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Author: Gustav P. Capart

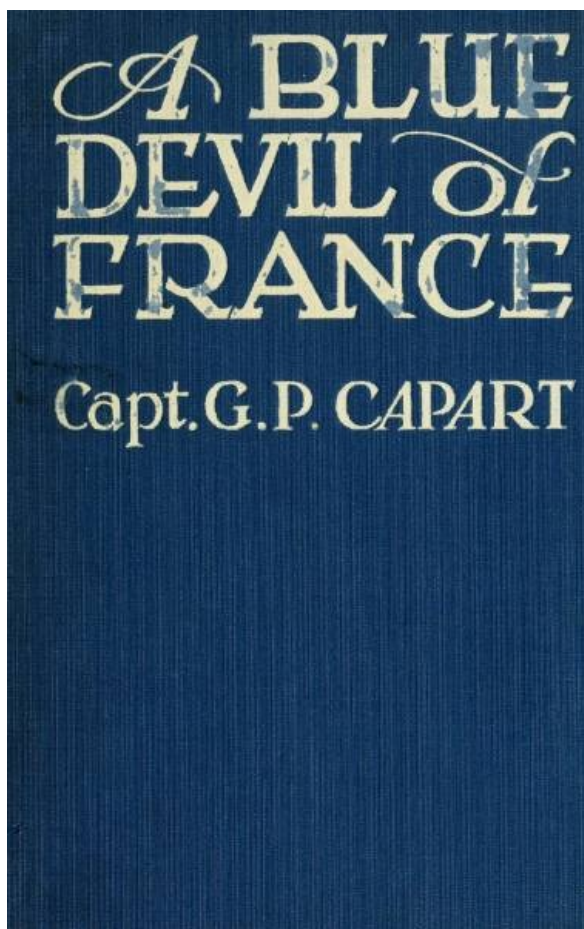
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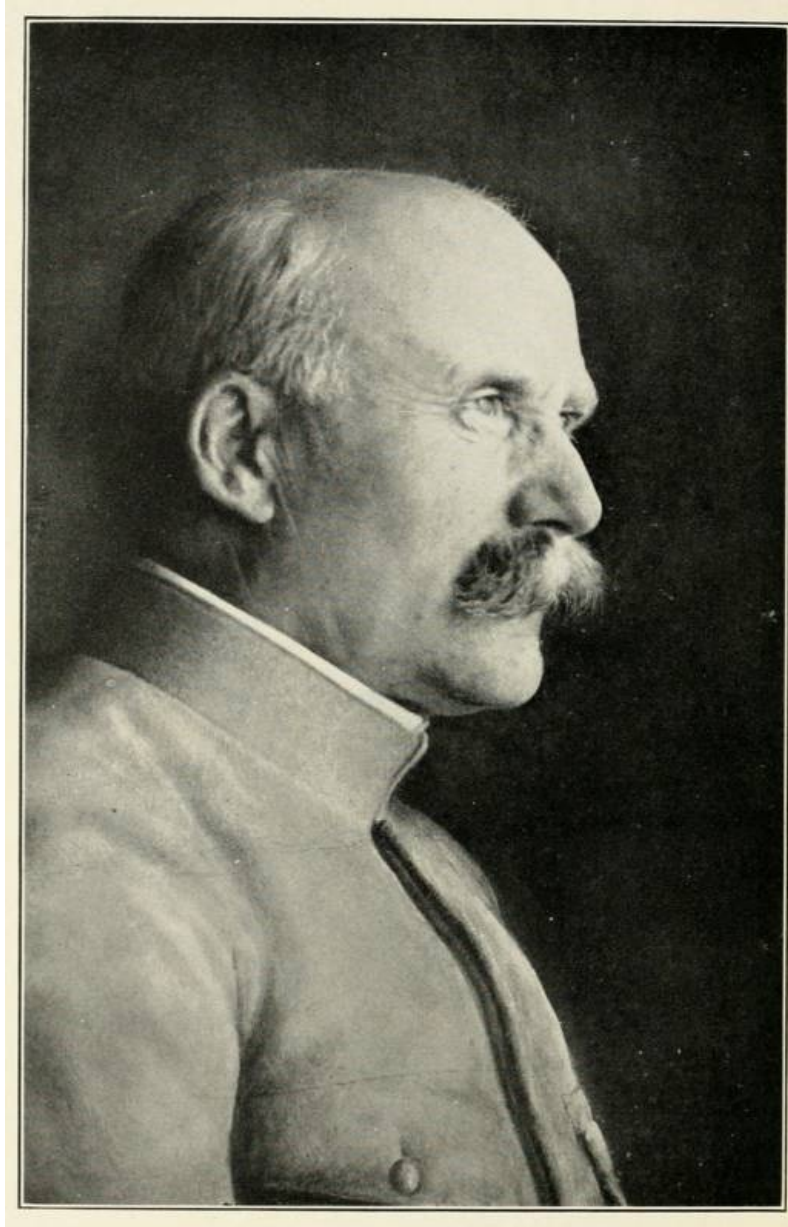
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## A Blue Devil of France



**Persevering  
Energetic  
Triumphant  
Ardent  
Intrepid  
*Nil ... melior!***

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## **A BLUE DEVIL *of* FRANCE**

*Epic figures and stories of the Great War, 1914-1918*

BY  
CAPTAIN G. P. CAPART  
LATE OF GENERAL PÉTAINE'S STAFF

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL FRENCH  
BY  
J. C. DROUILLARD



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[iv]

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TO  
M. PAUL BIZET  
M. DESIRÉ MARBAIS  
MY FRIENDS

[v]

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## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

[vii]

This volume contains an ensemble of true episodes about the French *poilu* taken from my diary.

The reader will regret, perhaps, the absence of continuity in the following chapters; that will rapidly disappear, however, when he sees the characteristic figures he should better know and love for a long time to come. A scruple has always guided me: to write the truth. I have been strict in writing nothing but what I have seen or heard.

In giving these souvenirs to the American public, I have had but one object: to mold in relief the warlike virtues of the admirable soldiers of France with whom I have fought for more than three years.

Mothers, wives, sweethearts and children of the heroes fallen in defense of their country, will find in these pages a precious consolation: they will see that with just reason they can be proud of their cherished dead.

I ask indulgence, much indulgence of the public. I have written these lines simply and faithfully during a long and painful convalescence; many times I have felt that my physical forces would abandon me before I could arrive at the end of my task. I shall be fully recompensed for these

THE LAWRENCE HOSPITAL  
Bronxville, New York  
June 2, 1918

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## TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

[ix]

To have known the author intimately is a rare privilege which has materially aided me in retaining, if I have been successful in so doing, the spirit and atmosphere of the original pages of "A Blue Devil of France."

In every sense of the word I am a literalist. Barring a very few instances I have been particularly rigid in my efforts to render a literal translation. Where it has been impossible to do this, the reader will find the original French to enhance the charm and simplicity of the stories.

Simultaneously this striking story of the great war is published in Paris under the title of *Comme Ils Vivent et Comme Ils Meurent* (How They Live and Die).

Redundant with vitality the several stories show a beautiful insight into the character of the French *poilu*, who, fighting for more than four years, remains unbroken in morale. Unpremeditatedly heroic, killing their adversaries clean, ever chivalrous, witty, smiling in the face of death and obscurity, these soldiers of France will go down in history as martyrs to a definite understanding between peoples.

Sordid as war may be, here is the glorious side. *Le Feu*, by Henri Barbusse, the critics write, is pessimistic and deals with the dark side of this momentous conflict. If that be true "A Blue Devil of France," with winning ingenuity, tells us in a simple, straightforward manner that there is another, nobler, majestic view of modern battle. It personifies the spirit of right, forever unquenchable, the champion over material forces seeking to destroy. [x]

Students of every free country will find in this book numerous examples of the spirit of sacrifice of those who, for four years, have written history with their blood; they will see that the most beautiful existence for a man is to know well how to live and die for his country!

Americans may here visualize the Argonne, Verdun, Saint Mihiel, the Champagne, consecrated spots, where their own blood is now being hypothecated to succeeding generations. They may see the type of the French *poilu*, with whom our boys are fighting arm in arm, as they go plunging on to certain victory.

J. C. DROUILLARD.

August 5, 1918.  
New York City.

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### A Blue Devil of France

*This chapter comprises several distinct periods in the life of the author.*

*Captain Capart left Switzerland, August 2, 1914, to enlist in the Belgian Army.<sup>[1]</sup>*

*He took part in the siege of Antwerp up to its fall (October 10, 1914), then as corporal in the dark days of the retreat.*

*From the month of December, 1914, he became attached to the French Army. He was commissioned sub-lieutenant, January, 1915.*

*The greater part of the stories in this chapter occurred during the period between March 7, 1915 and July of the same year, during which time he fought in the sector held by the Marine Fusiliers and that of the Zouaves in the region of Nieuport.*

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## CHAPTER ONE

[1]

### NIEUPOORT

[2]

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### A Blue Devil of France CHAPTER ONE

[3]

A SMALL CITY IN SWITZERLAND.

August 2, 1914.

War is declared!

I feel I must leave all, family, home, position.

I clasp my wife and three little ones in my arms.... The iron gate closes behind me and I almost break into tears—the happiest moments of my life are ended and I go toward the UNKNOWN—

One must heed Destiny!

MY ENLISTMENT, ANTWERP.  
August 6, 1914.

Already I curse war. I have journeyed seventy-two hours on the railroad to enlist as a soldier.

The recruiting officer in charge said to me when I faced him:

"Ha! another. This is a double invasion, the German invasion and that of the volunteers!"

THE OLD MAN AND THE GOAT, ANTWERP. [4]  
August 14, 1914.

All morning there is an uninterrupted cortège of civilians fleeing from the onrushing hordes. They have taken with them everything capable of being carried in their hands. The pathetic sight makes one feel the precipitateness of the flight, the despair, the panic!

A bent old man arrives presently; he walks slowly, fixedly regarding the ground. He is leading a little white goat, which, every ten paces or so, butts the old man with its horns, as if urging him to go faster. The latter does not falter—he walks straight ahead.

One doesn't know whether to laugh or weep.

THE SOLDIER WHO BAYONETS HIS  
FIRST BOCHE, BELGIUM.  
September, 1914.

A young soldier was seated alongside the road. He belonged to a Regiment of the Division quartered in the neighboring villages. He had a sad and dejected air.

I seated myself at his side because I wanted to know the impression of the men who had already been in battle.

"Have you been under fire?" I queried.

"Yes, corporal."

"How many Germans have you killed?"

I saw a haze of anger pass over the eyes of this young chap who regarded me with a fixed look. [5]

"Just one! I hate the Germans, I swear it, but I tremble to think what I have done—yes, I killed him dead enough!

"*Voilà!* I am a gardener by trade. I live in the Luxembourg. The garden of my masters—it is all my life. Why has this accursed war broken out? Can they no longer stay at home, the pigs?"

"Then I was called and you know the rest, because I will not speak of the first days of the campaign.

"But, *voilà!* one night we made an ambuscade on a farm in the outskirts of Vilvorde. It was dark. They told us the Germans would possibly attempt a reconnaissance in the village and it was necessary to open their eyes.

"We were placed in a house closer to the enemy lines than the others and it was forbidden to enter the street. Some of my comrades were hidden above on the second floor, but I was hiding back of the front stairs and observed the entrance-way.

"My nerves were overexcited by this long wait. A single ray of the moon wandered over the ground above the gate; it recalled one of my ambushes for flower poachers.

"Night advanced and finally I believed they would never come. Suddenly a well-sustained fire broke out a short distance away. I had fixed my bayonet and now grasped my rifle tightly.

"The gate opened brusquely. The night was clear and I saw a big devil of a German officer, revolver in hand, pass through and enter the walk. He desired without doubt to seek shelter, for he slammed the gate after him. [6]

"This is what passed then in a flash. I left my hiding place—he saw me. In his eyes there was the look of distress one always sees in those of a trapped beast. He shot at me, but so quickly that he did not aim. The report awoke the whole house.

"Already I had jumped at him—and I literally nailed him to the gate.

"Ah! To feel the crushing of bones—when one is accustomed to cultivate flowers—to feel the crushing of bones!"

BRITISH STOLIDITY, BELGIUM.  
October 9, 1914.

War? At the beginning no one knew then what it was. The enemy bombarded us with shells of an enormous caliber, which excited, more than anything else, our curiosity.

Two "Tommies" started to swim across the river Nèthe to where the enemy had but recently been thrown back. They repeated to everyone who asked them where they were going:

"We want to see the BIG cannon, yes the BIG cannon!"

THE PRISONERS OF [7]  
GENERAL DE MAUD'HUY, NEAR ARRAS.  
*January, 1915.*

Upon leaving table one day with General de Maud'huy, we came upon a group of German prisoners, who immediately looked at us, saluting respectfully.

"These are 'my prisoners,'" the general told me, "they work in the cantonment."

"I had at the beginning about a dozen boches and mustered them every night because we were only ten miles from the line of fire."

"Several escaped?" I asked.

"On the contrary," he replied. "The second night we counted eleven, the third, fifteen. Now there are fifty. We never knew where they came from!"

"I have enough boches. I mustered them all yesterday and told them that if their number kept on increasing I would send them all back. You will agree that it is impossible to keep a strict count under these conditions!"

THE ADMIRAL, NIEUPOORT.  
*March 7, 1915.*

I saw Admiral Ronarc'h for the first time to-day.

All morning the city of Nieuport was bombarded with shells of a very large caliber, crushing and enveloping the poor little Flemish homes in great clouds of brick-dust and smoke. The ground trembled. Our Marine Fusiliers<sup>[2]</sup> must have paid them back in full, for they returned a heavy fire [8] from the large guns of the fortress.

I arrived at Nieuport-Baths along the river Yser with Captain Ricard, who said to me:

"With all that racket, to-day, we are sure to find the Admiral and Commandant Delage——"

At the moment we reached the locks we were well serenaded—the shells literally rained around us. At regular intervals the larger ones burst in the city. Abject ruins—I no longer recognized this once lively little city which I visited during my childhood, dead and deserted to-day!

Finally we came, about four o'clock, to the admiral's shelter, where we found him, with Commandant Delage and the chaplain.

I was received with smiles and hearty handshakes; on similar days one is always sure to be received by the admiral in a most charming manner.

"Lucky chap," he said, "well have you chosen the day of your first visit to Nieuport. What a bombardment, hey! fortunately all goes well, practically no losses—that right, Delage?"

Commandant Delage smiled all over.

"Yes, admiral."

At that moment a shell burst so close that pictures were torn from the walls and a chair was turned upside down. A cloud of dust spouted through the ventilating shaft—at the same time we heard a rumbling of falling walls, the clattering of splintered glass and broken tiling falling on the ground.



**Shell hole in the courtyard of Admiral Ronarc'h's commanding post in Nieuport.**

We had, for our protection, an arch made of half-thicknesses of bricks. If we must be struck, then we should have, at least, the opportunity of not suffering very long! [9]

Each told his story, tales of the sea and of the war—then—that was not all, there was a programme of work to accomplish, and we at once set about the task.

---

Toward nightfall, I left the shelter or cave, which I shall never forget. The shell which shook us fell in the courtyard of a house, scooping out a funnel-shaped crater thirty feet in diameter. A Marine discovered the base of the projectile: a 420!<sup>[3]</sup>

A comrade who helped him carry it said:

"They are foolish if they think they can kill our admiral with a 420, and also be sure that St. Anne of Brittany will curse their German God!"

A TELEGRAM FROM ATTILA, NIEUPOORT-BATHS. [10]  
*March, 1915.*

Returning from the Great Dune after several days, Captain Perroud and myself stop before the old Nieuport-Baths' station. It is in a pretty state. We enter the ruins and have penetrated as far as the office of the Passenger Agent, all in a tumult, papers scattered everywhere—

Sealed telegrams are seen on the floor, and, it is strange, they have not excited the curiosity of the plunderers, for these latter would have found some fastidious reading. I confess, what concerned me was the desire to open some of them to see what persons could have said at the moment of evacuating Nieuport-Baths.

The first was addressed to an English woman, "Mrs. Smith, Regina Hotel, Nieuport-Baths." It said: "Things are beginning to get worse where you are. Nevertheless, do whatever you think best. Smith."

I opened the second telegram:

"Mademoiselle Y—, Regina Hotel, Nieuport-Baths." It was dated Ostend, October, 1914, and read: "Here there is absolute safety. Come at once. Many kisses! Attila."

Among all this tragedy and desolation here, above all, was the final comedy. I folded the telegram and placed it in my pocket.

Some weeks later I was dining in Paris at the home of Madame L—, wife of a professor in the *Conservatoire*; I had as my dinner partner the great *artiste*, Suzanne Desprès.





**Target practice at Sardine Cans, before St. Georges.**

After having told a thousand details of our life in the trenches, some frightful enough, others sad, the moment had arrived to inject a note of gaiety into the sombre tableau which I had sketched for them—I drew forth Attila's telegram. [11]

A cry escaped my partner. "Mlle. Y—, she was one of my company in the Théâtre de l'Œuvre!"

"And Attila?"

"He is the Director of the Théâtre des Galeries St. Hubert, in Brussels and well known in Paris!"

---

Attila's telegram has been safely delivered to Mlle. Y—, who, this time, will not complain of the remissness of the telegraph company, but perhaps, of her own indiscretion.

TARGET PRACTICE AT SARDINE CANS, BEFORE ST. GEORGES.  
*March, 1915.*

The Marines have found a way to divert German rifle fire from our loopholes in the trenches.

They have tied a number of empty sardine cans on the ends of sticks and fixed the latter firmly in the parapet, at which the boches shoot continually.

Since then "Fritz" spends his spare time in trying to knock them down; our losses have perceptibly diminished.

MASKED BALL, NIEUPORT-BATHS. [12]  
*March, 1915.*

Less than a mile from the enemy—

Rifle balls whistle to-night through the streets oftener than usual; there is a certain amount of nervousness in the sector.

But these wandering bullets will not thwart the *soirée* we have planned with some officers of the First Zouaves: a masked ball in the Casino!

We found plenty of odd and strange bits of apparel among the ruined villas; and our masked ball took on an odd appearance with the extraordinary costumes. The *toubib*<sup>[4]</sup> clipped his flowing mustaches and wore a lady's gown—he was good to look at! Young and fair, as he is, one had to regard him closely not to be deceived. Major Peigné was naturally taken for a "chicken" and there was much rivalry for a few moments, I swear it!

---

Degove with his old straw hat and battered valise was a scream, while Ricard, in his uniform of a Belgian officer of the First Empire, was absolutely funny—

The strident singing of bullets kept on—

We had a great time that night!

THE BEAUTIFUL PARISIAN PRINCESS, [13]  
THE GREAT DUNE.  
*March, 1915.*

We are going to install an electrical machine on the right bank of the river Yser. My men are bringing the heavy box in which it was transported. With its timbers protruding from each end, which makes the carrying less difficult, the gray covering looks more like a sedan chair.

And I think of a pretty princess taking her daily promenade along the edge of the water, which is unusually beautiful—

The weather, alas, is very bad, and the men are tired. The first rays of the spring sun have not come to warm the earth. In fact my *poilus* have more the air of carrying a funeral urn.

"Hey," I shouted, addressing them, "what would you say if you had a beautiful Parisian Princess in that box?"

"What would I say," returned an old corporal, "what would I say? I would say nothing, but I would put her in my bunk to warm my feet, and you fellows could battle among yourselves!"

LA CORVÉE, THE GREAT DUNE.  
*April, 1915.*

The rumble of the surf and the noise of the big guns do not sound well together.

This trench is bad to-night—the shifting sand obstructs my progress.

It is the time when the tide ceases to rise and the Territorials begin their work.

The trench is empty. No, there is someone sitting on the sand. At his side is a frame shelter made of ammunition boxes. He is alone. I imagined the boy had lost his way.

"Where have you been?"

"I dunno."

"Where are you going?"

"Over there."

"Who are you with?"

"With the others."

Not another word.

"Who are you?"

"I'm the whole damned army!"<sup>[5]</sup>

A STRAYED LETTER, THE GREAT DUNE.  
*April, 1915.*

I came accidentally in the trench, among a lot of leaves, upon a letter from a girl. It was almost covered by the sand.

"It is very lonesome, here, without you," it ran, "I think of you night and day, on the farm, in the fields, always. How wonderful it would be to clasp you in my arms, very, very tightly. I hope a baby will come. If it is a boy we will make him a strong *poilu* like yourself—if it is a girl we will call her VICTORY—and you see how beautiful the little one—our little one—will be. I will work a bit harder to bring her up well—"

A PERPLEXED CHAPLAIN, THE GREAT DUNE. [15]  
*April, 1915.*

A group of Zouaves have thrown themselves upon the sand. They are discussing animatedly German atrocities and cruelties in the invaded region.

The soldier-chaplain, seated by their side, says nothing, but contents himself with gazing steadily into the sand at their feet.

"Those cutthroats over there have done everything: they have violated women, young girls—"

"And the priests?"

"No, you idiot, why bring them into it—"

"—they have burned villages, massacred, killed old men, pillaged, robbed—"

"We will repay them—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth."

"Yes. When we get into their country, we will organize bands. We will have violaters, pillagers—incendiaries—"

"In what category do you want to be, Father?"

A CORPSE BETWEEN THE LINES, THE GREAT DUNE. [16]  
May, 1915.

While returning from a night reconnaissance between the lines one of our Zouaves had been killed; his body lay for several days in the sand about forty feet from our first line.

His corporal, a very brave Alsatian, could not look over the parapet without noticing his comrade's body did not shrink fast enough. Morning and night he was seen very pensive, talking to himself, irritable with the men—

Then one day when it was quiet, at full noon, he was seen to leave the trench, a shovel in one hand and a wooden cross in the other. Everyone, breathless, saw him advance slowly, calmly—

At first the Germans fired at him several times, missing him, notwithstanding the fact they were only about ninety feet away. Then they ceased firing to see, no doubt, what this fool was going to do!

He stopped close to the Zouave's body placed his cross on the sand and staidly began to dig a grave—

When he judged it to be deep enough he put the rigid body of his comrade in and began covering him with great shovelfuls of sand. Then he smoothed the tomb, planted the cross and adjusted the red badge of death—<sup>[6]</sup>

In an impressive moment of silence—for both sides looked on without losing a single movement—they saw him advance to the head of the knoll, his face to the cross, click his heels and give the military salute—

He came back slowly to our lines and jumped briskly into the trench. Immediately he began to pace up and down before his squad back of the parapet, with fixed bayonet, facing the grave his hands had dug. [17]

"Stand at ease!" said he, "listen carefully. My men who fall will not lack a burial nor will they lie in the open air like rotting dogs. Break!"

---

Fifteen days later a German bullet struck him in the head back of a loophole. He was killed instantly. His comrades interred him in the Zouave cemetery at Nieuport-Baths. They wrote his name on a piece of paper, which they rolled up and placed in a bottle—

THE DEATH OF THE TERRITORIAL, NIEUPOORT.  
May, 1915.

It has rained all day. Toward nightfall only did rain cease to fall. The sky is gray and heavy, but the air is fresh. The Marines in their dripping oilskins walk to and fro in the trench. The air is so clear that we can see, over there on the horizon, the silhouette of Bruges, with its old houses and high towers.

"It is sad to see you so mirage-like and far away, oh! Bruges the captive, brave city, in all your history you have thirsted for liberty—"

Two hours pass and it is time to rejoin my comrades at the cantonment. But I turn again and again to review the panorama before me. [18]

I come at last to Nieuport. As I enter the principal street, I see going ahead a brave Territorial, who also returns to the cantonment unshaven and unkempt after his long vigil in the trenches. He is completely equipped with all his personal belongings, but is in no hurry. This brave man is leaving the front for good because he is the father of five children. He precedes me some thirty paces and I hasten to catch up with him.

We arrive at the top of the Casino, when, suddenly, a whistling announces the arrival of a shell—explosion, smoke—a jagged piece of metal strikes him in the head and I see the man fall in front of me.

The acrid smoke gags me, but I am quickly at his side. He is dead: fractured skull—his face purple—mouth open—his brains strewn on the pavement—

---

That night while I am at dinner with my comrades, an orderly comes to say that there is someone outside who wishes to speak with me. In the darkened passageway I scarcely recognize the chaplain of the 16th Territorials, a man very simple and good.

"Lieutenant, you know, without doubt, that we have had one of our men killed but a short while ago. We are going to bury him at sunrise. Unfortunately we have no one to play the organ—Figon

is in the trenches—you will be very kind to play something for us."

"Good; you can count on me."

[19]

---

All night long the sight of distant Bruges and the death of the poor Territorial haunt me. I am seated before the piano in our "Villa" where we have installed our entire *ménage*.

I begin to improvise a melody, sweet and infinitely sad and the theme recurs again and again, developing into a funeral chant—yes, very soon I will play that for him—

---

Toward dawn a man comes to find me. It is very calm outside and the sector has a sleepy air.

I enter the church where can be seen large breaches in the walls and roof. A coffin hastily constructed, and covered with the Tricolor, red, white and blue, is in the choir, resting on two wooden supports. The organ is at its side, so close, so close, that I see the man's blood, which flows drop by drop, through the boards of the rudely built coffin—a brilliant red spot glistens on the white flagstone.

