

IN THE TRENCHES

By
XAVIER SAGER



FLANDERS.—The present war has abolished all that which until now lent to the resistance, to the retaliation and the obscuration of men a kind of grandiose splendor—has thrust to one side the fine array of troops that one sees in the ancient battle pictures; the variegated lines, the groups of staff officers going to the height of a plateau, the movements of the armies, the galloping of the cavaliers clothed in brilliant costumes, the beating of the drums—all that which created the ardor, excitement and courtesy of the combat. Warfare was gallant because it was made between adversaries who were in view of each other. What would such men as Napoleon, Murat, Lasalle, Wellington and many others think about this clandestine war?

Formerly a campaign consisted of one or two great combats of half a day, sometimes a whole day; then a joyous entry into the towns conquered. Good fortune and intrigue held in these wars as much a place as did the encounters of the enemy.

"It is as impossible to recount a battle," affirmed Wellington, "as to describe a ball."

But without wishing in the least to diminish the valor of the ancients, we must recognize that one of their battles would be merely a pleasure excursion for our soldiers of today. If Napoleon exacted from his "Gronagers" (Groniers) such discipline of iron, such impersonality, so contrary to the temperament of our race, and which the modern tactics force, if he had attempted what is indispensable at the present time—to transform their natural impetuosity into abnegation—the formidable grenadiers would have found the task too hard and would have said without dissimulation that it did not please them.

Today a hole in the ground, ordained silence, immobility under the rain that falls and the shrapnel that descends, under the sounds of the cannon that roar; battles of 40 days' length, without a single instant free from the deafening noise of the artillery, more or less near. On a front of 400 miles in extension the soldiers of the allies arrange things, and the French soldier accommodates himself with as much cheerfulness, gaiety and good humor as our ancestors acquitted themselves in their light and rapid adventures of former times.

Let us judge of it.

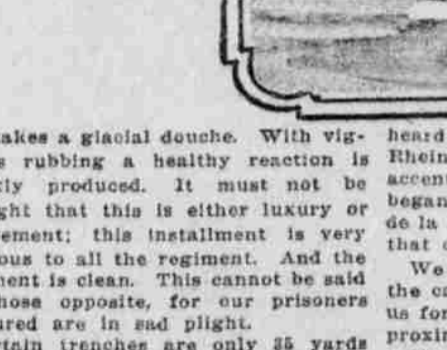
lent use if the surrounding land is woody, where trees can be procured, and when they are lacking tangled barbed wire constitutes an accessory defense. The effect of the artillery is null on this enclosure of network; it cannot be passed through except by the menelite or the shears. Also we have inaugurated the war of strongholds in the open country. Everybody invisible or nearly so, the least movement possible. It is observed. Word of order. To build the front that one occupies. It is manifestly the same on each side. The service is also regulated; three days in the trenches of the first line, three days in the reserve trenches, three days of repose.

Trenches! We have made them over a distance of hundreds of kilometers (a kilometer is a fraction more than three-fifths of a mile), and our lines from the front resemble molehills that are cut out in galleries. One can live there, and some men remain for two or three months in these moist ditches. The courage necessary to resist day and night the inclemency and the assaults continues. One sleeps little, one eats badly. How can such a life be described with enough power to make comprehensible the incalculable grandeur of its meaning?

Night, cold. Toward the morning a thick white frost falls on us. The sun rises, British, French and German begin their daily routine. From behind a great German captive balloon slowly rises. Opposite it a French balloon appears little by little. There! All is in place; the scenery changes not until the evening. But to pass days and weeks adorning these holes in the earth becomes monotonous. We busy ourselves in organizing to render the trenches more comfortable; each day brings an improvement. There have been some attempts to heat them. A brick and a foot warmer are tried by turns, for one must not dream of having anything with smoke, for that would be a sign for the enemy.

