

The Confessions of a German Deserter

Written by a Prussian Officer Who Participated in the Ravaging and Pillaging of Belgium

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left them. In contrast to the fugitives, whom we had met before, these were extremely frightened, appearing to be in mortal terror of their enemy. Whenever they looked upon one of us German soldiers they cringed in terror.

How different these were from the inhabitants of the village where we had first stopped, who had met us in a friendly, even polite manner. We tried to learn the cause of this fright and discovered that the fugitives had witnessed in their village bitter street fighting. They had become acquainted with war—had seen their houses burning, had seen their little property destroyed and could not forget the sight of their streets filled with corpses and wounded.

It dawned upon us that not merely fear gave these people the appearance of hunted animals; there was also hatred toward the invaders who had fallen upon them and driven them from their homes by night.

In the evening we departed and tried to reach our own regiment. The Belgians had concentrated somewhere to the rear under cover of darkness. We were quite near the neighborhood of the fortified city of Liege. Many settlements through which we passed stood in flames; the inhabitants driven out, passed us in droves. Women, children and old men were buffeted about and seemed to be everywhere in the way. Without aims or plans, without a place on which to lay their heads these poor people dragged themselves by.

Again we reached a village, which to all appearances had been inhabited by contented people. Now indeed nothing but ruins could be seen. Wrecked houses and farms, dead soldiers, German and Belgian, and among them many civilians, who had been shot by military order.

Toward midnight we reached the German lines. The Germans had tried to take a village which lay within the fortified belt of Liege and was defended tenaciously by the Belgians. Here all forces had to be used in order to drive the enemy out, house by house and street by street. It was not very dark yet, so that we had to witness with all of our senses the terrible fights which developed here. It was a man-to-man fight. With the butts of our guns, knives, fists, teeth we went against the enemy.

One of my best friends fought with a giant Belgian. The guns of both had fallen to the ground. They hammered one another with fists. I had just closed an account with a twenty-two year-old Belgian and was going to assist my friend because his antagonist was of superior strength. My friend succeeded suddenly in biting the Belgian on the chin so deeply that he tore a piece of flesh out with his teeth. The Belgian's pain must have been terrible. He released my comrade and ran away with an insane cry of pain.

Everything developed by seconds. The blood of the Belgian ran out of my friend's mouth; a terrible nausea and indescribable loathing seized him. The taste of warm human blood brought him almost to the verge of insanity. In the course of this night battle I came in contact for the first time with the butt of a Belgian gun. During a hand-to-hand fight with a Belgian, a second enemy soldier struck me on the back of the head with the butt of his gun so hard that my helmet was forced down over my ears. The pain was fearful and I fainted.

When I revived, I was lying in a barn, with my head bandaged, among other wounded men. My wound was not severe. I only had a feeling as if my head was twice its normal size. The other wounded soldiers and the ambulance men said the Belgians had been forced back within the forts and that hard fighting was still in progress.

Wounded men were brought in continuously and they told us that the Germans had already stormed several forts and had taken a number of main and auxiliary defenses, but could not hold them because they had not been sufficiently supported by artillery. The defenses inside the forts and their garisons were still intact. The situation was not ripe for a storming attack, so the Germans had to retire with enormous losses. The reports we received were contradictory. It was impossible to get a clear picture. In the mean time the artillery bombardment had become so intense that it horrified even the German soldiers. The heaviest artillery was brought into action against the steel and concrete defenses.

No soldier so far knew anything of the existence of the 42-centimeter mortars. Long after Liege was in German hands these soldiers could not understand how it was possible that the defenses, which consisted of double six-meter walls of steel and con-

crete, were reduced after only a few hours' bombardment.

I myself could not take part in these operations, being wounded, but my comrades told me later how the capture of the several forts came about. Artillery of all caliber was trained on the forts, but it was the 21-centimeter mortars and the 42s which performed the real work.

From a distance the 42-centimeter projectiles were heard to arrive, to the accompaniment of a fearful hissing that sounded like a long drawn-out screech which filled the whole atmosphere. Wherever it fell, everything was destroyed within a radius of several hundred meters. The air pressure which the bursting of the projectile produced was so terrible that it made breathing difficult for those of us who were holding the advanced positions.

To make this witches' holiday complete, the Zeppelins appeared during the night to participate in the work of destruction. The soldiers suddenly heard above their heads the whirling of propellers and the noise of the motors. The Zeppelins came nearer. They were not discovered by the enemy until they were close to the forts, which immediately played all the



Played the Searchlight on Them.

searchlights at their disposal on them, hunting the firmament for the flying foe. The whirling of the propellers of the airships stopped suddenly. Instead, high in the air a brilliant light appeared, the searchlight of the Zeppelin, which, for a moment, illuminated the entire landscape.