A few men of the 16th and some stretcher-bearers are kneeling in the nave; others arrive one by one, helmet in hand, without noise—

Scarcely had the service commenced and the priest begun his chant for the dead, than German and French shells screaming, pass over the church, as if they were searching for each other in the air. The shots progressed angrily, followed by their plaintive mewing.

At the offertory, I played the sad melody on the organ I had improvised during the night. I put all my heart and emotion into it. But soon everything seemed to grow dark within me—saw in the distance the towers of Bruges and, close, a coffin and a sheet of blood—

[20]

"*Dies irae, Dies illa*—"

ON PATROL BEFORE ST. GEORGES.  
*May, 1915.*

Before starting out I have taken my automatic pistol out of its scabbard and slipped it in my pocket.

I must go to the other side of the canal to the farm of the "Dead Cow." An ensign from the cruiser X— accompanies me with a dozen or so men.

Two of my sappers go along to aid the installation over there of an infernal machine. As German patrols reconnoiter the farm it will be a good turn at their game—

As darkness falls we tumble into a boat and cross the evacuation canal. All this is done with marked silence. We creep along revolver in hand. There is no one in the ruins of the farm. The patrol spreads itself around us, and during this interval, with my two *poilus*, I install the snare for the boches!

The work ended, we fall silently back.

Not a shot!

We have returned to our lines without an incident!

LADY DOROTHY, THE GREAT DUNE.  
*May, 1915.*

[21]

We are at table. Major Peigné presides at breakfast of the officers of the 19th Company, 2nd Battalion. The subjects of conversation which recur each day in a sappers' kitchen have been exhausted: progress of work along the sector, effect of the last bombardment, news of the absent ones, criticism of work accomplished by the soldiers, next *permissions*,<sup>[7]</sup> then we take up the eternal question, the only one which counts, assuredly, woman.

There have been many weeks in which not a one of us has seen a woman's petticoat, not a one, I swear it!

To be in this cursed city of Nieuport is not an enviable "visit at the seashore"—the enemy systematically persists in destroying it: the Casino, the villas and the approaches to the pier are completely torn to pieces. Can you imagine a woman in such a place?

Stories of woman, adventures of woman, anecdotes of woman, serve as topics of conversations. "When you haven't the object of your desires," said a profound philosopher, "you speak of it."

The conversation became general again, when, all at once, Lieutenant Divisia silenced us with a finger before him. No, it was impossible to be deceived, my word upon it, a woman's voice was heard in the next room!

Had a 420 fallen in the midst of us, the silence could not have been more impressive—of course realizing that it would have flattened us like pancakes. But, quickly and with remarkable unison, we arose quietly with the same intention—

[22]

Yet, with an energetic gesture, Major Peigné, who never lost a bet, stopped us and made for the door.

"Remain here," he said, "I will see what it is!" He entered the room at the side, nimbly closing the door after him. It was very malicious! We looked at each other with stupor and regret. Then we cautiously approached the crack in the boards that separated the two spaces. It was, in effect, a woman, a young woman deliciously beautiful, I assure you—an indelible vision in this terrible, stricken little city. Lady Dorothy, with her pretty khaki costume, appeared before us for the first time! She had the air of a warlike Amazon which became her perfectly, and, at first sight, we all had fallen in love with her—

She was engaged in a lengthy conversation with our corporal-secretary to whom she had been sent to do her bit among the soldiers, all unknown to us.

We all thought: "Little Lady Dorothy, the gold of your blonde hair which we see through the slit in the partition is as precious a bit as that you are offering to our corporal—"

After that we saw several times the fugitive vision of this angel with the blonde locks searching among the ruins for our wounded. She drove her own automobile with a steady hand, with enemy shells breaking around her, vainly seeking to blow her to bits.

THE CONSCIENTIOUS POILU, BEFORE ST. GEORGES. [23]  
May, 1915.

The nights are still very cold and to warm ourselves we have builded a comfortable fire by the sea. Sacks of sand, skillfully fixed by Richard, mask the flashes from the brazier, for otherwise they would certainly invite 77's and 105's which the enemy would not lose time dropping among us to disturb our momentary comfort in the first line.

Reymond and I have many things to discuss and the hours pass relatively fast; the Marine Fusiliers come and go in the trenches and communicating lines with a sort of nervous activity that never leaves them night or day, a trait found only in men that follow the sea.

The sector is extremely calm, the tide has gone out a bit and Reymond has sent a patrol to the other side of the evacuation canal.

Soon the *poilu* in charge of the patrol returns and, walking up to his superior, says:

"Captain, we have been out reconnoitering the enemy; we saw a boche on sentinel duty; he did not see us—I believe I can get him."

"How far is he?"

"About half a mile away."

"Go—get him!"

We continued the conversation as the *poilu* went on his errand; it struck us that the man had been deceived. As on a certain night they had charged on a blind, about a hundred yards from here—

The night was passing without incident when soon our brave chap returned and, assuming his former position before his officer, said: [24]

"Captain, I cannot get him—there is a network of barbed wire. Can I kill him?"

"Why, certainly. Always use your own judgment. You don't usually have time to come back for instructions—"

Again he started out and the heavens began to pale; we searched once more for images of the past in the glowing embers of the wood fire which was fast dying out.

Suddenly, over there, toward the German lines, a rifle shot broke the stillness of the night, followed by the well-known machine-gun serenade; immediately rockets, star shell and the artillery came to life—

Reymond rises, standing very stiff and straight.

"Ah, hang it! The poor devil must be shot to pieces—"

Our own cannon begin to mix in the fray. Reymond decides to send some men after the others. He is visibly concerned about our soldiers and is on the verge of going himself.

Just then the *poilu* stands before him for the third time, saluting respectfully:

"Captain—I have killed him!"

And he said it with a kind of accent that made a shiver run down the spine.

The sky commences to resolve itself into long yellow and gray stripes—ah, Flanders!—ah, Flanders!—

SIGNS ALONG THE YSER, BEFORE ST. GEORGES. [25]  
May, 1915.

The Marine Fusiliers leave everywhere traces of their *esprit*.

They have taken from a home, three-fourths demolished, a little statue of the Virgin, former protectress of the household.

Carrying it into the first-line trenches with them, they have constructed a niche for the Virgin in the sandbags.

With her open arms and sad air she seems to say to them:

"Our Lady of the Sandbags, pray for us;  
A simple figure in the niche am I,  
Pitying my children constantly;  
Die or win the war they must!"

---

Some yards farther is found, a little back of the first line, a large projectile, about three feet in length, fortunately unexploded, of the kind the boches have been generously distributing among us with their "minnenwerfer" for some time. A notice of warning says:

"We beg of you to let the infant sleep!"

---

The sand creeps into everything; that is why the *poilus*, for the entire length of the first-line trench, have placed cigar-boxes in which to keep their cartridges.

[26]

On each one is written: "Alms for the boches!"

THE DEATH OF KUHN, PARIS.  
*June, 1915.*

My concière brought me the following letter this morning:

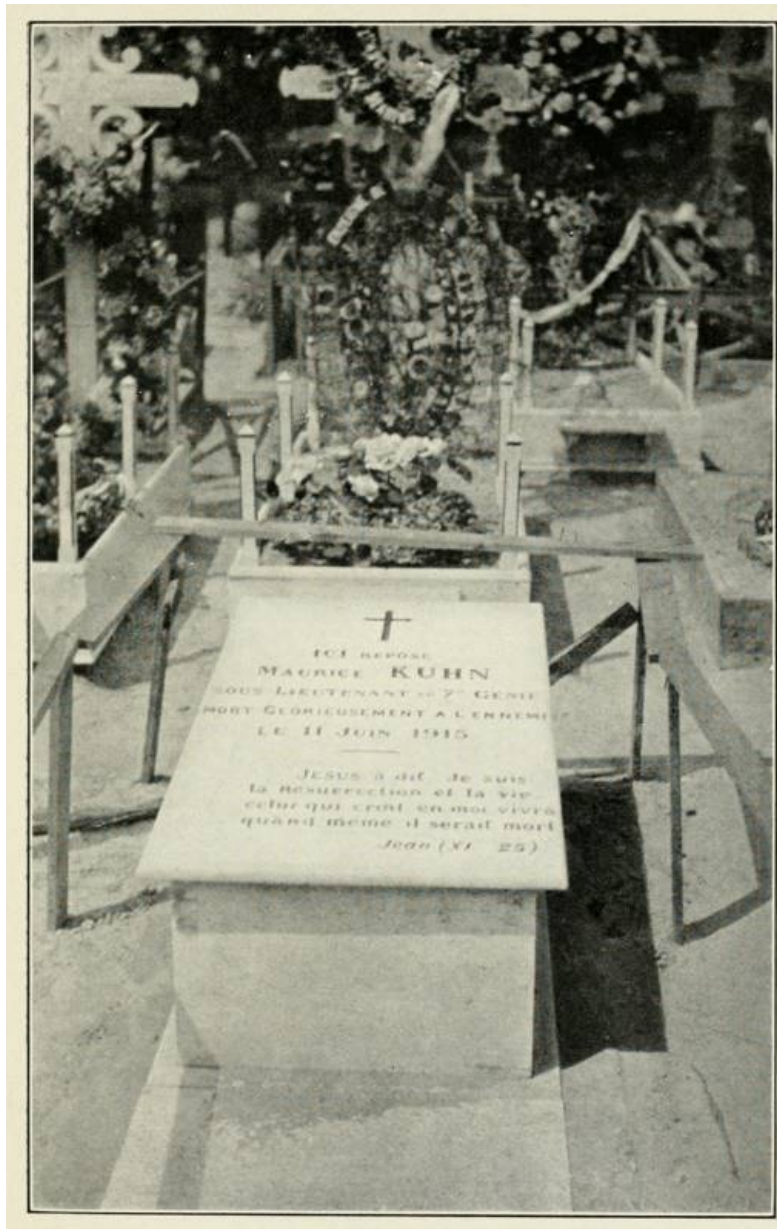
"WITH THE ARMY.  
*June 13, 1915.*

"My Dear Capart: A sad thing has happened since your departure. Our poor Kuhn was killed two days ago. This is what occurred:

"You know that the enemy and ourselves have been carrying on mining warfare; so three days ago the Brigade decided to execute a 'coup de main' and destroy the work of the boches.

"The 'coup de main' was carried out by volunteers from the 4th Zouaves, who acted as a covering party for the sappers charged with the operation. Kuhn asked to lead the volunteers who came forward.

"Everything passed very well at the beginning, the artillery preparation was perfect and at the given hour they went at it lively. The sappers captured in the mine twenty-two Germans, all very young, and an officer. They passed them rapidly back and it was at this moment enemy reaction was felt. Kuhn remained the last—the mine blew up—we saw him totter and fall on the parapet of the boche trench, among the partially cut barbed wire. Whether he was killed by the explosion of the mine or a German bullet no one knows—we were forced back and it was very late.



**Lieutenant Kuhn's grave.**

"That night there was general consternation: his men cried. A little sapper went out all by himself to recover the body. He could not endure to see the body of his lieutenant remain in the hands of the enemy. [27]

"Three times he tried to reach Kuhn's corpse in spite of incessant enemy fire which remained on the *qui-vive*.

"Finally, crouching, he came close enough to pass a cord under the arms and started back, rolling the circular wire entanglements in a manner you can very well imagine.

"At last he cleared the body from the wire, but we thought several times he would be the victim of his own devotion.

"At sunrise all that remained of Kuhn was in our lines. Captain Perroud came to see him and I accompanied him. Our poor friend's body was literally riddled with bullets, he was almost unrecognizable—

"What are you going to say to his mother. He was the only one left.

"He liked you very much and of course you will not fail to write a few words to the poor woman.

"Come back soon—we miss you!

"Degove."

[28]

#### FOOTNOTES:

[1] The Author was born in Brussels, in 1881, of Belgian parents. The two great-grandparents of Captain Capart were soldiers in the armies of Napoleon I.—Tr.

[2] French sailors. They wear a white hat shaped like those of our own sailors and a long flowing coat. On the hat is a large red tassel. In France this has given rise to the expression, "Les petites demoiselles aux pompons rouges," or the Little Ladies of the red tassels.—Tr.

[3] AUTHOR'S NOTE.—I took the base of this shell the same evening to General Hély d'Oissel,

who commanded the Division. Until this moment he was still undecided as to the caliber of shell the enemy had been using since early that morning.

[4] Surgeon.—Tr.

[5] Je suis la corvée.—Tr.

[6] The red tassel of his hat.—Tr.

[7] Vacations.

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## CHAPTER TWO

[29]

### MALANCOURT WOOD AND ST. MENEHOULDE

*This chapter adds a few impressions noted by the author during a very short trip he made to the Argonne in the month of July, 1915.* [30]

*It was at this epoch the army of the Crown Prince undertook strong attacks to the north of St. Menehoulde.*

*This sojourn took place between the two periods spent on the Belgian front.*

*For the first time Sub-Lieutenant Capart took part in an episode in the war of mines.*

*After having visited Verdun, Douaumont, and made a series of reconnaissances in Malancourt Wood, that of Hesse, and also to the west of Vauquois, Capart left for the Flanders' front where he took up his unfinished work.*

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## CHAPTER TWO

[31]

ALONG THE MAIN STREET, ST. MENEHOULDE.  
*July, 1915.*

Cannon rumble in the distance——

*Poilus* go and come along the thoroughfare. There is a great bustle in the village. The Argonne is the only interesting sector at this moment.

"Pretty hot up there?"

"I should say! Just came out of it!"

"Did you advance?"

"Yes. They attacked in mass formation, shouting 'St. Menehoulde—St. Menehoulde!'"

"You replied?"

"Pigs' feet! Pigs' feet! and we ate 'em up, lieutenant!"<sup>[8]</sup>

AN EPISODE IN MINING WARFARE,  
MALANCOURT WOOD.  
*July 7, 1915.*

We arrived yesterday afternoon toward dusk, in an automobile, and in full view of the enemy.

General de Salins, who commanded the Brigade, found us at this moment on the edge of the wood and could not believe his eyes—Guéneau and I were bumping along, making very slow progress on account of the numerous shell-holes along the road made during the last bombardment.

What a magnificent afternoon! At this time of the year, Malancourt Wood is an exquisite sight. The lengthening rays of the sun easily penetrate the green foliage of the trees that completely surround us. [32]

This sector had been active enough before, when the enemy for the first time attacked with flame-throwers. After that, save for the days when mines were exploded, the wood became one of the most quiet spots on the front.

We are heartily received by our sapper-comrades.

At night we all go together into the first-line trench, where there are but few soldiers. It is very black without. Not a rifle shot, not the sound of a cannon. What a difference from the sector in Flanders!

We leave the trench and go over, crouching, into No Man's Land, advancing with great precaution through the tall grass. When a rocket flares from our lines or those of the enemy, we flatten with our faces to the ground and remain without the slightest movement. Then we advance again, holding our breath. Finally we arrive at the enemy's barbed wire entanglements and hear them talking in their trenches.

I am close to Guéneau, who listens attentively while I murmur in his ear:

"Old chap, yesterday at this time we were drinking a whisky and soda on the boulevard."



We pass the night in a shelter placed at our disposal by Major Jouanic. We must assist in the early morning at the explosion of a mine under an enemy listening post.

We choose our time and it is yet night when we start out. Hardly awake, we look more like a hunting party: nearly all the sappers preceding us in the communicating trench are carrying clubs and might be taken for beaters.

Arriving soon at the first line, each takes the place that has been assigned. I look at my watch—the mine will be exploded at four o'clock.

It is near the edge of the wood and I gaze into the open stretch on my right. The sky is turning a deep rose and the birds are singing, as they sing at the break of a beautiful summer's day. All else is asleep in our corner of the earth, and for us who know, this silence is impressive—

Five minutes more—

I look in front of me. The mined spot is plainly visible—I see the German trench and the barbed-wire entanglement very well.

Farther to the right is the place where Guéneau and I had crouched the night before; I see the tall, yellow grass and the zig-zag path by which we had returned.

Two minutes—

My eyes do not leave the spot, where, in a few moments, human beings will be hurled in the air and disappear. They are our enemies, but one experiences that undefinable feeling that one is conscious of when looking at the guillotine about to fall before you. What silence!

Suddenly an enormous gust of earth leaps into the air— One gapes with stupor—a heavy detonation—the earth is transformed into a vast volcano and black soil and stones are shot continually up!

Everything in the vicinity becomes animated and three large trees begin to incline slowly in different directions with sinister crackings—

At the same moment I see very distinctly a German soldier thrown high into space, his hands tightly clutching his rifle. He turns over slowly and then his gun goes off, having, without doubt, unconsciously pulled the trigger.

Then it is this column of earth which falls showering and covering us with a rain of stones and pebbles, thumping the ground loudly—

And then comes the waking of battle; the stupor is over and a heavy fusillade breaks out along the whole line; machine-guns sputter, and the artillery fire becomes violent—

We are so close to the enemy trench that we hear the cries of the dying and wounded. The mine exploded at a well-selected spot and the losses must be heavy.

These cries are soon transformed into heart-rending wails which portray the resulting terror and anguish, cries of men who have been startled out of their sleep to die.



**Lieutenant Ducoux with the Magpie "Anatole" in Malancourt-wood.**

Bullets whistle loudly and clip the earth around us—the leaves, the new and pretty leaves of the wood, flutter and fall in our midst like in the sad days of autumn— [35]

---

Quiet comes again. A big German officer has the nerve to leap on the parapet of the trench very close to us, and shout:

"Well done, Seventh Engineers!"

His attitude seemed to imply: "You are in no danger now." He then jumps back quickly into his trench.

The wounded in due time are cared for and taken back—

Work is finished for the day!

THE MAGPIE "ANATOLE," MALANCOURT WOOD.  
*July 8, 1915.*

"What a luncheon, major! It is too much—too much, a thousand times too much. You dine well in Malancourt Wood! Hors d'œuvres, roast chicken, chops. What a remarkable chef!"

"I agree with you—he is the former chef of the *Lysistrata*, the yacht belonging to Mr. James Gordon Bennett, himself!"

So saying, Major Jouanic filled his goblet with champagne to the brim. We are less than fifteen minutes from the first line and the weather is marvelous—

"Dessert is ready, Ducoux, you can bring in Anatole." [36]

Ducoux got up and left table. He came back soon with Anatole on his finger, a young magpie who already had the air of an old maid—

Anatole is not well brought up—she is a little noisy. When one speaks to her of *Madame Colette* [9]

she gives herself up to comic contortions, and what a sight!

She drinks greedily of champagne out of the guest's glass and becomes shamefully drunk!

Now she staggers around the table, making insufferable cries. She inclines her head, staring at us with one eye—

"You shame us, Anatole. Be quiet and let us hear no more from you."

Anatole flutters over, seeking refuge on Ducoux's shoulder, whom she likes best, and goes to sleep—

A WALK IN THE FOREST, MALANCOURT WOOD.  
July 8, 1915.

This afternoon we have gone to inspect the sector. We arrived before the *Poilu* Cemetery—

The sun shoots great streaks of light through the trees and the spot appears to us like a mighty, luminous temple—

No one near the graves to weep and pray, and the souls of the dead untroubled—

THE WAY OF THE TEUTON, MALANCOURT WOOD. [37]  
July 8, 1915.

We went this afternoon to see one of our friends, a lieutenant of infantry, in the neighboring sector.

Bringing along a bottle of champagne, we drank it with him at the listening post, twenty-five yards from the enemy.

Naturally the empty bottle was hurled by a skillful hand into the trench of our neighbors in front —

The reply was not long in coming: three 77's which, by the gods, were placed well enough, but which, luckily, did no damage.

These imbecile boches always lack the proper spirit.

**FOOTNOTES:** [38]

[8] St. Menehoulde is the center of the "pigs' feet" industry.—Tr.

[9] Mme. Colette is a well-known French author. Her works about birds and animals have gained her an enviable reputation on the Continent.—Tr.

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**CHAPTER THREE** [39]  
**RETURN TO NIEUPOORT**

*After his short trip to the Argonne, the author spent the last days of July in the Flanders' Sector, where he remained until the end of September.* [40]

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**CHAPTER THREE** [41]

MOVING, NIEUPOORT.  
July, 1915.

My *poilus* were disagreeably surprised this morning. The proprietress of one of the villas occupied by a certain number of my men arrived at Nieuport this morning accompanied by a Belgian gendarme. General Hély d'Oissel, commanding the Division, had authorized the latter to make a search for some wine she had left in the house.

This is what is extraordinary: it is true the wine was there, but imagine and understand the despair of the *poilus*—they did not suspect the existence of the treasure! Some good *pinard*<sup>[10]</sup> was placed in a hole under the stairway, into which one descended by means of a trap door, also skillfully camouflaged by a morsel of linoleum.

And to think they had slept several months over this precious *pinard* without knowing it!

Luckily the good woman's carriage could not enter the city on account of the barricades, and other defense works, so my good-natured *poilus* profited by it, and aided her in moving. In this manner they saved a few bottles, which probably would have been broken by the jolting of the conveyance.

THE MAN CUT IN TWO, THE TRIANGULAR WOOD. [42]  
July, 1915.

This cursed road is terribly torn up.

When one returns to the city of Nieuport by automobile it is necessary to go at top speed along

there. The road is almost obliterated by shell-holes and the bombs which fall there incessantly. One must "fly" past the Triangular Wood.

This trip is impressive enough, because it is rare that one is not circumvallated by falling shells. It is very exciting!

One day when I was returning to Nieuport, the bombardment was extremely violent. I was sitting alongside the chauffeur. We had regulated our speed with that of a motorcyclist who preceded us by two hundred yards.

At the moment when we were leaving the Triangular Wood and had about reached the outskirts of the city, the motorcyclist was in a strange manner literally yanked from the machine by the force of an explosion and cut in two. He disappeared in a great cloud of smoke and dust. The wind was blowing rather hard and it cleared away quickly. We saw a Territorial on duty and he signaled with his rifle to stop at the side of the man who had been killed. The time and place had been well chosen, but there was nothing to do but obey, so my driver set the brakes.

The *poilu* said very calmly:

[43]

"I stopped you to tell you that you've got to go very fast along here. You see that man cut in two. It's a wicked spot. I've been here for two hours with instructions to tell that to everyone who passes here. That's the order!"

#### THE FOURTH ZOUAVES' BATHTUB, NIEUPOINT.

July, 1915.

For several months I lived among the ruins of Madame S——'s villa, having my quarters on the first floor. My orderly replaced the shattered window panes with bits of linoleum. Opening on the sea, the rooms were only partially destroyed. When Commandant Peigné left for Oostdunkerke, he turned this sumptuous apartment over to me.

From every angle, in my opinion, it was certainly the most comfortable spot of any in Nieuport-Baths, and particularly in the villa: the rest of it having been more or less wrecked by bombardment.

On the ground floor there was a grand piano which could still be played.

The furniture in my bedroom was still in place, also there was a magnificent bathtub, of the portable kind, which certainly had not been used for a long time.

One fine day I discovered with chagrin that the bathtub had disappeared from the apartment! Immediately I inquired every place, besides protesting vehemently against this inexplicable theft. As we had our mess in the house, I could not help but believe that someone had entered my rooms without the knowledge of our cooks and secretaries and taken my one luxury.

[44]

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Finally I had an explanation of this mystery. One day, very early in the morning, I was in a first-line trench, held by the 4th Zouaves, and was preparing to go into the cantonment for breakfast, when one of my comrades stopped me and insisted that I wait for *jus*,<sup>[11]</sup> which would soon come up, and have some with him.

It arrived shortly, boiling, carried by two men, in milady's exquisite bathtub; and she would have blushed to the roots of her hair could she have seen those scoundrels——

#### THE BRICK BRIDGE, BEFORE ST. GEORGES.

July, 1915.

Why is this wooden bridge called the "Brick Bridge"?

The latter is not exactly the right name. Perhaps it is because the little wooden bridge thrown over the evacuation canal at some time has been taken for one of brick by an officer of the Intelligence Corps while studying the map, and he has so baptized it.

One afternoon, I was sitting in a communicating trench at the side of Reymond, a few paces from the Brick Bridge.

It was a bright, sunny day and the boches were bombarding us with 105's. The shells passed ten or twelve feet over our heads, whistling loudly and exploded in the brickyard 200 yards on the other side of the Passchendaël canal——

[45]

"If they lower their fire we are gone," said Reymond.

The sport lasted an hour and they did not change the elevation of their artillery, fortunately. I was prepared that day to await calmly anything that came. One gets accustomed, progressively, to chatting unconcernedly and without a trembling of the voice when waiting for a mocking death that does not come——

"But I have it," said Reymond. "I know why it is called the Brick Bridge—because the brickyard is opposite——!"

So we were satisfied that day.

#### THE QUEEN'S FLAG.

July 21, 1915.

To-day it is the anniversary-fête of the independence of Belgium, and as we are at the extreme

point of the Allied line of defense, on Belgian territory, a captain of the 8th Tirailleurs and myself had the idea of raising a little Belgian flag on the listening post at the Great Dune.

The enemy's listening post faced us and was only fifteen yards from our own. It was there we exchanged, in ordinary times, bread, packages of tobacco, newspapers, hand grenades and rifle shots— [46]

We went to search for a flag that was red, yellow and black, at the dugout of the chaplain of the 16th Territorials, who had ornamented the altar of his chapel with French colors and those of the Allies.

The breeze was fresh enough and our little flag waved haughtily in the face of our adversary.

All day the Germans, as if enraged, fired volleys at our flag. The cloth was riddled with bullets, the staff itself split in two pieces. When it fell one of our Tirailleurs went crouching out and replaced it.

