup! he doubled up himself. In a few seconds, however, he said we were out of sight again, and so we straightened up and walked forward proudly erect, although every little while when some bullets went by just over our heads we showed distinct tendencies to collapse anew.

Now we came to the communication trench and climbed down into it one after the other. It was very different from the French "boyaux," or communicating trenches. Those were dug a good seven feet deep almost everywhere, and never less than six feet. So that one could walk about in them at one's ease without paying any attention to the bullets that cracked up above. Only a shell plunging directly into one of these three feet wide, seven feet deep ditches could be dangerous.

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But the Belgians could not dig down more than about two and one-half feet at the most without striking water. That, with an earth and sod rampart about two feet high, gave a protection never more than five feet at its highest and often under four feet in height. Now, it probably sounds very easy to keep sheltered while walking along behind four feet of ditch and parapet, but if any one tries it for more than five minutes at a time he will know what a real backache feels like.

This trench, which ran forward in very short abrupt zigzags, was floored with pieces of wicker-work to prevent sinking into the mud. The half-hour's rain had filled long stretches of it ankle-deep with water.

Crouched double, we waded along in single file, the Lieutenant, myself, the Commandant and his orderly. The bullets were striking some ruined farm buildings close on our left with sharp cracks. They hit the breastworks with muffled thuds and passed close over the breastwork with a kind of buzzing whistle. We paddled along till suddenly we came to a place where, for some unaccountable reason, the trench stopped, renewing itself again perhaps three or four yards further on. Across the unsheltered surface of the ground which intervened ran a slack telephone wire some two feet above the ground.

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"You'd better hurry up across here," remarked the Lieutenant as he scrambled out of the trench, took a couple of strides, swung first one leg and then the other over the telephone wire, took a couple of strides more and dropped into the trench beyond.

There is not the slightest question as to the hurry in which I negotiated this obstacle. Then, to see what I must have looked like, I turned to watch the two who were following me. The Commandant, I must confess, managed to accomplish the feat in a fashion not wholly destitute of dignity. But the way his orderly bounded out of the trench, hurdled the telephone wire and with one lithe leap descended upon us in the other trench was a sight for sore eyes. It certainly must have drawn a chuckle from the German sharpshooters witnessing it through their telescopic sights.

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A hundred yards or so further on we came to a halt at an angle in the communication trench from which could be had a good view of the front.

Lifting my head cautiously till my eyes were just above the edge of the rampart, I could see some 250 yards ahead the chocolate-colored back of the Belgian front trench. For where the chalky soil of Champagne makes the trenches there very white in color, the boggy soil of Belgium is a rich brown.

Beyond the Belgian front trench ran a line of tall trees; beyond the line of trees again ran another brown line.

"That's the German front line, I suppose?" I said to the Lieutenant.

"No, that's their second line you're looking at. Raise your head a little more, and right over the top of our front-line trenches you'll see their front line."

I craned my neck, and, sure enough, another brown line hove into view apparently only a few yards ahead of the Belgian front line, with the usual barbed-wire tangle in front of it.

"That trench is about 100 metres from our front trench," said the Lieutenant. "The Germans have got all that barbed wire before their front trench, but we don't need wire because we have the Y— Canal right before our front trench. Only it flows so close under the breastworks that you can't see it from here."

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A great cloud of jet-black smoke suddenly welled up from the Belgian front trench.

"Ah, that's a six-inch bomb they've thrown into our trench with one of their 'minenwerfer,'" exclaimed the Lieutenant.

The report of the explosion from where we stood, not more than 250 metres away, was not loud.

The artillery was hard at it. Big clouds of black smoke rose sluggishly by the German trench where the Belgian high-explosive shells were bursting. Livelier clouds of white indicated the shrapnel explosions.

I was craning my neck to see what damage was being done the German trench when a whole swarm of bullets struck very close indeed to my head. The Lieutenant pulled me down into the trench.

"They shot at you that time, all right!" he laughed.

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"Impossible!" I answered. "I can only barely see their trench over the top of your first-line trench, so how could they possibly see me from there?"

"Ah, but they were not shooting at you from there. They are up in the tops of some of those trees," he explained, pointing to the row of tall, innocent-looking trees. "Their sharpshooters climb up at night and snipe from there all day, and those of them whom we do not locate and kill climb down again the next night. They have telescopic sights on their rifles, and these rifles are mounted on little tripods so that they can fix their aim immovably on some spot where they think they have seen a movement; and the next time the movement comes, ping! Only I don't think they can use the tripods up in the trees."