These modern trenches advance irregularly, in zigzag fashion. They are carefours (where two or more trenches cross), some places (squares), impasses (blind alleys). This makes altogether an improvised town. In order that the soldier may find his trench they have baptised each one. There is the "rus France," "King, strasse," "rus de Russie," "rus de Bruxelles," "Place de la Liberté." Next, each "refuge" receives a name given on a brick. There is the "Palace Hotel," "Savoy Hotel," "Royal Hotel," etc., with the name of the proprietor. At the edge of the trench, hanging on bayonets fixed in the partitions of earth; these also serve as hat and coat rails. The water falls from a hose. It was the captain who had this idea. A shell had hollowed out a large hole at this place. A large flagstone was placed at the bottom and a roof put on the top. It is a reservoir fed by rain water. A tap is put at the end of a hose to conduct the water; this hangs above a tub, and in turn

BATH ROOM IN THE FRENCH TRENCHES
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one takes a glacial douche. With vigorous rubbing a healthy reaction is quickly produced. It must not be thought that this is either luxury or amusement; this installment is very precious to all the regiment. And the regiment is clean. This cannot be said of those opposite, for our prisoners captured are in sad plight.

Certain trenches are only 25 yards from the enemy, and from each burrow talking can be heard. French and Germans look each other in the eye, without hatred, but there remains the inevitable necessity of killing each other piously. And the war takes a new character. What a pity that there are not archers in the armies! An arrow had virtue in its parabola, penetrating more profoundly in the trenches, closer than a rifle shot can be sent. Soon we will come up with each other, knife between the teeth. Yet one does not feel the sentiment of a great combat—the struggle is too personal, too isolated.

Yes, we who have kept the enemy at bay for several weeks have the impression of doing nothing. We are reduced to writing the "Journal of the Trenches." There one reads the pleasantries of the war. "Yesterday evening Messrs. the Germans offered us an exhibition of fireworks from 9 to 10 o'clock," or "Two foreign nobles wearing officers' caps paid a visit to the west trench; they were received with a volley and honors due to their rank." Our men provide best roots for the artists of the trenches. The latter carve a caricature of the head of a German, generally a commandant-in-chief of one of their army corps. Recently I sent you some sketches of them. Some of the bests are hollowed out and filled with bulletins of French and Russian victories and are projected toward the lines of the Germans. Or they are sent over with madrigals together with hand grenades. One went, "How many are you in there?"

heard them yelling the "Wacht am Rhein," accompanied by the growling accents of an accordion. The French began at once to sing "Allons enfants de la Patrie," punctuated by a fusillade that closed the fete.

We are so close to one another that the cannon of neither side can fire on us for fear of striking their own. The proximity of the adverse trenches is such that it is dangerous to remain in observation. Some have placed a mirror above and behind, so that by its help what passes in front can be seen while remaining in the trench.

In this hole there is an inventor who always looks for some means whereby to play a trick on his adversary. The Germans have a mania for wire. They hemstitch their works with a metallic embroidery, of debatable taste, and it is one of our nightly sports to cut these with shears. Exasperated to find each morning their wire lace work in shreds they decided to hang there a carillon (chimes) of empty tins, accompanied by empty conserve tins. The first time that we used the shears—music and firing.

We did not continue that night, but the following night a corporal glided as far as the network, adjusting three ropes, and regained his trench, from where he began to ring up the Germans. The latter responded with precision and riddled their bottles and tins. A little later our corporal pulled the ropes; from the Germans another volley, nearer than the first. Silence; then again the dance of the bottles. We could hear the nervous orders; evidently the enemy did not comprehend this sudden invulnerability of the wire-cutters. During half an hour they attacked each jingling with an intense fusillade. Cleverly the corporal diminished the effects and descending graduated into silence. One guessed the triumphant relief opposite—they had killed all or put them to flight. Then furiously broke forth our fusillade, instantly followed by a rush with bayonets, and in ten minutes the German trench was ours.

Another night, profiting by the fog, to get a knowledge of what was in front, our men found at a little distance a trench where were the tools and weapons of its occupants. They possessed themselves of the weapons of the Germans, filled up the trench and returned with a smile on their lips, quite gay at the joke they had played on the Germans.