That night I took it down myself, rolled it up and carried it back.

The following day I sent the flag to Dr. Depage at La Panne. A few hours later it graced the boudoir of Queen Elizabeth.

"Ah," said our Tirailleurs, "it brings him good luck, this souvenir of July 21—she has kept it!"

MR. VEDOVELLI'S BOXES, NIEUPORT.  
*August, 1915.*

To-day the sun is atrociously hot and the river Yser and the canals exhale nauseating puffs from decaying bodies and carrion flesh which are not very agreeable to the nostrils.

Toward nightfall I found an ideal spot to rest: the Sub-commandant's Post North, on the road to Lombaertzyde. [47]

I am comfortably seated in a wicker armchair by the side of Commandant Martel and we have seen the penumbra deepen as darkness falls. Jupiter sparkles in the heavens; in the distance vagrant flashes of fire appear like a lingering hunting party.

We are waiting for a squad of Territorials to bring up several portable storage batteries (Vedovelli's system) to light the commandant's post. They were contained in cumbersome boxes and the good man had provided adjustable handles in order to make the work easier for the men. These he had shown to us.

But I was not a bit surprised when my Territorials did not arrive at the appointed time, because, in spite of Vedovelli's "handles," the boxes were so heavy as to be scarcely movable.

Finally I saw two of them coming, dripping with sweat, puffing, their eyes bulging, equipped naturally with their packs and with warm winter clothing for the approaching winter campaign.

At last they arrived. Letting the box with the adjustable handles fall brutally, they cried in unison as if compensated for the load:

*"Nom de Dieu de tous les noms de Dieu, I hope this damned box with its dirty handles bursts in the inventor's stomach!"*

A SHELL IN MY HOME, NIEUPORT. [48]  
*August, 1915.*

I am just about to start writing in my room, when suddenly, a boche shell explodes some place in the house.

A loud detonation—smoke—shell fragments and debris strike around me—a little dust on my uniform—that's all—

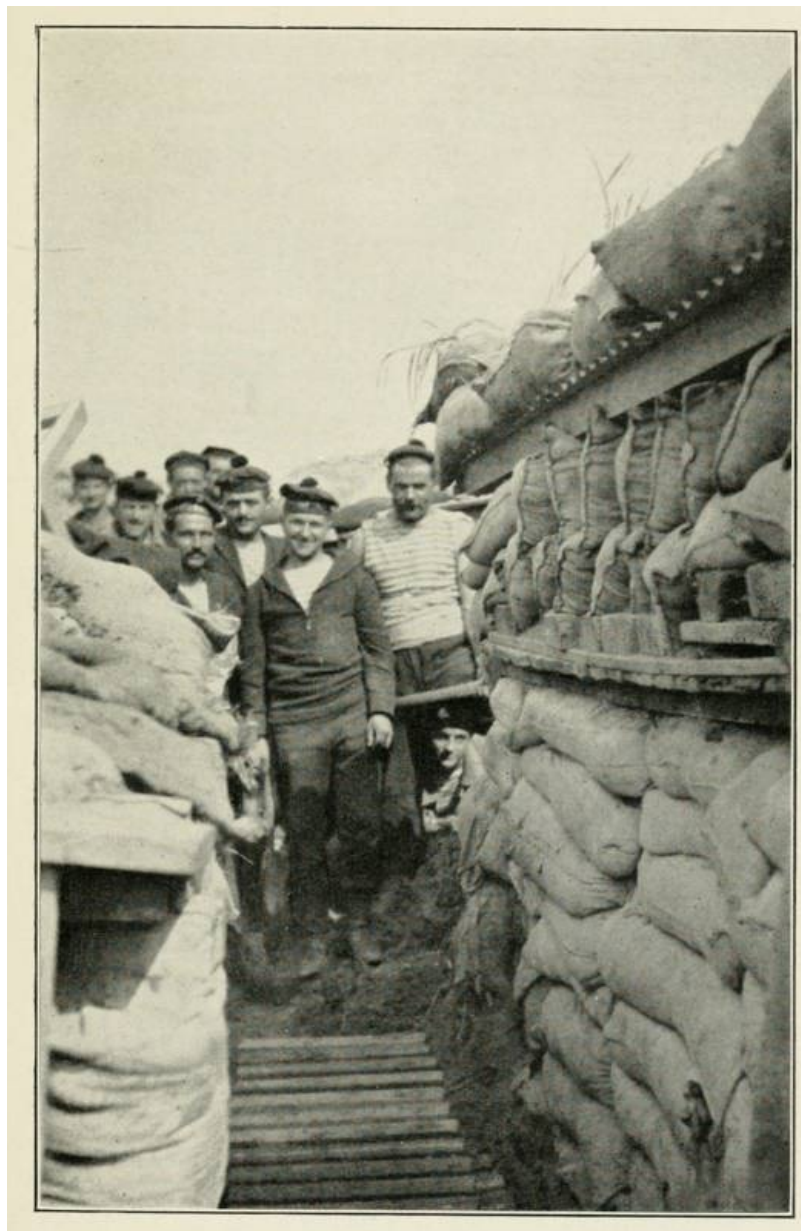
A horrible cry comes from the ground floor—I descend in jumps—

Our corporal-secretary lies in a pool of blood, gravely wounded in the thigh.

The "little fellow," shod in his sandals which he never has off, is already at his side. He believed it was I that was struck. With him I carry the wounded corporal into the kitchen where Simyan, the king of cooks and cowards, turns white with fear on seeing us enter—

AN IDEA OF JEAN GOUIN, [12] BEFORE ST. GEORGES.  
*August, 1915.*

Just now Reymond and I are sharing breakfast in a first-line trench—



**Richard in the midst of his comrades.**

A Marine Fusilier conceived the drôle idea of unscrewing from one of the abandoned coaches in Nieuport one of these little notices that the railroad company places under each window to warn travelers of the dangers of poking their heads out. The little enameled sign had been nailed by him on a plank in one of the first-line traverses, where one could read, with profit, this notice: [49]

"It is dangerous to stick your head out here!"

RICHARD'S GOD-MOTHER, ON THE YSER.  
*August, 1915.*

"Listen, Richard, a pretty marquise has requested that I find her a god-son! Do you want to be elected?"

"You are a husky lad like all the Marine Fusiliers, your behavior was good at Steenstraat, you are also good-looking, in short you have all the required attributes that go to make up a perfect god-son."

"With pleasure, lieutenant, thanks——"

"In that case I will take your photograph immediately, in the midst of your comrades, so that I can send one to your god-mother. She will be carried away! I forgot to tell you that the Marquise de R—— is charming and you will be spoiled as no one else——"

Some days after I sent Richard the picture which he slipped in a letter addressed to his god-mother—a very nice letter and well written.

A few days later the young chap told me that he was going on his vacation.

"Don't fail, Richard, to call on your god-mother," I cautioned, adding with a smile, "and don't forget to kiss her for me." [50]

It was only a short while before I received the following letter from the Marquise de R——:

"You have sent me a charming god-son, but the day of his arrival he seized me in his arms as if with all his strength and planted a sonorous kiss on both cheeks, saying, 'On behalf of my god-father!'

"It appears that you are his god-father! I am still thrilled by it. I pardon you this time because this brave boy has lifted a small corner of the great veil that hangs over Paris and which hides your sufferings. You are bold, he told me—do not expose yourself uselessly.

"The life in Paris is once more the same as ever. I am sending you some Parma violets, since you like them. They are all that I could find. I seldom go out. It is quite a long time since you have written——"

CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE ENEMY, BEFORE ST. GEORGES.  
*August, 1915.*

On arriving at the "Brick Bridge" to-night, I found everyone in great spirits. There was a group along the edge of the canal—in the middle was a boche prisoner.

The big lumbering cuss had the air of complete bewilderment. Our marines were all talking to him at once and harassing him with a thousand questions. An officer approached. [51]

"Quiet, men! Two men to conduct this fellow to the Brigade Headquarters, and lively!" They took the road, followed by the German, who kept at their heels like a pet dog.

The officer explained that for several days his marines had maintained correspondence with him. They placed their messages in a bottle which drifted along with the current. The boche had written:

"My wife has advised me to surrender, but you are terrible soldiers—you certainly would massacre me."

Some hours later the reply of the marines came to reassure him that everything would be all right.

This tableau lasted several days and "Jean Gouin" ended by believing that it was a ruse of the enemy and ceased to write. Finally a message came to them, drifting along in the bottle:

"To-night I will come along the slope of the canal. Do not shoot at me. I am the father of four children."

And so, when night fell, they saw a big, black mass creeping along the edge of the bluff. Our fusiliers were ready to spring, but he was alone.

---

With his two guardians the deserter was taken a roundabout way. They passed along the whole first line of the north sector because the two Marines wanted to parade the boche before their comrades.

They were proud of this capture and gave their prisoner cigarettes, and bread, and one of them had the generosity to slip a box of *singe*<sup>[13]</sup> into his pocket! [52]

They led him farther, almost to the road to Lombaertzyde, to show him to the Zouaves, and finally took the road for Brigade Headquarters.

In the sector held by the 2nd Regiment of Marine Fusiliers they discussed this incident for a long time.

FOR THE COOK'S TOURISTS, IN FRONT OF ST. GEORGES.  
*August, 1915.*

Boche torpedoes are decidedly disagreeable to listen to. The spot which seems fated to receive more than its share is the small fort north of St. Georges, 350 yards from the "Brick Bridge."

The Fusiliers have written on the sandbags: "Go easy—a dangerous bend!"

PETITES MARMITES,<sup>[14]</sup> ON THE ROAD TO LOMBAERTZYDE.  
*August, 1915.*

Commandant de Jonquières invited my comrade, Guéneau, and myself, to luncheon at the Sub-commandant's Post North—a spot that had a villainous reputation. The house is riddled with bullet and shell-holes.

A room is still habitable and there is found, admirably prepared, the commandant's table, with white linen napkins properly placed at each plate like a metropolitan restaurant. [53]

What a menu! The Marines dine well. The second course has been served when a loud explosion occurs in the vestibule: a 105 has burst in the house and the dining-room is filled with dust and smoke.

Commandant de Jonquières without rising from his chair cries out:

"Anybody hit, men?"

A Marine investigates and replies:

"Nobody, commandant, but there is some plaster in the cream. Shall I replenish it?"

"Call the chef."

The chef, a big, robust individual, comes in immediately.

"Commandant?"

"Listen. You have forgotten to write '*Petite Marmite*' on our menu. Another time don't forget it. That's all!" And, turning to us, he said, as if nothing had happened:

"You know I saw a movie in Toulon that was absolutely amazing, but I have seen better in Paris, some months before the war——"

THE SADDEST THING IN THE WAR, BEFORE ST. GEORGES. [54]  
*August, 1915.*

A listening post between the Passchendael and Evacuation canals. It is night—a night very black and without moon. I find a group of Marines seated on the ground chatting and I listen——

"What is the saddest thing you have seen, you?"

"It was at the beginning—we were in Belgium. It made me cry to see the burning towns, the poor people fleeing with everything they could carry, and that was not much. It was sad—and it gave one the blues! It hit them hard so suddenly—poor people——"

"And you, Pierre, what's the saddest tale you know of?"

"The death of Commandant Jeannot, at Dixmude——"

There was deep silence, for they all recalled it. A man, aside from the others, had listened closely without speaking—the others turned toward him:

"And you, *le vieux*, what would you say?"

"The saddest? *Allons*, you have forgotten then our friend wounded between the lines who babbled 'mother' all night, and whom we could not rescue; the same whom we put out of misery!—when at dawn he called to us, 'Kill me—I suffer too much!'"

"And you shot him?" I asked.

"Yes, lieutenant, we killed him—but it is the saddest thing in my war——"

*Tenez*, it seemed to be a night just like this and I could almost hear the cry "mother" in a plaintive [55]  
voice that grew farther and farther away——

THE RED LANTERN AT THE FIRST AID STATION, NIEUPORT.  
*August, 1915.*

There were casualties to-day. I am waiting for Thiébaud, my sergeant, and a squad of men, with whom I am going into the cantonment to-night at Nieuport.

We are to meet at the First Aid Station and a few men are stretched out on litters moaning. There is one particularly, who is suffering terribly: he has been shot through the stomach and the surgeon says in a hushed voice he will die on the way to the rear. Poor chap, his breathing is labored. They are waiting for an English ambulance to carry them, which will arrive soon, I hope ——

The odor of ether and dressings, mingled with the smell of blood, sickens me——

I go outside from time to time, to see if my men have not come up. A company of Fusiliers are being relieved and they file past me. One hears the hurried shuffling of feet. Then an artillery duel starts up. It is very dark in the street. The lantern hanging there casts sinister shadows on the men. Intermittently the sky is brightened up by enemy star-shell. Their lines are less than a mile away.

A soldier passing says to his friend:

"Look, *mon vieux*, at the red lantern—one of Nieuport's brothels!"

THE LOCK-KEEPER'S HOUSE, NIEUPORT. [56]  
*August, 1915.*

Two of my men, Poulet and Chandonnay, were living in the cellar of the lock-keeper's home where they were guarding some material I had sent up. Also, there was a picket of Territorials.

I left Poulet and Chandonnay this particular morning at the moment they themselves went to have dinner with their comrades a short distance away. I had given them leave until after breakfast because I wanted to make some changes in the arrangement of my precious storehouse.

It was one of those little Flemish brick homes where the roof and two stories had been shattered by bombardment, nevertheless in much better condition than the neighboring ones.

I, also, went to dinner on the other side of the locks, where the Marines held the sector.

The bombardment had slackened somewhat, but from time to time 420's came over, and, exploding, shook everything.

At the time I had fixed for the return of my *poilus* to the cellar of the lock-keeper's home, I was not a little surprised to see them coming to meet me.

"How is it," I said, "that you are not at your post where you should be, or in the dugout in safety?"

"Our post," they replied, stupefied, "our post—what post, lieutenant?"

"The lock-keeper's house."

"It's gone!"

[57]

I was a bit angry, but we at last arrived at the spot where it should have been. They were



perfectly right. There was no more lock-keeper's house! A 420, during our absence, had literally fallen right on the roof of the cellar.

"And the Territorials?" I asked.

"Chopped meat, lieutenant, chopped meat——"

A BOCHE WHO HAD ENOUGH, THE GREAT DUNE.  
*August, 1915.*

It is night——

The sentinel is on duty at the extremity of the embankment of sandbags, which protects the pier from shells that are coming over fast.

It is almost midnight and the brave Territorial looks continually at the sea which splashes at his feet.

Suddenly the man hears an unusual sound in the water in front of him. He is all attention and cries out:

"Halt, there! Who goes?"

The night is clear and soon he sees two dripping arms stuck high in the air.

"What are you doing there—this is not the time to go in swimming—advance with the countersign—it's a boche!"

"Kamarad! Kamarad!..."

"Listen here, I regret it, but I can't accompany you, you understand—I can't leave my post. You see that bridge? Take it! You will go to that house just over there, it is Marine Headquarters, and ask for the commanding officer. Is that clear? Now get along—good-night." [58]

And the prisoner left alone——

A SPECTACLE OF THE WAR, NIEUPOORT.  
*September, 1915.*

I lunched for the last time with my friend Reymond. He is accompanying me to Brigade Headquarters of the Marine Fusiliers, where I must say good-by, because, to-morrow, I leave for another sector.

We are in the principal street of Nieuport and are only a short distance from our objective when a frightful detonation rends the air a few steps away.

Dense clouds of smoke envelop everything. A few steps more, and we see a very sad spectacle. Four 105's, two timed shell and two percussion, break in the midst of a group of workers—forty or more Zouaves are on the ground, wounded or dead——

*Parbleu!* it was like a sight at the Great Dune, on a similar occasion; one could not help but see, like the nose on your face——What indifference!

A Zouave, short and stocky, yelling and waving his arms madly—he is all bloody—he must have gone crazy——

#### FOOTNOTES:

[10] Trench vernacular for wine.

[11] Coffee—Tr.

[12] Jean Gouin is the personification of everything witty, brave and odd about the Marine Fusiliers, the French soldiers of the sea. One of them is always referred to as Jean Gouin. The Germans learned to respect him very deeply in the first days of the war.—Tr.

[13] Singe—literally monkey. Vernacular for canned beef or meat.—Tr.

[14] Petite Marmite—Soup cooked and served in a small earthenware or metal receptacle or pot. Also, term used for German shell of big caliber.—Tr.

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## CHAPTER FOUR FIRST VISIT TO VERDUN

[59]

*Sub-Lieutenant Capart left the Flanders' sector for good. He arrived at Verdun during the first days of October.* [60]

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CHAPTER FOUR  
THE FANCIFUL IDEA OF MAJOR PETIT, VERDUN.  
*October, 1915.*

[61]

In the middle of the month of October, 1915, I was invited to dinner by General Coutanceau, Governor of Verdun.

Verdun, at this particular time, still retained its aspect of a little garrison city in times of peace, and, when I entered Bevaux Barrack, I felt far away from the war—

I found Colonel Masselin who awaited me in his office, busy as was his habit and who rose precipitately on seeing me enter the room.

"There you are—it is fine! The general is home and it is the hour to sit at table—he does not like to be late."

Some moments after, I was in the presence of the Governor of Verdun, a man very big, very cold, with a severe and glacial face.

We immediately entered the dining-room with its barren walls like those of a school-room, but brightened by a great wood fire, which burned joyously on the hearth.

We sat down and the general placed me at his side; the menu was excellent and the wines perfect. My neighbor, in spite of his severe mask, was a very fine and spirited conversationist, also this dinner, I felt, was for me a real luxury, inasmuch as I had the pleasure of finding myself in the company of this man of *esprit*. [62]

One spoke naturally of the war and I stated that in my opinion this epoch did not resemble the others from the point of view of the relations that could exist between two adversaries in the course of hostilities. In effect, it was our custom in youth to recite of truce-parties who came with bandaged eyes into enemy lines to make one or another communication to the commander of the adverse troops.

I added that the perfection of the art of destruction had killed the romantic side of war and that it was very regrettable.

The general protested, remarking that adventurous examples were not lacking, and as far as he was concerned, he was able to relate a story within his knowledge that was worth the trouble of telling.

This is what he told us and to which we all listened with very great silence.

---

Some months before war was declared, one of my old friends on his death bed urgently recommended his son to me.

The young Count de Marnac was a worthy youngster, and to his misfortune—and to mine—he was a *Camelot du Roi*.<sup>[15]</sup> [63]

Nevertheless, a boy very daring and full of the best sentiments. I was convinced he would be an excellent soldier. Sergeant in a regiment of infantry, he fought like a lion in the Belgian campaign and immediately distinguished himself. His colonel proposed him for a sub-lieutenant and I transmitted the request to General Sarrail, under whose orders I then was.

Was it for political opinions or for some other reason, I know nothing of it, but the propositions I received from his colonel and which I hastened to send to the General, were held without reply —

So, during the battle of the Marne, the Division to which my *protégé* belonged was on the right bank of the Meuse; I came, as you know, to be completely surrounded by the Germans for a period of forty-eight hours.

From that moment, I depended no longer on General Sarrail, from whom I was totally cut off.

So, an old order authorized generals commanding a besieged or surrounded spot to nominate officers up to a certain rank.

Having still in mind the last recommendation of young de Marnac, I hastened to send him his brevet of sub-lieutenant.

---

Up to here there is nothing romantic in my story, but you will see how this animal recompensed me for my kindness.

During the month of November, 1914, his Division was engaged in murderous fighting. [64]

He had a battalion chief, named Petit, known in his regiment for his lack of mental equilibrium. He always had ideas more or less strange and fanciful, and he always caused comment by his eccentricities and his *bizarrerries*.

I had ordered an operation to commence in the morning of the 15th, and Petit told all his men, before the attack, that he would give one dollar for every pair of German trousers they brought to him!

Do not laugh, he had more extravagant ideas than that!

---

The attack was successful and our *poilus* struck a hard blow; they took numerous prisoners and reaped a mountain of trousers!

This sight was absolutely grotesque; the boches did not know what we wanted with them and this "kilty" disguise did not go well with them at all.

Petit, himself, was literally jubilant, splitting his sides with laughter before the German column about to start for the rear trouser-less.

Lieutenant de Marnac was furious, because he could not admit he carried on war in this manner and took it upon himself to go into the German lines, on a truce, and present his excuses to the general commanding the Division in front.

He fixed a white handkerchief on the end of his cane, took a bugler with him and calmly started out toward the enemy trenches. [65]

All went well enough; the Germans bandaged his eyes and as he conveniently spoke the language, he asked the first officer he met to be conducted into the presence of the general of that Division.

The latter lived in a little village ten miles back of the lines so de Marnac's journey was long enough.

He did not arrive, until darkness had fallen, at the farm which served as headquarters of the boche general.

The general was at dinner when they presented our young man to him. He received him courteously and spoke French to him, but with difficulty.

"Sit down—what have you to say to me?"

And turning toward the young girl who served him, he added, "Mademoiselle, will you place another cover for the lieutenant? Monsieur, I listen."

"General, I am the interpreter for General Coutanceau, Governor of Verdun, and have come to present his excuses for an event that occurred to-day.

"This morning, in course of the attack at Consenvoie Wood, a French battalion major ordered his soldiers to cut the suspenders of all German prisoners they might take and to bring him the trousers, in return for which they would receive a dollar.

"Matters happened this way: our soldiers cut numerous suspenders, removing quite a few trousers from your infantrymen—"

"The Governor General charges me to tell you he deplores this act as being unchivalrous and to present to you his excuses and his regards." [66]

The boche general turned crimson because he had misunderstood de Marnac and when the latter had spoken of "cut suspenders" he certainly imagined some enormous thing—"

He showed by his nervousness the lack of linguistic knowledge he possessed. He called an interpreter and it was explained to him.

He found then that the reason for the truce was very decent and his face flushed with pleasure.

During all this scene the little girl, who incessantly busied herself about the table and who had not lost a word, bit her lips to keep from giggling.

Dinner over, de Marnac requested of the German general that he be allowed to retire.

He got up and the general charged him with a thousand pleasant sentiments for me—"

At the moment when he stepped out the door the little girl was lying in wait for him and whispered in his ear:

"We count on you for Victory!"

---

On leaving the German general's headquarters, his eyes were bandaged and he and his bugler were led back into our lines.

Having reached his post, he made out a complete report of what had taken place and forwarded it to me by the usual channels.

Judge my astonishment on reading the pamphlet, I cried: [67]

"They are absolutely crazy, both of them? Ought to be put in a strait jacket."

Then, I thought immediately of the scandal this story would stir up and the consequences which would follow. I was absolutely astounded.

After having reflected for some time, I sent this report to General Sarrail—without comment, naturally, and then I awaited the tempest.

The storm broke!—Sarrail got me on the telephone and called me a lot of pretty names. He was furious, and I swear he had reason—"

"Your *protégé* is doing nicely, I compliment you!—"

"Yes, general, he is completely crazy—"

"You will have that fellow executed immediately——"

"You forget the story of the trousers, general——"

"It was a fine idea of yours to appoint him sub-lieutenant, I compliment you——"

"There is also the story of the trousers, general——"

---

General Sarrail sent Sub-Lieutenant de Marnac's report to great headquarters. Major Petit and de Marnac were arrested immediately and things were going entirely wrong——

I was able, nevertheless, to save the young fool, by repeating this:

"Yes, but there is the story of the trousers!"

Finally, Petit and de Marnac were given thirty days confinement, and I commenced to breathe. [68]

You believe my story to be ended? Not at all! The most important episode was not long in coming, to my very great confusion.

January 1, 1915, at the break of day and in the same sector that the foregoing events transpired, a German lieutenant advanced toward our lines with a white flag and a bugler.

The officer carried an immense package under his arm, which was wrapped in pasteboard.

They bandaged the eyes of both and led them into our lines.

Conducted to the colonel, the boche lieutenant announced he had a communication to make to me. They reached me on the telephone and I gave the order to send him on.

I waited impatiently for an hour, I swear, and I was far from imagining what was coming——

---

The young man was brought into my office; he was a large and solid chap, who planted himself in front of me and saluted with respect.

"I listen——"

With a strong Teutonic accent he said to me in French:

"His Imperial Highness, the German Crown Prince, commander of the opposing army, has charged me to bring you this package!——"

I slowly untied the string that bound the package, in which I found a framed photograph of the German Crown Prince and in the corner he had likewise written in French: [69]

"To my loyal and chivalrous adversary! William, Crown Prince of Germany."

I was absolutely nonplused and I dismissed the boche lieutenant, whom I was on the verge of cursing.

---

"And the portrait?" I asked General Coutanceau——

"I forwarded it by the usual military channels. General Sarrail did not fail to notice the outcome, but I never knew what became of the picture——"

Turning toward me with his rare smile:

"You will agree that this story is a *veritable* romance!"

RECOMPENSE, BEFORE ORNES.  
October, 1915.

All night we have worked in No Man's Land.

What a night!

We had to install certain wire entanglements and *chevaux de frise*<sup>[16]</sup> in front of our trench of the first line.

Happily the boche mitrailleuse in front of Moulin d'Ornes did not fire; otherwise we would have been riddled!

My men went at it vigorously and all the work had been terminated—I had divided them into several gangs and had recommended the new wire network be placed parallel to the old. [70]

I went over the entire line to survey the work and to observe the patrols who protected the men ahead of the trenches.

