

"SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE"

Experiences With the British Expeditionary Force

(By Ravenscroft Green)

There is a glamor about the phrase "Somewhere in France" which not even actual experience can wear off. There is a romance about it all which is not wholly exuded by the pressure of grim reality.

Somewhere in France is a very wide term, and the duties of the British Expeditionary Force are as varied as the units who compose it. Somewhere in France may mean months of heroic work in the trenches; it may mean convoy duty from the base to the firing line; it may mean weeks and months of holding the lines of communication, or at the rail heads, or equally necessary through more prosaic work at the hospitals or the base.

At the base one sees little of the actual fighting, but there is a direct connection with the fighting line which differentiates it from all home camps, air raids, submarines and Zeppelins notwithstanding. The atmosphere is, in a sense, full not only of sounds of war, it is full of war. The camp is martial to a degree. A large number of the men are seasoned soldiers and a majority have been for months in the trenches, and to us come the wounded and the nerve-shattered direct from the firing line. Then there is the added attraction of our French allies, with their bright colored uniforms in marked contrast to the British sober, useful, work-a-day khaki.

A Warm Welcome

English illustrated papers have been full of pictures and photographs graphically describing the warm welcome which Tommy has received in all parts of France and Belgium. The welcome was beyond all question effusive. In the French towns souvenirs were exchanged. Tommy's uniform was literally stripped of its badges and incidental adornment. The sons and daughters of urban France were generous to a degree. In the country, fruit was given to our men in abundance. In Flanders whole orchards were literally lavished on the Expeditionary Force. The kindness and self-sacrifice, too, of the Belgian peasants and villagers in the billets was beyond all praise; Tommy is especially unstinted in his eulogy of the Belgians with whom he had been lodged. By this present time the Expeditionary Force has nearly a year and a half on the Continent. The impetus of the first welcome has spent itself or flows in more regular but less rapid and impulsive channels. Tommy has become a familiar object in France and Flanders. The French have a tremendous army of their own to think about. In every town in France the widow's weeds and daughter's mourning veil are only too common, whilst Belgium has suffered beyond description.

It is interesting to note already the incidental effects of the Expeditionary Force. Even in the hamlets children passing from school shout as you pass, "Good night, Tommy Atkins." Singing the first verse of our National Anthem has become quite a favorite pastime; and "It's a long way to Tipperary" has become a by-gone phrase on every French and Flemish highway.

A Real Proposition

The soldier wishes above all to impress the people at home that he is up against the real proposition. Fighting the Germans or Boches is no picnic; on this point Tommy is unanimous. A private of a line regiment who had been in the trenches for several months wished to impress me with the fact that the Germans were good shots. Let them as talk about the Germans have seven months up there," he said. "First of all we had weeks, sir, with water above our knees, and you couldn't cock your head above the trenches; between snipers and machine guns you were sure to get it. I got this for a souvenir," he said, pointing to a hole in his cheek where a bullet had penetrated. "Another time I had a bullet pass right through my side pocket which tore a part of my field service Testament away and pay book. Before I got wounded I volunteered for rations. It was a pretty hot day for snipers, so I put my canteen on my head and let it appear above the trenches. In a few seconds there were half a dozen holes in it."

Another day an East Ender down for a week's rest, said, "You talk about hardships, sir; why I've been used to roughing it but it broke me up. And going for rations, why it was worth the V. C., that's what I reckon. And sometimes when I had plenty of good food we couldn't cook it. Why, I've seen myself crying when I thought of young officers suffering wot wasn't used to hardships. But the water's all out of the trenches now. It won't be as bad when we go back. And our officers has shown some pluck they 'as this time—no error."

Going West

A Sergeant in charge of a platoon explained the difficulty of going for

rations. On a certain corner outside the trenches the Germans had a machine gun trained which poured forth a volume of lead at certain intervals. It was necessary to pass this corner when going out for rations. It was impossible to avoid it, and all kinds of subterfuges were indulged in to avoid "going west." Still the volunteers were not lacking, until it was found necessary to go under cover of the darkness.

