

DRIVEN TO ATROCITIES, GERMAN COMMANDER TELLS CORRESPONDENT

By E. ALEXANDER POWELL.

[By Cable to The Chicago Tribune.]

Headquarters in the Field of the Ninth Imperial Army, Chateau Lafere, near Renais, Belgium.—Three weeks ago the government of Belgium requested me to place before the American people a list of specific and authenticated atrocities committed by the German armies upon Belgian non-combatants.

Today General von Boehn, commanding the Ninth Imperial field army, acting mouthpiece of the German general staff, has asked me to place before the American people the German version of the incidents in question.

So far as I am aware I am the only correspondent in the present war who has motored for an entire day through the ranks of the advancing German army, who has dined as a guest of the German army commander and his staff, and who has had the progress of the army on the march arrested in order to obtain photographs of the German troops.

This unusual experience came about in a curious and roundabout way.

Invited by General Von Boehn.

After an encounter in the streets of Ghent last Tuesday between a German military automobile and a Belgian armored car, in which two German soldiers were wounded, American Vice Consul Van Hee persuaded the burgo-master to accompany him immediately to the headquarters of General von Boehn to explain the circumstances and ask that the city should not be held responsible for the unfortunate affair.

In the course of the conversation with Mr. Van Hee General von Boehn remarked that copies of papers containing articles written by Alexander Powell criticizing the German treatment of the Belgian civil population had come to his attention and said he regretted he could not have an opportunity to talk with Powell and give him the German version.

Mr. Van Hee said by a fortunate coincidence I happened to be in Ghent, whereupon the general asked him to bring me out to dinner the following day, and issued a safe conduct through the German lines.

Though nothing was said about a photographer, I took with me Photographer Donald Thompson. As there was some doubt regarding the propriety of taking a Belgian driver into the German lines, I drove the car myself.

In Midst of Kaiser's Men.

Half a mile out of Sothehem our road debouched into the great highway which leads through Lille to Paris. We suddenly found ourselves in the midst of the German army. It was a sight never to be forgotten. Far as the eye could see stretched solid columns of marching men, pressing westward, ever westward.

The army was advancing in three mighty columns along three parallel roads. These dense masses of moving men in their elusive blue gray uniforms looked for all the world like three monstrous serpents crawling across the countryside.

American flags which fluttered from our windshield proved a passport in themselves and as we approached the close locked ranks they parted to let us through.

For five solid hours, traveling always at express train speed, we motored between the walls of the marching men. In time the constant shuffle of boots and the rhythmic swing of gray-clad arms and shoulders grew maddening and I became obsessed with the fear that I would send the car plowing into the human wedge on either side.

Miles of German Soldiers.

It seemed that the ranks never would end, and as far as we were concerned they never did, for we never saw or heard the end of that mighty column.

We passed regiment after regiment, brigade after brigade of infantry, and after them hussars, uhlan, cuirassiers, field batteries, more infantry, more field guns, ambulances, then siege guns, each drawn by 30 horses, engineers, telephone corps, pontoon wagons, armored motor cars, more uhlan, the sunlight gleaming on their forest of lances, more infantry in spiked helmets, all sweeping by as irresistible as a mighty river, with their faces turned toward France.

This was the Ninth field army and composed the very flower of the empire, including the magnificent troops of the Imperial guard. It was first and last a fighting army. The men were all young. They struck me as being keen as razors and as hard as nails. The horses were magnificent. They could not have been better. The field guns of the Imperial guard were almost twice the size of any used by our army.

Thirty-two Horses Draw Howitzer.

But the most interesting of all, of course, were the five gigantic howitzers, each drawn by 16 pairs of horses. These howitzers can tear a city to pieces at a distance of a dozen miles.

Every contingency seems to have been foreseen. Nothing was left to chance or overlooked. Maps of Belgium, with which every soldier is provided, are the finest examples of topography I have ever seen. Every path, every farm building, every clump of trees, and every twig is shown.

