

IN AND OUT OF RUSSIA WITH BELGIAN "FLYING SQUADRON"

Armored Car Detail of 350, Which Went in at Archangel in 1915 and Came Out at Vladivostok in 1918, Arrives in America, Bringing Story of Revolution and the Withdrawal of the Muscovite Army

FIGHTING their way through the whole of Russia, from the Spring of 1915 to the Spring of 1918; mingled with the army of General Brussiloff in the Galician campaign, where they battled side by side with the brave feminine "Battalion of Death"; caught in the vortex of the Russian revolution and betrayed by the Bolsheviks because they chanced to be located in the heart of Ukraine; driving eventually clear across Siberia until they came to the shelter of the Chinese flag, remnants of a brave band of 350 Belgians, composing an armored motorcar squadron, have arrived finally in America with their story of wrecked Russia and of their harrowing experiences.

Because the style of fighting on the western front prevented the use of their unit in trench warfare and artillery dueling, the Belgian motorists were sent to Russia early in the war. Landing in Archangel, they were transferred to the southwestern Russian arena, and there took part in the big Russian offensive of 1916, when the Russians were forced back between Brzezany and Brody, as well as in the offensive led by Kerensky in 1917. In the cataclysmic events that followed they were buffeted about in the hands of the revolutionists and only escaped by resorting to the display of Belgian bravery—an appeal based on their choice of bullets instead of gold, proffered them by Germany.

In their campaign the Belgians had an opportunity to behold the spectacle of Russia fighting without weapons of warfare—

unable to express herself in the early days of the war because of the lack of military resources. The Russians then followed the Belgian armored cars in many memorable engagements and found inspiration in the indomitable spirit of the Belgians. Later on, these same Belgians beheld the pitiable spectacle of 10,000,000 Russians, demobilized at the command of the Bolshevik-controlled Soviet, laying down their arms to accept the false peace of the mailed fist of Germany.

The Belgians now were in a dilemma. They had been fighting in Ukraine. There they beheld the massacre of Poles and Ukrainians by the power-mad Bolsheviks. In turn, the Belgians had to endure the ill-will of the Bolsheviks, who accused them of partisanship with the Ukrainians. The story of their retreat through Siberia, of the German prisoners there in control and their flight to Harbin and escape finally to the United States by way of Vladivostok is here related by Maurice Rogez, one of the Belgian band.

Only recently these Belgians arrived in San Francisco and were tendered a wonderful reception. Lately they have been in New York. Now they are returning to their native country to battle again for the freedom of their nation from Prussian domination. And they go forward eager to join forces with the Americans, who have come into the great war since these remnants of King Albert's gallant army first opposed the Hun at Liege and Namur.



Belgian Dispatch Bearer on Bicycle Returning From Front Line Reconnaissance.

BY MAURICE ROGEZ, Member of the Belgian Armored Car Squadron.

RIDING in armored motorcars across the length and breadth of Russia, fighting for Russian liberty until our guns were taken from us in the shameless demobilization of the Bolsheviks, escaping finally by way of Siberia into China, 350 of my fellow-countrymen—I, a member of the party—have come now to the United States. Unable to fight longer for Russia, we are bound back to Belgium to take our stand once more beside our brave brothers for the redemption of our Belgium and the triumph of the allies.

In at Archangel to the far north, fighting for long, deep down in the southwestern arena of Russia—in the Ukrainian territory—our unit was again across the Ural mountains into the cold snows and dreary exiles of Siberia, we have seen Russia in all its parts. From the brave beginning under Kerensky until the pitiful ending under the Trotsky-Lenine administration we have seen the rise and fall of the Russian republic. Ten million men who might have fought on under the banners of the allies have been taken out of the great war—all because of the socialist overthrow directed by a few men in the interests of one class rather than the interests of humanity.