FRENCH CHASSEURS-A-PIED IN THE FIRST LINE NEAR ARRAS.
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The man wanted to drag away his booty as far as his entrenchment; this time a ball struck him. Two of his comrades boldly tried to replace him; they arrived at the tree and dragged it some yards. They were killed. There came still two others and after those two more. This fighting for a birch tree lasted several hours. The tree was at length taken away. It had cost the Germans 23 men.

There are some trenches that have even a cattle pen, where graze several cows. Lately was celebrated the birth of a calf, and each day at dawn and twilight some men leave their

ever, the hostilities continue. For instance, the Germans are set upon destroying a work of defense every evening that we have patiently labored at all day, according to orders given. On our side we no less systematically pull down a redoubt that the Germans were untiringly reconstructing.

One day, at an hour when by tacit accord the troops made a truce, two German officers came out from their trenches without weapons and their hands raised. They advanced toward our trenches, from where we in our turn came out. The officers explained that it was absurd to demolish every day the two pieces of work that both sides had been given orders to construct. He offered to abstain from touching ours if we on our part would leave theirs alone.

The agreement was concluded, some newspapers were exchanged, then at the moment of leaving one of them announced that their period of sojourn at the front was drawing to an end,

SOLDIERS IN THE TRENCHES ARE REAL CAVE DWELLERS
FROM THE SPHERE
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invisible. From here one does not distinguish it even by its thin line of trenches. The infantry is buried in deep holes. The plain is frightfully deserted. Still, some thousands of eyes watch it, some thousands of guns, fixed on the ground, wait threatening silent.

Night is come. The Winter nights are long. Silence and obscurity fall on the plain. We eat supper late, at 7 o'clock, in order to retard the moment when we must be alone. Fires burn actively under ground, invisible from the outside, and we throw ourselves to try to sleep and forget.

The cannon cease not their rearings, that seems to be stronger still in the calm, dark night. The moon pierces the gray clouds—a full moon. So long as she lights the woods and the plain with her pale rays there is no danger that the enemy will quit the trenches, but as soon as she sinks on the horizon, or the fog rises, one must expect and be ready for all. One sleeps or one awakes. It is no longer unerving as at first, when on hearing the first shot of a rifle the whole line was instantly on its feet.

From time to time someone laughs, someone gets up and lights his pipe. Someone growls in dreaming; someone whom sleeplessness annoys strolls about in the back trench.

Suddenly a near rifle shot. But from where? Alert! . . . Then there is no longer the heavy intermittent silence. All the sentinels fire into the gloom. A volley of bullets whistles over our heads. Already the sleepers are on their feet in a hubbub of exclamation and swearing. The fusillade, increasing from second to second, tears the echoes.

TEMPORARY TRENCHES—A BRITISH DOG SENTRY IN THE FOREGROUND
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advance, caught by the intricacies of the twisted wire, fall heavily. We shoot into the bunch with a joyous exultation. We are panicking and the preparation pours from our temples. A furnace is burning in each heaving breast.

All that mass before us, creeping, slithering, falls riddled with shot. The screaming and groaning of the wounded dominate the battle. Their spirit is surely spent, their firing is less arduous and we hear their officers swearing. A joyous exultation enfervens us. Just at this moment the clouds are broken by a great gust of wind and, dispersing, uncover the moon in the less obscure sky.

In a few seconds all is revealed. It has been carnage, a butchery. Not a place where there is not several bodies entangled in the wire, covered with blood, with faces convulsed frightfully. From this slaughter proceed lugubrious plaints and moanings. Some hundreds of them lie there dead or wounded in front of our trench.

Night Attack

BY XAVIER SAGER.
PLAINS OF FLANDERS, Jan. 12.—The evening closes in. The sky is agitated. First one aeroplane, then another passes at a great height. They are ours—spies which describe a very large orbit and go down yonder, far behind us, toward their nest. They even take their coffee in common. How-