A True Incident

The question of rations brings to the writer's mind an amusing but perfectly true incident. A small platoon of Scotch infantry in Flanders captured a healthy young gosling which they found wandering near their dug-out. Notwithstanding the severity of the German attacks they looked forward with Tommy's usual offhand optimism to a good Christmas. The gosling was therefore carefully fed and guarded in the dug-out. But eventually a psychological change came over the men. Their attitude to the gosling changed; as he grew into a real grown-up goose he became a favorite and pet, and eventually they adopted him as a mascot. When Christmas came they decided to seek elsewhere for a festive dinner, but unfortunately their kindness and self-sacrifice was rather tragically disappointed. When they were away foraging behind the lines the poor goose was flattened out by a transport wagon. Needless to add, he was accorded a military funeral.

A Masquerading German

In the early part of November a section was very much embarrassed in its movements by snipers. They had captured several of the enemy's trenches, but in passing from one trench to the other the men were falling in twos and threes from incidental shots, yet there were ostensibly no Germans about. Scout parties were thrown out, but no signs of Germans could be found. The only human being in sight anywhere was a Belgian peasant ploughing a field. His movements were closely watched, and the platoon gradually surrounded him, then closed in. Near to the peasant was a large haystack. They noticed him go to the haystack and load a rifle. Eventually they came to close quarters and captured him. He was a German masquerading as a ploughman.

"I Want to Forget"

One youth, barely eighteen, came into a Y. M. C. A. but for a cup of tea. He had just come down the trenches which would make fiction read very tame. He had been captured by the Germans, stripped naked and temporarily left for some reason or other. He managed to escape and get some clothing. He was captured again and escaped again, and after fearful hardships reached the British lines. He had had experiences in the rest. One can never forget his cheery optimism in spite of his hardships. Questioned as to how he felt when first under fire: "The old soldiers in the section keep us steady, sir," he replied. "and after a time we get used to it." Someone tried to lead him on to talk about his experiences. "I want to forget, sir," he said. "It has to go up again soon."

"They All Join In"

The men who have been months in the line cannot be expected to minimize its dangers, its nerve-racking experiences and its grim hardships, yet let some one start up a song at the piano in a Y.M.C.A. or recreation hut and immediately they all join in. Or if one should call for volunteers at an impromptu concert there is no lack of artists. Conjugating tricks, ventriloquist turns, and good instrumental music are always acceptable. In these scenes there is much humor and much pathos. What can be more impressive than to hear a thousand men who have all been in the trenches for several months, many of them having been wounded, gathered in a marquee or hut on the eve of their departure for the line again, singing "Keep the home fires burning." Or it may be, at the close of an evening service, joining in a good-by hymn. "God be with you till we meet again," or "O God, our help in ages past." A man would be more than a stoic who would not be moved by such a scene. Immediately after the service there is a rush to the counter or the retiring room or tent for pocket testaments, which many of the men read daily in the billets and trenches and which they specially treasure as souvenirs of their active service. A very large percentage of the married men beg for an extra Testament to send home to their wives or little daughters, as a souvenir from the front. It is not, strictly speaking, the purpose for which the Testaments are intended, but it may be considered a pardonable bit of sentiment in the circumstances.

Generous Fellows

The generosity of the men and their sympathy with the Belgian refugees is beyond praise. At a concert given in a base camp the commanding officer announced that a motor transport had accidentally killed a Belgian refugee, who had left a widow and two children. He made a brief announce-

ment that a collection would be made during the interval. If ever the Tommies storm the Germans as they did the ushers for collecting bags our cause is safe.

The spirit of the men is best understood by the offhand way in which they refer to their work. "I'm fed up with that ambulance train work," said a man. "I'm going back to the trenches again."

It may not be inopportune at this point to refer to the work of the R. A.M.C., especially the field ambulance. Both officers and men have done nobly. The work of collecting the wounded, including the Germans, under fire or under the cover of darkness, makes one feel like saying they are heroes every one. One man told the writer that at first, between shell fire and sympathy for the poor Belgian refugees fleeing from bombarded cities and ruined homes, his nerves would give way. "So I had to 'arden my 'art, sir, I did, and then I could look 'arter the poor chaps better."