If Russia had remained in the war—who knows? Maybe it would have been over now. Surely Germany never would have been able to launch her Spring offensive this year because of the millions of men she would have had to keep on the eastern front. Will Russia get in again? I do not know. Who can tell?

Sent Into Russia.

There were 350 of us, a spirited organization, well trained, nicely equipped with the armored motorcars that came into the war early in the first year. At the end of 1915 it was deemed expedient to send us into Russia. First of all, it was expected that the appearance of a squadron of Belgians with the story of their wronged country would make a favorable impression on the Russians and enkindle the spirit of brotherhood between the allies of the east and the allies of the west. In the second place, our armored cars were not so effective and not so much needed on the western front, where the warfare had resolved itself into intensive artillery and trench fighting.

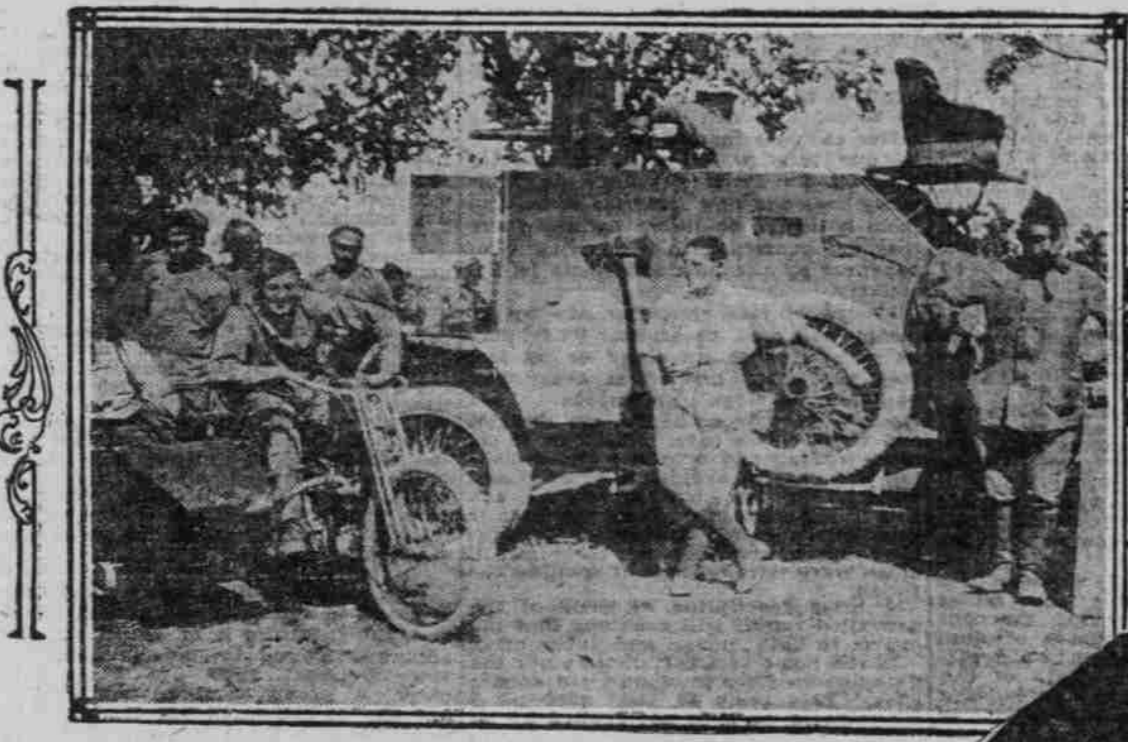
King Albert bade us farewell and we departed from our own dear native land—then writhing under the hand of the invading oppressor. By ship we proceeded to Archangel in the far north and there prepared for our active participation in the Russian campaign. Then for 23 months we saw active service in Eastern Galicia under the command of General Brussiloff. Here we participated in all the stirring battles that were part of the early drive against the Germans—and still later in the collapse of the same armies before Hun guns and subtle propaganda. Here took place the huge offensive of 1916, which drove back the enemy's front between Brzezany and Brody. Here also took place the great offensive led by Kerensky in 1917. Here also the terrible disaster—the collapse of the gigantic movement involving millions of men.