One of my gangs just missed causing us a villainous adventure! They stumbled on some wire, which by shell-fire had been thrown out of line, and following it, they had worked directly toward the enemy——

They had placed their *chevaux de frise* one after the other and I stopped stupefied on making this discovery. I had for a moment the impression that my men had been picked up by the boches.

Fortunately not a shot had been heard and I said to myself it would probably be possible to repair the error committed.

First it was necessary to find my *poilus*—

I followed the line of *chevaux de frise*, my revolver in hand. Thus I arrived a few yards from the boche wire entanglements. My men were not there and it was likely they had gone taking the material to the village. An hour later I found them and started them again on the work.

All the rest of the night passed without incident—

At daybreak I brought my workers and patrols back to Ornes, all satisfied with the work accomplished. On reaching the cantonment I said to them:

"*Mes enfants*, you have done well to-night and I am very much pleased with you—"

One of the *poilus* I had known for a long time, replied:

"Can I ask you a favor, lieutenant?"

"Certainly."

"Since you are pleased with us, we all would like to have god-mothers!"

"It is understood—you will have them!"

That is how the squad from Ornes got a very serious contingent of god-mothers to the great happiness of my *poilus*, who received that winter woolen socks and warm slippers!

**FOOTNOTES:**

[15] Royalist.—Tr.

[16] A certain type of wire entanglement.—Tr.

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**CHAPTER FIVE**

**EPARGES AND CALONNE TRENCH**

*This period of the author's life begins during the first days of October, 1915, and ends on the eve of the battle of Verdun, February 20, 1916.*

*He directed certain works in the different sectors of the Verdun front, at Eparges, at Calonne Trench, in the Hauts-de-Meuse, at Chevaliers Wood, at Ornes, at Forges and Béthincourt, at Corbeaux Wood, etc.*

*He remained a greater part of the time at Eparges, which was then the bloodiest sector on the front. The episodes in mining warfare left an impression of horror with those who were lucky enough to survive.*

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**Eparges Mill recalls the ruins of some ancient Abbey.**

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## CHAPTER FIVE

THE DAY OF MY ARRIVAL, EPARGES.  
*October 7, 1915.*

[75]

When I come here for the first time I cannot help but feel that I will pass the unhappiest moments of my life—

Upon arriving at Calonne trench and descending toward Mesnil-sur-les-Côtes, I perceive Eparges on the right. With its mine craters, its smoke, this barren hill, tinted red, appears like a kind of Stromboli—

The road all the way to Longeau is simply exquisite. Eparges mill, demolished almost completely, and overgrown with grass already recalls the ruins of some ancient abbey.

I have traversed the length of the sector with a friend—it is very active to-day. The boches, at break of day, exploded four mines simultaneously. A section of the trench is completely demolished and a hundred men have been killed—

We are on the verge of contact with the enemy and it is necessary to crouch over dead bodies and sandbags to observe what is transpiring in front of us—

GUNTHER DUGOUT, THE CORRUGATED IRON, THE RATS,  
THE MAP, THE LETTERS, EPARGES.  
*November, 1915.*

[76]

At the beginning our shelter was nothing more or less than a mole hole.

Little by little it is becoming habitable. The walls have been boarded and the ceiling made of corrugated iron.

A long, large, white table, with benches—-. How many of us will no longer sit there! Everyone found in this little space is loved like a brother.

On the board wall which separates the room from our sleeping quarters, which is arranged like a sleeping-car, there is a map of Alsace-Lorraine. Gunther, with his big fist, has traced an arrow in ink, which points from Eparges to Strasbourg. He has written:

"The hearts and aspirations of the 14th Company of the 15th Corps point this way!"

---

At night the rats, with an unseasonable boldness, run up and down between the corrugated iron and the roof. One doesn't know if they're playing or fighting. These gallops on the metal awake us with a start.

A flash from my electric lamp and I discover an immense rat tearing across the room with a telephone message sent to me at the moment I retired.

Ménard and Foulou prepare the evening meal before the arrival of the post-sergeant. The little fireplace at the side blazes cheerfully and fills the dugout with the pleasant odor of burning wood. [77]

Happiness is his who can relax completely after a rough day—

The post-sergeant arrives drenched, his package of letters and newspapers carefully wrapped. He seems ill at ease as if he finds himself in a palace.

"Ménard, give your friend a quart of *pinard*."

The paquet of letters for Captain Gunther is always very large. Many of them commence like this:

"I thank you from the bottom of my heart for having given us details of the death of our boy. We are proud of him."

Then there are others cheerful enough, others very sad.

I found a short while ago some of the last wild flowers, while returning from the front line. I have slipped them into my letters that are about to go. Oh! you who will receive these flowers will never know what one can suffer here!

THE FILTH, EPARGES.  
*November, 1915.*

Deep in Eparges mud, sixty yards from the enemy—

"Look here, my friend, you know very well it is forbidden to wrap the legs in sandbags—"

"General, it's for the filth—"

[78]

"These sandbags cost the Government more than ten *sous* a piece—"

"General, it's for the filth—"

"It is not permitted to waste material destined for the trenches."

"General, it's for the filth—"

"For what?"

"The filth."

"The filth?"

"Ah! general, it is all that you see here: the mud, the dirt, the bugs, with trampled boxes of *singe* and sardines under foot. This damned soil, which—which smells bad—general, all this is filth!"<sup>[17]</sup>

THE RETURN OF ST. ANDRÉ, EPARGES.  
*November, 1915.*

"Good morning, St. André—that you? Come in, *mon petit*, I'm glad to see you again."

"Yes, captain, here I am."

It is at Eparges, during the month of November, 1915. We are in Captain Gunther's dugout, who commands the 14th Company, 15th Corps of Engineers.

The weather is horrible. Outside the rain falls incessantly. The mud, the mud, the rotten, cursed mud is everywhere.



**Captain Gunther, who commands the 14th Company, 15th Corps of Engineers.**

Our shelter is damp. Water filters through the board walls and falls in large drops. A dim candle light. The sector is very quiet. [79]

St. André stands in the threshold. He is covered with mud from head to foot. What a trip it is to get here! His stalwart face is dripping with rain; this brave young lad of nineteen radiates health and good nature.

"Did you spend a nice vacation?"

"Not very good, captain."

"Not very good? Where did you go?"

"To Rennes."

"Did they not welcome you as they should?"

"No, captain, they treated me like a slacker. They said, 'What! not wounded or killed—you're not a real *poilu*!'"

"But, *mon petit*, you should have said you came from Eparges, the wickedest sector along the front."

"No chance to talk with those people. Our conversation ended in blows."

"At least, you have done your bit for France by giving her 'little St. André's,' *poilus* and sturdy like yourself?"

"Yes, captain, I'm not married—but I've got two sons."

"You are not married? You are going to marry her right away, my boy. You could easily have an accident here, and you would not embarrass your little friend——"

"That's true, captain——"

"I am going to give you two days' vacation so you can marry her, but I will have to get the certificate from the mayor." [80]

"Captain—I want to tell you—I would rather marry by proxy."

"By proxy! That's a strange idea—and why?"

"Because then it would only be good for the duration of the war."

THE PASSWORD, DIEUE-SUR-MEUSE.

November, 1915.

It is night—I return in a covered automobile with Colonel d'Auriac. At the road which crosses that to St. Mihiel, a sentinel waves his lantern—the machine stops.

"The password?"

"Marne!"

"That's not it!"

"What! That's not it? Call the head of the post," said the colonel nervously.

In a few moments that seemed long enough to us, the *poilu* brought the head of the post, who



dragged his feet as if half asleep.

"The password?"

"Marne!"

"Pass!"

"Wait! How is this, sergeant, when I give the word to the sentry, he does not let me pass through; on the other hand when I give it to you, you permit me to continue?"

"Well, you see, colonel, neither the sentry or myself know the password!"

[81]

AT THE ANNIVERSARY OF AUSTERLITZ, EPARGES.  
*December 1, 1915.*

It is the eve of Austerlitz. To-night and to-morrow we are going to celebrate the memory of our forefathers, the Emperor's Old Guard, who will shake in their graves with joy.

It is snowing. The night is bright with moon. Rifle shots resound loudly in the darkness. From time to time, are exchanged by one and then the other, rounds of machine-gun fire at fleeing shadows during the slow descent of star-shell.

I arrive from Verdun and my automobile is filled with everything I could hastily collect in the stores. We have a basket of oysters, fine white bread and fresh butter—

The florist in Verdun, a big fellow, always restless and uneasy, who will foretell the worst misfortunes until the end of his life, has given me an armful of roses and mimosas, that will look pretty there.

There will be cigars for our friends and for our *poilus*, and champagne, naturally—

We have been arranging for this little fête for a long time; there will be quite a lot of us: thirteen or fourteen infantrymen, sappers, artillerymen, all old habitués of the sector.

We are taking with us all those who have been sent back for rest. When we pass Mont-sur-les-Côtes, the sentinel stops and becomes pensive at seeing seven or eight officers piled together in the little machine. It is terribly crowded. What loud bursts of laughter! How wonderful life is among young men of the same age who have made the supreme sacrifice of their existence and know the least of that fugitive joy that falls to a soldier's lot.

[82]

Each one brings something to the dinner, some have *pâté de foie gras*, others *petits pois*, and pastry.

How late it was when our automobile brought us a half-mile from the first line—this is what caused a reprimand from the "general staff" some days later!

The boches are very quiet: not a rifle shot, not a cannon shot. The St. Remy searchlight which generally plays on the Eparges road is out to-night.

We have climbed Eparges hill—we pass through the ruins of the village and they are silhouetted like Christmas eve decorations. The enemy is very near to us and it is drôle to think we have scaled the height to pass an evening, a real live pleasure party.

When we arrive finally at Captain Gunther's dugout, there are cries of joy—. All his staff assist us with the numerous packages. The brave Ménard, with his commanding presence, his flowing mustache and kindly eyes, spares no pains to see that we are settled.

Our dugout has become quite comfortable since the installation of electric lights. Everything is perfect; there is not a hitch.

It is so crowded, elbow to elbow, that we throw off our tunics.

What a dinner! The oysters and champagne are the best. Oyster forks in this region made us all think—Ménard had a Prince Albert coat on over his uniform. Where did he get it? Mystery!

[83]

There is singing, laughing. They become grave when speaking of the comrades who are no more —

From time to time the ruffled form of one of our *poilus* passes out the door. They know we have not forgotten them. They carry a bottle, a pâté, or a box of cigars—and so the fête extends even to the advanced posts of the first line.

From the listening post to-morrow they will throw oyster shells at German heads. What faces they will make. Surely they will place them in their geological museum at Berlin.

The flowers on the table, a fantasy of color, cause some to weep with emotion. We have the most profound respect for them: "How come you here in the center of death and destruction—you come to us from the warm, beautiful countryside—"

I glance at my friends, Berthet, Blanc, Grabinski, the brave Grab, Flament, the doctor, and the staunch face of my captain—

We speak of the great Emperor and compare our army with his—How proud he would be of our *poilus*! What would he have done if he had had airplanes?

The time for champagne has come; Gunther drinks to all: the infantry, artillery, engineers, and the absent comrades. His voice trembles with emotion—"High Hearts! The road will be yet long. France has her eyes on us! Our lives belong to her. We will be happy to give them. If we are killed our children will be proud of us!"

[84]

In my turn, I speak to them of the Eparges—At this anniversary I feel the blood of my ancestors tingling in my veins, because I am a great grandson of a veteran of the First Empire.

I drink to Eparges, for each one of its letters is the beginning of a word representing the military virtues we must practice here:

ENCOURAGEMENT.  
PERSEVERANCE.  
ARDOR.  
RESOLUTION.  
GREATNESS.  
ENERGY.  
SUBLIMITY.

---

Champagne and liquor have their effect—now the music commences!

First the "Marseillaise" rings out. Could the boches have heard us from the bottom of their pits they would realize we were all ready to conquer or to die.

Then each one sings his little *chanson*—these pretty French songs full of verve and spirit. How odd it is to hear sung "The Marriage of Mademoiselle Fallières," here in this dugout, mute witness to so much drama—

---

The hour to separate has come. Each must take up his duties, save those who return to the rear.

It is midnight—and it is clear and calm.

[85]

I leave with Captain Gunther to go into the first line. It is well that our *poilus* see that we are at their side—are they not our brothers? We wish as well to know what the boches are doing!

We enter a mine gallery where the work goes on actively. Our sappers are digging fast for the enemy is working feverishly also. It is he who explodes it first—as usual!

"They are ahead of us—they're digging their hole," said one of Grenet's men.

He spoke with calm and indifference.

On the menaced part of the front the number of men has been lessened, save only in the little posts, where they wait events stoically.

Coming outside, a *poilu*, with an undefinable accent, says:

"Then they're going to spring it to-night?"

"Who told you that story?"

"Well, there's no need in hiding it—I'm not blind and I know what it means to go back there—On a night like this it wouldn't bother me a bit to be shot like an arrow up to the stars!"

Our rounds are finished. We can go back to our dugout and profit by the hours of quiet to get much needed rest.

In going into Sap 13 again, I look up at the heavens. My brain is so tired that I seem to see a cortège of soldiers. Are they the Old Guard and our *poilus*, our brave *poilus*? Yes, decidedly, the Old Guard is feasting up there, the Old Guard of Austerlitz—

The earth, in this clear and luminous night, appears in bold relief and one sees between the torn tree trunks, arms reaching out of the ground, arms lifted to the German heaven, and our own dead fallen on this cursed soil of the Eparges—they seem to contemplate the great fête up there

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[86]

It is the morrow.

What horrible weather! It is raining in torrents. Everything is soaked. Again we shall have to flounder about in mud up to the middle.

However, it is impossible to complain of your fix when you have flowers in your dugout!

During the morning a heavy detonation shakes the entire hill. It is these German pigs, decidedly, who have exploded the first one. They choose their time well.

Everyone dashes down to lend a hand to our comrades who are on duty. We shall have to reestablish the trench and evacuate the wounded.

If you attempt to go fast you get nowhere. The mud glues itself to your feet. The ground smells bad.

But it was not serious, only a warning, and soon I am back in the dugout, dripping from the neck down. It is the time to write.

I am alone with Cadet Flament, who, stripped of his tunic and wearing his blue jersey, has rather the air of a collegian. He is, however, a brave young fellow, our little Flament—

"Say, Flament, you had better write a letter home. It is three weeks now since you have given them any news." [87]

"You're right, lieutenant."

And little Flament began at once to write a long letter to his mother. She must be proud of her son. He is the only child. She lives at Château-Thierry. But what uneasiness, knowing he is at Eparges—

After having written the first letter, Flament writes the second. This one also is to a woman! The smile on his lips when he writes leads me to believe that this young rascal has a little friend or a fiancée—

I am certain of it when I see him place in a little box an aluminum ring which he has made himself, and some flowers from the Eparges, mingled with those we had at our banquet last night —

"Lieutenant, when you go down to-night, it will be very kind of you, if you will take these letters and this little package—"

"Gladly, *mon petit*," and I placed in my pocket, the letter for his mother, the one for the "other," and the little box destined for her also.

Flament begins to put on his shoes which he has vainly tried to dry out—. It will be necessary to keep them in the stove for three days to obtain this result.

Without question he has written to the woman he loves—he grumbles at the weather, the rain, at the cursed mud, at the boches—

Ah! what wouldn't he give to pay those boches back for having began this holocaust—

Suddenly an explosion, more violent than the one before, shook us in our chairs.

It is they this time who have sprung the mine. There will be many casualties! [88]

We jumped up and left the dugout.

It was raining; but at the same moment the cannonade raged. French and German shells tore through the air with frightful screams, an acrid smoke hung between Montgirmont and Eparges, machine-guns kicked up a deafening tumult—you damned coffee-mills—*va!*

Flament preceded me—he walked with his head high. How good-looking he is with his Tam O'Shanter cocked over one ear in the midst of bursting projectiles, face to the enemy—

---

A 77 hits him squarely, carrying away his thigh and half of his face—

My sergeant and two of his sappers collect the pieces. They carry this poor corpse, still heaving and stained with mud, into our little wooden chapel a few steps away—

---

An hour later, the flurry being over, I go again to see him with LeBlond. I have taken the flowers of the night before and placed them respectfully on his breast—

Poor young chap! He is unrecognizable. Can this be the happy little fellow of the night before?

On leaving the chapel, I notice that LeBlond is terribly affected and I say nothing to him. We arrive at the dugout where our brave captain, covered with mud, sobs like a child for his lost friend— [89]

Taking LeBlond by the arm, I say:

"*Mon vieux*, you are down-hearted—go with me along the whole first line—we have our dead to avenge! we must not weep for them—"

---

During the night LeBlond and I return to Verdun. Before retiring I reach in my pockets to empty them. Two letters and a little box rest in my fingers. I think a long time of these souvenirs of death—

After hesitating some moments, I say to my friend:

"Decidedly, I will send them to-morrow. These poor people will not learn too soon the unhappiness they bring!"

THE PHILOSOPHICAL POILU, EPARGES.  
*December, 1915.*

You will not believe me, but this morning at break of day, we found ourselves in mud up to our middle!

In the trenches and in the *boyaux*,<sup>[18]</sup> it was always the same thing—the sector was completely calm. *Parbleu!* the others in front of us must suffer exactly the same hardships.

I am numbed! For four days I have been struggling in this damned mud.

Woevre plain is thick with mist this morning and Champlon, seen from up there, resembles one of these pasteboard villages over which a miscreant youngster has poured water.

I sense a feeling of real joy, however, on seeing the first glimmerings of day, because to-night we shall be relieved— [90]

I descend into "Precaution Trench," sweeping into a river of mud, and find myself nose to nose, at the crossing of Sap 8, with one of my *poilus*.

On seeing me he cannot refrain from laughing.

"What are you laughing at?"

"Lieutenant, what a sight you are! You've got mud in your hair, and mud on your eyeglass—you ought to look in a mirror!"

"Listen, *mon petit*, it is not necessary to speak of it, because if one looks around himself here, he always ends up by finding someone very unhappy—"

"Very true, lieutenant, because instead of being in a lot of mud we could easily find ourselves up to our necks in something a whole lot worse!"

---

That night I am in the home of M. and Mme. Louis at Verdun.

The good woman has a great wood fire going—May God bless her!

I am so numb with cold that I cannot undress—my shirt is frozen to my back—

This good and sweet creature assists me and, hearing my teeth chatter, weeps softly and murmurs:

"What would his poor mother say if she saw him in this condition—" [91]

THE RELIGIOUS POILU, EPARGES.  
*December, 1915.*

Accompanied by one of my *poilus*, I ran across the chaplain of the — Regiment of Infantry, in front of the P. C.<sup>[19]</sup> of the colonel.

We are both in a sorry plight.

The preceding days have been such an accumulation of physical and moral misery, that I could not help but say to the priest:

"Father, I feel death hovering around me—hear my confession!"

"Confess you here? Do not think of it. You make your own hell on earth in the Eparges. I will pray for you. And you, *poilu*," he added, turning toward my sapper, "to what religion do you belong?"

"I belong to that which looks God straight in the eyes!"

THE MEN OF BRONZE, EPARGES.  
*December, 1915.*

We have just put in some frightful days up there. The mud, the horrible mud, is infinitely more terrible than any enemy shells.

It is relief day!

What luck to end this nightmare. One is sad, however, for the others who come to take your place. [92]

The Eparges soil is red—our uniforms of horizon blue, dirty and covered with this mud, appear tinted with blood.

A sad array. We all have a dejected mien. Several of us will not come back.

Four *poilus* are carrying one of our wounded. They advance carefully. Night has fallen and the lingering red shadows disappear from the heavens, one after the other, darkening our march.

We meet General Renaux, commanding the Division, who comes to inspect the sector.

Contemplating us dolefully, he said:

"My poor children, what a state you are in!"

"General," replied a *poilu*, straightening, "that is nothing. It is we—the men of BRONZE!"

MAJOR HÉLY'S VISIT, EPARGES.  
*December, 1915.*

It is reception day, to-day. Major Hély of the General Staff, after having inspected the sector, will dine with us.

And so, there are fresh flowers on the table—chicken and champagne.

A ray of sun is equally in the party. What luck! The boches are quiet.

It is the end of the dinner.

Ménard brings the *jus*, excellent coffee which he pours in the cups. The only coffee spoon makes the rounds of the table. Ménard also deposits a dusty bottle which we all regard in silence but with respect. [93]

Captain Gunther himself will pour the precious liquor in the little glasses—

Major Hély sips this plum nectar like a connoisseur. He sniffs the brandy and it causes him to smack his lips—

"Ah! Gunther, where did you unearth this marvelous stuff?"

"In a cellar of the village, under the corpse of an old woman."

PRECAUTION TRENCH, EPARGES.  
*December, 1915.*

Precaution Trench leaves a memory of horror with all those who have frequented it—. There is such an accumulation of German and French corpses; all huddled together, that one feels a swelling of the heart if one remains for any length of time in this charnel-house—

But we have to put the trench in condition. With sweeps of the shovel human arms and legs are dismembered so that free passage may not be blocked. Legs and bodies are, above all, difficult to disentangle—

At night, when the earth breathes, our men faint occasionally, and it is necessary to give them menthol-alcohol on bits of sugar—

"Look, *mon vieux*, at that rotting breast—"

"It's possible a woman, dearly loved, has been tightly pressed against that breast there!" [94]

"This man has been reported missing—he still wears his identification tag—"

"Perhaps they are waiting at home for him—they are always hoping, without doubt—"

"Him? Ough! he's shot to hell—but—what about her?"

YOU'RE A SLACKER! EPARGES.  
*December, 1915.*

Do you believe all those who have survived this horrible December winter, at Eparges, are martyrs? Not at all. Listen to what I heard this morning.

Two sapper-miners were arguing and this is what took place:

"You ought to be ashamed to be always in F gallery—it won't be blown up by the enemy for two months. It's always the same with you fellows who go in for this kind of fighting—"

"Désiré, you're nothing but a slacker!"

A WALK IN THE FOG, CALONNE TRENCH.  
*December, 1915.*

There is a thick, heavy fog here this morning—

One can stand on the parapet, where, two hours afterwards, he would be pierced like a sieve.

It gives one a very curious sensation to go several steps in front of the trench, over the snow, to reconnoitre the terrain ahead of us. [95]

And it is quite different to inspect this sombre place which we always see through a periscope, not knowing what it really is.

Dead boughs and leaves crackle under our feet while we move with care. There is a zig-zag path in the wire entanglement right in front of us—

In a hollow in the terrain we discover a German corpse, or more precisely, a skeleton dressed in an infantryman's uniform, a rusty rifle at his side—that is the thing in question.

The body must have been there a long time—

THE POILU BOULEVARDIER.  
*December, 1915.*

Day has not yet come—the weather is misty, and the rain has stopped. From time to time a rifle shot—

They are working lively to set a wire entanglement between the line of craters and a support trench. It has got to be done fast because daybreak will soon be here. The men sense the completion of the task, and hurry to finish it. They joke and seem to forget they are at a place the worst on the whole front.

The quiet astonishes them; neither of them find it natural—

Suddenly a heavy explosion—a great trembling and a large spout of earth rises in the air a hundred yards from us—

"There it is—a boche *camouflet!*" [20] [96]

At the same moment the well-known serenade—from all sides comes a rain of projectiles: minnenwerfer, shells and bullets. A man, wounded, cries like an infant with its throat cut—

Expecting an attack, I shout to my *poilus*:

"*Attention!* keep your eyes open!"

Corporal Poulet replied with an inexplicable accent:

"That's all right; as long as your eyeglass is not broken, everything will go well!"

A POILU WEEPS, CALONNE TRENCH.  
*December, 1915.*

A beautiful day—but how cold it is!

From the German lines as well as our own, white smoke curls up from wood fires.

The hour at which the sector becomes active has not arrived, and I have plenty of time to make the rounds of the first line to keep warm.

Poor little hill! It is barren!

It has been well named: "the lobster's claw." Certainly it has the form and color. The trees are cracked or shattered clear to the roots, because tons of projectiles have fallen on it.

The view from this dominating position is really exquisite!

In front of me are the heights of the Meuse, to the left is Longeau valley, with the village of Eparges in the bottom and the hills of Montgirmont, Eparges and Hûres which rise on the other side.

The hills this morning assume the unforeseen aspect of Mediterranean imagery, red and blue, a land of silence, as if one would find Samos and Ephesus close by. [97]

I arrive at a machine-gunner's post—the man is alone, his comrade must be only a few steps away from him. He is crying!

He was seated on the ground, his chin in his knees. Unshaven, unkempt, he had such a pitiable face that I sat down at his side—

He was visibly embarrassed and annoyed at having been taken by surprise with his eyes full of tears.

"Good morning, *mon vieux!*"

"Good morning, lieutenant—"

"How damned cold it is this morning."

"Oh! yes—"

"What's the matter? Is there anything wrong?"

"Nothing, I assure you—"

"You can talk to me like a brother." He did not reply.

"I'm hungry! It won't bother you if I have something to eat here—sardines, a box of *singe* and some *pinard*—you'll have a portion?"

At the end of a few moments we were the best friends in the world. I knew his name, where he was from and what he had done in the campaign.

"Why were you crying a moment ago when I came up on you? You are not a man to be afraid in the Calonne Trench, because you are brave—I can read it in your eyes—"

[98]

"I'm going to tell you. I went back for my first vacation. I had not told my wife because I wanted to surprise her and the youngster—"

"When I arrived at home, that night, the miserable—"

"Stop, *mon petit*, I understand. What did you do?"