At one place a huge army wagon containing a complete printing press was drawn up beside the road and a

morning edition of Deutsche Kreiger Zeitung was being printed and distributed to the passing men. It contained nothing but accounts of German victories, of which I never had heard, but it seemed greatly to cheer the men.

Field kitchens with smoke pouring from their stovepipe funnels rumbled down the lines, serving steaming soup and coffee to the marching men, who held out tin cups and had them filled without once breaking step.

Covered Wagons Hide Machine Guns.

There were wagons filled with army cobbler, sitting cross-legged on the floor, who were mending soldiers' shoes just as if they were back in their little shops in the fatherland. Other wagons, to all appearances ordinary two wheeled farm carts, hid under their arched canvas covers nine machine guns which could instantly be brought into action.

The medical corps was as magnificent as businesslike. It was as perfectly equipped and as efficient as a great city hospital.

Men on bicycles with a coil of insulated wire slung between them strung a field telephone from tree to tree so the general commanding could converse with any part of the 50 miles long column.

The whole army never sleeps. When half is resting the other half is advancing. The soldiers are treated as if they were valuable machines which must be speeded up to the highest possible efficiency. Therefore, they are well fed, well shod, well clothed, and worked as a negro teamster works mules.

Only men who are well cared for can march 35 miles a day week in and week out. Only once did I see a man mistreated. A sentry on duty in front of the general headquarters failed to salute an officer with sufficient promptness, whereupon the officer lashed him again and again across the face with a riding whip. Though welts rose with every blow, the soldier stood rigidly at attention and never quivered.

Finally Reaches Von Boehn.

It was considerably past midday and we were within a few miles of the French frontier when we saw a guidon, which signifies the presence of the head of the army, planted at the entrance of a splendid old chateau. As we passed through the iron gates and whirled up the stately tree-lined drive and drew up in front of the terrace a dozen officers in staff uniform came running out to meet us. For a few minutes it felt as if we were being welcomed at a country house in America instead of at the headquarters of the German army in the field. So perfect was the field telephone service that the staff had been able to keep in touch with our progress along the lines and were waiting dinner for us.

After dinner we grouped ourselves on the terrace in the self-conscious attitude people always assume when having their pictures taken, and Thompson made some photographs. They probably are the only ones of this war, at least of a German general and an American war correspondent who was not under arrest.

Then we gathered about the table, on which was spread a staff map of the war area, and got down to serious business. The general began by asserting that the stories of atrocities perpetrated on Belgian non-combatants were a tissue of lies.

"Look at these officers about you," he said. "They are gentlemen like yourself. Look at the soldiers marching past in the road out there. Most of them are fathers of families. Surely you don't believe they would do the things they have been accused of."

Explains Aerschot Crimes.

"Three days ago, general," I said, "I was in Aerschot. The whole town now is but a ghastly, blackened, blood-stained ruin."

"When we entered Aerschot the son of the burgo-master came into the room, drew a revolver, and assassinated my chief of staff," the general said. "What followed was only retribution. The townspeople only got what they deserved."

"But why wreak your vengeance on women and children?"

"None has been killed," the general asserted positively. "I am sorry to contradict you, general," I asserted with equal positiveness, "but I have myself seen their mutilated bodies. So has Mr. Ginson, secretary of the American legation at Brussels, who was present during the destruction of Louvain."

"Of course, there always is danger of women and children being killed during street fighting," said General von Boehn, "if they insist on coming into the street. It is unfortunate, but it is war."

Data Startles General.

"But how about a woman's body I saw, with her hands and feet cut off? How about a white-haired man and his son whom I helped bury outside Sempstad, who had been killed merely because a retreating Belgian had shot a German soldier outside their house? There were 22 bayonet wounds on the old man's face. I counted them. How about the little girl two years old who was shot while in her mother's arms by a uhlan, and whose funeral I attended at Beystodenberg? How about the old man who was hung from the rafters in his house by his hands and roasted to death by a bonfire being built under him?"

The general seemed somewhat

taken aback by the amount and exactness of my data.