Suddenly all became dark again. A few moments later powerful detonations revealed the fact that the Zeppelin had thrown off "ballast." That went on a long while. Explosion followed explosion. These were followed by clouds of fire. In the air, exploding shrapnel which the Belgian artillery fired at the airships could be observed. The whirling of the propellers started up again, directly above our heads. It became quieter and quieter, until the powerful ships of the air disappeared from our vicinity.

Thus the forts were leveled. Thousands of Belgians lay behind the walls and under the fortifications, dead and buried. A general storming attack followed. Liege was in the hands of the Germans, who had paid, in dead alone in this battle, 28,000 men.

CHAPTER II.

I went to Aix-la-Chapelle to a hospital. I met many more wounded men who had fought in Belgium. All were of the opinion that the Belgian dead numbered as many civilians as soldiers. Even if the German soldiers who fought in Belgium do not admit the cruelties committed against the Belgians, it cannot be denied that at least 80 per cent of the cruelties known to the world to have been committed in Belgium were only too true.

A young soldier who lay next to me in the hospital told me that his company, during a street fight in Liege, was given orders to kill everybody without discrimination. Systematically, one house after another was set on fire. The inhabitants either fell in the flames or became the victims in the streets to the gun barrels of the German kukur-bearers.

At the time I doubted the words of my neighbor, even though I had seen what German warfare meant. After a few days I was released from the hospital and again restored to my detachment. Partly by auto, partly by

train, I reached my detachment by ten o'clock in the evening. Our transport moved this time over Trier to Luxembourg. The little grand duchy of Luxembourg was overrun entirely by German soldiers. The Germans who had made their homes in Luxembourg had everything taken away from them, especially the farmers, all food, without thought of payment, so that in Luxembourg at this time there was a shortage of food. The people here as well as in Belgium were very friendly, yet they harbored a terrible bitterness against the German government, which had loosed its troops like a band of robbers and murderers over their peaceful country.

Belgium and Luxembourg, the two first unhappy victims of the damnable German politics and its drunkenness with power!

That the Luxembourg citizens detested Germany an incident showed me which happened in the village of Mar-moth. We were in a friendly conversation with a Luxembourg farmer. Two officers approached and listened. One officer, a captain, asked the Luxembourg farmer, "What do you think of the war, and of the quickness of Germany? There is only one Germany, isn't there?"

"Yes," replied the farmer. "Thank the Lord."

For those four words the farmer was arrested at once and transported to Germany as a court prisoner. I could never learn what became of him.

The same evening we were transported in automobiles and on the evening of August 20, 1914, we reached our detachment, which was about 35 miles from the Belgian city of Neuve Chateau. The regiment to which I belonged did not take part in any operations after the fall of Liege, but was transported to this part of Belgium. Now I learn for the first time how heavy was the loss in my company in the Liege fighting. We lost 187 men to dead and wounded.

This night we slept in an open field. At five o'clock the next morning we marched again until four o'clock in the afternoon, when we were given a rest.

It was about ten o'clock in the evening when we received orders to advance. We were all ready to proceed when another order came for us to remain at our bivouac overnight. During the night we heard thundering of cannon which became more violent. The battle of Neuve Chateau, which had continued from August 22 to August 24, 1914, had begun.

At four o'clock on the morning of August 22 we resumed our march. At Neuve Chateau the French army had encountered the Fourth German army. First there was, as always, minor outpost and patrol fighting. By and by larger masses of troops participated, and as we took our part in the battle on the evening of August 22, the fight had developed into one of the most sanguinary of the world war.

When we arrived the French occupied almost three-quarters of the town. The artillery had set the main part of Neuve Chateau on fire and only the beautiful residence section in the western part of the city escaped at that time. All night long the house-to-house fighting continued, but when at noon of August 23 the city was in German hands the enormous cost to the Germans could finally be determined.

Residences, collars, streets and sidewalks were heaped with dead and wounded. The houses were in ruins—empty shells, in which hardly anything remained undamaged that was of any real value. Thousands became beggars in one terrible night. Women and children, soldiers and citizens were lying where the pitiless shells and bullets had hurled them from life into death's dark void. True impartiality reigned in the killing. There was a Belgian woman lying next to a Belgian baby which she had borne from house to street. Close by lay a man of uncertain years before an empty house. Both his legs were burned to the knees. His wife lay on his breast and sobbed so pitifully that her grief could not be endured. Most of the dead were entirely or partly burned. The cries of agony of the animals fighting incineration were mixed with the groans and sobbing of the wounded.

