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Artillery Camouflage on the West Front--(Official)

Concealing Gun Positions from the Enemy's Aerial Photographers Has Become a Complex Science.

By Joseph Whitney-Ganson,
Officer in French Artillery.

It is axiomatic for an artillery officer to hide all traces of his men and position. Hence has arisen a system of "camouflage," to use military slang. One uses all means to disguise a gun, an observatory, or wagons and the like. The material employed is "saffia," which has the disadvantage of being slightly transparent at a distance, showing the shadows of a cannon to be concealed. Linen is cut into various forms and smeared with paint. But spontaneous combustion is an enemy, too, for the paint has a base which ignites readily.

Enemy airplanes are everywhere, taking photographs in spite of anti-aircraft guns and airplanes on guard. Photographs play an enormous part. Things look different at a high altitude. Shadows are emphasized, colors change. In outlining a defensive work, aerial photographs should be taken at various stages and examined with a magnifying glass, so as to be sure that an enemy photograph may display nothing indiscreet.

A large strip of linen, although in color harmony with the surroundings, often reflects so much light as to be quite evident in a photograph. If the linen be wet, it becomes a mirror. Blue appears white. Neutral gray is the best

disguise for a wagon, because of the diminished reflection.

The time of day changes natural colors at a distance. A wood may be green in the early morning, blue at noon, and violet at night. There is a radiation peculiar to each material, and the artist disguising military constructions must be conversant with the laws of optics. The earth is an excellent reflector, while certain disguising materials are not. Hence a contrast against the surroundings is quite evident in a photograph.

Flat surfaces are dangerous. Branches of trees thrown carelessly over a trench show plainly in a photograph, whereas, if they are set upright in a natural position, the extremities give the effect of

stippling, and the betraying traces are hidden.

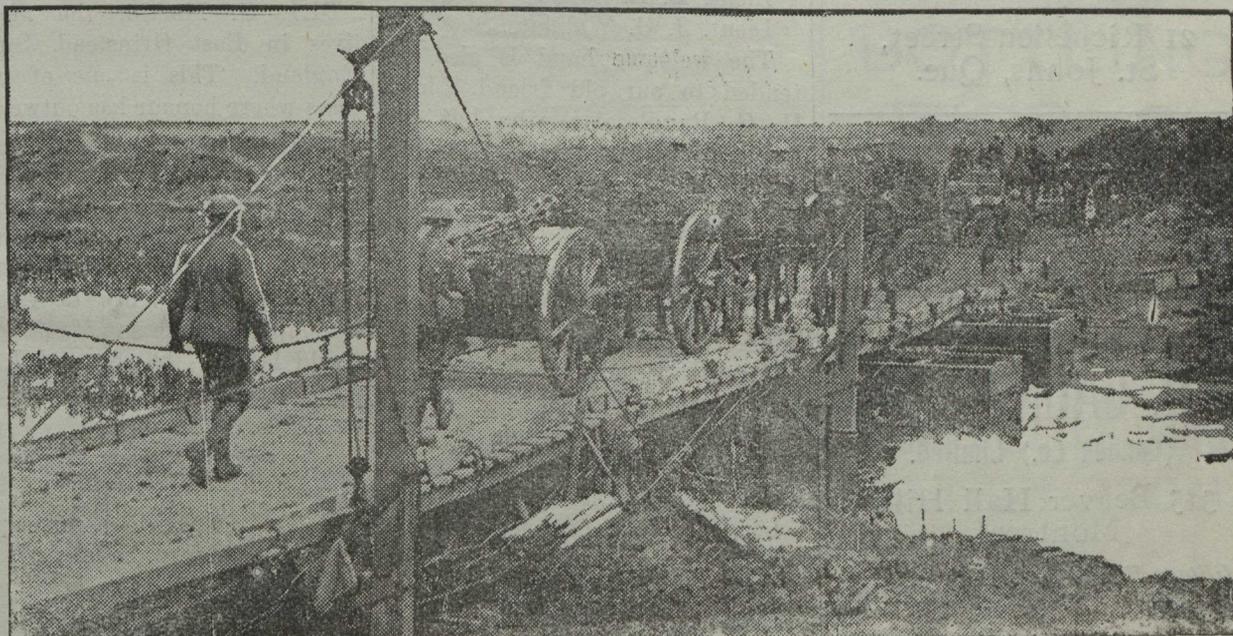
Tufts of grass can be scattered irregularly. They give a better disguise than if spread solidly. A path is a dangerous indication. Telephone wires often show because the men making repairs leave a sort of path. Telephone wires converging show a central station with the probability of a battery near at hand. In a photograph white oval-shaped spots appear under the muzzles of guns where the hot breath of the cannon has scorched the earth. Four of these tiny spots on a photograph placed under the magnifying glass are sure evidence of a battery. They can be imitated advantageously for a false battery.

Photographs taken at a high altitude have characteristic lines and shadows not appreciable to a layman. But the use of a stereoscope brings certain objects into relief. Photographs taken of the enemy's lines from day to day show infinitesimal changes which are evidence of construction under progress.

But shadows at 8 o'clock are different from shadows at noon, and the photographs should be marked with the hour of exposure and the direction of the north, so that the angle of light may be estimated.

Photographs are useful as a posteriori evidence of precision in bombardment. A gun has many

(Continued on Page 10)



Artillery crossing the Yser. —Photo by courtesy of C. P. L.