The armored car constitutes a weapon of redoubtable efficiency. Always in the front ranks our cars have had the Russians in their attacks. Very often in the face of a German attack our cars, coming up suddenly with quick-firing guns in action, rallied the panic-stricken Russians and led them to a glorious victory. Our cars were constantly in the thick of the fighting. At Zborov, in 1914, after the battle, our cars captured the town three Belgian armored cars held it almost alone against the attacking Russian soldiers in the front line trenches outside the town were wavering before the terrific barrage laid down by the enemy. It seemed they were about to break and run. Up came our cars. The dreadful fire of our machine guns swept the steps; the thin gray line of the advancing line broke back before the ally fled panic-stricken. It was a glorious sight to behold what followed. The Russians, overjoyed, rushed from their trenches and embraced the Belgians, caressing the motorcars in their glee.

Always the armored car was a rallying point. Its appearance galvanized the Russians and held them firm. At Konlukhi, in July, 1917, one of our cars rushed forward under the direction of Constance-Marie, the famous Belgian wrestler, to determine the cause for a sudden slack in the Russian attack. Soon it was in the midst of the fighting. The enemy advanced this lone brave car. A shell smashed it to bits. A second shell pierced it, killing the chauffeur. But the remainder kept on working the guns until compelled to fall back before the superior attack. The Russians had implicit confidence in the Belgian cars; they desired the inspiration of their leadership for any great attack.

In this same fighting at Konlukhi in 1917 delegates sent by the soldiers appealed to the Belgians the very first day of Kerensky's offensive. The Belgian officers showed the Russians the bad state of the roads, transformed into marshes by the water of the rivers. The Russians insisted that the Belgians "try" anyway. "If our soldiers see you on the roads," they said, "they will go forward and they will follow you to the last. Come, show yourselves, and the day will be ours."

Soon came the collapse. All the bravery of the Belgians could avail nothing. It was pitiful to see them falling back after their wonderful fighting. They had not the facilities with which to carry on the war. A



Belgian Armored Car Behind the Russian Line Waiting the Order to Go Into Action.

Russian officer, asking that our squadron go forward on a particular reconnaissance, said: "I am asking you to get this information for us. If it is information that we can get only from air scouts, but we have no airplanes left, and you are the only ones to fulfill the undertaking."

Bravery of No Avail.

The bravery of the Belgians got to be useless. The armored cars remained on the field alone and found no followers. The rout became general. Nothing could check it. From our position at the front we were not able to judge all that was going on in Petrograd after Kerensky had been deposed and the Soviets were working with Trotsky and Lenin. What we saw at the front was the huge Russian army slowly falling back, slowly disintegrating, their morale gone. All our words and deeds went in vain. Instead of leading the attack we were busy covering the retreat and preventing the wholesale capture of our allies by the Austro-Hungarian army.

Repeatedly the Russian high command called upon us for help. With British armored cars we covered the retreat in July a year ago. The Russian Sixth Army Corps, to which the Belgian squadron belonged, was thrown off its normal line of retreat and fell further south in the worst possible disorder. The corps staff and various units were completely separated. The regiments—all intermingled—hurried away desperately, anywhere, everywhere, without the least semblance of military order. "You have seen the pictures of it, you have heard the stories; they have not been overdrawn. Along the roads, obstructed by piled-up abandoned goods, strewn with arms, ammunition, guns and materials of all kinds, horses killed in the collisions of the rout, one met officers pale and dejected, their clothes all torn. One man would be asking another, 'Do you know where I can find so-and-so regiment?' or, 'I am chief of the staff of so-and-so division—could you tell me where I could find it? I have been lost for two days.'