At the Lieutenant's suggestion we scattered down along the trench in case our little crowd might have been observed from a tree and an artilleryman might try his luck on us.

Further down the trench where I took my new stand I went on watching the shells burst, and listening to the projectiles from the opposing sides go rattling along their invisible rails high overhead.

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A little off to our right the French 75's were firing so quickly that I hoped it would develop into the famous "trommelfeuer" ("drum-roll fire," as the Germans call it), but it did not. We had received word that they were going to fire 400 rounds at some objective whose nature I did not learn. They certainly were firing them, and losing no time about it, either.

I could not see their shells burst, as the lines took a turn just to our right and disappeared behind some trees.

At the points where the armies of different nationalities connect they are always scrupulously careful to inform each other what artillery work they have in preparation, so that a sudden violent cannonade on the part of one army will not alarm the next with the idea that a German assault is being resisted.



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**UNDER HEAVY FIRE IN A BELGIAN COMMUNICATING-TRENCH.
(THE FIGURE STANDING UPRIGHT JUST BEHIND THE AUTHOR
IS THE LIEUTENANT, WHO STRAIGHTENED UP DURING THE
MOMENT THE SNAPSHOT WAS BEING TAKEN BUT WAS NOT HIT)**

It was particularly interesting to watch the Belgian soldiers, who every few yards squatted placidly in the trench, short spades and trowels in hand, busily engaged in digging little pits about two feet deep in the bottom of the trench, and then scooping out little channels running to these pits. These channels would drain the surrounding yard or two of trench bottom into the pits, leaving muddy patches where a moment before three or four inches of water had stood. There the Belgian soldiers squatted like children making mud pies at the seashore, and chatted complacently in Flemish while they fought the enemy, who was only less hateful to them than the Germans. A splendid, cool, nerveless lot of men, doing their work unostentatiously but efficiently, neither dashing on the one hand nor dogged on the other, but gifted with the admirable *morale* of the imperturbably matter-of-fact.

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Suddenly I heard an exclamation from one of the soldiers. Looking where he pointed, I saw, just beyond the Belgian front trench, a huge column of muddy water standing bolt upright against the horizon. It stood there motionless until I began to think it would remain a permanent fixture in the landscape. Then it suddenly collapsed. A Belgian shell falling short had soused down into the Y— Canal and exploded, sending up this five-story waterspout.

It seemed a shame not to go forward into the front trench, but with the Germans lobbing six-inch bombs in there with their "mine throwers" and the artillery getting busier all the time, the Commandant thought it would be taking too great risks. So we turned and crouched along back. As we did so, it is worthy of comment, three German shells struck not far to our left at not more than half-a-minute intervals and not one of the three exploded. It was a striking example of faulty explosives.

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We returned by a different trench, so that we did not have to repeat the acrobatic feat over the telephone wire. But we had a little excitement to make up for it, for, as I splashed along with a most intense crick in my bent back, one of the German projectiles, which was apparently running on perfect schedule along its overhead rails on its way toward the Belgian artillery, suddenly jumped the track and came hissing down toward us.

Simultaneously with the crash of the explosion I saw the men ahead of me passionately hugging the bottom of the trench, and I found myself on my knees and elbows, not a whit behind them in

my devotion.

"That was a close one," said Captain L——.

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"What was it—a 75?" I asked.

"Seventy-five nothing," he replied; "that was a 150 millimetre, and it exploded within thirty metres of your head. There—see for yourself. If we had not been in the trench that would have caught us nicely!"

I peeped over the edge of the trench and there, sure enough, was a big cloud of sooty black smoke wallowing up from behind some broken masonry not more than thirty yards off.

"Filons!" ("Let us beat it!") said the Commandant tersely, and we did.

VIII

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LESSONS

The great lesson that a visit to England, France and what remains of Belgium to-day will teach any one who is willing to be taught by hard facts and not by wistful visions is that peace in the near future is quite impossible. For the only peace, in the conviction of the Allies, that will end this war is a peace neither of conciliation nor of compromise, but a peace whose terms are arbitrarily imposed by one side and of necessity submitted to by the other.

That is the end to which the Allies are determined to fight, whether that end is achieved by the more merciful method of decisive military victory or must be gained by the more terrible pressure of complete financial, industrial and economic prostration.