"I thought at first to kill both of them. But I simply turned away from the door—and—I came back to rejoin my comrades—"

THE THREE JURORS' CROSSROADS, CALONNE TRENCH.  
*January, 1916.*

LeBlond is going to meet me to-night at the "Three Jurors' Crossroads!"

Here there is an important storehouse belonging to the Engineers, where materials are kept, destined to supply the sector. There is, above all, a hut where I go to seek shelter. Since morning an icy rain has been falling and I'm glad to be able to find a dry spot.

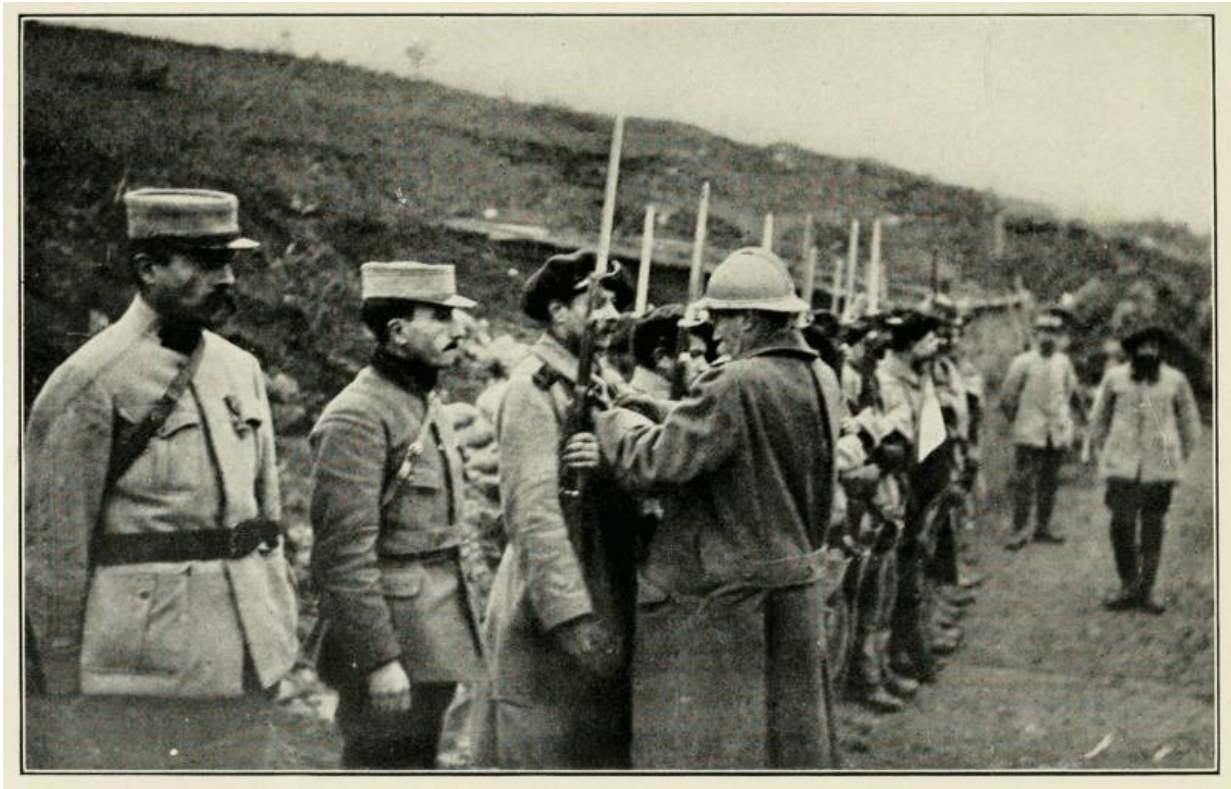
I go into the meager room, feebly lighted by a smoking lamp. What luck! The warmth is soothing and I can dry myself—

On the table is a set of chessmen!

"Who plays chess here?"

"I do," replied the head of the *dépôt*, a young sub-lieutenant.

"A game?"



**Colonel Geney awarding "Croix de guerre" to blue devils of Captain Gunther, on the battlefield.**

"That's a go!"

[99]

We are absorbed in the game—and, with the log fire to keep us warm, I forget everything: the war, hardships, and at the same time, I must confess, all that I love——

THE PRACTICAL POILU, EPARGES.  
*January, 1916.*

This episode took place at l'Eperon-des-Mitrailleuses, which is balder than the head of our friend Mollinié. Tons of explosives in the last few months, have been dropped on this little sector, and the pretty wood which runs down each side of the hill has completely disappeared. Underground, two long galleries of about 125 yards each are being dug to intercept the enemy. Again we find ourselves on ground where mining warfare progresses. The length of these galleries renders the work extremely difficult; the air there is bad and at the end of the tunnel our sappers can only work for a few hours.

The installation of electric lights and ventilators betters, from day to day, living conditions which exist in these villainous holes.

These latter also occasion a visit from the Colonel of Engineers, who, on a certain night, comes to inspect the improvements. He always has a kind word for everyone.

Arriving at the end of the gallery, he questions the brave *poilu*, who, in the presence of his colonel works with an exaggerated rapidity.

"You ought to be very grateful to your lieutenant who furnishes you with light and air."

[100]

"Yes, colonel, but I prefer *pinard!*"

THE LOGICAL POILU, CHEVALIERS WOOD.  
*January, 1916.*

Chevaliers Wood appears to be at the extreme ends of the earth, so much so that one feels far away from everything down there. The cold is dry and piercing. Pretty, white smoke rises from the shelters, in which are burning bright log fires. The ground, on the outside, is covered with snow.

I am going back to the trenches, having at my side a little blue devil. The *poilu* is leading a mule, a nice, gentle mule, carrying ammunition to a machine-gun section.

We passed at the side of a 75 battery, so well *camouflée* that we had not seen it. We are just even with it when it begins to fire.

The mule makes a jump and I see the moment when our little chasseur is going to be spilled on the ground.

He recovers his balance and, furious, plants himself before the animal.

"*Nom de Dieu*, don't you know *our* 75's?"

TRAGIC COINCIDENCE, EPARGES. [101]  
*January, 1916.*

I have spent several days at Berne on vacation. Some hours before my departure I went into a

shop to buy a cold luncheon to take on the train.

Near the shop-door two elderly women were talking in a low voice. At the moment I went out, passing close to them, I overheard the word "Eparges." I stopped short.

"Pardon, madame, well have you said 'Eparges'—I come from there and I return! In two days I shall be there and it startled me to hear the name pronounced so far from that spot that I will never forget it!

"Perhaps you know someone there? Tell me, I will go and see him for you——"

"My son, Charles, is at Eparges—his name is Charles Dubois. He is in the 9th Engineers——"

"Under orders from Captain Grenet, my friend; he is a sapper-miner——"

"Yes, Charles is a corporal in his company."

"Upon my arrival at Eparges, I promise you, madame, that I will find your son. He will be very happy when I tell him that I saw his mother at the precise moment she was thinking of him——"

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On the road, in the auto, which is taking me to Mesnil-sur-les-Côtes, I think of Charles Dubois, whom I shall easily find at the end of my journey.

I will not go to bed in the shelter, without having seen him—God knows, however, what fatigue the last step will bring—— [102]

Alone on foot, I will make the hard trip the length of Longeau, a brook, which was torn up enough in 1914 and the beginning of 1915.

During supper tête à tête with Captain Gunther, who welcomed me heartily on my return, I am haunted by the memory of two old ladies——

"What happened in my absence?"

"Nothing in particular, except this morning. We had five men buried by a *camouflet*—they began at once to recover the bodies. All were killed——"

"I am going above to-night, with your permission——"

"You must go to bed—you look very tired!"

"I have promised a woman to see her son——"

"I will accompany you."

Some moments later, we began the trip, so laborious at night, almost to the crest of Eparges.

At first the long path—what irony!—the length of which was found the shelters of our sappers and from which came at one time or another, sounds of voices. Then we passed Sap 13, where was heard the purring of the electric generator and the compressor.

Farther on is the first-aid station, where a moment never goes by without finding wounded there ——

Then it is the P. C. of the colonel, where there is always a great bustle, and where one must say to the *poilu*,

"Out of the way, *mon petit*, let me pass."





**Eparges, The "Ravine of Death"**

**From left to right: Lieutenant Blanc, Captain Gunther, Sub-Lieutenant Capart.**

Finally, the subterranean passage about sixty feet in length, and we come out in a spot not so dark: Woevre plain is down there. We turn to the right. It is the "Ravine of Death," where trees mutilated by projectiles are silhouetted against the night like a band of witches. [103]

One feels in this place a veritable impression of horror—

In front, pointing into the starry heavens, the crest of Eparges—

Laboriously we climb the hill, stopping from time to time to get our breath. Only a few cannon and machine guns trouble the calm of the night.

At last we arrive close to Grenet's shelter, where several men formed a group along the embankment. I called one of his sergeants whom I already knew.

"Do you know Charles Dubois?"

"Yes, lieutenant. You heard then that we recovered his body?"

"He has been killed—?"

"This morning—"

"Where is he?"

The *poilu* turned—I saw a stretcher, a shapeless mass covered with a blanket, two heavy shoes which stuck out, shrouded with red soil—

It is night. I gently lift the blanket and scarcely recognize the contour of his face—

I can hear the voice of an old woman, who says to another:

"Charles is at Eparges; I am so uneasy."

THE COMMERCIAL BAR, EPARGES. [104]  
January, 1916.

Bombing duels all morning—

We have gone to pay a visit to Major X— at his fighting dugout; the major never worries about anything—

"Ah! how good of you to come—let me offer you a drink: some Turin, whisky and soda, Pernod, or Cassis—which do you want? You will remain and have lunch with me? I have a live lobster"—he brandished that animal triumphantly—"and, with that, grilled lamb chops, potatoes, *pont-neuf*."

Turning toward the telephone operator and without waiting for our reply, he said:

"Waiter, set two covers more!"

FATE, EPARGES.  
January, 1916.

"Mamma! your ears are tingling to-day—"

I left Colonel Moran's shelter and directed my steps toward our own, following the board path. I walked with difficulty because the terrain was bad. On my right the mud was so deep that one could not step out into it without sinking up to the hips!

The boches commenced to shell us with 150's. The first shot fell between Montgirmont and Eparges, in plain view, 75 to 125 yards from me. The second burst 125 yards to the left, back of our little board chapel, raising a great fuss. [105]

The third hit ten feet from me—whack! It did not explode, but splattered me from head to foot—I couldn't be picked up with pincers!

"Mamma! your ears are tingling to-day."

THE COLONEL WHO LOVES GOOD MUSIC, EPARGES.  
*January, 1916.*

Bombardment all morning—the hill trembles—

I am lurching with Colonel X—, an immense Corsican, who never knows what fear is—

The meal is, *ma foi*, very good and very lively. A big boche torpedo burst not far away—

"Tell me of Verdi's music instead of this German melody outside. I'm a lover of the arts!"

EPARGES CEMETERY.  
*January, 1916.*

Eparges Cemetery with its symmetrically aligned graves is touching. The Bavarians bombard it systematically, their hearts set upon destroying it, and the shells churn these sacred little plots from top to bottom—

The *poilus*, on the board path, shake their heads and say:

"There! again they're murdering our dead."

LOST IN THE DARK, CALONNE TRENCH. [106]  
*January, 1916.*

Night black—night without moon—rifle shots resound like in a cave—we can't see more than a yard in front of us. My friend and I must rejoin a squad of *poilus* at work.

We have taken a short cut and stumble into shell-holes. We bump into tree stumps—climb hills. Yes, we are lost. We retrace our steps—tired and hungry.

We fall against something—it's a mound! I flash my electric torch on it, masking the glare with the flat of my hand. It's a grave! There is a small wooden cross on which is written: "Here lies an unknown soldier."

LeBlond and myself gave a sigh of relief:

"We are at the 'Grave of the Apple Trees,' which is to the right in the direction of the cross; we are on the proper path—Thanks, poor old chap—"

THE FIRST TRAIN, EPARGES.  
*January, 1916.*

The narrow gauge track has been finished—the first train is due to arrive to-night. Captain Gunther has put Ménard's Prince Albert over his uniform, and, with a little red flag, a horn and a lantern, has gone to await the arrival of the convoy. One hour, two hours pass!

The train did not come—it has been derailed near Trésauvaux. We learned later that the track had been torn up by shells. [107]

"Ah! these Government railroads—they never run."

HERMAN AND HIS CANTEEN, EPARGES.  
*January, 1916.*

For some months we have seen this corpse in front of us—fifty yards away—In the rain, snow, cold, we have noticed it change its position several times—

Herman, the "pretty German officer," was often the subject of discussion: for he must have on him shiny brass buttons to decorate our cigarette lighters and our cartridge boxes—his boots could no longer be any good, because around him there must have been a nice bed of mushrooms!

A change in the line brought us close to Herman. The first patrol which went out crouched over to him—

Quickly one cut the buttons from his tunic—

"Wait," said one of the men, "he's still got his canteen!"

A *poilu* easily detached it, then shook it close to his ear—the canteen was yet half full!—

He unscrewed the cover—he sniffed it. It was brandy!

In a low voice, he said to the others:

"*Eh! les vieux*, it's brandy!"

Tossing off a drink, he passed Herman's canteen to his neighbor—

[108]

January, 1916.

It is two o'clock in the morning—all the men have retired. I have just returned from Calonne Trench and am very tired on entering our shelter. A man—with a sheepskin thrown over his uniform like a cape—is waiting for me in the outer room. He is seated near the smouldering fire. He rises quickly.

"Good morning, cousin——"

"What, you here!—Speak low because the others sleep."

"Yes, I learned that you were at Eparges, and obtained permission to come and see you before going into the trenches."

"What are you doing?"

"Back of the lines I'm a color bearer, here, I am just like the others. Very soon we are going to occupy the craters."

"Keep your eyes open, *mon petit*, and don't forget that in this damned sector you must have sang-froid and presence of mind if you want to get out of it alive. You must save from tears some pretty pair of eyes—a handsome young man like yourself certainly has a sweetheart!"

He blushed to the roots of his hair.

"I'm not ashamed of that. If I survive this only the love of a woman can bring happiness hereafter." [109]

He hastily drew a picture out of his wallet.

"Look, cousin, how beautiful she is—I adore her!"

Two hours later a bullet penetrated his thigh while he was in 0 crater.

Now he is in a little white bed and in a few weeks he will be able to see *her* again——

THE ONE WHO READS PLUTARCH.

January, 1916.

While looking over the first line of Calonne Trench, I found a *poilu*, seated on the ground, reading.

"What is that you are reading?" I questioned.

"A translation of Plutarch."

"It's all right to read history, my friend, but you are doing better—you are making greater history yourself—Read on!"

MAJOR ANTHOINE'S CANDLE, MONT-SUR-LES-CÔTES.

February, 1916.

Ah! What a brave man this Major Anthoine—we are to dine with him to-night.

When we arrived we found him bent over his map as usual—magnifying glass in hand, he followed, hour by hour, this war of mines, this underground struggle, so bitter at Eparges. The dinner was more than perfect as it always was.

As we were about to leave, he commenced to undress and with a lighted candle in hand and half-clothed, he conducts us to our machine. [110]

The boches have seen the candle and without delay a 77 comes whistling over loudly, bursting on an empty house in the village. The major held up his candlestick for them to see, then extinguished it, saying:

"Snuff it out!"

In reply the boches sent over, one after the other, three 77's which did no more damage than the first.

"You see, it was hardly worth four to put that damn' thing out!"

DISCOVERED, ORNES.

February, 1916.

To-night a patrol discovered a corpse between the trenches. It was a very young boche soldier, almost a child. They brought the body into our lines.

Upon searching him, they found some papers—I was near the commander of Ornes, when an officer approached with them.

In a leather case there was a letter written on very plain paper.

"Can you read German, Capart?"

"Yes——"

"Read, then——"

Slowly I read a simple letter from a mother to her child.

"Your young brother Louis is not discreet, so we must tell him he cannot see you on your next vacation. The work at Ruhr is very hard now and everyone complains. We need many things badly, and, above all, miss you—When is it all going to be over?" [111]

"Stop!" said the major. "They brought on this war. They suffer? So much the better!"

"It is up to us now to kill these wolves and their young—and here's one. Get every one you can, men! Let the she-wolves howl in anguish!"

## FOOTNOTES:

[17] Gadoue.—Tr.

[18] Communicating trench.—Tr.

[19] Commanding Post.—Tr.

[20] Counter-mining. When an enemy mine is being dug, a *camouflet* destroys it before completion.—Tr.

[112]

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## CHAPTER SIX

[113]

### THE FIRST MONTHS OF THE BATTLE OF VERDUN

*This deals with the battle of Verdun. The author took part in the first days of the battle on the right bank and the left bank of the Meuse. He spent, likewise, almost all the month of March at the Verdun front.*

[114]

*On June 7, 1916, Sub-Lieutenant Capart became attached to the General Staff of General Pétain, but often he continued to fight and work with the poilus and also with his old comrades.*

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## CHAPTER SIX

[115]

DAY BEFORE BATTLE OF VERDUN, EPARGES.  
*February 20, 1916.*

At dawn the sky is unbroken. It is a veritable spring day that is here! A ray of sun in this spot—what good luck!

I feel this morning a delicious sense of joy and happiness to live.

A *poilu*, on the board walk, said to his friend: "This will be a great day for airplanes."

In effect, all morning our airplanes and those of the enemy described, at very high altitudes, frequent circles, recrossing the lines, girded by puffs of white smoke of breaking projectiles.

In spite of the joy which filled us all, we never spoke but of the next attack, the topic of conversation for the past several days.

We were at the turning point of the war; month after month, the ruin of the Central Empires became more certain, each hour that passed they became more enfeebled in human energy and in money! "*Parbleu*," said an officer, "their armies have been developing on the different fronts excessively, the strain on their troops has become very strong; and a military decision imposes itself upon them."

They wished to hasten the end of the war and the way to finish it is to attempt a great thrust, a decisive thrust, a desperate thrust—the propitious time is come, it is the moment to attack, there is not an instant to lose!

[116]

It was easily determined that a formidable battle was about to commence and that the shock would be heavy—

Here are some of the remarks that were passed back and forth at Eparges, the eve of the battle of Verdun. That night in the trenches there was a silence, a silence impressive. The night was calm and starry—

### THE DAY OF *February 21, 1916.*

I left Eparges at six o'clock in the morning. As before the day dawned magnificently. In a happy mood, I start out with Dr. Nicolas to find some of my *poilus* on the menaced front.

An automobile was waiting on the Mesnil-sur-les-Côtes to take us to the north of Verdun.

On leaving at seven o'clock in the morning, the rumbling of cannon, heavy and uninterrupted, was heard: the battle of Verdun had commenced...

I did not intend to stop at Verdun, but on approaching the city, I saw the civil population fleeing *en masse* toward the country, after 380's fell at regular intervals on the martyred city for about an hour.

After a short stop, I left again for Cumières and Côte-de-l'Oie, where I also had a squad of workers.

Leaving Bras, it was easy to determine that the enemy had launched his offensive on the right bank of the Meuse.

[117]

As far as the eye could reach the bursting of large projectiles was seen: they fell particularly on the forts, on the roads, on the cantonments, on the trenches.

The crushing noise produced by these large *Marmites*<sup>[21]</sup> became accentuated hour by hour; a curtain of smoke collected against the blue sky, and, with the brightness of the day, this spectacle certainly did not lack grandeur.

I still command a view of the battlefield seen from the Côte-de-l'Oie; columns of smoke go rolling on the banks of the Meuse. I had never seen such parallel artillery preparation up to that day.

Our *poilus* cried:

"The 77's and 105's no longer exist!"

It could easily be seen that "something" was taking place on the right bank where the intensity of the artillery became greater hour by hour.

They fought stubbornly before Samonieux and we heard the noise of the machine-guns. I made the resolution to go and rejoin the men I had at Ornes, on the right bank, since it was they above all that were in the greatest danger.

---

The memory of the afternoon of this day will forever remain sad; I ask myself often how my comrade LeBlond and I had been able to reach Ornes.

We succeeded in reaching Bras toward two o'clock: the village was violently bombarded—human bodies and horses blocked the streets. [118]

I went to pay my respects to General B— whom I found in his fighting post, surrounded by his officers. He wished us good luck in affectionate terms.

We climbed Côte du Poivre and arrived at Louvemont toward three o'clock in the afternoon. In going through the village, our eyes commenced to be irritated by tear gas: the bombardment was infernal.

It was apparent that the enemy was undertaking a decisive action. The road which we traversed was hammered by numerous projectiles and there was nothing for us to do but forge ahead like automatons—

LeBlond had taken my arm, and, together, it was decided not to stop before any obstacle—

The nearer we approached Chambrettes the more dense became the fire.

At four o'clock the enemy piled up a barrage on the road and concentrated their fire on the farm: it rained projectiles of all calibers—of all big calibers, I know.

In a circle of 325 yards radius, there fell, certainly, four *marmites* every second, of a caliber equal or superior to 21 centimeters. The ground trembled and a smoke, acrid and suffocating, enveloped us.

The 150 timed-shell from time to time rent the air with their furious screams like those of a cat when you step on its tail—

During my whole campaign never have I seen an equal density of fire.

Torn bodies of skirmishers were scattered here and there in this zone of almost certain death. Continuing our way we had escaped death more than once in this violent fire. We were covered with spurts of earth from bursting projectiles which fell close to us and those that fell around struck us with ricocheting fragments of steel. [119]

As there was not urgent need of reaching Ornes, we resolved to tarry a few instants in one of the shelters on the farm. We had 175 yards to go in a rain of steel and well-directed fire, or as dizzy a route as the ascension of Mount Cervin, for example.

We entered the telephone post at the precise moment the *poilus* ascertained all underground lines had been cut—

The shells continued to fall so fast around us that we had the impression of being on the inside of a hermetically sealed autobus rumbling with great speed over a rough pavement.

A projectile burst at one corner of the shelter which crumbled from the force of the explosion and threw us all together in a heap—No panic!

I sensed the feeling that our last hour had come and the men, picking themselves up in silence, crowded into the corners save one who cried, gesticulating with his arms:

"Is—is that what you call a demolishing fire?"

---

Our objective was Ornes and if it became necessary to die I avowed that I would prefer to fall in the light, my eyes turned toward the sun. "If die we must," I say to LeBlond, on leaving the dugout, "I would rather be killed outside—" [120]

"I am with you—"

Again we traveled over a space of 350 yards in a haze of fire and smoke—

A *marmite* fell a few steps away, covering us with dirt—I see my comrade stagger, struck on the head with a large mass. Fortunately it is only a ball of turf which knocks him violently to the ground—

He picks himself up, and in a ringing voice:

"Yes, if that one will not get me a vacation, now, you will not be very *chic*!"

---

Some hours later we reached Ornes, having had to go through the barrage at Chambrettes, and another, of 305's, on the cavernous road along Chaume Wood. This road, so quiet a few days before, had become a veritable hell.

The village of Ornes, itself, was relatively calm that night, the infantry attacks not having begun up to the present, only between the Meuse and Herbebois Wood. The *poilus* waited calmly all events that might be forthcoming, always ready to do their duty stoically and simply—

I had promised General B— to give him news of our sector during the night, all the telephonic means of communication having been destroyed.

Again I traversed the entire road from Ornes to Bras; at Chambrettes the spectacle was fairy-like—our batteries on the one side fired in unison and their flashes illumined the heavens. In front of us the soaring shells came thick and fast from the forest of Spincourt and Forges Wood, intermittently brightening the darkness like a luminous *pianotage*, giving one the impression that every ten square yards there was an enemy battery. [121]

The sky was ablaze on the horizon—it was the burning villages—

Yes, they began well the great battle, the greatest battle in the history of the world—

#### THE DAY OF *February 22, 1916.*

Our impressions were precise, the battle was going to be rude. The enemy had accumulated a formidable heavy artillery, to which it seemed impossible to respond for the moment.

They sent over as many 210's as they formerly had 77's and as many 280's, 305's, 380's, and 420's as they had 105's and 150's.

The men all felt immediately at the beginning of the battle that the enemy would be stopped only by mere brute strength—

#### AT NOON IN A CELLAR IN THE VILLAGE OF CUMIÈRES.

During a very heavy bombardment we were lunching. We had a basket of oysters that came from Verdun. The merchant sold out his wares so that he could flee with the townspeople—The city is empty. [122]

"*Allons*, if the oysters last, it will be possible to withstand the blow!—"

#### ROAD TO ORNES—NINE O'CLOCK AT NIGHT

The number of dead men and horses along the road to Ornes has increased—

The intensity of enemy artillery fire has not diminished, and the sound of the battle reaches farther to the right—

We pass wounded, alone or in little groups, dragging themselves to the rear—

#### CHAUME WOOD—TEN O'CLOCK AT NIGHT

A cry!

"Here—help!"

We stopped—

This cry is repeated several times. I enter the Wood. Guided by the sound of the voice and climbing over shattered and twisted trees, I end by discovering a human form cowering in a shell-hole—

"You're wounded?"

"Yes, in the head, the arms, in the legs and the heart—"

"*Mon vieux*, you bawl too much to be really wounded. Get up!"

The unfortunate arose and I read fear in his eyes.

"Where do you come from?"

