

# SNAPSHOTS FROM THE FIRING LINE

SO little of the romantic or spectacular exists in this mad war, so little to recall the panoramic campaigns of Marlborough and Wellington, and such a wholesale obliteration of those picturesque accessories that were fatuously supposed to be the very essence of things martial, that artists are in despair, poets are dumb and war correspondents nearly bereft of their senses. So we are told.

This lament is based largely upon such altered factors as the elimination of bright colours in the uniform and equipment of the modern soldier, the relative disuse of cavalry, the hugely extended battle lines, and, of course, the suppressive influence of the Censor.

On the other hand, if we were able to remain mere interested spectators, and were content to visualize the innumerable heroic scenes and incidents of which we read, not striving for a continuity that only history can yield a decade or more after the war is fought and finished, we should soon perceive that all the elements that have contributed to the glory (and the horror) of past campaigns are here reproduced on such a lavish scale that attempting to view too much we achieve little more than a blur. Let us rather be content with snap-shots, relegating all cinematographic effects to the retrospective days of peace.

Here, then, are a few snapshots of my own, of incidents that seem far from hum-drum. They were taken through that rather imperfect lens—the eye and intellect of those simple-minded heroes from the front who have faced danger and death as a matter of course, and to whom taking a trench, sorting supplies at the base or surveying a peaceful countryside for foraging purposes are all alike in a day's work. They naively supply the facts: let us adjust the focus.

## S. M. Advises Brown Not to Go Scouting

"SERGEANT-MAJOR," said I, to one of my N. C. O. friends at Pleasant Vale Camp, "I've done a little exploring in my life and I'm 'fed up' with this office work—isn't there any chance of my getting a scouting appointment at the front?"

"Don't you try that game," quoth the S. M., "I've been through it and know."

"Have a cigarette," I interposed, which in this (and I suppose any) army is the invariable open sesame to a confab.

"It's a fact, Brown"—puff, puff—"artillery scouting is the next meanest job to getting hung. You catch hell if your information's wrong, and they forget all about you if it's right."

"Of course, while the armies are standing still, scouting proper doesn't exist; they've got signal stations now, about the same as on a railway—but you said scouting—"

Puff, puff!

"They made me scout at the battle of Mons (meaning the retreat from Mons), and I'll never forget shoving off one day to try and spot the enemy's field batteries. After riding some two or three miles, I comes up with some French cavalry moving over a rise in the ground, and thinks I, I'll just keep on their flank and mebbe I'll see something. Well, I goes along a few hundred yards when suddenly a whole hill-side started spitting at us—machine-guns, they was, with a nice, clean range, and me a mounted target, like the rest. Of course the Frenchies spurred off—what was left of them—but my mare didn't need any extra urging—a bullet in her flank was hint enough for her.

"Well, I streaks it for a couple of miles and what should I run into but a R. A. M. C. man bandaging some wounded troopers.

"Have you seen the M. O.?" he asks me—I've got half a dozen cases for him in that barn over there."

"No," says I. "Have you seen my battery?"

"I seen a battery moving off on the double about an hour since," says he, "but I don't know its number."

"Well, I shoves off again, and presently I runs into one of our garrison artillery guns, with two or three officers and about a score of gunners and drivers.



BROWN takes a new tack in this budget of impressions from as near the front as possible. Not being able to go and see things for himself, he browses round among those who have been in the fighting, some of it as far back as last September, and uses his journalistic proclivities to get the snapshot sketch stories that make up the following breezy, personal collection of narratives. We have followed Brown from the time he "enlisted" in New York and started on his combination career of soldiering and correspondence. He has described camps and armies and conditions as he has seen them. He has touched up with his illuminating humoresques many a thing which, if told too seriously, would be unpleasant reading. In these snapshots he gets the life and the vernacular of the man from the front, and does it with the personal, colloquial style that makes easy reading for warm weather.

By G. M. L. BROWN

"Do you know where the enemy's field batteries are placed?" says the Captain.

"I know whereabouts their machine guns are," says I, "and I suspect their field pieces ain't very far in the rear," and with that I points out the lay of the land to him.

"Then," says the Captain, "I suspect it's time for us to do a move."

"Captain," says a dapper little Lieutenant, "just suppose we drop a few shells over there to stir things up."

"Just suppose I put another hill behind me," says I to myself, "before they stir up that wasps' nest!"

"And did you find your battery?" I asked.

"Yes, next morning about eight o'clock—they'd had orders to move to the rear, and there was me hunting for them all night, and nearly getting potted a dozen times."

