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## The Proud Prussian Guard Beaten

### By the Army of Sportsmen Curtin Saw Drilling in Hyde Park.

In Sadness and Hopelessness the Return to Potsdam of Broken Battalions of Guards Surpassed all Other Sights of War — American Writer Saw That Kaiser's Best Troops Realized They Had Met Their Masters at Contalmaison — Hidden in Lumber Wagons, But German Public is Beginning to Realize Fate of Their Best Troops.

D. Thomas Curtin, an American writer who spent ten months in Germany, but who was only allowed to write what the censor directed, on his return has been revealing the war conditions in the land of the Hun. Various circumstances enabled Mr. Curtin to witness a sight strictly forbidden to the German public—the return of the wounded from the front. In this his second article on his ten months' stay in Germany he describes the return to Potsdam of the wounded of the Prussian Guard after their encounter with the British at Contalmaison and the efforts of the authorities to hide them from the people. Of this he writes as follows in the London Times:

The 4th of August is the anniversary of what is known in Germany as "England's treachery"—the day that England entered the war in what the German government tells the people is "a base and cowardly attempt to try and beat her by starving innocent women and children."

On that sunny and fresh morning I looked out of the railway carriage window some quarter of a mile before we arrived at Potsdam and saw numerous brown trains marked with the Red Cross, trains that usually travel by night in Germany.

There were a couple of officers of the Guard Cavalry in the same carriage with me. They also looked out. "Ach, noch einmal" ("What more of them?") discontentedly remarked the elder. They were a gloomy pair and they had reason to be. The German public has begun to know a great deal about the wounded. They do not yet know all the facts, because wounded men are, as far as possible, hidden in Germany and never sent to Socialist centres unless it is absolutely unavoidable. The official figures which

are increasing in an enormous ratio since the development of England's war machine, are falsified by manipulation.

And if easy proof be needed of the truth of my assertion, I point to the monstrous official misstatement involved in the announcement that over ninety per cent. of Germans wounded returned to the firing line. Of the great crush of wounded at Potsdam I doubt whether any appreciable portion of the serious cases will return to anything except permanent invalidism. They are suffering from shell wounds, not shrapnel, for the most part, I gathered.

#### Broken Men.

As our train emptied it was obvious that some great spectacle was in progress. The exit to the station became blocked with staring peasant women returning from the early market in Berlin, their high fruit and vegetable baskets empty on their backs. When I eventually got through the crowd into the outer air and paused at the top of the short flight of steps I beheld a scene that will never pass from my memory. Filmed and circulated in Germany it would evoke inconceivable astonishment to this deluded nation and would swell the malcontents, already a formidable mass, into a united and dangerous army of angry, eye-opened dupes. This is not the mere expression of a neutral view, but is also the opinion of a sober and patriotic German statesman.

I saw the British wounded arrive from Neuve Chapelle at Boulogne; I saw the Russian wounded in the retreat from the Bukovina; I saw the Belgian wounded in the Antwerp retreat and the German wounded in East Prussia, but the wounded of the Prussian Guard at Potsdam surpassed in sadness anything I have witnessed in the last two bloody years.

Your Neuve Chapelle wounded were, if not gay, many of them brittle and smiling—their bodies were hurt but their minds were cheerful; but the wounded of the Prussian Guard—the proudest military force in the world—who had come back to their home town dejected and humbled—these Guards formed the most amazing agglomeration of broken men I have

ever encountered. As to the numbers of them, of these five reserve regiments but few are believed to be unhurt. Vast numbers were killed, and most of the rest are back at Potsdam in the ever-growing streets of hospitals that are being built on the Bornplatzfeld.

One of the trains had just stopped. The square was blocked with vehicles of every description. I was surprised to find the great German furniture vans, which by comparison with those in England and the United States look almost like houses on wheels, were drawn up in rows with military precision. As if these were not enough, the whole of the wheeled traffic of Potsdam seemed to be commandeered by the military for the lightly wounded—cabs, tradesmen's wagons, private carriages—everything on wheels except, of course, motor cars, which are non-existent owing to the rubber shortage. Endless tiers of stretchers lay along the low embankment sloping up to the line. Doctors, nurses, and bearers were waiting in quiet readiness.

The passengers coming out of the station, including the women with the tall baskets, stopped, but only for a moment. They did not tarry, for the police, of which there will never be any dearth if the war lasts thirty years, motioned them on, a slight movement of the hand being sufficient.

#### "Move On."

I was so absorbed that I failed to notice the big constable near me until he laid his heavy paw upon my shoulder and told me to move on. A schoolmaster and his wife, his rucksack full of lunch, who had taken advantage of the glorious sunshine to get away from Berlin to spend a day amidst the woods along the Havel, asked the policeman what the matter was.

The reply was "Nichts hier zu sehen" ("Nothing to be seen here; get along"). The great "Hush! Hush!" machinery of Germany was at work.

Determined not to be baffled, I moved out of the square into the shelter of a roadside tree, on the principle that a distant view would be better than none at all, but the police were on the alert, and a police lieutenant tackled me at once. I decided to act on the German military theory that attack is the best defence, and stepping up to him, I stated that I was a newspaper correspondent. "Might I not see the wounded taken from the train?" I requested. He very courteously replied that I might not, unless I had a special pass for that purpose from the Kriegsministerium in Berlin.