Braze Despatch Rider

An episode in a despatch rider's life on the firing line may not be uninteresting. Despatch riding on the line is always a difficult position, fraught with much danger and hardship. The battle started at 6 a. m. and the despatch was handed at 8.30 to the man for reinforcements and artillery fire to repulse the enemy which had concentrated in a wood, the enemy outnumbering ours more than ten to one. On account of the nature of the country cycle riding was out of the question, and in the first place a dangerous bit of ground had to be crossed for the despatch to be endorsed by another British officer. Once the despatch rider had made the road he expected to be fairly safe; but on reaching it he found the fire on both sides and from the front, and already fifty men lay dead who had fallen that morning. Detached houses, far apart on the road, were the only means of cover. The man sought cover in a drain, and in passing to the next house literally walked over the bodies of ten dead comrades. Immediately on leaving the drain the man heard a scream and an explosion. He was wounded in the back, the shrapnel penetrating both lungs. For a moment the man decided to lie down and die, but on recovering from the shock he resolved to run forward as long as he could. He ran 300 yards and reached the next house. The house fortunately was occupied by other despatch riders and officers. The man still held the despatch crumpled in his right hand and just before he collapsed managed to hand it over to an officer who sept it forward.

The despatch was duly delivered; they rendered the wounded despatch bearer first aid, and in two hours he was passed down the lines by a company of stretcher bearers walking along the open road under a terrific shell fire, a distance of two and a half miles. When relating this incident to the writer, the despatch rider said, "My rifle, which I carried in my hand, was shattered to atoms, so small that I could not even find a piece for a souvenir, and yet my hand was untouched."

The men furnish splendid examples of heroism and self-sacrifice, and are most responsive to spiritual influences.—Sunday at Home.

I. C. R. TAKES OVER LINE TO MUSQUODOBOIT

The Service in the Meantime Will be on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, Leaving Dartmouth At 3 p. m.

Halifax, Dec. 31.—The operation of the Dartmouth to Deans Branch of the Government railway system will be undertaken on Monday, January 3. The trains will run from Uper Musquodoboit, leaving at 5.30 in the morning and arriving at Dartmouth at 10 o'clock in the forenoon, thus making the run of 70 miles in four hours. Returning the train will leave Dartmouth at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, arriving at Uper Musquodoboit at 7.30 o'clock in the evening. The trains will run on three days each week—Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. It will be a mixed service—passenger and freight. Cavicchi and Pagano, the contractors who built the road have been running the service for some months and have thereby been a great convenience to the people travelling from Halifax to Middle Musquodoboit. Now it is to be undertaken by the I. C. R. as a branch of the system that extends from Halifax to Winnipeg. The desire of the people on the shore and through the Musquodoboit Valley is at last to be gratified with the operation of the road as a part of the I. C. R. and in this respect the beginning of 1916 will be memorable. It will be noted that the road in the meantime will be operated not to Deans but to Uper Musquodoboit.

—Halifax Herald.

We do not know what "zelligewebentzuendung," or "bindegetbendzuendung," is, but it looks like a joy ride on a lhotyope.

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CHRISTMAS OFF CAPE HORN

(By Captain George S. Laing)

Cape Horn and the Cape of Good Hope are perhaps the two greatest marine milestones in the world. The cutting of the Suez Canal in Arabia and Egypt fifty years ago made a carpet slipper route to India, China and other oriental countries. Now we have the Panama Canal, giving easy access to and from the Atlantic and Pacific.

Before these great canals were built the two capes made all large vessels pay homage to them. To go around the world by water, you had to go round the capes; and no voyage of importance could be completed without reckoning what these hard corners had in store for you.

Quite a fleet of vessels must still use the southern points; and their names and associations with early navigators and explorers, as well as their vast importance in mercantile affairs, will make them live for ever.

Cape Horn is situated in the archipelago known as Tierra del Fuego, which translated from the language of Magellan means "Land of Fire." Look at the map of South America, and the Cape Horn district appears like a shoe to the vast continent of which it is the foot.

The writer has doubled a cape more than a dozen times, and the tale of a memorable Christmas off "the Horn" may interest the boy readers at least.

Our craft is bound from Arica, a small seaport that marks the line between Chili and Peru, to Middleboro, England. Loaded with a heavy cargo of manganese ore and coming through considerable stormy weather we at last find ourselves off Cape Horn on Christmas Day.

What next? You may well ask that question, for the answer is an unusual one. We are becalmed. Yes, becalmed off "the Horn"—this awful corner that has been called gloomy, barren, inhospitable, bleak, and a whole bushel of adjectives that lack cheer or hope.

It is a beautiful, clear day, and the land in the Cape vicinity is seen to the north, whilst the few black dots south-west of the vessel indicate the lonely islands of Diego Ramirez. We are just as far south of the equator as Port Nelson in our Hudson Bay is north of it, and the Christmas holiday is mostly spent in aquatic sports.