Any attempt to abort this object by mediatory proposals, whether Pontifical or Presidential, the Allies frankly declare they would consider an inopportune impertinence.

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I have had the privilege of studying the spirit of the English, the French and the Belgians at a time when that spirit was being severely tested—when their fortunes were at their lowest ebb since the days just before the battle of the Marne. Their spring advance had utterly failed to materialize; throughout the summer they had been held in almost complete check by the Germans' depleted line. The Dardanelles had turned out to be a slaughter-house, with success appearing more and more precarious, and the only alternative to success seeming to be disaster.

The starvation of Germany had become a conceded impossibility. Her dearth of rubber, copper, cotton, etc., had assumed more and more the nature of a superable handicap rather than a decisive crippling. Her financial situation had already made fools of so many economic seers that they had become less and less didactic regarding her impending bankruptcy.

The practical success of allied diplomacy among the Balkan neutrals had grown to seem more and more dubious.

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Finally, Russia had been so manhandled that in the opinion of British and French military authorities with whom I talked it would take her from one to two years to reorganize her armies into condition for an effective offensive.

Yet, in spite of all these admitted disadvantages, I did not meet a single Frenchman, Englishman or Belgian who was not sincerely confident of ultimate victory. But only an ultimate peace could, in their conviction, be victorious. An immediate peace, or a peace in the near future, no matter what the German concessions, would for the Allies be the peace of defeat.

From Germany must come, not concessions, but abandonments, or the war, with all its hideous sacrifices unredeemed, would be a failure. Such an artificially fabricated peace, such a compromise between irreconcilable principles, would be but the prelude, more or less dragged out, to a fresh conflict.

I have talked to men and women of many classes, of many degrees of education and of many grades of intelligence. I found their views unanimous and their reasons for these views so constantly the same as finally to seem almost hackneyed.

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I am aware of the existence in England of such a body of peace propagandists as the Union of Democratic Control, and in Holland of some French pacifists, and scattered here and there of Internationalists. But of all the men and women with whom I casually talked there was not one who shared these gentlemen's views.

Of all the French statements of reasons why the war must go on, which were iterated and reiterated to me, the best came from a prince, a retired naval captain and a little dressmaker. Unfortunately, they may not be quoted by name.

The prince said: "After this taste of blood the world can never remain long at peace while any powerful nation dedicates itself to the ideals and instincts of militarism. Germany, under the guidance of Prussia, is to-day such a nation. These aims and instincts have been so thoroughly absorbed by her people that, even if they sincerely wished to, these people could not eliminate them inside of two or three generations. It is ludicrous to imagine that these characteristics, which have become nearly if not quite hereditary, could be negotiated out of them. They must be subjugated out of the German people."

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The naval captain said: "It is a mere matter of arithmetic. It can be easily demonstrated that at the end of this war, with its cost on her shoulders, if France does not immediately reduce her armaments to a minimum she is absolutely bound to go bankrupt. Now, as we cannot conceivably trust any mere promises of disarmament which Germany might make, it is obvious that we must go on with this war until we have reduced her to such a condition that we can enforce disarmament upon her, and thus safely enjoy its benefits ourselves."

The little dressmaker said: "My husband has been fighting at the front for months. It would be natural for me to wish the war to end to-morrow, no matter on what terms, if I could get my husband back before he is killed. But I want the war to go on until the 'Boches' are crushed; otherwise in another ten years or so there will be a new war, and then they will come and take away not only my husband, but my son as well."

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In England the same line of reasoning prevailed. And the fact cannot be too strongly emphasized that this reasoning did not take the shape of stock arguments devised by politicians to bolster up some expedient course and drilled into the people for parrot-like repetition. The arguments were the spontaneous expression of the heartfelt convictions of all these people.

Intelligent opinion in England ranges between the two statements made to me, respectively, by a very famous Tory statesman and administrator, and by one of the best-known Liberal statesmen in English public life to-day.

The first of these was terse and to the point:

"It is the greatest mistake for your Government to feel that the United States can, by remaining neutral, help to bring the war to a close. This war will be fought to a point where no mediation will be possible or needed. No peace with Germany, signed with a Hohenzollern in power, would be worth more than twenty years' peace to the world. To make Germany's promises binding on her, her people have got to have a share in her foreign policy, and that they cannot have under the present dynasty or system."

