

The Confessions of a German Deserter

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

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(Continued from last week)

CHAPTER IV.

and when the lieutenant inquired a second command to halt, the soldier turned around and threw the bread before the lieutenant's feet. Then he said quietly, "I do not wish anybody any harm, but if you and your automatic family, and the whole German nation had to endure what the poor Belgians are obliged to suffer, it would be a bitter but just lesson."

This man was sentenced to serve 14 days for talking back to his superior officer. It surprised us all that he was let off so easily.

But bitterness in the ranks grew, and at last the many hard punishments that were pronounced created so much feeling that the soldiers refused to file any of their comrades.

We left Sully the next morning and one hour later crossed the Franco-Belgian border. Here again we were ordered to give three cheers as we did when our troops first crossed Germany into Belgium. At noon we arrived at Vivier-Au-Court. We remained in the village until evening and were permitted to go about without restrictions. In the afternoon nine men of my company were arrested for assaulting a woman but were soon released.

At this time there was a great scarcity of tobacco among our soldiers and I knew that a mark or more was paid for a cigarette whenever one was offered for sale. Here, in Vivier-Au-Court there was but one government tobacco stall. I have seen how men were forced by noncommissioned officers at the point of guns to give up their entire supply of tobacco for worthless requisition papers. These "gentlemen" later sold their tobacco at half a mark for small packets.

Toward evening we marched off and brought the howitzers to a new position, from where the enemy's defenses on the Meuse could be bombarded. After a short march we encountered and fought a French army northeast of Donchery. Only the enemy's rear guard was on our side of the Meuse. To it was given the duty of covering the crossing of the main body of the French armies over the Meuse, which was done near Donchery.

The few bridges left standing were not sufficient for the enemy to cross as speedily as he should have. As a result there developed in Donchery a terrible fight. The French made an enormous effort. There was a terrible slaughter as man fought against man. It was one of the most fearful battles I have ever witnessed. No one knew afterwards how many he had killed.

Sometimes stronger men, then weaker ones attacked. The glare from burning houses turned into red the whites of the fighters' eyes and revealed men battling one another frothing at the mouth.

Without any headgear, unkempt hair, uniforms open or mostly torn, it was bayonetting, hitting, scratching and plunging like wild beasts for life or death. Everybody fought for his life. There was no quarter. Only moaning and gasping could be heard.

Each man thought only of his own life, of death or his home. Old memories raced through the mind, pursuing one another feverishly and yet men grew wilder, for they now battled a new enemy—exhaustion.

But there could not yet be any let-up. Again and again there is nothing to do but strike, stab, bite, fighting without guns or other weapons except those provided by nature for life or death.

The exertion becomes more superhuman. You bite and you are a victor. But victor only for a second, for the next antagonist is already upon you. He has just killed one of your comrades. You suddenly remember that you still have a dagger. After a hasty search you find it in its regular place. One, two, three and it sinks to the hilt in the breast of your enemy. On, on, where there are new enemies. You suddenly see your next antagonist before you. He is after your life. He bites, stabs, scratches, to get you down, to pierce your heart with his dagger and again you use yours. Thank God, he lies on the ground; you are saved. But stop; you must have that dagger back. You pull it from the breast of your late enemy. A stream of warm blood shoots from the open wound in your face. Human blood, warm human blood. You shudder, terrified only for a few seconds, for there is another adversary. It is again necessary for you to defend yourself. Again and again the murder commences anew. Always, and always again through the whole night.

At last, toward four o'clock in the morning, the French retired across the Meuse with the Germans storming after them. When the bridge was full of German soldiers, it was blown up by the French and hundreds of Germans found their death in the Meuse.

The scene of the slaughter could now be surveyed at leisure. Dead and wounded were strewn all around, and over them clouds of smoke and flames made the air thick. But we were already too hardened to feel much pity. Humanity was thrown to the winds and the cries and begging of the wounded left everybody cold.

Some Catholic sisters lay dead in front of their convent. The only building that was spared in Donchery was the armory of the Twenty-third French dragoons.

There was not much time in which to do anything, for at seven o'clock the French began to hurl shells into the village. We fortified ourselves behind a thick garden wall directly in front of the Meuse. The river bank at this point was flat, but on the opposite side it was steep. Here the French infantry had dug itself in and established three lines, one above the other. The artillery firing was too far. We did not come within its range, so that we were able to observe the effect of the shelling of our own artillery on the enemy infantry positions before us. The 21-centimeter shells rained by above our heads and burst with a fearful noise in the enemy's trenches.

The French could not resist this hail of shot very long. They soon abandoned all the heights on the river bank. They abandoned Soudan without a fight and it was left intact, which had not been the case with Donchery. Hardly a house had suffered.