"Such things are horrible, if true," he said. "Of course, our soldiers, like soldiers of all armies, sometimes get out of hand and do things which we would never tolerate if we knew it. At Louvain, for example, I sentenced two soldiers to 12 years' penal servitude apiece for assaulting a woman."

Louvain Library Incident.

"Apropos of Louvain," I remarked, "why did you destroy the library? It was one of the literary storehouses of the world."

"We regretted that as much as any one else," answered the general. "It caught fire from burning houses and we could not save it."

"But why did you burn Louvain at all?" I asked.

"Because the townspeople fired on our troops. We actually found machine guns in some of the houses." And smashing his fist down on the table, he continued: "Whenever civilians fire upon our troops we will teach them a lasting lesson. If women and children insist on getting in the way of bullets, so much the worse for the women and children."

"How do you explain the bombardment of Antwerp by Zeppelins?" I queried.

Explains Zeppelin Bombs.

"Zeppelins have orders to drop their bombs only on fortifications and soldiers," he answered.

"As a matter of fact," I remarked, "they only destroyed private houses and civilians, several of them women. If one of those bombs had dropped 200 yards nearer my hotel I wouldn't be smoking one of your excellent cigars today."

"This is a calamity which I thank God didn't happen."

"If you feel for my safety as deeply as that, general," I said earnestly, "you can make quite sure of my coming to no harm by sending no more Zeppelins."

"Well," he said, laughing, "we will think about it." He continued gravely:

"I trust you will tell the American people through your paper what I have told you today. Let them hear our side of this atrocity business. It is only justice that they should be made familiar with both sides of the question."

I have quoted my conversation with the general as nearly verbatim as I can remember it. I have no comments to make. I will leave it to my readers to decide for themselves just how convincing are the answers of the German general staff to the Belgian accusations.

Photographs German Army.

Before we began our conversation I asked the general if Mr. Thompson might be permitted to take photographs of the great army passing. Five minutes later Thompson was whirled away in a military motor car ciceroned by an army officer who had attended the army school at Fort Riley. It seems they stopped the car beside the road in a place where the light was good, and when Thompson saw approaching a regiment or battery of which he wished a picture he would tell the officer, whereupon the officer would blow his whistle, and the whole column would halt.

"Just wait a few minutes until the dust settles," Thompson would remark, nonchalantly lighting a cigarette, and the Ninth Imperial army, whose columns stretched over the countryside as far as the eye could see would stand in its tracks until the air was sufficiently clear to get a picture.

Thus far the only one who has succeeded in halting the German army is this little photographer from Kansas.

Show Thompson Gunnery.

As a field battery of the Imperial guard rumbled past, Thompson made some remark about the accuracy of the American gunners at Vera Cruz.

"Let us show you what our gunners can do," said the officer, and gave an order. There were more orders, a perfect volley of them, a bugle shrilled harshly, the eight horses strained against their collars, the drivers cracked their whips, and the gun left the road, lounded across a ditch, and swung into position in an adjacent field.

On a knoll three miles away an ancient windmill was beating the air with its huge wings. The shell hit the windmill fair and square and tore it into splinters.

"Good work," Thompson observed critically; "if those fellows of yours keep on they'll be able to get a job in the American navy after the war."

In all the annals of modern war I do not believe there is a parallel to this American war photographer halting with an upraised, peremptory hand the advancing army, leisurely photographing regiment after regiment, and then having a field gun of the Imperial guard go into action solely to gratify his curiosity.