"From Herbebois—they attacked with their flame-throwers—I saw my brother lieutenant, burning like a torch. My comrades stayed, but I know nothing more—" [123]

#### THE MAGNIFICENT POILU, CHAMBRETTES. *February 22, 1916.*

A column of infantry-munitions wagons halted at the fork in the road from Beaumont and Ornes; a 305 shell had dug a deep crater in the road which was cut in two.

These light wagons, in good order, could pass neither to the right nor to the left of the hole on account of wire entanglements.

Observed by the enemy, the convoy, after some moments, met with a veritable rain of projectiles, time and percussion, which fell around us.

Men, horses and mules were killed or wounded. A *poilu* spontaneously took command of the column, his immediate superiors having been killed. The beasts reared and plunged, frightened by the flashes and explosions which succeeded each other rapidly. The men clinging to the bridles were killed on the spot before they could make a move!

A little soldier is lifted high by his frantic mule, which stands, straight up on its hind feet. He curses, he yells, while the timed shell churn the air with wailings like a dying child—

"I say you will not go back—at a time like this, *you* mules *must* not go *back!*"

[124]

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A few seconds later he and his mule are on the ground, fastened, one to the other, by the bridle: the shell which killed him has almost stripped his body of clothes. I also was thrown to the ground, but I am not hit—

Bending over the man, I attempt to find, but vainly, his identification tag, so that some day the name of this obscure hero may be known—

The mule, stretched out at full length, essays to raise its head, still grasped by the hands of the corpse, and gives a couple of useless kicks—

It commences to snow—

#### THE DAY OF FEBRUARY 23, ELEVEN O'CLOCK AT NIGHT.

The major, commanding Ornes, says to me:

"This is what must be done! Our left has completely collapsed and we can be flanked at any moment. I have sent a reconnaissance to Herbebois Wood; the patrol has returned and tells me no one is there any longer—

"As you know the sector perfectly, you must go to Louvemont yourself to inform the Division of our situation. Take someone with you so that if one is killed the other can carry the information just the same! Be careful along the Chaume Wood, because from here to Chambrettes, you will meet up with a boche patrol. It has now become a first-line position. Keep your revolver in your hand—"

"Yes, major."

"Go, my friend."

"Thank you."

[125]

"Good luck—"

#### THE MATCHLESS POILUS, BEFORE CHAUME WOOD. *February 23, 1918.*

The road from Ornes, before Chaume Wood, has assumed a fantastic appearance! The trees are fallen and the branches are entangled—

The beautiful countryside has become chaotic following this avalanche of projectiles of the preceding days. The bombardment is always frightful. The snow which has fallen the night before makes going bad and one slips and stumbles incessantly. How difficult it is to follow such a road at night when you haven't slept for three days!

Again I have been made a scout and I ask myself if I will be not soon, in my turn, one of these hideous corpses which I pass each instant and which have been snapped up by death along this damned road. It seems now as if the shells were searching you out and rifle bullets followed you —

In the semi-moonlit shadow I perceive two stretcher-bearers caught by death as they carry their wounded; the one in the lead is on his knees, the other already down, both clutching the handles of the litter.

I continue my route. Before arriving at the bifurcation of the two roads to Ornes and Beaumont, I cannot longer recognize my direction, so great has been the change in the aspect of the surroundings during the last three days.

I overtake two men who, en *pères peinards*,<sup>[22]</sup> happy at meeting someone, suggest we go together. They walk without haste; the terrain has become very difficult to follow and it is dark —

[126]

Suddenly one of them makes a false step, he has not seen an immense shell-hole, and he falls forward head first—

His comrade, on the edge of the crater, bursts with laughter.

"You're not crazy. You know well enough the subway is closed at this time of night!"

#### AT THE WEST CORNER OF CHAUME WOOD, MIDNIGHT.

"Who goes there?"

"France!"

Some *poilus* hastily cross a part of the trench at the border of the Wood. The officer in command of them is one of my old comrades at Eparges—

"Tell me the news. How is it going?"

"I was going to ask the same question?"

"It's the third day. The attack will be held!"

"Yes, it must be held!"

We embraced each other and parted—I have never seen him again!

ON THE ROAD FROM CHAMBRETTES TO LOUVEMONT. [127]  
*February 23, 1916.*

Two men go along the road with a heavy step—we follow them.

"It's serious—but we'll get 'em. What an attack!"

"What a difference from Champagne!"

They stopped before a corpse, curled in a heap; he had certainly fallen to-day because we had not noticed him yesterday. With his big bloated lips and blackened face he might have been taken for a negro—

"How curious is the problem of life and death! Why him and not us?"

"Poor chap, poor old fellow. Let's go—"

THE POILU WHO HADN'T ANY SUSPENDERS.  
*The day of February 24, 1916.*

The cannonade is frightful. There is a dumbfounding fire along the route—and we are right in the midst of the stricken zone.

"Look out, my friend, please don't stop, we'll all be shot to pieces—"

"I must pull up my pants—they've fallen down—I haven't got any suspenders—"

"You are not even reasonable—during such days we are living in historic moments—you can use twine just as well—"

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL POILU, ORNES. [128]  
*February 24, 1916.*

It is night—

The sky is ablaze to our left. They will perhaps attack at any moment. Shells rain around us four at a time and at regular intervals.

As the positions on our left have been forced back and our flank menaced, Chabert's sappers have hastily dug a small trench at the entrance to the village, facing the west.

The *poilus* are waiting stoically for whatever may transpire. A man is curled up and, numb with fatigue, sleeps. One of his companions shakes him and says:

"*Mon vieux*, you cannot sleep. Wake up, because each minute we hold them now, it is a VICTORY!"

WOUNDED, BEZONVAUX.  
*Night of February 24-25, 1916.*

Our artillery no longer responds. The order to fall back was given at five o'clock. My men are moving toward Verdun, conducted by Sergeant Thiébaud. I stop at Bezonvaux, hoping to find there my comrade Chabert. I have promised his mother, who has only this boy, that I will watch over him like a brother—

Followed by Corporal Poulet, who has remained with me, I wander around in the violently bombarded village. I enter the empty homes abandoned by their inhabitants, where our poor soldiers, tired out and saying nothing, lie stretched out on the floors. The big *marmites* arrive at regular intervals, crushing houses and occupants— [129]

Finally I end by discovering one of Chabert's sappers and say to him:

"Where is your lieutenant? Take me to him!"

"I don't know where he is—I believe he has been killed—"

The night is black and the air is filled with smoke and dust. One stumbles above all on plaster and bricks—

Sinister detonations and cries and groans. There is, in the air, the breath of catastrophe, yes, of catastrophe, which oppresses your chest.

The man who guides us is lost—he goes and comes, he makes us take wide detours, he is afraid and is nervous—

A large projectile falls at our side—the *poilu* is knocked down, giving vent to a raucous cry as he falls. I fall myself to my knees and feel the heat of blood which runs down my chest. My left hand rests on the body of the sapper and I am conscious of it covered with warm blood—

Poulet raises me up, giving me a drink of brandy. Stray bullets whistle around us—

I am only slightly wounded and take Poulet's arm to direct ourselves toward Fort Douaumont



where I will have it dressed.

How long and sad is this road. It is a veritable Calvary for me and I stagger lamentably; these last days have proven almost too much— [130]

"Lieutenant, why doesn't our artillery respond any more?" Poulet asked me several times.

"I do not know, *mon petit*, we are going through grave times, but we must not get discouraged. Have confidence!"

CÔTE-DE-L'OIE.  
February 25, 1916.

Someone who must be amazed is the surgeon-in-chief of Gondrecourt!

I arrived at his hospital in the early morning in Colonel Gency's automobile, who announced my coming by telephone—

A hospital attendant tore off my tunic, cut off my shirt, baring a bloody chest—

"We are going to give you an anti-tetanus injection, radiograph you, and to commence with, I'm going to call the surgeon-in-chief—"

While the attendant was gone, I hurriedly dressed myself and left—English fashion. Luckily Colonel Gency's automobile was still there. I had no fear of pain, or the boches, but I don't like doctors!

I went through Cumières like a shooting star would pierce a rain of projectiles and sought refuge at Côte-de-l'Oie, where I know they will not come to search for me—

FEAR, CUMIÈRES. [131]  
February 25, 1916.

Fear ... Oh! terrible thing! It is a contagious malady that has to be watched. All of us have inside a cowardly beast that awakens sometimes at the approach of danger—

Very violent bombardment to-day. The two chauffeurs who brought me here this morning left the machine at the entrance to the village. On returning from Côte-de-l'Oie I found them in a sappers' bombardment shelter where they sought refuge.

These men are green and grumble about things. Around them are some *poilus* and a captain. The explosions outside redouble and I feel as if the whole world was ill at ease.

The two automobilists, to put on a bold front, speak of their machine "which must be demolished by this time" or "which must have been torn to pieces long ago," and by the trembling of their voices I divine that they are thinking of themselves in speaking of the "automobile."

Little by little the others chatted about the effect of the bombardment and they discovered that the dugout was not very solid and that an accident could easily happen. The captain appeared to me nervous and at once I felt that strange thing burning within me—

This anguish that grew inside is perhaps the result of these last days of fatigue during which we had not been able to rest an instant, day or night. It is, perhaps, the result of my wound of last night which still bleeds and makes my shirt stick to my body— [132]

No, it is these two cowards, these two birds of bad luck that make us shiver—

At such times "you have got to kill fear," or one is lost. The means? Get out of this hole! the pretext—

I found it when the two chauffeurs recommenced their old story:

"Oh! our machine—how it is being riddled!"

"You," I said to him, "you sicken me with your machine. I'll wager that there is nothing the matter with it. Go and see and we'll find out for certain! It is not an order that I give you, but only that when the question is settled in your mind, you will leave us in peace—"

The cannonade grew worse at this moment and there was a literal downpour of shells in the village—

"You are not going? Then I'm going myself—and at least I will not have to listen to you any longer —"

I started toward the stairs when I heard LeBlond's voice in back of me, which said:

"You are crazy—you have vowed to get killed—it is suicide—"

I looked him in the eyes, to the depth of his soul, and murmured:

"I've got to—I want to go. Stay here!"

I went out. Nothing was said, but all looked at me, stupefied—

[133]

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Ah! *mes enfants*, how it fell!

When I took the first steps outside my legs trembled and I believed I would be incapable of accomplishing the task I had imposed upon myself. Fear shook me. I walked along the street. Gradually I felt stronger. Suddenly, after a few minutes' walk, I felt as calm as if I had been

walking along a promenade at Nice——

Despite the flurry, the smoke and brick dust which I had to breathe, I continued the route, taking pleasure in my folly, experiencing an unhealthy and dangerous joy——

Soon, I found myself at the side of the machine which had not been touched, but an unexploded 100-shell was half buried on its flank——

I lifted the shell out and, carrying it in my arms, took the road for the shelter. The returning was effected like my going, through a cloud of dust and smoke of bursting projectiles. Never had a walk done me so much good and when I entered the dugout with my "precious souvenir" I thought:

"This time I am armored!"

I walked through the group of men and deposited the shell on the captain's table.

"What was that you said? You are both chumps and your machine is uninjured, but I found this alongside of it. I make you a present of it so it will be a reminder of to-day——"

And immediately they smiled and became themselves again——

K. C., VERDUN. [134]  
*February 28, 1916.*

It is night, but a terrible night—the battle is unchained. The heavens, black as ink, are brightened each instant by the flashes of explosions.

German shells which fall in the city make a louder noise than during the preceding days, as if they broke in a cellar——

Not a cry—not a wail—stoicism——

On the roads around the city there is a great bustle of camions, gun carriages and caissons. Then there is the hasty shuffling of troops going into action to-night, and who will relieve their comrades holding the line over there.

All these movements are made silently, without cries, without useless words, but everything moves rapidly——

I direct myself toward the city, when suddenly a small machine stops at my side. A man of athletic stature, who was seated at the chauffeur's side, jumps lightly out of the machine and approaches me.

He flashes his electric pocket lamp, no doubt to see who I am. At first I had taken him for an Englishman, by reason of his khaki uniform.

"Officer?" he said to me.

"Yes, what can I do for you? You are English?"

"No, American."

"American!"

"Yes, I'm a K. C."

"*Cassé*?<sup>[23]</sup> Who is it that is hurt?"

[135]

I said this with such an accent of chagrin and almost of despair, that he broke into a loud laugh.

"No, not *cassé*, but K. of C.," and he held up his sleeve on which were found the two letters.

He then spoke volubly enough in English, of which I could not understand a single word, but which certainly must have been of lively interest, to judge by the heat of his discourse. Fortunately he continued in French:

"Lost the road——"

"Where are you going?"

"Fort Souville——"

"What are you doing?"

"We are picking up the wounded of the Second Army. We must go quick——"<sup>[24]</sup>

"Yes, time is money——"

"No, time is blood."

"I will give you one of my men who will accompany you——Thiébaut, take these gentlemen to Fort Souville, by the Etain road——"

"Thank you!"

"One second! I wish I could talk English so that I could commend you for what you are doing. Then, you Americans have crossed the ocean to mix in this hell and to succor our wounded—— Wait! You are a fine type, and I am proud to grasp your hand! Good luck!"

"Good-bye—Good luck to you!"

[136]

SOUILLY.  
*February 28, 1916.*

An uninterrupted file of camions extends from Bar-le-Duc to Verdun. It is like an endless chain which never stops day or night.

A *poilu*, who is breaking stones in the road, says to his neighbor:

"This battle will be called in history, 'the Battle of Camions.'"

THE DETERMINED POILUS, VERDUN, BEVAUX BARRACKS.

March 1, 1916.

I have just left "General Quarters" and meet two *poilus* of the 20th Corps.

"Where are the trenches?"

"What trenches—?"

"The trenches where they are fighting."

"We are returning from vacation and want to be in it!"

"It is twelve miles from here."

"We can do that easily on foot—we will be guided by the sound of the cannon."

THE SUMMIT OF DEAD MAN'S HILL. [137]

March 2, 1916.

There is nothing to say, but we desired to keep in touch with some *poilus* in a bombardment dugout 225 yards from the spot where we now are. The communicating trench is blocked up and it is in full view that we have to leap over this stretch of ground—

It was toward the end of the day, but one could yet see very well. Scarcely had we gone a step along the road to Béthincourt than Guéneau, LeBlond and myself were seen by the boches. They turned their cannon and machine-guns on us—yes, three 105's which came over seemed deposited by hand. The first covered us with earth at some yards to our left; the second fell a short distance to the right on the edge of the road.

"Let's get out of here, *les copains*,<sup>[25]</sup> fifty yards farther—quick!"

In a few bounds we were away from that dangerous spot. The third shell burst, in effect, exactly on the place we had just left—

We are at this instant at the point where the road from Béthincourt starts to the top of Dead Man's Hill. A little wagon is turned upside-down, with the stiffened remains of the horse and its swollen belly still in the shafts.

We just had time to crawl into a shell-hole behind the carcass which hid us from the enemy and served as a shield. Our protector gave off nauseating puffs of a very rich scent:

"It is *drôle*," observed Guéneau, "that Dead Man is nothing but a rotting horse!"

[138]

CARNAVAL! DEAD MAN'S HILL.

March 7, 1916.

The cannonade was elaborate to-day—What desolation! This moonlighted scenery would sadden you profoundly—enough that man be that heartless he can utterly destroy and ruin nature beautiful, even to the very roots. The machine-guns sputter intermittently. Someone shouts:

"Ah! Wonderful! How strange it is!"

"What is the matter with you?"

"Lieutenant, to-day is *Mardi Gras*!"

IMAGINATIVE EXPRESSIONS, VERDUN.

March, 1916.

The sector is being frightfully bombarded and all one can do is to wait for the attack—

"Good morning, *mon petit*, is it going?—"

"Yes, lieutenant, it's bad in the aquarium—has been that way all morning. I've changed my sex three times since you saw me a short while ago—"



**Ravin des Fontaines (Verdun) during bombardment.**

MY ORDERLY HABERT, VERDUN. [139]  
*March, 1916.*

I have just returned from Verdun, worn out by fatigue, at the beginning of the afternoon, with the idea of getting a few hours sleep in the silent and empty house of Monsieur Louis. Habert, alone, had not left it. I had taken him as an orderly for the reason he was the father of five children. Besides, he is not a warrior and it is plainly uncomfortable for him to wait on us when the shells break around *Rue sur-l'eau*.<sup>[26]</sup>

I am dying with envy to get into bed. I climb the stairs to the first floor where the bed is made. Habert has found a pretext not to accompany me—

The shells whistled angrily and fell thick and fast on the city. They seemed to say: "Ah! you wish to sleep—but just try it." At the end of a few seconds I slept profoundly—

What good sleep, what a deep sleep, during which Death itself would come without one knowing it—

I had, nevertheless, the vague sensation of having been shaken and left dizzy by an explosion that prevented my making a movement. I finished by opening my eyes. The room was yet filled with dust and smoke; the window frame and part of the wall were thrown on the quilt! It was with difficulty that I could extricate myself and I shouted:

"Habert! Habert!"

Not a reply—

Immediately I imagined that the poor boy had been killed. My clothes had been scattered around the room and I descended the stairs four at a time without taking the time to even put on my trousers— [140]

"Habert! Habert!"

He wasn't in the dining-room, nor in the kitchen where there were some broken glasses—

I opened the cellar door. The rascal was behind it with a bottle of my prune brandy in one hand and a little glass in the other—

"*Nom de Dieu!* I catch you at it! You carry away and drink my prune brandy while your lieutenant is shelled in bed. To-morrow you will go into the first-line trenches, *misérable*—to the trenches, you understand me—"

I read in his mocking eyes with his half-penitent air:

"I'm easy about it, you like my chicken fricassée too well."

A REGAL DINNER, VERDUN.  
*March, 1916.*

"Habert, we have as guests to-night, two colonels! Dinner on the table at seven o'clock and let everything be perfect.

"Your assistant and yourself will be in white from head to foot: breeches, jacket, socks, shoes and white gloves."

"Good, lieutenant."

"That is not all—wait before you speak—rice powder on your hair, so that it will all be regal—your hair well combed. Have you got a comb?" [141]

"Yes, lieutenant."

"By the way, you have never told me—do you know how to use a tooth brush?—"

"To shine the brass?"

"They use them also for other things—I want a candelabrum on the table and have the candlesticks polished. Now for the menu—No, I forgot the flowers. You will find them in the basket that came from Bar-le-Duc with the provisions—Where was I?"

"The menu, lieutenant."

"Ah, yes. Appetizers—four or five different kinds—oysters, tomato soup, grilled sole, chicken fricassée—your specialty—goose livers and romaine salad, fruit, dessert, coffee.

"Wine! The best that *père* Louis has left us—with the goose livers, the champagne—with coffee my prune brandy, but be ready and if I call you be prompt. A roaring fire on the hearth—Good!"

"Lieutenant, I do not believe that will be enough—I would serve a steak before the chicken—"

---

At the appointed time we go to search for Colonels Peigné and Benoit, who have not left the cellars in the Citadel since the beginning of the offensive, that is to say for three weeks—and they underwent a nerve-racking siege of it—

We brought them through the city and then "home" by the *Rue-sur-l'eau*. During the meal we thanked them several times for having accepted our modest repast so graciously. [142]

Ah! Our "modest dinner!" And we all "vaccinated the tomato" as Habert called it. Soon there was no thought of bombardment and all the preoccupations—What a feast!

---

They spoke of it a long time, it appears, in the humid cellars of the Citadel...

THE PILLAGER, VERDUN.  
*March, 1916.*

It is night! I have just walked through Verdun, which is always being bombarded. As I was passing in front of a house, I heard a noise inside, the door was half-open—I entered the hallway

In the bedroom at the side there was a series of loud noises as if someone was trying to move furniture—

I open the door. I flash my electric torch and perceive a soldier lugging a large wooden chest like a common house thief.

He has not seen me, but turns brusquely at the flash of the light. He is kneeling on the floor and regards me fixedly.

"What are you doing there? Surely it is your sister's house or you wouldn't be kneeling that way! Perhaps I interrupt you?"

He shot me a wicked glance and looked furious at having been caught in flagrant wrong. [143]

"That's not right, what you're doing there, no, it's not right."

"I do nothing wrong, I came here to sleep for a few hours on a bed!"

"In the meanwhile you make enough clatter to wake the neighbors, if there are any, and visit the storeroom—"

"I'm doing nothing wrong, I assure you—"

"We will talk it over! I am wondering why I didn't blow out your brains when I found you pillaging the home of poor people—Here you soil the glory and honor of your comrades. Go! you disgust me!"

"Me also, I have been through hell like the others, and perhaps to-morrow I shall be killed—yes, I will be killed, I swear it. I'm honest—I no longer know what I'm doing. It's true it's not right. What must I do? I've seen all sides of it—I know no more. Arrest me—here I am!"

"Go join your comrades! Go quick. You have time to make reparation—you know what. This secret will rest between you and me. Now go!"

The man took himself away without daring to look back and I watched him disappear into the night—

PRECIPITOUS DEPARTURE, VERDUN. [144]  
*March, 1916.*

To-day I returned to Verdun, and LeBlond and I have taken a rest in the comfortable home of M. and Mme. Louis.

These worthy persons quit the city with the former's sister, Mme. Joannie, and Habert, our orderly, watches the premises.

We have just received a letter from Mme. Joannie dated at Bar-le-Duc, recounting at length her terror and vexation happily over. She must have left so precipitously the necessaries and also the superfluities! She requested us to make a visit to her room and forward the more important objects we should come across.

We then entered her room and apart from a few broken glasses everything was still arranged as it was on the day of her departure. Dresses, trinkets, yellow photographs, stuffed animals, dignifiedly seemed to be awaiting her return—

In a corner of the sideboard—her false teeth! Poor, poor Mme. Joannie, you must have been afraid to have abandoned them!

"She was afraid of swallowing them," said Habert, between his teeth.

THE POILU WHO LOOKED FOR A "GOOD" WOUND,  
VERDUN (RIGHT BANK). [145]  
March, 1916.

We are at work in a narrow position, at the entrance to Tavannes Tunnel. The bombardment is incessant and the air this morning is saturated with that odor of ether and sour apples which we have all breathed down there—

One of my *poilus*, his helmet resting on his ears, strikes a blow with ardor, although he appears to be in a very bad humor, I assure you—There is no doubt about it for a single instant, seeing him sink the stakes anchoring the wire entanglement with heavy blows of the hammer as if he wanted to smash them—

A 105 arrived, breaking a few yards from him, a large fragment skidded on the ground, hitting him on the head—

I see the man make a bound and fall flat on the ground—

With his two hands he tears off his blue helmet, completely crushed, and, contemplating it with bitterness, cries out:

"Damn!—with that, I'll never be sent to the rear!"

THE POETIC POILU.  
March, 1916.

In a dirty sector on a beautiful, sunshiny day—

"Ah! there you are, *mon gros*, why are you all dressed up?"

"I leave on vacation, lieutenant."

[146]

"Where are you going?"

"Paris."

"Lucky fellow! When you get there what will give you the greatest pleasure after all the hardships you have endured?"

"A woman's smile!"

THE POILU WHO NEVER SMILES, VERDUN.  
March, 1916.

This morning I was with a group of soldiers, laughing and joking with them. The newspapers had brought us good news and our joy manifests itself in loud bursts of laughter—

A man was seated aside from the others and had an absent and gloomy look. My attention had been drawn immediately by the expression of despair which one could easily read on his features. I lowered my voice and said:

"Look, sergeant, what is the matter with that *poilu*? He cannot enjoy himself and laugh like the others? His face is drawn and pale! Can you explain that—"

"Well, lieutenant, one night he had instructions that were not clear and a patrol came back into our lines. He believed it was the boches and fired. He killed a close friend—"

"From that time he has always been sad and several times I noticed he cried at night. You will see, one of these days he will do away with himself—"

HOW THEY LIVE AND HOW THEY DIE, [147]  
TAVANNES TUNNEL.  
March 15, 1916.

Tavannes Tunnel, everyone will tell you, leaves a memory of hell. It constitutes a natural shelter for troops in reserve in the sector of Vaux. The enemy bombarded the extremities of the Tunnel with gas shell and those of a large caliber—

During the long months we had dead piled up at the entrance to these villainous holes, because access was had by means of two passageways, opening to the sky, with each side of the rocky walls very abrupt—

When shells burst in this limited space, it was impossible to get under cover and the corpses of our dead accumulated at the two outlets of the Tunnel!

Those who met in Tavannes Tunnel must have hated the spot. They groped around blindly awaiting anything!

At times, I believed myself that I would be one of these kind of bugs, black and stinking, that one crushed under foot!

---

One day the moment arrived to send re-inforcements to a place very near there. There was nothing to say but get going immediately! A sergeant took command of the little column—

"Forward, *mes enfants!*"

The cannonade raged and it was "bad" outside—The 150 timed-shell and the big 210 percussion shell followed each other rapidly, searching out the more nervy ones— [148]

The sergeant left the Tunnel first, briskly ascending the incline, believing he was followed by his men. He turns and perceives they are not there—yet!

"*Nom de Dieu!* what are you doing, you laggards! Are you coming to-day or to-morrow!"

They came out, the *poilus*, but with head and back bent as if under a shower of rain. They hurried, without precipitation, because of the steep climb. Now that they have left the Tunnel, they are all right—

They creep along worm-like and the file of men, like beads on a rosary, extends from the entrance to the Tunnel to the waiting sergeant.

