EYEWITNESS STORY OF HOW THE HUNS CONDUCT THEIR SLAVE RAIDS IN BELGIUM

Tragic Scenes of Deportation at Wavre Related by a Belgian Who Escaped the Ordeal

The following description was written by a Belgian gentleman, who notwithstanding his high social standing, as also the fact that he is fifty years old, very narrowly escaped deportation. He succeeded by an exceptional chance, and at the cost of a considerable outlay, in getting this narrative smuggled through in the hope that it may be used in some way to help save his companions in misfortune.

There are serious reasons for believing that the deportations have not as a main object to merely provide Germany with slave labor, but that the intention of the Germans is to make a display of frightfulness in connection with the present move for peace in order to show Belgium and the Allies what the Germans have still in store if they do not accept their terms. They are greatly mistaken, for as far as Belgium is concerned, never has the spirit of independence and the love of liberty been more intense in that country than at the present moment, and nobody there is thinking of crying for mercy but only of demanding justice.

The district of Wavre (Brabant) consists of twenty-two communes—there are 2,800 communes in Belgium. The order which summoned at Wavre the entire male population between the ages of 17 to 56, of twenty-two villages of the district of that name—about 10,000 men—was posted on November 14, and read;

NOTICE.

"All men between the ages of 17 and 56 (inclusive) of the commune of ____ are requested to present themselves on Nov. 15, 1916, at 8 o'clock a.m. (German time) at Wavre market place. The burgomaster should be present. The men concerned should be carrying their identity cards, and in case of need their moldskacks (card of control). Small hand baggage will be allowed. Those who fail to appear will be immediately transported without delay and by force to the places where they are to work. Besides they are liable to very heavy fines and long imprisonment. Priests, doctors, lawyers, schoolmasters and professors need not present themselves.

Ottignies, Nov. 3, 1916.

The Imperial Kreischef of Nivelles,
Graf von Schwerin."

So it is for to-morrow. And the notice was not posted until seven o'clock in the morning, an hour when all men who are not out of work are already in the factories or in the yards. They were expecting, they were fearing this order. But without doubt they had had a forlorn hope that it would be delayed; a vague hope, one of these hopes which instinct keeps alive against all reasoning, in the souls of the people. Undoubtedly they had not believed it. They did not believe it until, when the notice was posted, suddenly among the women and children came the panic-stricken desolation of complete surprise. The workers who did not know of it had to be warned; they had to be warned so that they might have time to prepare, so that this day might be spent with their dear ones — the last perhaps—and together to take such precautions, poor, unavailable, such as were possible. The weeping women went to fetch their men to take them back to their homes; and then there were heart-breaking scenes, poignant but admirable in the feelings of the simple, stoical devotion which they reveal. The greater part of these homes are poor; two years of war, of dear living, of rations have brought about destitution; there is nothing in the house but the portion of food strictly measured for each one, and to-morrow, if the father, if the eldest son is sent away, there will be no more resources. That matters nothing; there is no thought except for the beloved being who is threatened; in the bundle they are preparing they put the last warm garment, the last blanket, all the bread they have left, everything — to-morrow, indeed, when he is gone, who will want to eat.

A Melancholy Procession

They must be at Wavre at eight o'clock says the order. And for the greater part of the men summoned, the way to the chief town of the canton is long; one hour, two hours. There are no more farm wagons in the country; there are no more trains. They must walk, carrying their bags; so they must leave early. Before six o'clock the procession, the melancholy and interminable procession begins on the roads, in the biting cold, the dark November morning, the freezing wind, for the weather is cruel. Nature, menacing and dark, accentuating the anguish in their hearts. But they must be strong. The impression of despair must not be given. Most of the men have forbidden their families to accompany them; the anguish of the separation might make them show weakness. This must not be so near, all of them are going alone. One sees marching to their Calvary, only groups of men, marching in silence, and heavily, heavily, as if their poor, meagre bundles were very heavy. Only a few women, who have not been able to control themselves, follow, weeping. Here is Wavre. The little village lies grim and grey on this sad morning. It is hemmed in by troops, who, at all openings, bar the way. Men are engulfed in the narrow streets leading to the market-place, the huge square, with its low houses, with shaky facades, sorrowful remains of a savage invasion. It has been completely evacuated, and all the roads which lead to it are empty. Only one can see, at the end of those roads, behind the warring troops, the crowd from which come cries, names, words of farewell to the poor people, rounded up, village by village, who are waiting, dejectedly, pitiful in their impotence and their humiliation. A few among them remember, with a little sorrowful smile, that yesterday in the same place there had been a pig market.

Choosing the Slaves.