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The second statement was:

"The best information that I can obtain from Germany is that, if she wins, the advanced party, which is in the ascendancy, plans to erect Poland into a semi-independent kingdom, contributing to it that portion of Poland which Germany herself now possesses. She will annex Belgium, probably a strip of Northern France, and possibly enough of Holland to give her command of the mouths of the Scheldt and Rhine.

"Personally I cannot feel it to be unreasonable from her point of view that she should plan to correct a situation where her great water artery, the Rhine, is bottled up at its outlet. She will also take all Courland, and this, too, is not so unreasonable, since the population is far more German than Russian. Nevertheless, if such geographical and ethnological changes as these were accomplished and to be maintained, who can conceivably imagine that Germany can afford to modify her militarism?"

"My own views as to what the general terms of peace should be if the Allies win are shared by men in both England and France whose opinions will have weight in the peace negotiations. They are:

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"To erect an independent Polish kingdom or state; to reconstitute Belgium with indemnity; to hold a plebiscite in Alsace-Lorraine, taken by a neutral, preferably the United States, in order to determine to whom they should belong, and in what proportions; to dismember Turkey, excepting Anatolia, which, being strictly Turkish, should be left to the Turks; to enforce a very large degree of disarmament upon Germany and Europe; to leave the German-speaking German Empire intact. (This talk about the deposition of the Hohenzollerns as one of the peace terms is sheer impertinence.)

"Now, you must readily perceive that any peace made in the near future must conform or approximate to the German plans which I have outlined and must involve a continuance of militarism and a standing incitement to fresh wars. While a peace on the terms which we favor, a peace that will perpetuate peace, must be wrung from a decisively beaten Germany, and is therefore a long way off. That is why we shall have to go through a very bad time of it for some period to come, and why our ultimate victory will be at least one year, and possibly two or three years off."

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The keenest realization that victory will be slow, the completest confidence that its certainty is axiomatic, is to be found in the allied armies. There, ungrudgingly, they give the Germans fullest credit for their preparedness, for their foresight, for their powers of systematic and sustained labor, for their inventiveness. And they do not waste their time trying to devise discrediting substitutes for such words as "ability" in talking of their Generals, "courageousness" in talking of their soldiers, and "patriotism" in talking of their people. It is only when you get far behind the firing line that manliness merges into meanness in estimating the enemy.

Yet these very officers who paid such soldierly tributes to their antagonists were so wholly assured of eventual victory that any scepticism on my part did not irritate them, but merely moved them to good-natured smiles.

"So far," an English staff-officer remarked to me, "we English have been bungling amateurs in the art of war contending against trained professional specialists. But with a couple of years' more experience I believe we shall know as much about it as they do, and then we shall win."

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"In the last analysis, talking from the military standpoint, this war, like every war, will be won

by men," said a French staff-officer. "The Germans will not be beaten through lack of guns or ammunition or machinery or supplies, but through lack of men. How long by the aid of mechanics they can postpone the hour when the lack of men becomes fatal to them I do not know—one year, two years. But in the end, with the allied man-power steadily growing, and the German man-power steadily lessening, their military collapse is inevitable."

These are typical of a score of similar views advanced by officers, from Generals down to subalterns.

In the French army, as they show you their elaborate machine-shops mounted on motor-lorries for the repair of all the vehicles in the transport service, they will say with the most complete conviction: "This mobility is not of much importance now, but when we begin the pursuit of the 'Boches' then they will come in handy!"

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When they show you their great parks of supply-trains, each carrying three days' complete provisions for one army corps, they will tell you earnestly:

"Not much use now when the railroads do most of the carrying of supplies to the armies, but wait till the advance begins and then we shall be useful!"

When they let you examine their wonderful 75's, mounted on an automobile capable of doing over thirty miles an hour over the road, and of starting a stream of twenty-five shells a minute one minute after coming to a standstill, they will shrug their shoulders and say: "Something of a waste just now, perhaps, but when the advance is on they will do wonderful work!"

The advance! The advance! is in all their minds.

"But when will the advance begin?" you ask a chalk-powdered infantryman sweating in the sun-soaked trenches.

"Ah!" he will answer with complete unconcern. "Not yet, Monsieur. They say next spring or next summer. But then 'On les aura!'" ("We'll get them!")