When the bugles sounded in Donchery, it was discovered that our company had lost 38 men in battle. A position was taken behind the dragoon armory and our company, which now was reduced to 90 men, was ordered to attempt the building of a pontoon bridge over the Meuse. After we had been re-enforced by 80 men, we marched in small detachments in order not to draw the enemy's attention to us. After an hour's march we stopped in a small forest about 200 meters from the Meuse to rest until darkness set in. At twilight a division bridge train was driven up close to our hiding place. This was soon followed by a corps bridge train as a reserve. After all preparations were made and the main advance work such as setting up the bridge stays and landing platforms, were ready, the single pontoon wagons drove up. They were speedily but silently unloaded. We completed four pontoons, that is, 20 meters of bridge, without the enemy discovering anything.

Then suddenly the searchlight of the enemy was set in action and scanned the river. We dropped to the ground at once. The enemy must have seen us, for the searchlights played here and there and kept our bridge position under continuous glare. We were discovered hardly before we knew what had happened, and a rain of fire fell in the water in front of us. We continued to lie flat on the ground as four more shots struck the water, this time a little nearer to the bridge and one shot hit the bank. At once a third rain of shot followed and two struck the bridge. Two men fell in the water and two lay dead on the bridge. Those in the water swam ashore and escaped none the worse for their experience except for a bath.

In spite of the continued volume of artillery fire, we brought the two dead men to land. The bridge was now greatly damaged and there was no choice except to replace the damaged pontoons by new ones. We began this difficult task as soon as the artillery fire let up. Hardly had we begun it again when a salvo struck and greatly damaged the bridge. Fortunately we had no losses. We were now ordered to retire, and after a half hour began anew. The enemy's searchlights were now dark. We brought about ten pontoons up without interference and then we were suddenly bombarded again. We had attracted the attention of the enemy's patrol.

Several batteries now opened fire on us at one time and after ten minutes the entire work was only a pile of wreckage. Two more men were killed. The order now came to retire. Eight men were detailed to attend to the dead and wounded and we were taken out of this danger zone. After we marched about two kilometers up the river, we were halted, and discovered that the corps bridge train was in place. We were told that we would get the bridge ready on land. Sections consisting of two pontoons each were firmly fastened together, equipped with anchors, everything else made ready and then put in the water. The location for the bridge was indicated to us and we rode with all our might down to the bridge position. The enemy did not see through these tactics and did not interfere, so that all the parts reached the position in a very

short time, where they were fastened together. In less than twenty minutes the bridge was completed and the infantry stormed over it.

The bridge was covered with straw in order to dull the noise of the troop movements. At the same time, at different places, transports with pontoons were assisting the army to cross and before the French found out what had happened our troops had occupied the opposite bank and established themselves firmly there.

The French artillery and infantry now opened a terrible fire on the pontoons. Our units, which had defended the pontoons, were relieved and replaced by infantry. I was made a leader in the pontoon and with four men at the paddle and 18 infantrymen as a crew, we started our first crossing in a veritable hail of shell, but with only one minor casualty, we reached the opposite bank. A comrade took my place at the steering gear. On the return trip, our pontoon was struck by bullets but fortunately above the water line. All about us the pontoons crossed, several in a sinking condition. The men who manned them, all of whom could swim tried to swim to the bank, but many infantrymen were drowned.

We landed, and took a new pontoon which, by a superhuman effort, we managed to get across the river a second time. This time we arrived with two dead and one wounded infantryman. Long before we reached the bank the infantrymen jumped into the shallow water and waded to land.



Arrived With Two Dead and One Wounded.

With the two dead left in the boat, we turned around. Our crew ached as a result of the continuous rowing and their hands were soon covered by blisters, but nevertheless we had to row on. There was no rest.

When we were 20 meters from the bank, our pontoon was hit below the water line by several bullets. When the bullets struck our boat they made only a tiny hole, but as it emerged on the bottom, it tore an opening as large as a plate. As a result our pontoon settled rapidly and there was nothing else for us to do except to jump into the icy water and swim. Hardly had we left the boat when it sank, but we all reached the other bank safe for the moment.

In spite of our wet clothing we had to take a new boat at once, and with our blistered hands had to man the oars again. In the middle of the river we collided with another boat. This boat had lost its pilot and two rowers. It rammed us and our pontoon tipped over and 18 infantrymen and one member of the crew were thrown into the water. We were saved along with four men from the other pontoon and taken to the left bank. Hardly had we landed before we were ordered to take over a pontoon loaded with ammunition.