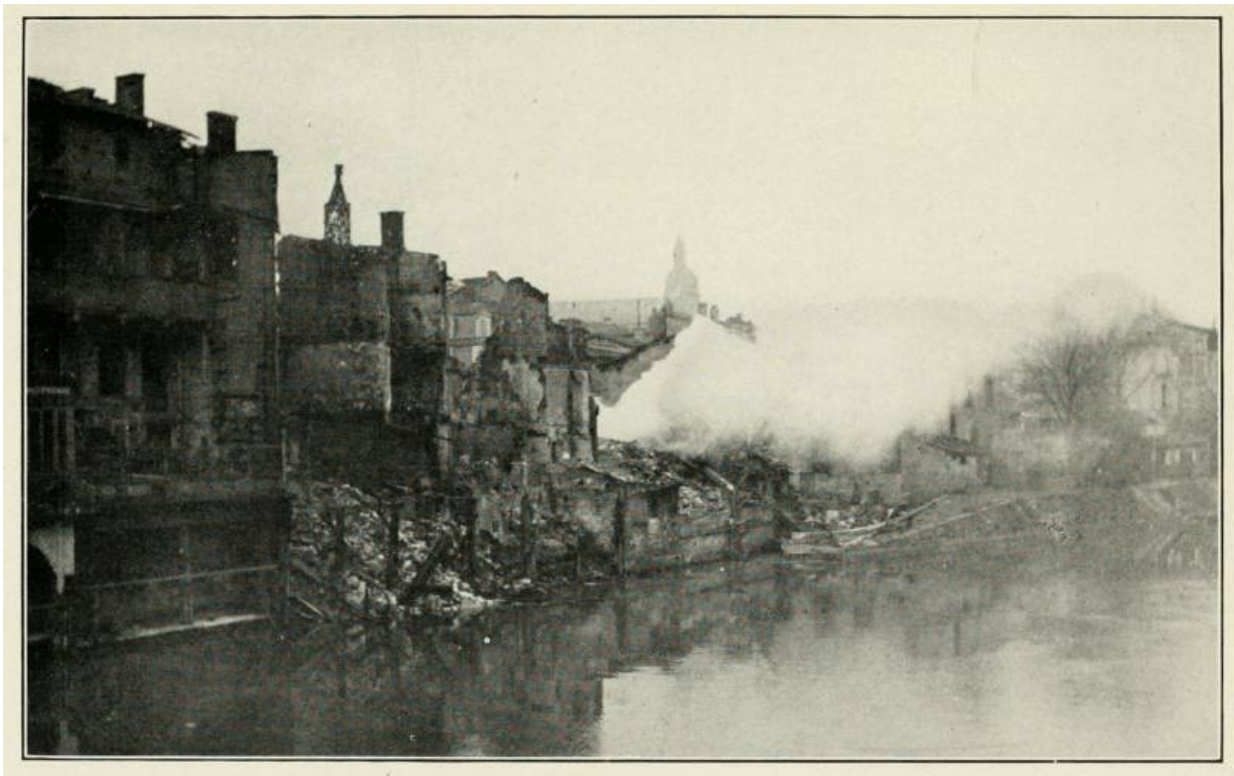
Suddenly an explosion, flurry, smoke—right in their midst, *les pauvres!*

For some instants they all disappear in the cloud—but there is "horizon blue," crumpled bodies and a spinning helmet—

Finally the cloud clears away; there are still some men around him and the sergeant shouts again:

"*Nom de Dieu!* you laggards! Are you coming to-day or to-morrow!"

They hurry on, striding over the bodies of their comrades who have fallen—



**Verdun and the Meuse, March 23rd, 1916.**

ANXIOUS HOURS, VERDUN. [149]  
*March, 1916.*

To-night we sent one of our men to the Citadel of Verdun to send a package of papers to Colonel Benoit.

We were at table—Habert lighted the lamp and night had fallen. Our orderly had scarcely placed the rabbit stew on the table than three violent raps were heard at the door.

An old Territorial, with a dejected air, entered the dining-room, and we saw by his bearing he came to announce a misfortune—

"What is it you have, *mon petit?*"

"Are you Lieutenant Capart?"

"Yes——"

"I am returning your papers—we found them on the man who carried them—he has just been killed and your name was seen at the top of the papers and I brought them to you."

"Our sapper has been killed! How did it happen?"

"The shell struck him squarely, killing three other *poilus*. He is in shreds, lieutenant. Good night, lieutenant——"

LeBlond and I were astounded at the death of this brave boy, who had just left us. With sadness we turned over the papers in his handwriting and covered with his blood. Habert's features were pale and dejected.

The news extinguished our appetites and we sat gloomy and silent before the excellent meal [150]  
Habert had prepared for us——

---

An hour later one of our *poilus* arrived by the *Rue-sur-l'eau*, and said to us:

"You know the news?"

"Yes, we have heard the sad thing—*Pauvre petit*——"

"He sends his respects to you, lieutenant, and asks if you have received your papers all right——"

"*Voyons, voyons*—whom are you talking about?"

"But—about your secretary——"

"We were just informed he had been killed——"

"No, lieutenant! he was slightly wounded in the arm and will be away a few days on leave. These Territorials from the South of France always see the dark side of things——"

Our supper was spoiled that night, but we breathed easier——

COCO, VERDUN.  
*March 25, 1916.*

I left the region of Verdun to-day. An order calls me to Paris. I decided to bring Coco with me, because Coco is the "last civilian in Verdun."

The poor little parrot is ill at ease in his cage since Madame Louis went away and since the bombardment of the city began.

When window panes were smashed his feathers bristled up and his frail little body began to [151]  
tremble——

I placed the cage in the machine that takes me to Bar-le-Duc—Repeatedly during the journey the bird cries:

"To Hell with the Crown Prince!"

It is surely Habert who has taught him this new "song"——

[152]

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

[153]

### THE RECAPTURE OF FORT DOUAUMONT AND THE ATTACK OF PEPPER HILL

*The author assisted in two important episodes of the great war. On October 24, 1916, he flew [154]  
over Fort Douaumont with Major Armengaud at the precise moment the *poilus* swarmed over it  
after eight months' of incessant battle. The first men who entered Douaumont were the same  
sappers of the 19th Company, 2nd Engineers, with whom the author fought at Grande Dune.  
(Chaps. I and III.)*

*It is during this period that the author was appointed first lieutenant in July and Captain in  
October after the capture of Douaumont.*

*On December 15, 1916, Captain Capart was at Pepper Hill during the victorious advance of the  
French.*

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

[155]

STORY OF A PAIR OF BOOTS, BAR-LE-DUC.  
*June 6, 1916.*

I have just dined with General Pétain. I find myself in the little home of M. and Mme. Lévy, where I have put up during the last days of our sojourn in this city.



I occupy a pretty room looking out on the garden, at which I look every morning on awakening  
—

Seated on my bed, I do not think of sleep, but let my thoughts wander, fixedly regarding the flame of my candle!

All at once my eyes rest on the new boots which I have bought the same morning in Paris.

I begin to laugh. It had been very apparent to me that all my comrades had admired them—

Yes, I recall, when the general was talking to me, I heard one of them say to the other:

"What wonderful boots!"

---

That is not all! I got ready for bed—From to-morrow a new life opened for me—I began with the boots.

I unlaced them, but perceived with despair that, in spite of energetic efforts, I could not pull them off my feet— [156]

Unnerved and swearing like a madman, using the furniture as a buttress, I painfully succeeded in getting one off—but the other? Impossible!

This damned boot did not seem to understand—I heard a noise in the room above. Decidedly it is M. and Mme. Lévy who are frightened!

---

The next day at seven o'clock in the morning, my orderly, Lefèvre, entered my room. He opened his mouth very wide on finding his lieutenant in a pretty white bed, a leg swinging over the side with a new boot on it—

MY LIFE BELONGS TO YOU! BAR-LE-DUC.  
June 8, 1916.

"Capart!"

I turned around. It is *he*! I saluted respectfully.

"Are you settled?"

"Yes, general. I am glad for this opportunity alone to tell you how grateful I am for having been appointed by you. You can count on me no matter what circumstance. Ask of me what you will, my life belongs to you, general, I give it to you—"

Our glances met, and he said:

"I know it."

THE REGIMENT WHICH PASSES, NETTANCOURT. [157]  
July, 1916.

The sun has just come up—I open my eyes. I am not wrong, it is the blowing of bugles that wakens me—

I jump out of bed and fling the large window clear up—my room is flooded with light—

It is a regiment which is passing—it comes straight from Dead Man's Hill. Our *poilus* are tanned, but their faces are worn—

"My poor *poilus*, your uniforms are covered with dry mud, but you are magnificent—!"

The band plays "Sambre and Meuse" and I am so affected that I throw myself on the bed and sob like a child.

A LITERAL TRANSLATION, CAMP MAILLY.  
July, 1916.

I was assisting at some trench-mortar tests which have lasted several days. The President of the Republic, accompanied by a large suite, honored us by his visit to-day.

The camp presented an extremely unique aspect by reason of the great number of Russian officers and men, which one sees everywhere.

Out of consideration for the visit of M. Poincaré, a Russian Battalion gave an exhibition drill. When the President passed it in review, the Slavic troops became clamorous. They shouted in Russian something which must have meant: [158]

"Long live the President of the French Republic."

From their gestures one of our *poilus* was explaining the meaning to one of his comrades in back of me.

"Hear what the Russians said to the President:

"You have seen me in the little bar around the corner."

AS THEY GO, A LITTLE VILLAGE IN THE ARGONNE.  
August, 1916.

The priest of R— has invited me to have coffee with him. The kindly old man saw the German invasion in 1914. He had been rudely treated in his native hamlet, and he appeared—when one saw the ruins—to have had many days of grief. Two days of battle and this was all he knew of war!

The boches, on retiring, had set fire to four corners of the village and everything had been burned, save his church where he permitted some German wounded to seek shelter.

Our troops triumphantly entered the smoking ruins of the village at night—

"My brave boys," the priest said to them, "I embrace you and thank God—"

The *poilus*, stirred with the feverish lust of pursuit, demanded:

"Any Germans here?"

One of the men, gone completely mad, shouted:

"Where are they? I'll stick this bayonet through 'em—"

Then someone said:

"There are wounded in the church."

"I pleaded with them," the old priest said.

"My children, they are our enemies, but respect the wounded!"

"The wounded!" roared the other, "the wounded! I'll cut 'em to pieces!"

"They all followed me like a pack of hounds," the priest went on, "and I prayed to God for aid.

"The first one we saw, on entering the church, was a Bavarian stretched out in a pool of blood. Rolling his eyes up at me, he muttered:

"'A drink—I'm thirsty—'

"'Nom de Dieu, father, so you let your wounded die of thirst—that's a rotten trick! Here! drink this—you!' the *poilu* said, handing his canteen to the boche—"

HE! NETTANCOURT.  
*August, 1916.*

"Since you are fighting near him—what is *he*?"

"PERSEVERING;

"ENERGETIC;

"TRIUMPHANT;

"ARDENT;

"INTREPID;

"*Nil-melior!*"<sup>[27]</sup>

THE OLD TERRITORIAL ON SENTRY DUTY AT THE [160]  
MONTMIRAL RAILROAD CROSSING.  
*September, 1916.*

I left Paris during the night in an automobile and am returning to General Quarters. I have fallen asleep on the way—

A brusque stop! I open my eyes—

An old territorial flashes a lantern in my face—a railroad track crossed the road—

"What is the name of this place, *mon petit*?"

"This place, captain, is—the railroad crossing!"

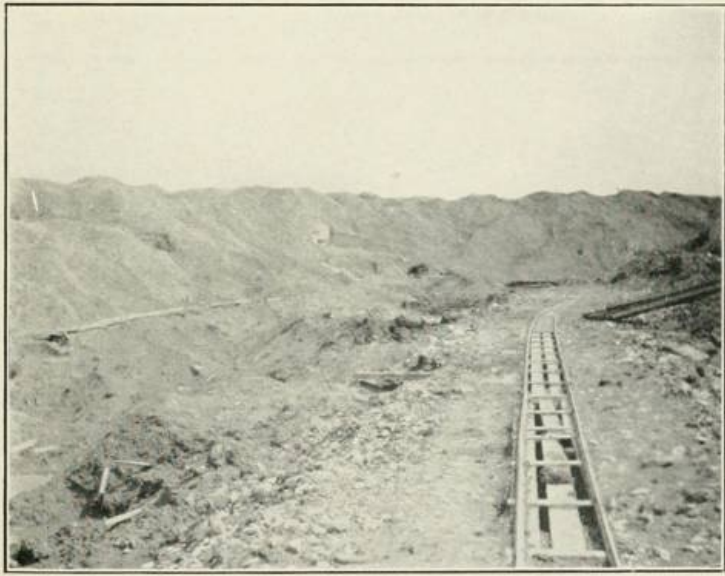
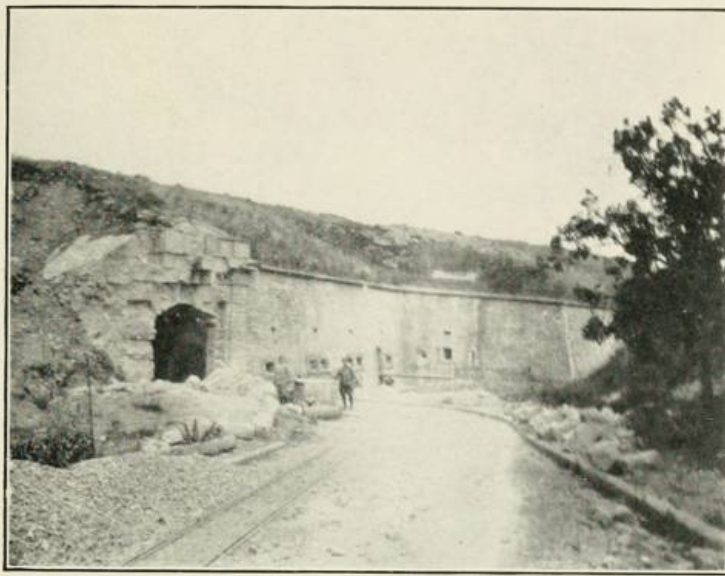
THE EVE OF THE RECAPTURE OF FORT DOUAUMONT.  
*October 23, 1916.*

Major Armengaud and I left Nettancourt this morning by airplane to assist in the operations about to be unloosed before Verdun.

The weather is uncertain and some large running clouds are above us. Before landing at Lemme, it had been decided that we would make a short incursion over the lines—

Here is the Meuse! The two banks of the battlefield appear to me yellowish gray with the Douaumont Hill tinted red.

The cannonade is raging—I see the vivid flashes of shells leaving the guns and I hear loud detonations above the noise of the motor—



**Entrance of Fort Douaumont in July 1915 and April 1917.**

The weather is very nasty! Always it is the same thing. It will surely rain to-night!

[161]

We flew above St. Michel Hill at the moment when our 400 shells fell on Douaumont and on Vaux, throwing up columns of earth and smoke.

From Fort Douaumont rise big voluted shafts of smoke. Fortunately our artillerymen had found the joint in the armor—

Not a boche *avion* in the air. What matter! This spectacle is so thrilling, that, for the moment, my machine-gun gets very little use—

The *poilus* themselves must be there in the trenches, waiting the hour of attack. I cannot see them, but my heart and thoughts go out to them.

I had the impression from that very moment the recapture of Fort Douaumont was certain—

We landed in about an hour without a single incident—

DOUAUMONT.  
October 24, 1916.

It is maddening. It is raining. At the aviation field where I am, everybody is effervescent. The first results of the day are magnificent, the *poilus* advanced along the entire line!

Unluckily it is necessary to renounce any thought of flying and the attendant consternation is general. Some "cuckoos" essayed to go up in the driving rain. They kept close to earth—they flew blindly and were shot at a few times—

We must remain inactive and powerless all day, when the others are participating in the fête!

[162]

Toward two-thirty o'clock the dark clouds in the south, part—The "cuckoos" leave their hangars, although many of the pilots are skeptical of the weather—

At three-fifteen a blue canopy in the heavens—at last! The whirring drowns everything—everyone hurries—one after the other they shoot out and take the air. Soon, perhaps, it will be too late—After having described a large circle over the field to gain altitude, they leave in groups, going

northward—

Major Armengaud and I have decided to leave in our turn. I am really thrilled, I avow, at the idea of flying during the battle—

---

Some instants after, roads, flat stretches, forests, flit by beneath us. At the end of ten minutes' flight, we were in a rather thick mist—but what matter—!

We fly over the Meuse to the north of Verdun—we are 4,000 feet high and penetrate a thick cloud. We reach clear space. The air is full of *avions*—there are more than eighty! *Chasse* squadrons cross the horizon. The "sausages" are all up as usual. The sky is marvelous. There are vacant spaces of gilded light to our left—Verdun is somewhat in the haze. To the north the sky is clear—I see the most gorgeous spectacle that my eyes have ever beheld! The cannonade thunders and a thousand flashes burst from the mouths of our guns. Our exploding projectiles form a regular and mobile parabola, marking the advance of our troops—

[163]

The enemy reacts but feebly and his barrage is laid down over our old lines. Shell-holes filled with water appear like cups brimming with molten gold! To the west the sky is reddish scarlet; to the east all is steel blue—

We return closer to earth. Our barrage has gone beyond Fort Douaumont—our 400's are still breaking on Fort Vaux; great columns of dirt rise more than 125 yards in height—

Douaumont is ours!—

I jumped straight up in my seat; I laughed, I shouted, I wept—

Two *avions* flew very low. The daring Captain de Beauchamp soared over the du Hély ravine; it looked as if we would skid along the ground—

We circled over the battlefield like a great bird that has discovered its prey and is ready to sweep on it!

The *poilus* themselves, whom we regarded as the messengers of victory, swarmed around the superstructure of the Fort and signaled us! They waved their handkerchiefs and flapped their great-coats like birds' wings in order that we might recognize them.

I frequently turned to Major Armengaud, shouting:

"Douaumont, Douaumont is ours!"

---

Suddenly our motor became silent—Armengaud tapped me on the shoulder. I turned and he cried:

"We must land!"

We were at that moment at a fixed altitude and I saw Armengaud twist to the right and to the left in the fuselage, looking for a safe spot to land—

[164]

All at once the wind whistled loudly and we assumed a dangerous slant. At certain moments the machine rocked—it did not seem to be going ahead—then it recovered its nose.

"I do not see a place to put it!" Armengaud cried:

"Douaumont, Douaumont is ours!"

It did not matter to me, although we fell; it was perhaps death, but—Douaumont was ours!

The ground seemed to approach very rapidly; Major Armengaud guided his airplane toward a little prairie north of Dugny, bordered by two gullies. We landed easily on the ground, but our "cuckoo" broke a hidden telephone wire—

"*Hein!* what do you think about it, Capart?"

"What a spectacle—you're an ace, major!"

I jumped at the same moment under the fuselage to connect the telephone wire he had cut. At the same time the major examined his motor—it was a trivial matter and soon repaired!

At the end of half an hour we got the motor running and once more rose in the air.

Darkness fell and the atmosphere was biting cold. The wind sang in the wings of the machine. When we reached the environs of Lemme, above the forest, it seemed as if we were standing still. It became more and more obscure and I asked myself how we could land. It was black below, but, here, it seemed as if we flew through a sea of blue. The woods appeared a sombre tint and the mist which clung to the branches looked like clusters of fleece on Christmas trees—

[165]

The little lights underneath us flickered one after the other, enlivening the vista more and more as they grew more numerous. Streams of camions on the different roads resembled long, phosphorescent worms—

Masses of clouds, strung out like attenuated lawn veils, fluttered quickly past, between us and the ground, completing the fantastic sketch—

I turned yet again. Back of us, one could still perceive the last scintillations of the battle! The bursting shell, which we heard no longer, became long, vivid flames that rose above the horizon  
---

During those hours I experienced the most stirring moments of my life, and one of the greatest epochs in the history of the world! Thanks, dear bird!

We arrived above the aviation field; the major shouted at me:

"Lean over to the right and keep your eyes open——"

We watched the ground closely so as not to be smashed. What matter, once more, because we are still under the spell of the sight we have just seen——

Descending slowly, our eyes commenced to be accustomed to this obscurity. We recognized the contour of the field, and our old "cuckoo" dropped gently on earth——

And that's how we assisted in the recapture of Fort Douaumont!

WHAT PASSES IN YOUR MIND WHEN FALLING [166]  
10,000 FEET, VADELAINCOURT.  
October 25, 1916.

To-day I went up on a rocket test at a very high altitude. Suddenly one of the rockets burst in the propeller, and it snapped like a pistol shot—the horizontal rudder also was damaged——

The descent commenced by great jerks and it seemed as if the machine would collapse and fall apart——

Flameng, my pilot, made a sign "that it could go very bad with us——" We went through a great cloud and I began to believe we would crash to earth. Despite three accidents in two days, this will be very pretty, I say to myself. I thought that after what I had seen these last three months, it would be absolutely idiotic to die in a bed, and I began to laugh at the idea——

The *avion* lands like a butterfly on a prairie——

THE MARQUIS AND THE MARCHIONESS, NETTANCOURT.  
November, 1916.

We had gone to take a turn around Avocourt Hill; the air was magnificent. We were 7,000 feet high directly above the spot we were going to land——

The major stopped his motor and commenced to descend in circles; I recognized the château, the village, the station——

On a road in the fields, a man, a woman, and a dog—even at this altitude it was impossible not to know them, the three characteristic specimens of a bygone age, more fanciful than Nature herself! [167]

I pointed my finger toward the ground so that Major Armengaud might see them also. He looked and likewise began to laugh——

I swear, it was *drôle*: like three big flies jiggling on the bald head of an old man!——

THE MAN WHO KNOWS THE SECTOR BETTER  
THAN ANYONE, AINES.  
December 1, 1916.

I am not sure of the road. It is night and as we are close to the lines I stop the machine——

I see a *poilu* and beckon him over.

"Do you know this territory well?"

"I know this sector better than anyone——"

"How is that?"

"Because I'm the gravedigger of the Regiment!"

PRISONER CHATTER, PEPPER HILL.  
December 15, 1916.

Night falls—victorious day—success along the whole line——I go by foot along the road from Louvemont, something I have not done since the first days of the battle of Verdun. The German prisoners and wounded, in their field-gray uniforms, dirty with mud, descend the hill in little groups, their arms raised. [168]

Some of them approach our men, saying:

"War finished—War finished!"

"I believe you're telling tales," was the reply of a *poilu*.

BRAS, PEPPER HILL.  
December 16, 1916.

I assisted yesterday the second attacking party, at Pepper Hill.

I have just passed the night at Froideterre,<sup>[28]</sup> which has been well named—At dawn the sound of

the battle diminished. On leaving the shelter where I had been installed, I saw, a few steps away, an airplane, its tail in the air, that I had noticed the night before—

At Brigade Headquarters I was asked to interrogate two young German officers who had been captured on the backbone of Pepper Hill—

I go back to Bras over the same route that I came. The ruins of the village are flooded with mud. For a whole year, day in and day out, I was once at Bras, but then it was a pretty village with inhabitants—

To-day there is nothing more than ruins, mud and dead bodies—

PRAYER AT NIGHT, A LITTLE VILLAGE [169]  
IN SWITZERLAND.  
December 26, 1916.

On entering the door, I hear Anne-Marie, who is saying her prayer *du soir*:

"Lil' Jesus, protect papa, who is at war, mamma, my grandparents, my little brothers—"

"Louder, Anne-Marie, the good God is neutral and does not hear—"

## FOOTNOTES:

- [21] Marmites—German shells of big caliber.—Tr.
- [22] As they leave the trenches, muddy, unshaven, dirty, red-eyed.—Tr.
- [23] Cassé means wounded, hurt or smashed, and when pronounced sounds very much like "K.C."—Tr.
- [24] This is the first time the author saw a member of the Knights of Columbus actively engaged in succoring wounded at the immediate front.—Tr.
- [25] A familiar expression, friends or companions.—Tr.
- [26] A street in Verdun.—Tr.
- [27] The first letter of each word spells Pétain, the general who assumed command at Verdun, finally breaking the thrust of the Crown Prince actually being maneuvered at this time. General Pétain's strategy upset the boche plans, causing them to abandon Verdun as a by-road to Paris.—Tr.
- [28] Cold-Ground.—Tr.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### THE BATTLE OF CHAMPAGNE OF 1917

*The author fell seriously ill and spent several weeks from the beginning of January, 1917, in the hospital at Châlons-sur-Marne.* [171]

*At the end of February, 1917, he again took up his work with General Pétain.*

*In the attack of Mont-sans-Nom, he accompanied the Morocco Division (Champagne, April 17, 1917).*

*Captain Capart left France June 2, 1917, for the United States as a member of a Scientific Mission which collaborated with officials of this Government just two months after America became an Ally against Prussianism.*

## CHAPTER EIGHT

GENERAL GOURAUD'S POILU, CHAMPAGNE. [173]  
December, 1916.

General Gouraud, when speaking of his *poilus*, never fails to tell the following story: "It was during a violent bombardment—The men are in their dugouts, save only the lookouts—"

"One of them, every time a shell broke near him, responded with a shot from his rifle, so that several times his comrades, passing by the opening in the shelter, got ready to dash out, believing the enemy was attacking. Finally they shouted at him:

"*Nom de Dieu*, what do you mean by shooting like that with your rifle—"

"Eh! *les vieux*, I'm laying down a barrage!"