But no one had time to bother with them. The French were making another stand outside the city in an open field. As the enemy vacated the town the Germans made an error which cost them hundreds of lives. They had occupied the entire town so quickly that the German artillery which shelled a part of the city did not know of the change in the situation and threw shells into the ranks of the infantry. Finally our soldiers were compelled to give up some of their gains by the pressure of our own as well as the French fire, but regained this ground afterwards. Strangely enough, the residence section previously mentioned had not suffered seriously. All the houses flew the Red Cross and were used as temporary hospitals.

Here it was reported that Belgians mutilated German soldiers. Whether this were true, or only a rumor, similar to others being constantly started by German soldiers, I cannot say, but I do know that on August 24, after the French had retired, it was made known through an army order that German soldiers had been murdered there, and that the German army could not leave the scene of these outrages without first avenging the victims.

It was ordered by the commander of the army to level the remainder of the city and to show no mercy. As we took a short rest from our pursuit of the enemy and looked backward clouds of smoke to the eastward showed that the order had been executed. A remaining battery of artillery had re-

(To be continued)

Hemingford News Items

Mrs. Izetta Lotspeich was looking after business matters here the first of the week, returning to her home in Alliance Monday.

William Cory made a business trip to Alliance the first of the week.

Mr. and Mrs. John Sampsy came in from Sioux county last Friday and spent a few days at the Shepherd home.

Mr. and Mrs. Melick, from Hopkins, Mo., came Friday morning on 41 to visit their children living here.

William Elder left Saturday night for a few days' visit with friends and relatives at Anselmo, Nebr.

Miss Belva Geiger and Mrs. Russell Miller were shopping in Alliance Thursday between trains.

Word was received from Mrs. A. G. Danborn, who is in the hospital at Omaha, that she is getting along nicely.

Mrs. C. H. Burlaw was shopping in Alliance Monday between trains.

Mrs. B. U. Shepherd entertained the Solo club last Friday at a birthday supper in honor of Mr. Shepherd.

Mrs. Vaughan and little daughter from Alliance came up the first of the week for a few days' visit at the Potmesil home.

Miss Helen Green was a passenger to Alliance Monday on 44, returning on 43.

Miss Hattie Grimes closed a very successful term of school in the Kenke district, Friday, April 26.

Emil Hernal, an old-time resident of this place, is visiting friends and relatives here at this writing.

A very large crowd attended the Red Cross dance at the opera house Saturday night. The dance was given by the Peltz orchestra.

Mrs. Shady was a west bound passenger Saturday on 43 for Crawford for an over-Sunday visit.

The March edition of The Nebraska Printer has just reached our desk. This little printer's mag. is getting better with every issue and Brother A. D. Scott, publisher, is filling with it a long felt want. It is now in vol-

ume three and going strong.

F. M. Broome, proprietor of the Antioch News, and receiver of the United States land office at Valentine, was in the city last Wednesday on business.

Red Cross headquarters will be closed on Saturday except for one hour—from 5 to 6 o'clock in the afternoon.—Mrs. S. W. Thompson, chairman.

Road to Happiness

Be amiable, cheerful and good natured and you are much more likely to be happy. You will find this difficult, if not impossible, however, when you are constantly troubled with constipation. Take Chamberlain's Tablets and get rid of that and it will be easy. These tablets not only move the bowels, but improve the appetite and strengthen the digestion. For sale by druggists.



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Beautiful—Sanitary—Low-priced



"They are so beautiful you could never guess they cost so little."

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The beautiful coloring and dainty designs found in Congoleum Art-Rugs will be a revelation to you. And when you see for yourself that they are washable, waterproof and sanitary, you will understand why they have made such a sensation throughout the country.

they have two features that make friends for them on sight. They lie flat on the floor without fastening and cannot be "kicked up" at the edges.

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GLEN MILLER

WILL HAVE ABOUT

4000

Head of Cattle

At Fremont, Nebraska

For Sale. As Follows:

About May 5th. 1000 head three and four year old steers.

May 10th. 1000 head of two year old steers.

May 20th. 1000 head of yearling steers and 1000 head of two year old steers.

If in the market for stock cattle write or wire

A. C. SIBBITT, Hyannis, Nebr.