

The Confessions of a German Deserter

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

(Continued from last week)

In the barn, which served as a snare to the civilians, were thrown together men and women, youths, children and old men. Many were wounded by shell splinters and cartridges and others had suffered burns. Everywhere was the most terrible misery; sick mothers and half-starved infants for whom there was no milk were obliged to perish here; old people died from the excitement and fright of the previous few days and last of all men and women in the prime of life slowly died from wounds because there was nobody to care for them.

A company of Hessian reserves, every one a veteran, passed with bowed heads and tired feet. They must have had a very long march. Their officers tried to make them move more lively. They ordered that a song be sung but the Hessians were not in the mood.

"Will you sing, you pigs?" cried an officer and the pitiful-looking "pigs" tried to obey this order. Faintly sounded from the ranks of the overtired men: "Deutschland, Deutschland Ueber Alles, Ueber Alles in Der Welt." Despite their broken strength, their tired feet, disgusted and resentful, these men sang their symphony of rasper-Germanism.

Several comrades who like myself had watched this troop pass came to



Sitting, Bitterly Crying, by the Debris of Her Late Home.

me and said, "Let us go to the camp and try to sleep so that we might forget all this."

We were hungry and on the way home caught several chickens. We ate them half-way and then laid down in the open and slept until four o'clock in the morning when we had to be ready to march.

Our destination on this day was Sulpites. Before the march started the following army order was read:

"Soldiers, his majesty the emperor, our supreme war lord, thanks the soldiers of the Fourth army and sends to them his full appreciation. You have saved our beloved Germany from the invasion of hostile hordes. We will not rest until the last enemy lies on the ground and before the leaves fall from the trees we shall return home victorious. The enemy is in full retreat and the Almighty will bless our arms further."

After this talk we gave three cheers, something which had become routine for us. And then we resumed our march. We now had plenty of time and opportunity to discuss the gratitude expressed by the supreme war lord. We could not make out just what fatherland we had to defend so far in France. One of the soldiers expressed the opinion that the Lord had blessed our arms, to which another replied: "A religious man repeating such silly sentiments is guilty of sacrilege, if he speaks seriously."

Everywhere, on the march to Sulpites, in the fields and in the ditches, lay dead soldiers, most of them with hideous-looking open wounds. Thousands of huge flies swarmed on the corpses, partly decomposed, and giving off a fearful stench. Among these corpses, unsheltered under a blazing sun, were encamped wretched fugitives, because they were forbidden the use of the roads while the armies needed them, which was practically all the time.

In the evening, after a long march, we reached the town of Sulpites. Here our captain told us we would find numerous frank-tireurs. We were ordered to bivouac. Instead of being as-

signed quarters, and on going into the village were obliged to take guns and cartridges with them. After a brief rest we entered the village in search of food. Dead civilians lay in the middle of the streets. They were citizens of the village. We could not learn the reason for their having been shot. The only answer to our questions was a shrug of the shoulder.

The village itself had not suffered to any noticeable degree as far as destruction of buildings was concerned, but never in the course of the war had I seen a more complete job of plundering than had been done in Sulpites. That we had to live and eat, is true, and as the inhabitants and merchants had flown there was no opportunity to pay for our necessities. Therefore we simply entered a store, put on stockings, laundry, and left the old things, then went to another place, took whatever food looked good to us, and then proceeded to a wine cellar, there to seize as much as our hearts desired. The men of the ammunition column, located in the village as well as the sanitary soldiers and cavalry by the hundreds, searched the houses and took whatever they liked best. The finest and largest business places in Sulpites served a very large rural district surrounding and therefore were stocked up on almost everything. Within a short time these places had been cleaned out. The munition drivers and train columns carried away old pieces of silk, ladies' dresses, linens, shoes, dress goods and every other article imaginable, and stored them away in their ammunition cases. They took children's and women's shoes, and everything else they could lay their hands upon, although many of these articles had to be thrown away shortly afterward. Later, when the field post was developed and gave regular service, many of these things were sent home.

A large chocolate factory was robbed completely, and chocolate and candy in heaps were trampled in the ground. Empty houses were broken into and wrecked, wine cellars cleaned out and windows smashed, the latter being a special pastime of the cavalrymen. As we had to pass the night in the open, we tried to find some quilts and entered a grocery store and a market place. The store was partly demolished, but the apartment upstairs was as yet intact with all the rooms locked. It was evident that a woman's hand had worked in this house, for everything was neat and cozy. But all this order was still surpassed by the arrangement in a large room, which apparently had been inhabited by a young woman. We were almost ashamed to enter the sanctuary. To our astonishment we saw hanging on the wall opposite the door a picture burned in wood and under it a German verse: "Honor the women, they weave a braid of heavenly roses in their earthly life." (Schiller). The owner apparently was a young bride, for in the wardrobe was a trousseau, tied with neat blue ribbons, carefully put away. All the wardrobe drawers lay open. Nothing was touched here. When we visited the same place the next morning, impelled by some impulse, we found everything in that house destroyed. Barbarians had gone through this home, and with bitter ruthlessness had devastated everything, with every evidence of having utterly cast off the ethics and standards of civilized races.

The entire trousseau had been torn from the drawers and thrown partly on the floor. Pictures, photographs, mirrors, everything was in pieces. The three of us who had entered the room clenched our fists with impotent wrath.