In this terrible catastrophe the Belgian cars stood valiantly by their panic-stricken allies. It was their mission to halt the enemy as he came up upon the heels of the retreating Russians. At one time, for a continuous period of 11 days, we remained constantly in action, hurrying from point to point, covering up the retreat, seeking to rally the flying divisions. But it was no use. By the thousands the Russians were being driven down the river, in response to the order issued by the Soviet—the "priказ" calling upon 10,000,000 men to abandon their arms.

An Army Led Astray.

Discipline was at an end. The Russians were told they no longer need obey their officers. They were just to decide for themselves what they wanted to do. As a result, the potential Russian army became a disorganized rabble. Thousands of Germans who had been opposing the Russian front were now being driven away to be launched against our brothers and allies on the west. No pen can picture the transition in Russia from the best of all worlds to the reign of terror that was to follow. These Russians could fight if they wanted to. Now they were content to listen to the words of their Socialist leaders—to throw away their arms and dream about the new possessions and new power they expected to get.

In vain the Belgians awaited for a reawakening of their Russian compatriots. See what happened to us then! At Kiev, where the Belgian towns were surrounded by Mouroviev's hordes. The St. Michael monastery where we were quartered became the storm center of the attack between the Russian forces. Bombs and shells

exploded in the courtyard; "rafales" of bullets whistled in the garden. The casualties were heavy among the civilian population. In a single day the monastery changed hands seven times. All the while the Belgians were helpless. Finally after a fortnight of fighting the Bolsheviks mastered the town.

Now the plight of the Belgians became worse. Their presence in Kiev together with the Ukrainians was interpreted as an act of hostility by the Bolshevik leaders. General Mouravieff said to our leader: "Belgians have been fighting with the Ukrainians (we had not). Your cars have been in action. Your trucks have been used for the transport of Ukrainian troops, and for re-equipping purposes. One of your officers wearing the Russian uniform has been taken prisoner."

The Belgian commander denied all these accusations. He stoutly maintained that we had remained neutral through all the fighting and urged a court of inquiry. These explanations were not accepted. The Bolsheviks seemed to demand that we should be treated as traitors. We were ordered to leave the town for three days, for there is going to be a regime of terror. Afterward you will be permitted to leave.

The terror . . . ! This word was on all lips. Many Ukrainian and Polish officers were in the town. They knew their fate, as the Bolsheviks previously had shown no pity. In Finland, in Sebastopol, they had proceeded to a general slaughter of officers. But the Russian carries fatalism until it becomes paradoxical.