The work of choosing begins. By groups of a thousand, the men are conducted to a school building where the agent of the German authorities keeps office. To get at this school-building the road runs by the banks of the Dyle. It is the picturesque spot of Wavre. In normal times there is an atmosphere of peaceful gaiety, of cheerfulness. This morning at the windows of the houses the anguished faces of women, of children, of old people in tears. There are people on the roofs. They all gaze greedily at the passing lines. They want to see once more, perhaps for the last time, a husband, a son, a brother, perhaps a fiance. After a wait of four hours the crowd is finally conducted to the school. I watched the men. I know a number of them. I saw a lot of their faces grow suddenly very pale. They walked in very firmly, but they are ghastly pale. One feels the anxiety which freezes them, arrests the blood in their veins. These are the married men, the men who have left wife and children and who ask themselves are they going to see them again very soon. If not, not for a long period, one never knows, perhaps never. The others, the young men, go with a proud step. There is defiance in their eyes. As they approach the school-house all heads are raised, listening. A rumor, a sound which grows, grows—it is —yes, it is singing. Almost one would say it was the "Brabanconne," yes and that was the "Marseillaise" coming from the courtyard of the school. And in fact, at the end of that courtyard are the men who have already been taken. It is they who are singing the Belgian and French anthems. When they see us, they all cry out, "Don't sign, don't sign." They are splendid. There is no anguish here. They are over that full of bravado, a rude pride, of masculine virility. There are no complaints. When one among the men sees a friend released, he asks him only to tell his family that he has been sent away; and then he starts to sing again, passionately, singing his song of defiance.

The Word of Fate.

We go in by a first room. A doctor is there, who examines those men who are armed with a medical certificate. He seems indulgent, quite generous; he liberates some of them. A second room. Here the fate of each man will be decided, briskly, mechanically, in a few seconds and without appeal. One peremptory word—and it is slavery—or freedom. Here are many uniforms. Kreischef civil commissary officers and all have that military rigidity which permits of no discussion. The three delegates of the commune—generally the burgomaster, an alderman and the communal secretary—authorized to assist in the examination of their villagers, can quite evidently do nothing. Two officers, who divide the duty between them, make the decision. One on each side of the room, they examine the men rapidly, beginning with the young men of 17 to 25 years of age. They look at the card, which gives the trade and social position of the holder. They throw a glance over the man, as if to weigh his strength, his value as an animal. One question, at the tip of his tongue, for the sake of formality: "Are you unemployed?" and immediately, whether the reply is negative or affirmative, the decree, inexorable. If the card gives a trade which would be useful "labas" the officer cries."Left turn." Left turn! That is the road to Germany. To go out of the room they must go through a door divided by a barrier into two narrow corridors and guarded by two soldiers. The left-hand corridor gives access to another room, where are gathered those who are to go.

If the officer cries" right turn!" it is liberty. The man passes before an under-officer, who puts a stamp on his identity card. The right-hand corrdiro leads to an open window, before which is a table. They must climb that table, on to another table placed outside the window, and jump down into the street. It looks like an escape. It is, indeed, an impression of flight. There is no impression of relief or comfort, for the heart is still torn thinking of the others, the poor others. And then the nightmare is not yet at an end. One must still contemplate the abominable, torturing sorrow. One must still gather unforgettable remembrances of pity and paralysed indignation. At the end of the little side street here is the crowd. It has grown. It was lasting too long, it was too much anxiety; from all the villages the women had come to the mothers, the wives, the fiancees, weeping. They catch hold of those who have returned, demanding news, sobbing. Is he taken, he for whom they are waiting, their beloved, the chief, the prop of the house, the man whose departure ends everything? They don't know, they cannot reply; they come out into the midst of imploring women, into the midst of the poor, sobbing people, for they are all sobbing, even those who can clasp to their hearts their man who has been given to them.

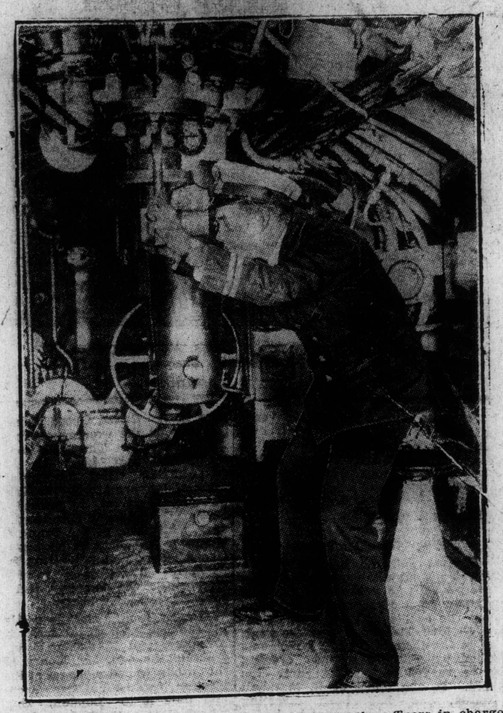
Harrowing Last Scenes

During this time what goes on to the left, to the left where are those who must go. There, each man as he arrives is asked if he will sign an agreement, that is, consent to work for the Germans, earning meanwhile a large salary. If he consents, he gives his name and address, and he is authorized to return to his home, so that he may make his preparations and depart at the end of a few days.