NENETTE AND RINTININ! CHÂLONS-SUR-MARNE.  
March, 1917.

"The morale of our *poilus*," cried our comrade Delormes, "is simply magnificent!" I have just bought some writing paper at the store of *petite Antoinette*, who was literally jubilant the

moment I entered her shop. She received a letter from her husband, who is fighting on Maisons-de-Champagne Hill. She made me read the missive, which I would like to see awarded a prize by the Academy:

"Do not worry, my Nenetie," it read, "we will beat these brutes! Here, our bowels are firm! But what we are doing to *them*! But above all, don't worry!"

It was signed "Rintintin!"

AT THE HOSPITAL OF CHAUMONT-SUR-ÈRES.  
March, 1917.

The poor boy will suffer no longer—he passed away quietly. The nurse is bent over him, and, one after the other, closes his eyes—

She is deeply moved on seeing her *poilu* go! This exquisite creature, wife of one of our comrades, loves her wounded with all her soul!

Her last one arrived in terrible shape. She remained at his side night and day. Two times he was operated on. At times he was better, at times worse. During his first moment of consciousness, he asked that his wife be summoned—

What difficulty she had in obtaining a complete address and formulating a telegram according to his wishes! Then he murmured:

"She will not arrive too late?"

The nurse had written:

"Your husband is gravely wounded; come quick, but hope for the best."

What a painful journey she would have to endure!

During these days she learned a little more of the life of this man. Every minute she went to see if the wife had not come. She returned close to him. [175]

"Be assured, *mon brave*, you will get better. She will come. One travels with difficulty these days —"

She exaggerated the slowness of travel and he accepted what she told him; but he whispered:

"Urge her, madame, to come more quickly!"

Then she became impatient—Why did she not come? Some instants after she pitied her: surely she must have had great obstacles—some grim sentinel must have stood in her way—and she might have fallen angry herself thinking of these things.

She often interrogated the doctor and told him very softly:

"I wish she would come right away!"

She knew that the wife of her *poilu* had three babies to care for—What a catastrophe in this poor laborer's home if he never returned.

Soon she knew there was no longer any hope. "At least," she said to the doctor, "you can keep him alive—she will come—"

The agony was long, very long and the wife did not come. She sent for her again. What could be the matter?

---

On seeing her dear dead, an ineffable sadness engrossed her and big, silent tears fell from her eyes—

An attendant approached her—she turned her head and wiped her eyes—

"Someone there to see your wounded, madame—" said the man who did not know— [176]

Paralyzed, fixed to the floor, she could not move. She saw coming toward her, shrouded in an impressive silence, a woman—one of those women of France, good mother, good wife, good patriot, accustomed from youth to go through a harsh and bitter life as the wife of a laboring man, with serenity—

She went straight to him. The nurse followed her with her glance. She could no longer see her face, but saw the woman bend a great while over her dead. Of what was she thinking? Of the Calvary of her man, of his wound, of his agony, or rather of her own sadness, or the children for whom she would have to struggle—

She turned and, coming toward her:

"Is it you, madame, who have cared for him? Permit me to kiss you."

It was the nurse who wept—

THE IRREVERENT POILU.  
March, 1917.

An élite Division was *au repos*<sup>[29]</sup> in a pretty little village on the Meuse where the houses are gray and from where one can hear the cannon at Verdun, like a spring thunderstorm.

General Pétain has gone to spend a few hours with these heroes, accompanied by my worthy



### The mud in Fumin-wood (Verdun)

The brave *poilus* do not permit themselves the pleasures of complete inactivity. Whatever spot they may find themselves in, they organize and "dig themselves in" as if they must remain for the rest of their lives! [177]

A *poilu* is working arduously over a little board hut. He has running around him two of his "loves," small pigs, plump and rosy. It is understood they will be eaten, but not before the squad finds them completely "*à point*."<sup>[30]</sup> While waiting it is necessary to keep them in a shelter and our *poilu* will quickly finish the sumptuous dwelling for his favorites.

My comrade, busy looking around while awaiting the general, becomes interested in the conscientious labors of the man——

"Is it for them you are working?"

"Yes, captain, I am making them a wonderful P.C."

THE GENDARMES' SOUP.  
March, 1917.

I return from Fort Douaumont and am worn out. An automobile is coming to meet me at Galavaude Bridge and I am waiting for it——

The gendarmes guarding the approaches to the bridge notice that I am fatigued. They approach me, asking if I would not like to sit down.

"Did not someone ask you if Captain Capart had returned?" [178]

"No, captain. Wouldn't you like to come in our home where it will be more agreeable than in the road?"

I entered the home of the gendarmes. On the table, which had been set, several covers had been laid with infinite care. A pot of steaming soup simmered over a smouldering fire——

"Oh!—soup!" I cried, sniffing the air——

"If we dared, captain, we would be happy, very happy, if you would ask for a plate—or better—two plates——"

On saying these words, he lifted the lid of the kettle on the fire; then with a ladle filled the soup plate full to the brim——

The soup was excellent!

Since that day, I always regard *les cognes*<sup>[31]</sup> with sympathy——

LETTERS WRITTEN BEFORE GOING INTO THE  
ATTACK, CHÂLONS-SUR-MARNE,  
ELEVEN O'CLOCK AT NIGHT.  
April 16, 1917.

To Captain Noël D——

My dear friend:



I regret that I was not able to grasp your hand to-night—I leave in a moment to join the Morocco Division— [32]

If you receive this letter, you will know I have fallen in the attack on Mont-sans-nom. Do not pity me. When I was a child, I experienced then a profound emotion in reading the lines of the Cid—

"To die for country is not a sad fate,  
In death there is glorious immortality!"

This is not the time to grow sentimental, because I have only a few minutes more—It is raining hard outside and I have builded a roaring wood fire in my room—I have burned not a few of my old papers, as you advised me—

If I am unlucky, you will find a letter which I wish you would send to Madame X— together with some bric-à-brac and souvenirs you will find in my room—

There is also a box on which is written "Destroy in case of my death": burn it!

I wish to thank you, my dear friend, for all you have done for me since I have known you—You have been to me a devoted brother and I have for you a deep affection—

My best regards to all my comrades—I will do my duty—

*Vive la France!*

To Madame X—

[180]

Dear little woman:

I send you and my three little ones my last and tenderest kisses—

The weather is atrocious—The attack will begin at four forty-five this morning—I rejoin the Morocco Division immediately—

Tell my boys that I want them to be soldiers like myself—

Do not weep at my death, which is coming, it is the most beautiful end a soldier may hope for—

I thank you for having made me happy on earth: you were my first love—

I kiss your lips for the last time—When you see mother, tell her my last thoughts were of her—

MOMENTS OF WEAKNESS.

*April 17, 1917.*

What bad luck!

Every time an attack is planned it must rain. One must paddle along in the mud—and then the water runs down your neck—

As we will start before daybreak over the top, one, naturally, will stumble—we collect all kinds of sticks so that we may scrape the mud from our sleeves—

---

I find myself leaping over the first German lines—then, the wide open space before reaching the second position.

Our artillery has done good work, the wire entanglements are fortunately destroyed.

[181]

We leap over more trenches and *boyaux*—From time to time our glance is arrested by German corpses around which occasionally some of our own have fallen—

Bullets sing in every direction—machine-gun nests we have passed sputter at us from behind.

We go ahead without hesitation, but without speaking—one never speaks during these moments!

The field inclines and it is necessary to stop and pant a few instants—a circular view—prisoners hastily descend the hill, their arms raised, staggering like drunken men—

It is a nasty place to tarry any length of time—two boche machine-guns sixty yards to our right spit at us. Our advance can be effected, luckily, thanks to the deep craters our guns have made the preceding days. Day has fully broken—a fine rain is falling—

The position is as unmanageable as a runaway horse. We gain the second objective. The trench is wider than the former one and I cannot jump over it—

It is necessary to descend into the trench. I am followed by a few companions—A young German *blesé* is stretched out in the bottom. He is extremely young. He has curly hair and so blond that he looks like a little child—

He has been thrown in a jumble and the partially demolished trench on top—his head is twisted and his body and legs are sticking up in the air—

He makes an effort to rise. Striding over him, I see bloody froth on his lips—I heard him murmur:

[182]

"*Wasser, wasser*—"

With his arms and shoulders he makes another effort to get up—

One after the other we pass over the wounded boy, careful not to step on him—

---

The attack progresses, but I have the vision of this child continually before my eyes. I replace my revolver in the holster, and with blows of my cane I stop a crowd of prisoners we have just taken, who attempt to flee, throwing down their rifles as they go—

We have attained our last objective. Without losing an instant, we begin to organize it and get ourselves settled. At the end of a few minutes, officers and *poilus* commence to feel the reaction of what we have just passed through.

Everyone talks at once. We comment on the missing ones. There are several versions on the death of the friends we have seen fall—

For example, several had seen the little boche. Many remarked about his youth and his childish face—he yet breathed—

---

Some hours later, I could not resist—I made my way back two miles to see if he still lived—

I found without difficulty the path which will forever remain solemn in my memory. From a distance I saw the trench and the indentation at the foot of which I was sure of finding him— [183]

---

He is dead! He has not changed his position, but his face is waxen. His two arms are extended with fists clenched toward the heaven he has without doubt cursed!

---

After having contemplated the dead boy, I retrace my route, with lowered head, to find my companions—

I had not gone fifty steps before I met, face to face, one of my comrades of the attack that morning—

"What are you doing here—you, too?"

"I come to help him out—"

"He is dead—"

"Let's go back."

---

It is night. What quiet after that terrible day of battle. Glorious day!

We are quartered in the German shelters—use whatever we can find to build a fire—

It continues to rain outside. We have formed a circle and discuss the events which have just passed endlessly.

In a corner of the shelter several men, lying full length on the floor, speak in a low voice. They are the colonel's messengers. I hear one who says to the other:

"I went back to see him—he was dead. I will reproach myself the rest of my life for not having helped him up this morning when we jumped over him." [184]

THE HEROIC POILUS, CHAMPAGNE.  
*April 17, 1917.*

Nothing withstood the attack of the 8th Zouaves; we reached our objective at the given time. We are elated over our success. [33]

The noise of the battle is dying out. The enemy surrenders to us in little groups. I find myself, cane in hand, standing before a dugout, from which crawl a dozen or so Saxons with their captain —

Pointing at our *poilus*, covered with mud and magnificent, he said to me:

"What are these men—lions?"

"No, they are *poilus of France!*"

THE CHIVALROUS POILUS, CHAMPAGNE.  
*April, 1917.*

We are at the retaken positions on Mont-sans-nom. Colonel Lagarde occupies a sumptuous shelter in which he has extended the hospitality of inviting me to dinner. A bouquet of flowers, sent directly to me from Châlons, has been placed on the table in a shell-made vase.

The Zouaves, who saunter in and out of the colonel's P.C., are visibly astonished—



### Convoy of ammunition in Champagne.

They are convinced that it is General Pétain himself who has sent the flowers to their colonel, in recognition of their success the day before— [185]

One after the other the roses disappear, the last ones vanishing petal by petal—

The same day and the next, the 8th Zouaves repelled the enemy counter-attack with rose petals in their button-holes!

THE JESTING POILUS, CHAMPAGNE.  
May, 1917.

General J. B. Dumas is passing his troops in review to-day. Our stalwart *poilus* have fought admirably, and, before leaving for the rear, *au repos*, must be honored—

General Dumas, who is popular with his men, stops in front of a good-looking boy, sturdy, vigorous and superbly healthy!

"You remember me?"

The *poilu* stares astonished and does not reply.

"*Voyons*, you know, all the same, who I am?—"

". . . ! ! !"

"*Allons*, speak—"

The *poilu* said to himself, "If I don't tell him that I remember him, he'll murder me—"

"Yes, I remember you, general, I remember you perfectly—"

". . . ? ? ?"

"You are the former station master at Bécon-les-Bruyères!"

A FETICH! MONTE CARLO. [186]  
February, 1917.

"I have a favor to ask of you, captain, pardon me—"

"Which, mademoiselle, I will be very pleased to grant you—"

"Here is a little kerchief—I give it to you and ask that you wear it around your wrist, the next time you go into battle."

"I promise it."

"It will bring you good luck and I am certain you will do great things that day!"

CHAMPAGNE.  
April, 1917.

"Your little kerchief has been an excellent fetich, mademoiselle. I wore it on my wrist in the attack of April 17. It is a priceless star of gold, on my *croix de guerre*, and I hope you will be pleased! I offer it to you—because, it is *my* shining star!"

THE RETURN OF JEAN PAUL COCHIN,  
GRAND BLESSÉ, PARIS.  
May, 1917.

It was at the beginning of July, 1915, when the army of the Crown Prince unloosed its big thrust in the Argonne.

The battle was raging to the north of St. Menehoulde and this sector became suddenly the most active on the whole front. [187]

Jean Paul Cochin, soldier of the second class in the — Regiment of Infantry was sorely wounded July 7, toward four o'clock in the afternoon near Vienne-le-Château. A shell burst near the parapet of the trench in which he was stationed, shattering his two arms.

He was thrown violently to the ground and lost consciousness—

Toward dusk he half-opened his eyes, but could not move; he suffered very much—his lips dry and he had a tremendous thirst.

Then he felt himself being moved—he recalled vaguely having heard the murmur of a voice—some jolting, sharp pains which hurt.

A stop! He heard guttural voices, a bright light passed several times before his eyes which he could not open—

Another shifting—a rapid journey and many bumps and joltings—

---

When he again regained consciousness he found himself in a bed and looked to the right and to the left to find out where he was. He was in a large room and perceived numerous other beds like his own.

He could twist his head, but his body was fixed, immobile, and his two arms hurt him terribly.

He saw approaching the bed a man very big and strong, with gray hair, gowned in white, accompanied by two assistants and a nurse. [188]

The doctor gave several orders in German. Little did it matter to Jean being a prisoner, but his suffering was horrible. The doctor began unwinding the bandages to examine the wounds. Soon he was not conscious of what was going on. They placed a white napkin over his face and he inhaled the strong odor of ether. For some moments it seemed to him cannon were booming in the distance and a loud whistling in his ears, then nothing more—

Some hours later he came to himself for the second time and found that his bed was bound and wrapped like a mummy. He was so feeble—so feeble. How long his sleep had been he did not know.

A nurse on seeing him open his eyes brought him tea and he murmured "thanks"; then she cautioned him in very bad French to lie quiet and not to move.

The horrible nightmare and the fever lasted through the night and because he steeled himself he would not cry—

In the morning the doctor came back with the nurses and demanded in French that he answer some questions: he must give his name and the unit to which he belonged. Then all got black again before his eyes and the poor devil fainted—

---

Thanks to his strong constitution, he took a turn for the better, not, however, without passing several bad days, and the fever left him.

How long was all this going to last? He did not know—

[189]

So he began to feel better and stronger and rejoiced when the doctor, in the course of his visits, said to him:

"You're going to pull through, and I'm glad of it—"

He was still extremely feeble, had to be nourished with a spoon, but he did not forget that he was very well taken care of in this hospital.

Turning his head, he perceived with surprise that his neighbor in the next bed was his comrade in the trenches, Paul Dubois—

"Is that you, Patachon?"

"Yes, my *pauv' vieux*."

"Why, you here, too—what's the matter?—"

"A foot gone—leg lots shorter—but I complain no longer, Cobusse; you don't suffer much any more—I thought I heard the death rattle those first days—"

"No, I suffer no more—"

"You know how we got here?"

They began reconstructing the scene completely, the bombardment; and they recalled the premonitory whistling of the shell that had wounded them both.

They chatted for a long time and there was a consolation for having been taken prisoner in

finding themselves together.

Some weeks later Cochin and his comrade, being improved in health and strength, were evacuated to a hospital in the interior. They made a long journey on the railroad and perceived more and more how unfortunate it was to lose one or more limbs.

On arriving there, Cochin had so lost the notions of equilibrium that he fell several times to the ground to the great despair of Dubois, who thereafter never slackened his hold on him. [190]

Cobusse and Patachon came rapidly to be very close friends; these two wrecks of the war could not be separated and found in each other a reciprocal sustenance.

Patachon washed, dressed and fed Cobusse and rolled his cigarettes. He tried to explain to his friend that one can go through life without arms and used such unusual arguments that it caused his comrade to smile at times.

And the latter said amusingly:

"In the meantime, I have an itching—scratch then, my head—not there!—yes, there, how good that feels, Patachon——"

Their morale remained excellent and they were confident of victory.

During their captivity, one rainy day, they were sitting side by side on a bunk and began to talk of their families.

Cochin told how his wife was waiting for him in *Panam*<sup>[34]</sup> with their little Hélène, who was almost five. He could not stop talking of the little *gamine* who was "his own picture."

"You cannot realize, Patachon, how lively and intelligent she is. Ah! what wouldn't I give to clasp her in my arms."

To change the conversation Patachon said to him: [191]

"Some time you'll be eager to scratch yourself, Cobusse—Don't stand on ceremony, you know I'm here for *that*, my old friend—we must aid each other in life."

The long hours of captivity passed sordidly enough, broken by the arrival of letters from France and packages of food.

When they talked with the Germans they were completely reassured on the outcome of the war: both of them were very skeptical when they heard the bells ringing and when they read the bulletins announcing another German victory. When their guardians looked gloomy Patachon never failed to smile at Cobusee.

"Our overseer wears a long face these great days, he must again have swallowed another pill!"

The two, and their comrades, shattered wrecks like themselves, always passed the sombre days in the little German village where they were taken. They had to suffer numerous privations. They missed the hospital at the front and the German doctor who was "rather a good sort."

They had to take insults from these heartless people and many times they were able to read a secret joy in their eyes on seeing them crippled.

"Ough! the dirty beasts, Cobusse, did you see how that woman there sneered at us——"

---

Many months went by and Cochin and Dubois never left each other. They spoke less of the war, but retained the hope of returning to France and of this they often talked. [192]

"Listen, Patachon, here we are, you and I, *grands blessés*, and we should have been in Paris long ago—what are they trying to do—keeping us all this time?"

"Yes, Cobusse, it commences to be very long——"

One day, however, it was announced their turn had come and they could leave. At the thought of seeing France again they were thrilled. They had done their duty and could return home proud ——

Quickly they were ready and began the long journey across Germany. Their train was full of *grands blessés*, miserable beings which the grave did not want and which it was glad to be free of. As Patachon said, "They all look like a lot of wire and rubber——" They were blind, sick, maimed and mad!

There was enough misery in that train, but all were haughty and dignified!

"What a sad air," said Cochin, "this boche country has——"

Rolling along thus during one entire day, the night was broken by very long stops that seemed endless. And these long hours of waiting made them very tired and low spirited; as soon as they started again everyone began to laugh and talk.

As they drew near to the Swiss frontier scarcely could they conceal the joy they felt on leaving this country that was killing them.

At dawn the train arrived at a station all lit up, where, in spite of the early hour, there were great throngs. It is Schaffhouse!

Along the platform Swiss officers and soldiers went to and fro, excited as if they saw Frenchmen [193]

for the first time——

"We are in Switzerland, Patachon——"

"Are you sure?"

They looked out the car window and scarcely had time to see, on the other track, a trainload of wounded Germans going the other way.

"You see, they are maimed like us——"

The soldiers in the two trains regarded each other closely without a word.

Hardly had the train of the German *grands blessés* started to leave the station than a military band began to play the "Marseillaise"!

Yes, the "Marseillaise"—They raised their heads and there wasn't a one who did not hold himself in an effort not to cry——

Then the station became crowded with persons who wished to see the *grands blessés*. They distribute flowers, cigarettes, little tri-colored flags, small cakes, chocolate, colored postal cards—The station gets more and more crowded and the excitement grows.

"Ah! we are not in that boche country any more, Patachon—I begin to breathe easier already——"

But they're all more or less amazed at this great bustle to which they are ill-accustomed, and for the first time they see human beings who have sincere pity for their misery.

---

At Zurich, at Olten and at Berne, they see the same things and more so as they approach France. Here, the manifestations are clamorous and very lively. Above all, the people speak French and shout: "*Bravo les braves!*" [194]

However, they are not yet completely happy: they are not home! But they stretch and become more attentive to the surrounding country. Through the window they admire the Bernoise Alps blanketed with snow.

At Fribourg, a woman holds out a bouquet of flowers to Cochin, while her daughter presents him at the same time with a cup of steaming bouillon. They cannot understand why the crowd shouts so much. They cry also: "*Vive la France!*"

"Take it," say both the mother and daughter.

Patachon leans out the window.

"He cannot take them," he says, "because his arms are gone——"

The two step back as if to shrink away from this immense misfortune, but Patachon calls to them:

"Pass me the flowers and the cup—it is I who am his mother at present. Thank you, madame; thank you, *ma petite*—*Allons*, drink that, old brother. Is it too hot?"

The mother and child begin to cry, "Oh, the poor, the poor *blessé*."

Cochin stiffens as if proud of his wound——

---

They passed by Lausanne, and Geneva, and at the latter place said adieux to Switzerland. It was night when they crossed the border and a half hour later entered the station at Bellegrade—France! [195]

At last they were home. The people were different. Nurses went up and down the platform with a cheery word for everyone. In short, each one wanted to tell his story, but a smile from these women almost made them forget it.

The following day they got out at the Lyon station where a beautiful ceremony had been planned to receive them. The mayor addressed them in front of the station and at his side were the general commanding the district and the city officials. Little girls, quaintly dressed in their first communicant costumes, distributed flowers, and Patachon fixed a pretty rosebud in his comrade's tunic.

The mayor compared them to old flags riddled with bullets, at which one gazed with pride and emotion. Everyone was grave, because they were conscious it was true.

The music kept on playing—the throng went wild—was this not a beautiful dream after that horrible nightmare? The blind themselves smiled, as if they saw—They breathed the air of France!

---

They went back into the train, this time to complete the last step of their journey: to-morrow they will be in Paris.

They are tired and they find the time passes slowly, so great is their impatience.

Cochin telegraphs his wife to be at the station with the little one—

They cannot sleep and they speak of their captivity. They are content within themselves as long as they do not give way to discouragement. They fully apprehend now the return—what will become of them?

They await the coming of day with disquietude. Night seems without an end. At last, the sun routs the darkness and they recognize the outskirts of Paris—

At seven o'clock in the morning their train enters the station—

"The war is finished for us, Cobusse, and we are lucky to get back—"

Cochin does not reply. He looks out the window and sees the station crowded with people—they are all talking at once—

"Patachon, I see my wife and H el ene—Wave at them!"

"Where are they?"

They have seen him and begin waving their hands, at the same time making signs for him to come down on the platform. Patachon shouts out the window:

"We're coming!"

Cochin, very pale, leaves the coach, assisted by two nurses. He is some steps in front of his wife, who is holding H el ene. He walks ahead rapidly as if to take her in his arms, and then understands. He stops—and falls back, sobbing on the shoulder of his friend—

"Come—come, my *pauv' vieux*, don't cry—what's this—you who never cry!"

[197]

"Patachon—I can—I can never clasp her in my arms—"

PARIS.  
May 27, 1917.

"What a sad air you have—an infinite sadness—"

"I believe no longer in GOD, nor the love of a woman, nor in the friendship of a friend—"

"You believe then, no longer in anything?—"

"Yes, in glory—posthumous—"

AT SEA, ABOARD THE CHICAGO.  
June 5, 1917.

I leave for the United States!

The vigorous part of my life is terminated. I am on the high seas and my eyes do not tire as I contemplate this magnificent sight. Physical and moral suffering are forgotten—

I awaken each day a little farther away, and I forget that nightmare.

Is it possible I am here—I—What repose!

NEW YORK.  
June 15, 1917.

To-night I have seen land again and felt a shudder, the first after a very long time.

On seeing the Statue of Liberty, my eyes are full of tears, and I cry:

[198]

"Wonderful United States, quick—into the struggle! Now it's you—Strike, strike—strike *hard!*"

FINIS

### FOOTNOTES:

[29] Inactive, resting after having been in battle.—Tr.

[30] In fine condition.—Tr.

[31] Popular appellation for gendarmes.—Tr.

[32] Elite Division consisting of Zouaves, Tirailleurs and Foreign Legion.—Tr.

[33] This regiment took over 800 prisoners in the attack, also many large guns.—Tr.

[34] Panam—Paris.—Tr.

### Transcriber's Notes

The table of contents was generated and does not appear in the book.

Obvious errors of punctuation and diacritics repaired.

Hyphen removed: battle[-]field (p. 117), sand[-]bags (p. 52).

P. 22: a woman, young woman -> a woman, a young woman.  
P. 79: in the threshold -> in the threshold.  
P. 104: Pernot -> Pernod.  
P. 107: our cattridge boxes -> our cartridge boxes.  
P. 125: bifucation of the two roads -> bifurcation of the two roads.  
P. 126: two men whe -> two men who.  
P. 128: Shell rain around us -> Shells rain around us.  
P. 134: German shell -> German shells.  
P. 147: When shell burst -> When shells burst.  
Caption of illustration following p. 160: Donaumont -> Douaumont.  
P. 180: Morocco Divison -> Morocco Division.  
P. 190: Cobusee and Patachon -> Cobusse and Patachon.  
P. 192: there were great throngs -> there was great throngs.

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A BLUE DEVIL OF FRANCE: EPIC FIGURES  
AND STORIES OF THE GREAT WAR, 1914-1918 \*\*\*

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