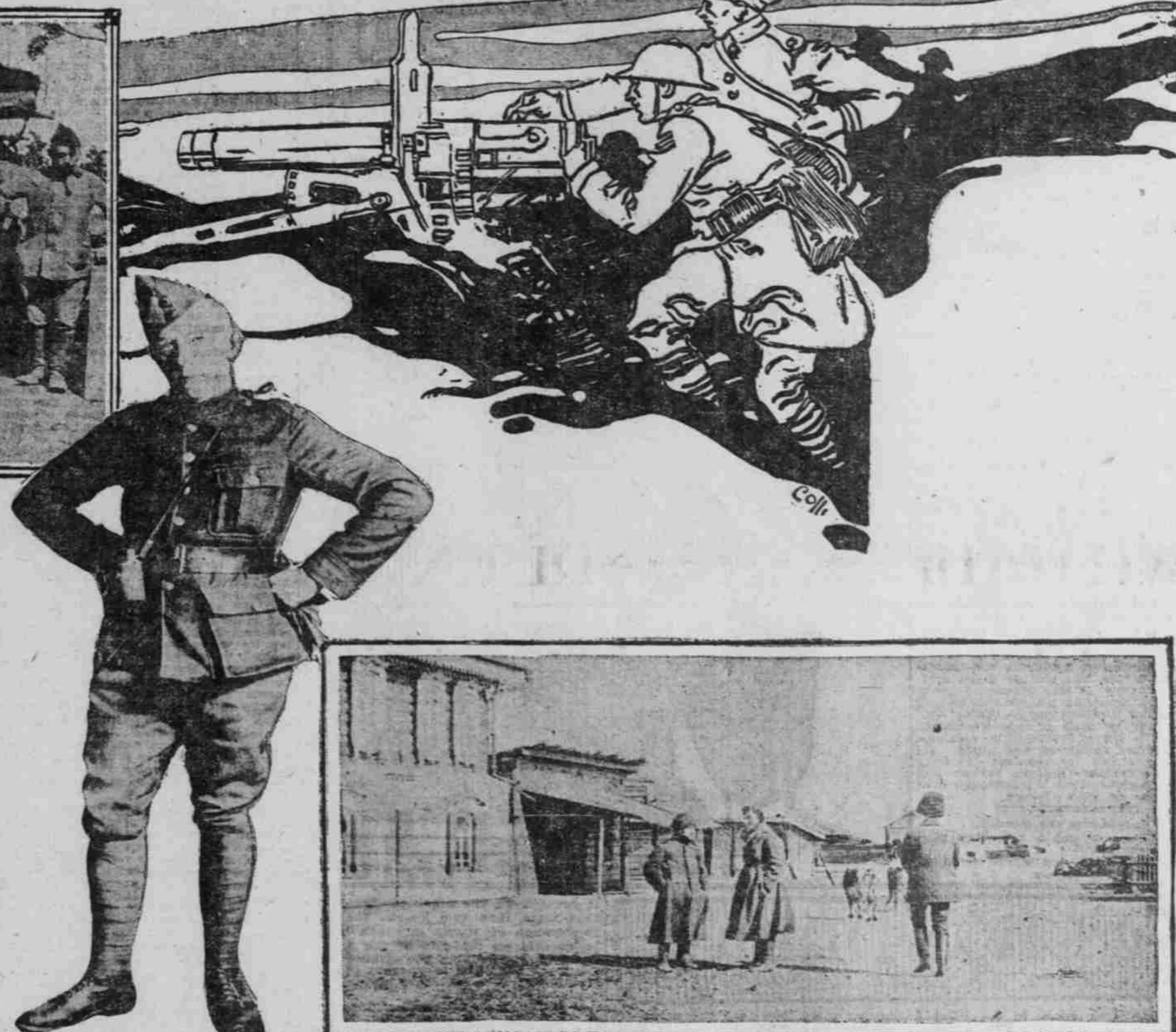
In the Rada the Bolsheviks found full lists of residing officers, and soon the patrols were spread throughout town "to carry out justice." Justice it was nothing but death. The majority of these officers, trapped in their lodgings, never defended themselves. They were killed on the spot. Sometimes they were dragged from the houses and hurried executions took place before the front doors. The murderers searched the bodies while yet warm and robbed them of all valuables, clothes and boots. The poor "bourgeois" were butchered without mercy. Because they wore decent clothing was sufficient pretext for killing them. Always the same—death.

In front of the Governor's Palace there was a large open square. There hundreds of officers were shot. Corpses were thrown over the parapet of the Dnieper bridge. They fell on the sands below, many of them, and never were buried. For days the city reverberated with the shots of the firing squads. Continuously automobiles loaded with corpses ran to and fro in the streets, leaving behind them a trail of blood. Patrols were everywhere. Armed guards were about, taking their toll in lives. Finally the visions of horror ceased and conditions became normal again after the reign of terror had run its course.

It was February 21, however, before our Belgian train was permitted to leave the city. We were to go to the country. Well we knew that the provisions we obtained at our start on the long trip to Vladivostok would be all that we would have for the journey. It took us nearly two months to make the trip to Vladivostok, and then we arrived only after the most tempestuous journey, beset with perils all along the way. At Volodga on February 1 we had met the American and Japanese missions en route to Petrograd.