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And that unconcern means far more than appears on the surface. It means that the "poilu" knows he will have another winter in the trenches, with all the terrible discomforts that soldiers dread so much more than they dread danger. He knows it, and is completely reconciled to it.

"That was the one thing we feared"—a French General admitted to me—"the effect on the men's *morale* of the certainty that they would have another winter in the trenches. But they know it now, and 'ils s'en fichent!" (to which the nearest American slang equivalent would be "they should worry!")

In the amazing New France (which the French prefer to consider a reincarnated rather than a transformed France) the people are as determined as the army. A short time ago, when the authorities first began to give the soldiers at the front their "permissions" to go home for three days, they did so with considerable apprehension that the home influence on the soldier might be a disheartening one.

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But, on the contrary, the reunion seemed to give mutual encouragement. The soldier braced up the "home folks'" confidence and pride in the army, and the home folks stimulated the soldier's confidence and pride in himself. Thus the experiment has turned out a great success.

The politicians and their fermentations are, in France, the bugbears of the army officers. This feeling of aversion and contempt extends, so far as I could make out, down through the rank and file. They feel that when a nation is at death-grips with its enemy even the most beautiful of democratic theories should be safely locked away with other luxuries; that the politicians should confine their activities to voting the funds necessary for the successful prosecution of the war, and should leave the conduct of the war severely alone.

But in France even those politicians who hanker after a finger in the military pie are unanimous for seeing the war through to a decisive victory. They may play politics about whether the Government should or should not have been removed from Paris to Bordeaux last September; they may squabble over whether General Sarrail is the persecuted military genius of the war or an incompetent officer whose removal from Verdun should never have been sugar-coated by his appointment to Gallipoli; they may intrigue to oust Millerand from the War Ministry and try to get together on Briand for his place; they may stick loyally to Joffre because an old man who is fond of fishing is not likely to become an old man on horseback.

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But, whether tirading against the evils of a bureaucracy or perorating against the iniquities of the censorship, you will find the politicians of France, Royalists, Clericals, Conservatives, Radicals and Socialists with all their subtle subdivisions, having proved their patriotism by the greatest sacrifice of which a politician is capable—having for nigh on ten months kept silent!—earnestly and honestly working for their country. They are striving, not for the quick peace of compromise which would relegate the silent, efficient soldiers to their subordinate powers and would restore to themselves all the prestige of full-throated eloquence, but for the deferred and definitive peace of victory, with all the continuance of second-fiddling to which such a postponement subjects them.

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It is indeed fortunate for the alliance that France—Army, Government and People—is united in the determination to fight this war through to its logical conclusion. For France is apt to be the nation which pays the piper. England is physically safe behind her fleets, Russia proper is physically safe behind her distances, for the German invasion is not apt to go far beyond her alien provinces of Courland and Poland.

But France is not at sword's length, but at dagger's point, with her enemy—one little slip by any one, from an absent-minded General down to a sleeping sentinel, and she may become not a defeated, but a conquered nation.

And this you can see in the faces of the French to-day. Not anger, not bitterness, not sadness; neither excitement nor despondency is in their faces, but a look of hushed and solemn suspense. It is a nation with straining ears, with straining eyes, with bated breath, waiting, waiting.

After leaving the hush of France, England appears at a disadvantage largely undeserved. Compared with the atmosphere of strain in Paris, the atmosphere of London seems one of relaxation. Contrasted with the breathless struggle for self-preservation in France, the British attitude toward the war seems almost dilettante. [155]

This is unquestionably due in part to the fact that in England a very literal-minded race is shipping its soldiers to fight in merely geographical localities for seemingly abstract principles. The trouble is that England has the Channel and France has the imagination. It is obvious how markedly stronger the combination would be if Britain were fighting an invader and France were fighting for a sentiment.

The superficial impression of holiday soldiering that one gets in England is emphasized by the British hatred of the dramatic and the British worship of sport. The British go on laughing, dining, play-going, dancing, supping; in fact, frivolling, because they think it would be melodramatic to forswear these pursuits because of the war. They go on cricketing, racing, fishing, shooting, hunting, because they go on eating, drinking, sleeping and bathing. These are part of the bodily functions of the Briton.