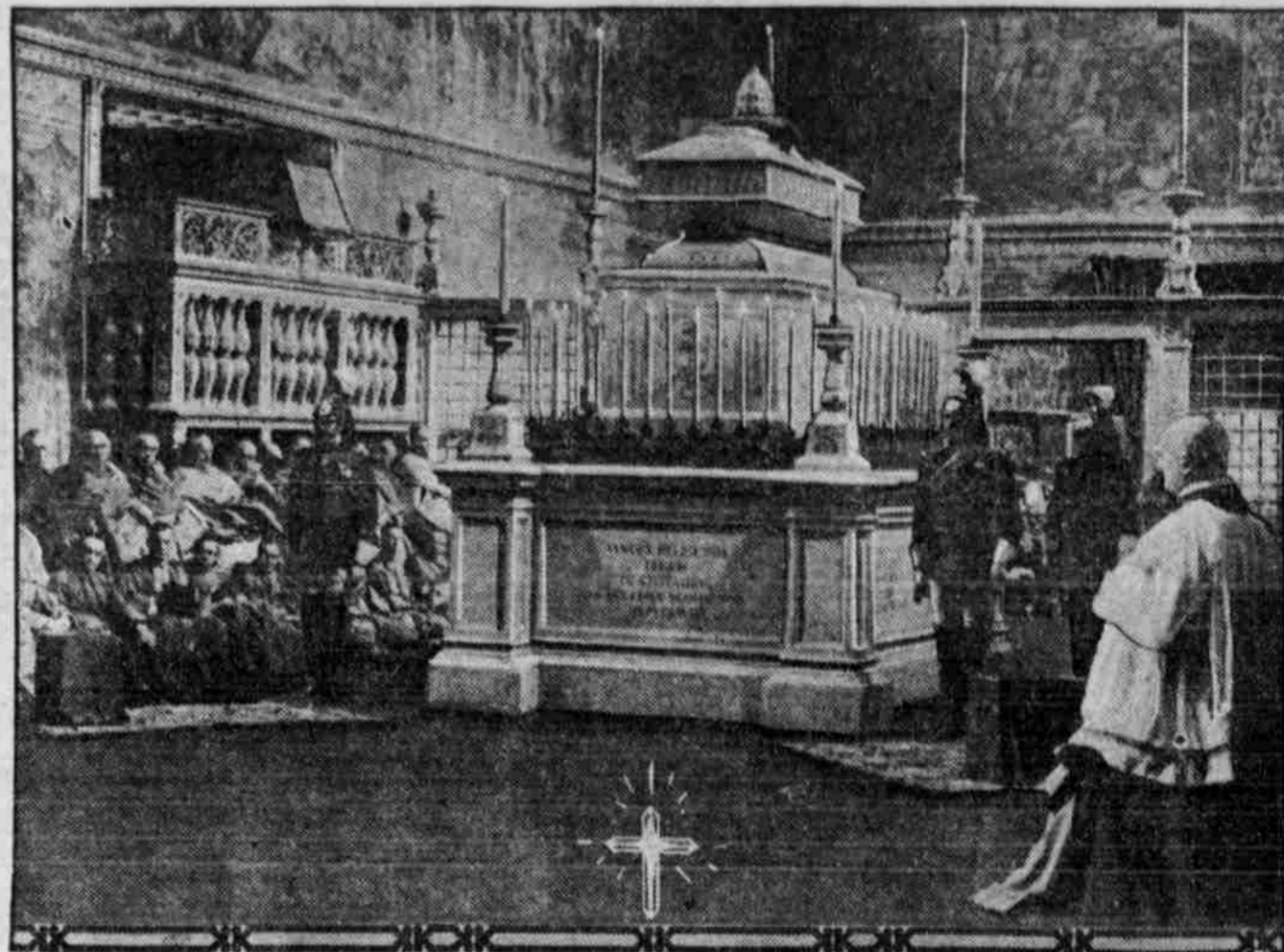
Find English Leaders.

According to a dispatch from a Daily Mail correspondent at Zouen the Germans have been able, with seemingly uncanny precision, to locate the headquarters of the British general staff, no matter where it moves.

Throughout ten days, beginning when the fighting was about Mons, the invaders poured shells close to the meeting point of the king's generals.

It was the same thing what headquarters were at Donai and Landreles, whereupon Sir John French withdrew his position to Le Cateau. There it was the target of a terrific bombardment, which set fire to the town and burned it. The next move was to St. Quentin, where again the British headquarters were a mark for the German fire.

