

BELGIUM

even to duck my head every time a shell or a ball had gone over.

There was, too, a sense of order and of cleanliness, except—loathsome detail—everywhere, over all, there were crawling flies, millions of them, moving about sluggishly, deliberately, along the edges and the walls of the trenches. On the gratings little green toads were hopping; one, in a strange respect for life, had to be careful not to step on them.

That was all—that and a bunch of poppies and vines overhanging the edges of the trenches where the sand bags were piled. No one was firing from our trenches; we saw no killed, no wounded, even. Those men seemed to have nothing to do with that hail of balls that flew always just over our heads, the shells, highest, of all describing great parabolas in the air, which they seemed to darken almost palpably, like a cloud. That was imagination, of course; the sun was blazing in a brazen sky.

The bullets whistled, or sang—that buzzing sound which nails make when boys throw them sharply through the air; and the English rifles kept up a fusillade like fire-crackers, the racket of an old-fashioned Fourth of July at home; the sunshine added to the similitude, even if it did make it all garish and unreal, as if it were not really happening after all. But the eyes of the soldiers that looked on death always and awaited it—they were real.

We had been in the trenches for an hour when we came to a little steel cupola, with a soldier inside, sitting on a stool, his eyes pressed to a narrow slit like a bar of brilliant light. He had a telephone at his elbow, and his gun. There were periscopes here and there, some of