The Trip Across Siberia.

Through the immense snowy steppes of Siberia, where for many weary miles not a soul was to be found, our train moved at last—the last train from the "civilization" of Russia bound for the Far East. At every station the Russian soldiers gazed at us. The sight of an organized party seemed to anger them. Some of the Russians wanted to take the train and get out of Russia. They were prevented. Some



Maurice Rogez, One of the Belgian Armored Car Squadron, Who Tells This Story of His Experiences.

argued: "These are our cars." They flung all manner of questions at us. "Who helped you in Galicia?" "For whom did the Belgian boys die?" "What about your wheat?" "Who protected you when there was no more hope left for you?" You are wearing our clothes. We want peace, and there you go with our clothes on to fight on the French front." All disorder, all chaos, all auspicion.

Throughout Siberia we ran counter to the many German prisoners. The number increased as we continued on our way eastward. They circulated freely and seemed not at all like prisoners of war. Some were engaged in business; others, musicians, were playing in the "tchinaya." They had even their own newspapers printed in German. These were all couched in the socialistic arguments and praised highly the overthrow of the rulers and the leaders in favor of the workers. Everywhere we found evidences of the Germans heading the propaganda that was unsettling the Russians and making the country ripe for German intervention.

In Omak our train was stopped and the Bolsheviks demanded the complete disarmament of our motorcars. They were inclined to hold us indefinitely, regardless of armaments. Our officers resolved to make them fight for the Soviet of Omak. A series of conferences followed. The Soviet was unrelenting in its position, and our men had about resolved to make them fight for our armaments. We had about decided to take charge of the train and run it through to Vladivostok by sheer violence. Finally, in an impassioned appeal before the Soviet, one of our men, a Russian interpreter, won them over with his speech.

They Vow to Break Through.

"When in 1914," he began, "that giant Germany came to little Belgium, she offered both hands to her 'friend.' In one hand were gold ingots, in the other lead bullets. In one hand gold, but dishonor; in the other virtue and heroism, but death. What did Belgium choose? The lead bullets . . ." The speech went on in that way until the

The Only Street in Oioviannaya, the Last Siberian Town Where the Belgians Were Detained.

Soviet was touched by the appeal and consented to our departure.

But we encountered the same thing now virtually everywhere we stopped. On March 22, when we arrived at Tselita, the Soviet, after giving the order to permit us to proceed, rescinded it. The Bolsheviks ordered a thorough search of the train, intent upon the capture of arms and ammunition. Finding nothing (we had been compelled by this time to leave our cars and guns behind us) the train went forward again. In Oioviannaya the Soviet sent delegates for a further inspection of our train, and after another tedious delay we satisfied them and were permitted to leave.

Now our train arrived at the Gobi Desert, about 200 miles from the Chinese border. It was our purpose now to get into China and beyond the surveillance of the Russian Soviets. Here our resolve was taken—the firm determination to break through at all costs. The Russians were strongly inclined to prevent our departure and were of a unit on this point until our interpreter provoked a dissension between them by his eloquent argument. So well did he succeed that the Russians sent one of their number back to Tselita for instructions. All this time we were detained under close watch.

Back to Belgium to Fight.

It so happened that in the absence of the envoy our interpreter and the leader of the Russians discovered they had been students at Liege University. That gave a common bond of sympathy between them that greatly aided our cause. In consequence, one of our officers, the interpreter and the Russian commissary left for the Chinese frontier on a locomotive under the white flag. To our great joy next day a train was sent out by the Chinese government and we were permitted to go forward to the shelter of the envoy our interpreter and the other officers, the interpreter and the Russian commissary left for the Chinese frontier on a locomotive under the white flag. To our great joy next day a train was sent out by the Chinese government and we were permitted to go forward to the shelter of the envoy our interpreter and the other officers, the interpreter and the Russian commissary left for the Chinese frontier on a locomotive under the white flag. 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