In the southern oceans there are some wonderful sea-birds which are the constant companions of ships and sailors. I refer to the albatross, mollyhawk, and cape pigeon principally, as these birds stay with us for weeks and in some cases months.

The same dozen or two dozen birds will follow the ship for thousands of miles, and only when we get north of their appointed latitude, will they desert us. Nature has ordained that these birds should live in the cold and icy waters of the Southern Hemisphere, and no inducements will take them away from their prescribed limits. We both hear and see the penguins, but they are too fond of the floods and ice-floes to follow ships. Besides, the penguin's wings are useless for flight and this most peculiar creature is more of a seal than a bird, and necessarily stays inshore. His weird cry is like that of a baby screaming for the moon.

After a special breakfast and a special wash, we agree to catch a few cape pigeons and perhaps an albatross or mollyhawk. The pigeons are very easily caught in a calm; but the larger birds are seldom landed on board unless in a breeze.

First of all, a piece of fat salt pork is cut up into little cubes the size of a carmel and a few of these dainty morsels are thrown overboard close to the ship's side. In a minute a dozen pigeons are scrambling and chattering over the mess. Talk about swallowing quickly, our pigeons (they are just like your domestic ones, only fatter and a uniform color, black and white, and possessed of a stronger bill), actually jump the lumps of fat pork down their throats.

The eagerness of "the early bird"

to get all the food is very amusing. No "share and share alike" with these fellows. Look at that one trying to down two pieces at once. See the bulge in his throat as it works its way down? Did some one say mastication. No time for that. Although the wind is absent, a heavy dead swell rolls up now and again, and the wee birds could almost be caught by hand as the ocean heaves them up towards the ship's rail.

Paddling about at a more respectful distance are the larger birds; and you can guess how irritating it must be for them to watch the wee birds getting all the food. At last a big albatross means to make a raid. See him rise? That's a sight in itself. This giant sea-bird can spread ten and twelve feet of wings and angle them to suit the wind and his purposes.

Being a calm day he has a little difficulty in "getting under way," as sailors say. He just slightly opens his wings and with an upward exertion gets on top of the sea, with his huge webbed feet. Now watch him! What feathers will not accomplish, feet will. There he goes just like a small side wheeler, and after a hundred yards are covered in that initial mode of flight, he rises majestically and in full command of his wings.

What does he mean to do? He is coming in amongst the pigeons to gobble up some pieces of fat pork. The idea of seeing all this food on Christmas, has made him bold. Reconnoitering for a minute or two as he circles round the ship, his strategy will soon lead him to swoop down to within six feet of the sea. Then he comes on a parallel line with the ship's side, and before you can say "Davy Jones," the little birds have scattered and a deal of splashing takes place as the albatross tries to stop his heavy body just where the food is.

He plunges his big webbed feet into the water to stop himself, and makes a clumsy and unsuccessful attempt to get a morsel of pork. Away he goes sideways fashion, and tucks down out of reach of danger, where a consultation is held with two or three more of his kind.

Whilst the sailors and apprentices are amusing themselves thus in the waist of the vessel, the mate and boatswain, have managed to get a baited line well astern and a few of the larger birds soon know it. The undoing of an albatross is his bill. It is of the hook kind and resembles a parrot's at the point. Who knows this better than a sailor, when he wants to catch his bird companion?

A sharp angled piece of sheet copper is on the end of the line, and a slice of fat pork is lashed around it. After playing and nibbling with this contrivance for a while, the bird puts his hook bill into the hole and the man on board pulls the line tight. The minute the albatross finds his bill jammed, he makes the predicament much worse by using his webbed feet as a resisting power.

As the man pulls his prey on board the line becomes tighter, for the hook within a hook is a pretty safe hold, providing there is no back up. On comes the big bird, causing quite a commotion, and intent on tightening the grip with his feet against the water.

He is now under the rail, where the precaution is taken to lash his bill, for fear he snips off a nose or an ear from one of his captors. It gives two men a good lift from the time he leaves the water till he is landed on the main deck under the shelter of the bulwark. Now he has the freedom of the ship, and can no more rise in flight from the deck than a horse could.

We catch the pigeons easily with blunt hooks and after playing with them on deck, just throw them back again over the rail. Their flesh is too rancid for eating, unless we are shipwrecked or short of provisions.