"They didn't pin a note for you on some tree, I suppose," I grinned.

"What, for a scout? No bloody fear, Brown, no bloody fear!"

## Disobeyed Orders and Saved the Guns

"ON August 26th last," reminisced the same Sergeant-Major, "we held the village of Ligny in France, but only to protect our infantry, which was ground-slogging to the west as hard as they could step it. I was still supposed to be scouting, but that day they grabbed me for dispatch rider and everything else that was likely to make life unhealthy. Ligny, you know, is kind of curved on one side, not so much as a horse-shoe, but—in a crescent, the Sergeant-Major wanted to say, but the word evaded him—"more like the rim of your cap, with plenty of hedges and trees. Well, the Major planted three batteries along that curve, one at each end and one in the middle, so that we could concentrate our fire on the slope of the next hill. We concentrated all right, too, and a shocking lot of havoc we made with their infantry; but God save me, it was like trying to wipe out a garden of ants.

"The enemy's batteries tried to spot us, of course, but they always just missed our guns—a little too high, or too low, or too much to one side, and us all the time planting shells as fast as we could work the guns.

"My business was to ride around that lovely curve, taking orders to the three batteries, with the shrapnel bursting around me and cutting branches off the trees over my head, and ripping up the dust almost under my horse's hoofs. Once a chimney nearly tumbled on me, and another time a shell sung right past



my ear, a fine, soothing melody—eh, what?"

"Hot work," I commented.

"You're right it was hot work—so d—d hot that on one of my rounds I stops at a house for a drink. A little old lady comes to the door—funny, isn't it,

how them people will stick to their homes—and seeing what I was, she brings out a mug of wine—white wine, and very refreshing, too—and when I finishes, she signals that I could keep the mug. Do you know, Brown, I had that little mug for four months; but what I was going to tell you was that I hadn't ridden to the corner of the poor old dame's garden when a shell falls right on her door-step and kills her. Blew her to pieces, Brown, and me riding off with her mug as a kind of keep-sake!

"Well, when the old Major was tired giving orders, I thinks I'll have a rest, so I dismounts and gets behind a big tree for a smoke, and I'd hardly struck a match before a dozen bullets hits that very tree, only on the other side.

"This is a good place to stay awhile," thinks I, when blame if the Major doesn't pipe up: 'Corporal, it's coming up rain—ride back like a good fellow and fetch my mackintosh. Blame my blinkers! Ride through a storm of lead to fetch his mackintosh just to keep off a few rain-drops.'

"Did you get it?"

"Yes, I got it all right; but things warmed up so, I was a half hour making the return trip.

"Well, when I gets back and the Major puts on his mackintosh, up rides the General.

"They're advancing on the other side, Major," he says—"abandon your guns, and get your men away as quick as you can."

"Very good, Sir," says the Major, and as soon as the General disappears, he sends me around to the Batteries with orders to remove their guns by hand—the horses had been taken away from us—with sufficient ammunition for a dignified retreat.

"And did you save them?"

"You're bally well right we did. Let's see your Army List."

I handed him the ponderous volume (it happened to be the January number), and after much thumbing he found the following entry under "Companions of the Distinguished Service Order":

"Major Charles Hawker Liveing, 135th Battery, Royal Field Artillery. Bravery and devotion in withdrawing guns by hand under a heavy fire near Ligny, France, on 26th August, 1914."

"But he really disobeyed orders, didn't he?" I asked.

"Yes," mused the S. M., "he disobeyed orders, but you see he saved the guns. There were eight promotions among those three batteries over that affair, but I'm d—d if I got so much as 'thank you'—not even for fetching the Major's mackintosh 'under a heavy fire, near Ligny, France!'"

## The Day His Two Years' Drill Faded to a Phantom

NEAR the city of "Lighton," which at this late date I might as well be frank enough to call by its right name—Brighton—is a famous hill overlooking the Weald known from time immemorial as the Devil's Dyke. Thither one afternoon I



journeyed with three companions across the Downs, and arriving hot and dusty, essayed to quench my thirst in the inviting hostelry that decorates the summit. The bar was deserted except for one lone gunner, who proved to be an R. F. A. man invalided from the front.

"When did you come over?" I asked.

"Away back last autumn."

"Badly wounded?"

"Rather."

"What happened?" I ventured.

"Well, it isn't anything to boast about," he replied; "it was last September, and our battery had been sent to the rear to cover the retreat of the main body (up to this point, the same old story—one I've