We received orders to remain in Sulpites until further notice and the next day witnessed the return of many fugitives. They came in great throngs from the direction of Chalons-sur-Marne. They found instead of the peaceful homes they had left a wretched and deserted ruin. A furniture dealer returned to his store, as we stood in front of his house. He broke down when he viewed the remains of his enterprise. Everything had been taken away. We approached the man. He was a Jew and spoke German. When he calmed down a little he told us that his store had contained merchandise worth more than 8,000 francs.

"Had the soldiers only taken what they needed for themselves," he said "I would be satisfied, for I did not expect anything else. But I never would have believed of the Germans that they would have destroyed everything."

Not even a cup and saucer were left in this man's house. He had a wife and five children, but had no idea of what had become of them. And there were many more like him.

The following night, remaining in Sulpites, we were again obliged to camp in the open "because it swarmed with frank-tireurs." Such were our instruc-



Devastated Everything.

tions. In reality nothing was seen of frank-tireurs, but by this method the enmity toward the people living in the towns along our line of march was maintained. The Germans practiced the theory that the soldiers fight better and are more amenable to discipline when filled with hatred of their enemies.

The next day we were obliged to march to Chalons-sur-Marne. This was one of the hardest days we ever had. From the very beginning, as we began our journey, the sun blazed down upon us. It is about 35 kilometers from Sulpites to Chalons-sur-Marne. This distance would not have been so bad, despite the heat; we had already made longer marches; but the beautiful road from Sulpites to Chalons goes with unending monotony without so much as a curve or a bend to the right or left. As far as we could see it stretched before us like a long white snake.

Many soldiers fainted or were stricken with sunstroke. They were picked up by the infirmiry columns which followed. That the troops who had traversed this road before us had fared worse was evident from the many dead Germans who lay along the road. The commander feared that he could not get the machine in motion again if it was halted, and permitted to stretch its weary limbs on the ground for a brief rest. And so it crept along like a snail. Only, instead of having a snail's shell on its back, there was a leaden burden.

The monotony of the march was broken when we reached the enormous camp at Chalons. This is one of the largest of the French army camps. We saw Chalons from the distance. As we halted about an hour later outside the city in an orchard, without a single exception every man fell to the ground exhausted. The field kitchens were soon brought up, but the men were too tired to eat. We did eat later and then wanted to go to town to purchase some articles, particularly tobacco, which we missed most. Nobody was allowed to leave camp. We were told that entering the city was strictly forbidden. Chalons had paid a war contribution and therefore no one was permitted in the city.

We heard the dull sounds of the cannon in the distance and suspected that our rest would be brief. The rolling of gunfire continued to grow stronger. We did not know then that a fight had begun which was destined to become fatal to the Germans.

The first day's battle of the Marne had begun!

CHAPTER VI.

At 12 o'clock, midnight, we were alarmed and half an hour later were on the march. The cool night air felt good, and despite our weariness, we made rapid progress. Toward four o'clock in the morning we arrived at Cheppy. It had been completely plundered. We halted here for a brief rest and watched preparations being made for the execution of two franchiseurs. They were two little farmers who had supposedly concealed a French machine gun with its crew from the Germans. The sentence was executed in such a way that the people were shown who their real rulers now were.

The little town of Pogany, located midway between Chalons-sur-Marne and Vitry-le-Francois, fared no better than Cheppy, a fact which we discovered when we entered there at nine o'clock.

We were now considerably nearer the spot where the guns were roaring, and retiring of wounded and the munition columns showed us that west of Vitry-le-Francois, a terrible battle raged. At four o'clock in the afternoon, we arrived at Vitry-le-Francois after a forced march. The city was filled with wounded, but the town itself was not damaged. The battle must have been going badly for the Germans because we were ordered into action without being given any rest. We were within three kilometers of the battle line, when we came within reach of hostile fire, a terrific hail of shells tore up every foot of ground. Thousands of corpses of German soldiers indicated at what enormous cost the Germans had brought up all available reserves. The French did everything they could to prevent the Germans from getting the reserves into action and increased the artillery fire to an unheard-of violence. It seemed impossible for us to be able to break through this barrage. We saw hundreds of

(To be continued)

MICKIE SAYS

EDITORS IS SURE FORGIVIN' CUSSES! A GUY KIN DIE AN' BEAT 'EM OUTEN ELEVEN YEARS' SUBSCRIPTION AN' THEN THE EDITOR'LL SET DOWN AN' WRITE HALF A COLUMN ABOUT WHAT A FINE FELLER THE DECEASED WUZ AN' HOW EVERYBODY WILL MISS HIM!



Romans Liked Cock Fighting.

In the New Testament the cock is mentioned in reference to the denial of the Lord and indirectly in the "cock-crowling." There is no mention in the Old Testament of the cock or hen. These domestic birds were known to the early Greeks and Romans and probably were introduced by the Romans into Palestine. It is said that these birds were prized by the Romans both as food and for cock fighting.

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Now is the time to
Clean Up!
ECONOMY IN EVERY CAKE
with
SAPOLIO

NOTICE

Regarding Uncleaned Alleys
I have appointed a special policeman to accompany Scavenger Sam Shelton on his clean up trips around the city. Every person with a dirty alley will be asked in a gentlemanly way, to allow Mr. Shelton to clean the alley immediately. A refusal to have

this done will necessitate action by the city officials, resulting in a fine for failure to comply with health regulations. Furthermore the alleys will be inspected each week. Any dumping of refuse in alleys from now on will result in a fine being taxed on the offender.

W. E. ROUSEY, Mayor.

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