The albatross, which weighs about forty pounds, is killed with quick dispatch, as he is very useful. Only under the above conditions do we use him as a food. His breast, however, makes a beautiful muff; his headpiece a magnificent mounting for a hall; his bill alone surmounts the back bone of a shark, if a walking stick curio is desired. Then his webbed feet make ornamental pouches; whilst his tube-like bones are used by seamen for pipestems. The fat, with which he is well supplied to battle with the cold, is mixed with a little tar and used as a dubbin for boots, etc.

Seamen are never cruel to these ocean companions, and they are the only birds which actually love and prefer the lonely ocean to the coast line. Beyond a month or two each year, which may be spent on the scattered reefs and islands of the southern oceans for the egg season, these great birds live, rest and eat on the wildest waters. In prolonged gales you can see our feathered sailors getting little spells of rest in the hollows between the wave crests, and just as the boiling crest would appear to smash them to death, they rise quickly and sail down the smooth, back of a green mountain, then up the incline of the next and so on. A strange thing about these south-

ern ocean birds is the fact that they never rest on the ship's masts or rigging; nor have they been detected even flying through amongst the masts and sails. Unless in calm weather, at which time they make detour flights a pastime, the birds follow in our wake, where any food thrown overboard is quickly spied.

From our point of view we had a merry Christmas off Cape Horn. While Christmas is the mid-winter season in Canada, it is the mid-summer in the waters that have just been described.

CONTEMPORARY OPINION

Were the Shoe on the Other Foot

Perhaps some way of dealing with the dynamite and murder plotters might speedily be found by the answer to the simple question, "What would Germany do in our place?"

—Baltimore American.

A Menace to the World

It is unquestionable that peace cannot come while the spirit which brought on the war is unchastened. It is also unquestionable that victorious Germany would be a menace to the rest of the world. The weakness of the President's dealing with Germany has lain partly in his failure to recognize this fact.—Philadelphia Public Ledger.

The Drunkard's Good Resolve

We are certain that there are many thousands of men who bless the "No Treating" orders in these days when they are hard put to it to pay their rent, and taxes and educate their children and who devoutly hope that the old tyranny may never be restored. Why is this? There can be only one explanation. People want the Order to work. They do not want to evade it. Even the drunkard is on the side of restriction. This may seem to be a paradox, but really it is not. The drunkard in his sober moments wishes to be saved from himself. He is made up of good resolves. When he is not drunk he looks upon the temperance lecturer who tries to help him as his friend. He is much more tolerant towards preachers and teachers than the moderate drinker, who knows that he is in no need of help and in no danger.—The Spectator, London.

A Wrong Idea

Mr. Ford could do much more good by spending his money to relieve the suffering of wounded and sick soldiers and starving and homeless women and children. In going on his "peace voyage" he is simply throwing his money into the sea. And if he had the power, and exercised it, to end the war tomorrow, and could put every soldier back at his fireside, he would be doing evil instead of good. He would be covering up the wound with all its poison in it; Europe would die of gangrene in a decade unless, as would be likely, the war were renewed in a year or two and fought to a finish. The conclusion of the war now, with the iniquities which Germany has put upon the world more than half triumphant, would be a sin against God and man and the safety of the world.—Boston Transcript.

Peace

Why have the comments of Germany's press become so frank on the sufferings of the people, from loss of men, from hunger, from the price of all necessities? They cannot speak without permission. It may be that the Government is preparing them for peace terms that are not those of a victor; that are at the best those of a drawn battle. Germany hasn't a chance if the people of France, Russia, and England keep their nerve and apparently they will. It is a terrible way to win a war, grinding down the resources, destroying the most effective manhood of a great nation, but it is being done. France helped by England, and by Russian diversion, saved Paris. Then Russia saved her own armies. England swept the surface of the seas, then solved the submarine menace, and then undertook submarine business on her own account and closed the North Sea. For Germany to get from Constantinople to Egypt and India is a dream. She is beaten, if the Allied peoples will it. Probably she cannot stand for a year the strain now being frankly revealed. It is even possible she may not stand it through the winter. But what a price. About half the fighting men of Germany are supposed to be dead or crippled. The Allies are losing about as many, but swapping even for them means victory. How many will be dead in a year? Of course it is worth it, in a sense. A military despotism, must not rule Europe. But Germany has suffered so much that if peace were made to-day on the status quo ante the people of Germany would soon land a blow on the solar plexus to the regime which made them pay such a price for nothing.—Harper's Weekly.

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