If he refuses—and that is the case with an immense majority—he is menaced, threatened with all calamities, and goes to join the tumultuous group of those who did as he did, dignified and unbending, and he is greeted with cheers as for a victory—the victory of a man who submits, but whose spirit has no submission. We are still waiting. They are waiting for the number to be sufficiently large. When it is, is surrounded by soldiers with fixed bayonets, and encircled by cavalry. Then it is "en route for the station!" Two officers march a little in advance, their horse-whips—yes, their horse-whips—in their hands. The side streets are followed. From time to time, a weeping woman, an old man, having come this far by the most tremendous effort, manages to slip between the ranks for one last farewell, for a supreme embrace, but at once the soldiers push them back, at once, often before that longed-for embrace. On the main street which is reached, at the windows of the houses the poor people still watch, watch with dry, fevered eyes, reddened with tears, and almost mechanically wave their handkerchiefs. But those whom they thus salute do not wish to break down. Is it to reassure the courage of those dear ones who see them thus; is it in order to prevent an exhibition of weakness before those soldiers who are guarding them? Nearly all of them march with head high; they wave their hats and they sing, they sing unceasingly, as they sang in the courtyard of the school. But there were voices that are husky and full of tears. They march. At each corner of a street there is a short struggle. Always one or another of the prisoners tries to escape, but always a horseman pursues him and brings him back to the ranks, unless, by a stinging blow from his whip one of the officers has not already sent him back. And then, the man, pale, his fists clenched, is quiet for a few moments. What passes in his thoughts? What passes in the hearts of those others, who, marching by their homes, throw themselves into the arms of their wives, kiss their children, and are torn from them by a soldier? They are quiet too. But pretty soon, once again they are singing, with a louder voice. They are not going to break down.

Finally, the procession comes to a level crossing. They are collected on the rails, between two embankments. The station is quite close, and a train of cattle trucks is waiting. One can see nothing more. One hears only shouts, songs, the "Brabanconns," and the "Marseillaise," again. This lasts a long time, a very long time—hours. Night has fallen. About six o'clock, suddenly, the singing voices are drowned by trumpet calls. Music! yes, they have sent into the station a regimental band, and it is this band that celebrates, with the accented music of a military march, the departure of that train, unlighted, lugubrious; that train whose passing over the level-crossing rouses such despairing sorrow and emotion that old men and the women fall fainting to the ironic sounds of that military march, quick, exasperating. They have gone. But where? No one knows. What to do? No one knows. Will they ever come back? No one knows. No one knows. No one knows. What do we know, except that from now on we shall live with that heart-rending memory, and the anguish. And even if they come back, never again can they live in security, that security of the old days, when it was thought that such things were no longer possible.

AT THE HEART OF THE SUBMARINE—WHERE ENTIRE SHIP IS CONTROLLED



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"I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink..... naked, and ye clothed me....."

Then shall they answer him, saying—"Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? ....or naked, and clothed thee?"

And the King shall answer.....
"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me".

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AUSTRALIANS SAIL FOR ENGLAND

Graduates of Royal Naval College Have Completed Course

Sydney, Australia, Jan. 27.—(Correspondence of The Associated Press—The first graduates of the Royal Australian Naval College at Jervis Bay, who completed their four years course this month, will sail for England next month for duty with the Grand Fleet under Admiral Sir David Beatty. The graduating class consists of twenty-five members, and this first instance of Australian-trained midshipmen joining the Grand Fleet is hailed with great interest in Australia.

Governor-General Sir Donald Munro Ferguson, in an address to the graduates, spoke of the honor that was theirs. "You are," he said, "on the eve of joining the Grand Fleet greatest security for His Majesty's which under Providence, is the arms and Allies. Midshipmen have the soft side of all British hearts. You will have a hearty welcome. Australia owes a big debt to Cook and Flinders, a debt which you are helping to repay. There could be no more acceptable contribution and one to be judged as worthy as the first fruits of the college and of its staff. Your bearing, good manners and conduct testify to the high tone maintained, and that you are qualified to exhibit that character and personality which from Nelson downwards have ever distinguished the British sea officer."

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