I remembered a large window in the first and second class dining room in the station, from which a very close view of the tragedy could be gained. I knew that there was no train back to Berlin for an hour and a half. I took a ticket, handed it to the uniformed woman, who deals with them as in England, and explained to the soldier and Unteroffizier who stood by her that I would like to go into the dining room to read and get something to eat. I walked straight to the window of the dining room and ordered butterless bread and Dutch cheese—the universal and almost standard midday diet of Germany to-day—and was glad that my Berlin ticket served. My ruse succeeded. I saw everything and un molested.

By this time the wounded were being moved from the train. The slightly wounded were drawn up in double ranks, their clean white arm and head bandages gleaming in the noon day light. They stood dazed and dejected, looking on at the real work which was just beginning—the removal of the severely wounded.

#### Wounded in Furniture Vans.

Then it was that I learned the use of those mammoth furniture vans. Then it was I realized that these vans are part of Germany's plan by which her wounded are carried—I will not say secretly—but as unobtrusively as possible. In some of the mammoth vans put 12, into others 14; others held as many as 20.

The Prussian Guard had come home. The steel corps of the army of Germany had met at Contalmaison the light-hearted boys I had seen drilling at Hyde Park last year, and in a furious counter-attack, in which they had attempted to regain the village, had been wiped out.

These were not merely wounded, but dejected wounded. The whole atmosphere of the scene was that of intense surprise and depression. Tradition going back to Frederick the Great, nearly 200 years ago, had been smashed by amateur soldiers. The callow youth of 18 who served my lunch was muttering something to the barmaid, who replied that he was lucky to be in a class that was not likely to be called up yet.

The extreme cases were carried at a snail's pace by bearers, who put their feet down as carefully as if they were testing very thin ice, and who placed the comfortable spring stretchers in the very few vehicles which had rubber or imitation rubber tires. This was done with military precision and great celerity. The evacuation of this train was no sooner finished than another took its place, and the

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If your child's stomach, liver and bowels need cleansing, give only delicious "California Syrup of Figs." Its action is positive, but gentle. Millions of mothers keep this harmless "fruit laxative" handy; they know children love to take it; that it never fails to clean the liver and bowels and sweeten the stomach, and that a spoonful given to-day saves a sick child to-morrow.

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same scene was repeated. Presently the great furniture vans returned from having deposited their terrible loads, and were again filled. One van was reserved for those who had expired in the journey, and it was full.

#### What the Guard Means.

The Guard had its garrison chiefly in Potsdam, but also partly in Berlin, and represents the physical flower of German manhood. On parade it was inspiring to look at, and no military officer in the world ever doubted its prowess. Nor has it failed in the war to show splendid courage and fighting qualities. English people simply do not understand its prestige at home and among neutrals.

The Guard is sent only where there is supreme work to be done. If you hear that it has been hurled into charge you may rest assured that it is striving to gain something on which Germany sets the highest price—for the life-blood of the Guard is the dearest that she can pay.

In the battle of the Marne the active regiments of the Guard forming a link between the armies of Buelow and Hansen were dashed like spray on jagged cliffs when they surged in wave after wave against the army of Foch at Sozanne and Fere Champenoise.

Germany was willing to sacrifice those superb troops during the early part of the battle because she knew that von Kluck had only to hold his army together, even though he did not advance, and the overthrow of Foch would mean a Teuton wedge driven between Verdun and Paris. One year and ten months later she hurled the Guard Reserve at Contalmaison because she was determined that this important link in the chain of concrete and steel that coiled back and forth before Bapaume-Peronne must remain unbroken. The newly-formed lines of Britain's sons bent but did not break under the shock. They were outnumbered, but, like all the rest of the British, that the backs from the front German soldiers have told me about, these fought on and on, never thinking of surrender.

I know from one of these that in a first onslaught the Guard lost heavily,

but was reinforced and again advanced. Another desperate encounter and the men from Potsdam withered in the hand-to-hand carnage. The Germans could not hold what they had won back, and the khaki succeeded the field grey at Contalmaison.

The evacuation of the wounded occupied hours. I purposely missed my train, for I knew that I was probably the only foreign civilian to see the historic picture of the proudest soldiery of Prussia return to its garrison town from the greatest battle in history.

Empty trains were pulled out of the way, to be succeeded by more trains full of wounded, and again more. Doctors and nurses were attentive and always busy, and the stretcher-bearers moved back and forth until their faces grew red with exertion.

#### Without Hope.

But it was the visage of the men on the stretchers that riveted my attention. I never saw so many men so completely exhausted. Not one pair of lips relaxed into a smile, and not an eye lit up with the glad recognition of former surroundings.

It was not, however, the lines of suffering in those faces that impressed me, but that uncanny sameness of expression, an expression of hopeless

gloom so deep that it made me forget that the sun was shining from an unclouded sky. The dejection of the police, of the soldier onlooker, of the walking wounded, and those upturned faces on the white pillows told as plainly as words could ever tell that the Guard had at last met a force superior to themselves and their war machine. They knew well that they were the idol of the Fatherland, and that they had fought with every ounce of their great physical strength, back-

ed by their long traditions. They had been vanquished by an army of mere sportsmen.

My thoughts went back to Berlin and the uniformed scuffings at the British army and its futile efforts to push back the troops of Rupprecht on the Somme. Yet here on the actual outskirts of the German capital was a grim tribute to the machine that Great Britain had built up under the protection of her navy.

In Berlin at that moment the afternoon editions were fluttering their daily headlines of victory to the crowds on the Linden and the Friedrichstrasse, but here the mammoth vans were moving slowly through the streets of Potsdam.

To the women who stood in the long lines waiting with the potato and butter tickets for food on the other side of the old stone bridge that spans the Havel they were merely ordinary cumbersome furniture wagons.

How were they to know that these machines contained the bloody story of Contalmaison?

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