About five more times we crossed the Meuse. Meanwhile day broke and then a terrible battle developed between the troops which had crossed and the French. The Germans had the best in this encounter because they could not be shelled by the French artillery.

We were given a short rest and lay in our water-soaked clothing in an old abandoned trench shivering with cold. Our hands were swollen to twice their normal size. They pained so greatly that we could not hold a bottle to our lips. It was a terrible sight to see young and strong men lying on the ground helpless and broken.

After a short rest we were ordered to seek for wounded in the burning houses but we did not find many, for most of those who had been badly wounded and unable to save themselves, were burned to death. Only the buttons of their uniforms and their weapons indicated to us to which side they had belonged.

In some cases, there were not even these vestiges. Only a little heap of ashes within the ruins of a house, was all that was left of whole families for whole streets. During the search most of us behaved as if we had not taken part in the terrible events of the last hour, as if we had not seen the horrors of this encounter and as if we had forgotten entirely the danger we had just escaped.

As to honoring the dead, something which had been taught us by our mothers from infancy, or a fear which the

(To be continued)

OBITUARY

Eleanor Theresa Durham was born at Drummondville, Canada, April 8, 1846, and died at her home in Alliance May 1, 1918, age 73 years and 23 days. She was married to James Skinner, September 8, 1867. Mr. and Mrs. Skinner came to Nebraska in the early part of 1886, being among the early homesteaders in this part of the state, one of their early experiences being that they had to drive to Hay Springs, a long distance in those days, for supplies. Mrs. Skinner was the first school teacher in their district. The first religious services in their community was held in their house. Mrs. Skinner became a member of the First Christian church five years ago being baptized by Elder Frank Woten. She was not only interested in spiritual things, but was most patriotic as well. As a member of the Red Cross she was quite diligent, being engaged in knitting for the soldiers previous to the time of her death.

She will be missed by her husband, with whom she had happily lived for over fifty years, two daughters, Mrs. Maud May and Mrs. Myrtle Leishman, three grandchildren, Mrs. Fay Turechek, Miss Ethel Hembrey and Harry Clark, who is stationed at Camp Bliss, Texas.

Mrs. Skinner had been in poor health for several years past, however her condition was not considered serious until a week ago, death re-

sulting from a general breakdown of her system. She had lived a long life, her faith was in Christ, now comes rest.

Funeral services were conducted at the Christian church by the minister, Elder Stephen J. Epler, on last Friday afternoon, interment being made in Greenwood cemetery.

M. E. Holloway, manager of the Hupmobile agency of Alliance, announces that this week he has made arrangements to handle the Chandler car. With the addition of this car, which is one of the best on the market, the agency is provided with two car values of interest to car buyers—namely, the Chandler and the Hupmobile. The establishment was installed by Schwabe Bros., of Chadron, with Mr. Holloway in charge. At present they have the location at 114 East Third and the building formerly occupied by Nicolai.

Leslie G. Rice, of 301 West Third street, visited Kansas City and sent a box by express from there to Alliance. The box was labelled groceries, but the employes of the express company thinking the groceries had a peculiar odor notified the authorities. They were ordered to deliver the box and as soon as the delivery was made the officers seized it and found it contained eight quarts of whiskey and wine. Mr. and Mrs. Rice were arrested and brought into court. Mrs. Rice was dismissed, Mr. Rice being fined \$100 and costs.

BEGIN HOT WATER DRINKING IF YOU DON'T FEEL RIGHT

Says glass of hot water with phosphate before breakfast washes out poisons.

If you wake up with a bad taste, bad breath and tongue is coated; if your head is dull or aching; if what you eat sours and forms gas and acid in stomach, or you are bilious, constipated, nervous, sallow and can't get feeling just right, begin inside bathing. Drink before breakfast, a glass of real hot water with a teaspoonful of limestone phosphate in it. This will flush the poisons and toxins from stomach, liver, kidneys and bowels, and cleanse, sweeten and purify the entire alimentary tract. Do your inside bathing immediately upon arising in the morning to wash out of the system all the previous day's poisonous waste, gases and sour bile before putting more food into the stomach.

To feel like young folks feel; like you felt before your blood, nerves and muscles became loaded with body impurities, get from your pharmacist a quarter pound of limestone phosphate which is inexpensive and almost tasteless, except for a sourish twinge which is not unpleasant.

Just as soap and hot water act on the skin, cleansing, sweetening and freshening, so hot water and limestone phosphate act on the stomach, liver, kidneys and bowels. Men and women who are usually constipated, bilious, headachy or have any stomach disorder should begin this inside-bathing before breakfast. They are assured they will become real cranks on the subject shortly.

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