FUNERAL SERVICES FOR THE LATE POPE PIUS X



Scene in the Sistine chapel at Rome during the funeral services for the late Pope Pius X. In the center is the cenotaph and at the left the cardinals.

BEAUTIFUL LOUVAIN AS THE GERMANS LEFT IT



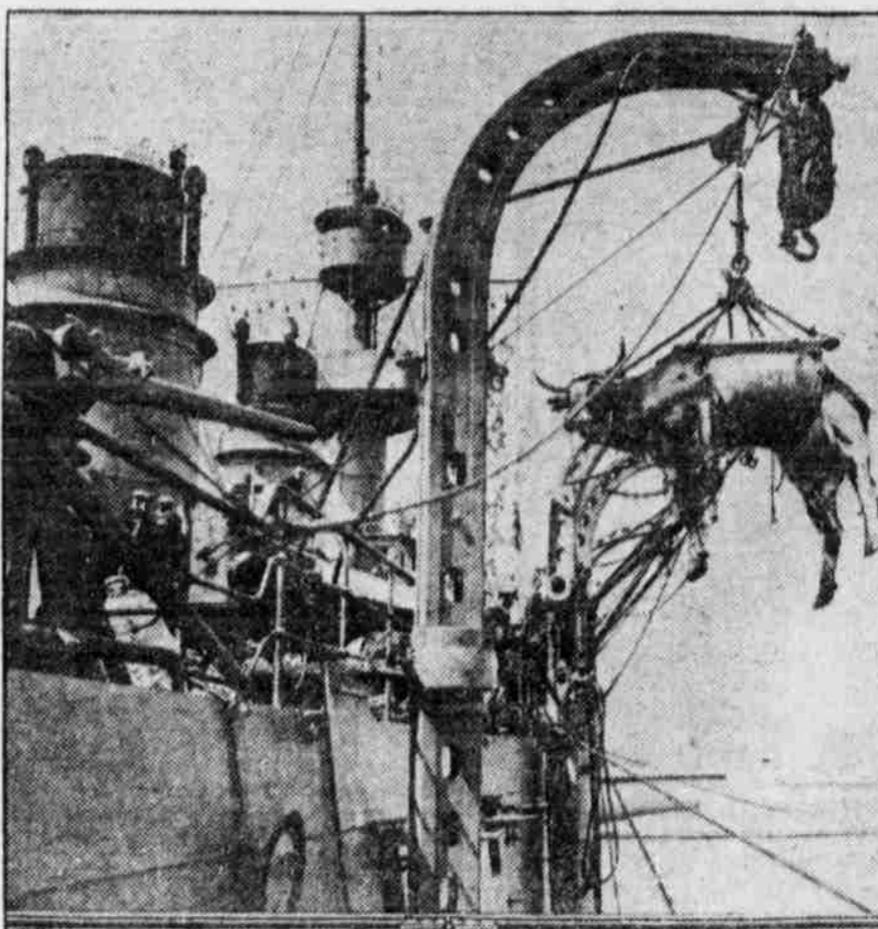
First photograph to reach America showing the beautiful city of Louvain, Belgium, after its destruction by the Germans, who assert that the citizens fired on the kaiser's troops treacherously.

HEROIC CHARGE OF NINTH BRITISH LANCERS



Remarkable photograph, showing the Ninth British lancers in the act of charging a German battery, which they took, though at heavy loss to themselves. The lancers were led by Lord Grenfell, seen at the left with sword extended.

FRESH MEAT FOR FRENCH CRUISER



Hoisting one of a herd of 24 steers which were taken aboard the French cruiser Montcalm in the harbor of San Diego, Cal. The Montcalm, which is now in Pacific waters searching for German cruisers, is unequipped with a cow storage plant, and carries just enough fresh beef for immediate consumption.

HEROIC DISPATCH BEARER



M. Bergen, a Belgian dispatch bearer, who rode 20 miles through the German lines to deliver a message to Willebroeck fortress, near Malines, and performed his mission, though seriously wounded by German bullets.