To any other nation, sport, no matter how intimate a part of the national life, in certain emergencies becomes trivial. To say that to an Englishman would be equivalent to saying that under any circumstances childbirth or prayer could be trivial. It is a national characteristic which must simply be accepted. [156]

The impression made on superficial observers by these manners and habits of casual unconcern does England a certain injustice. For as far as her duties to her allies are concerned she has undoubtedly gone far beyond her obligations.

As one of her Cabinet members (a man who may well be her next Prime Minister) put it to me:

"The best two ways that I know of to prove one's devotion to a cause are to pay for it and to die for it. England is voluntarily doing both in far greater measure than her commitments call for. When the war started she agreed to help France on land with an army of 150,000 men. She has now raised an army of 3,000,000 men.

"When the war started she agreed to assume the naval responsibility of protecting the coast of France. She has not only done that, and incidentally driven Germany from the seas, but she has thrown her ships into the attack on the Dardanelles and has helped Russia with her submarines in the Baltic. [157]

"When the war started there was a financial understanding between England and France. England has not only carried out her share in this understanding, but has been instrumental in the financing of Italy, and stands ready to assume further similar responsibilities in the Balkans.

"How any candid mind in the face of such a record can charge Great Britain with shirking her share in the war passes my understanding."

There is no doubt about the truth of this. To get the voluntary gift of three million lives within one year, to get the voluntary loan of £600,000,000 in less than one month is probably an unparalleled achievement. Great Britain has done far more than her duty to others called for. And yet the question will not be smothered: Is she doing all that is called for by a strong, far-seeing nation's duty to itself?

She has thrown into the scales all the peculiar assets of a democracy in spontaneous zeal and voluntary sacrifice. But can a really great nation in such a crisis as this afford to be the recipient of only those contributions, no matter how prodigal, which are spontaneous and voluntary? Can a really proud nation afford to base its career at such a time upon the charity of its citizens? With Russia on the one hand purging herself of the bureaucratic evils of absolutism and forcing upon herself the pains of democratization, with France, on the other hand, sacrificing for the time her most cherished principles of republicanism in order to substitute the efficiency of Authority for the waste motions of Democracy, can England afford to remain complacently convinced that she represents the happy mean between these two extremes—a mean which needs no modifying? [158]

Can England as a nation continue with admiring acquiescence to watch the cream of her manhood spend itself in Flanders and the Dardanelles; continue with deprecating acquiescence to watch the skimmed milk of her manhood preserve itself at home for the sacred duty of fathering a future generation?

Can England acquiesce placidly in the professional, the business, the financial sacrifices generally which so many Englishmen are splendidly making, and acquiesce plaintively in the disgusting treason whose guilt was shared in varying measure by the gouging coal-owners and the striking coal-miners of Wales? [159]

Can England set out to curb the drunkenness which in certain parts is crippling her ammunition production and then sink back into acquiescence in the temporizing compromise which taxed drunkenness instead of terminating it?

Can England, in fine, afford to preserve Personal Liberty at the slightest risk of imperilling National Liberty?

Perhaps England can. Perhaps England must.

So long as England fulfils and far exceeds her covenants with her allies it is not a question for them to answer. It is assuredly not a question to which any neutral visitor can with seemliness hazard a solution.

It is not even a question, in my opinion, which is apt to affect the ultimate outcome of this particular war.

But it is a question to which on some future day Macaulay's New Zealander will, with positiveness and propriety, be in a position to find the answer.

Transcriber's Note:

Obvious typographical errors have been corrected. Printer's inconsistencies in the use of accents, hyphens, and punctuation have been retained. The original spelling has been used except where there was good reason to correct it.

Misprints and misspellings corrected in the text:

"avons de réglage" changed to "avons de réglage" (page 3).

"fusilage" changed to "fuselage" (page 4).

"aviatiks" changed to "Aviatiks" (page 4).

"pilot- spotted" changed to "pilot spotted" (page 10).

"practise" changed to "practice" (page 33).

"departs" changed to "'départs'" (page 57).

"leant themselves" changed to "lent themselves" (page 86).

"scrupulously cleanly" changed to "scrupulously clean" (page 100).

"drommelfeuer" changed to "trommelfeuer" (page 136).

Unusual words:

The word "exterpreting" appears on page 78. It is not a spelling mistake but neither has an adequate definition been found. From the context in which it is used it might be an amusing play on the word "interpreting."

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*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK OVER THE FRONT IN AN AEROPLANE, AND
SCENES INSIDE THE FRENCH AND FLEMISH TRENCHES ***

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