

**MY FOURTEEN MONTHS
AT THE FRONT**
Continued from first page

what became of him in the end, but the last of his stunts that I heard about was this: There was a big seventeen inch howitzer doing us an awful lot of damage. It was out of range of our guns, and we were much put about as to how to get it out of action.

The "mad major" went out alone in his aeroplane and took with him just one bomb, a hundred pounder. He located the gun he wanted while flying at an altitude of 3,000 feet. He got right over the position and stopped his engine. He did a nose dive to within 400 feet of the gun. Then he dropped his bomb and blew the thing to atoms. He got back safely, but the planes of his machine were riddled with bullets.

Soon after this we were on the move, and, as it happened, we went from bad to worse. The first day we entered a little place that was unoccupied by troops, and we decided to spend the night there. The Germans must have heard of our arrival promptly, for before we had been there an hour shells began to drop in on us.

The officer I was driving was with me at the time the first one burst. It landed in the back yard of the house we were in, and the force of the explosion sent us all in a heap on the floor. The officer decided that we would get out of the place and find some nice, quiet spot to spend the night. We left at once and went about five miles down the road until we came to a field ambulance. We found that they had some spare stretchers, so we decided to stay there. The officer's servant carried stretchers in for all of us, and after having something to eat we went right to sleep, as we were tired out.

I don't believe we had been asleep more than an hour when a shell landed in that field ambulance! It tore through the roof and burst in the room next to us, killing and wounding eighteen men who had already been wounded once. I got up in a hurry, but found that the officer was before me, and when I reached the car he was making himself comfortable in the tonneau. I took my waterproof sheet and blankets and made myself a bed on the cobbles under the car. I slept like a log until it began to rain, and then I got up in disgust and sat up the rest of the night in the driving seat.

The next day we stopped in a little village called Pradelles, the place where the Germans had stood a priest up against the wall of his own church and shot him because he wouldn't give them the information they wanted.

Across from this church was a little "estaminet," where I went to buy a bottle of wine to have with my dinner. You can imagine my surprise when the Frenchwoman in charge called me an "English pig" and said that she would sell nothing to the English. I told her what I thought of her, and she told me what she thought of me.

She said the English were thieves, murderers and other nice things and informed me also that the only true gentlemen in the world were the Prussians. She certainly had me aroused, and I was going to arrest every one I could find in the house until her daughter came in.

She saw at once how things were and led the old lady upstairs and then explained that the Germans had taken her two youngest sisters away and that since that time her mother had been insane.

It was outside of Pradelles that we ran into the Germans and had a long distance scrap. We were not strong, and we didn't know how strong they were, so we were not pressing them very hard until some re-enforcements came up. I think they were in the same position, for they didn't try to get to close quarters. So we kept at it all afternoon until at night the Germans retired, and we camped a little farther on and waited for our main body to come up. Our casualties numbered only about twenty dead, and we buried them in the churchyard before we left.

I passed through Pradelles about two months later, and I went into the churchyard where those chaps were buried. The people of the village have set little white crosses at the head of each grave. On each cross are the name, number and regiment of the soldier lying below, and under that is "Mort de la Champ d'Honneur." It was a most thoughtful thing for those poor peasants to do.

It was in a village called Outraesteene, quite near Pradelles, that I first saw the Prince of Wales. He was with Sir John French, and they were reviewing a brigade that hadn't been in the country very long. He is a nice looking fellow, but very boyish in appearance. He is liked by the men and quite often will go and sit among them and talk to them.

Soon after this I received orders to prepare for a two day journey in the car. I didn't know where I was to go until the night before I was to start.



The Prince of Wales, With Sir John French, Reviewing a Brigade.

and then I was told that I was to go to Paris to get an officer who was waiting for me there. Of course I was delighted, for I hadn't been in any large city for a long time.

Paris is more than 200 miles from where we were then, and my orders were to make it in one day. While it was a long journey, I felt that it would be well worth it, so I set out with a light heart. At Eilers I hit the main Paris road, and it was glorious. There is no speed limit for a dispatch car, and you bet I was flying my blue and white flag that day. Straight down through St. Venant, St. Pol, Doullens and Amiens I flew, and about 6:30 I came to the outskirts of Paris. I was surprised on entering the capital to find so few British soldiers. I knew that we had several permanent bases in the vicinity, and I expected to find the place swarming with Tommies.

CHAPTER VI.

Bomb Throwing Perilous Work.

SOON found the reason for Tommy's absence, for as soon as I left the car and started out on foot I was continually being stopped and asked who I was, what I was, where did I come from, what was I doing and what was I going to do. Being on special duty. Had a pass in my possession which bore the French stamp as well as the British. This pass would take me anywhere in France or Belgium, and a flash of it, coupled

with the words "special duty," permitted me to go where I pleased. Had I been without it I would have been arrested about every ten minutes.

The defenses in Paris against hostile aircraft attack were a revelation to me. I never saw anything more thorough in my life. Any of the more venturesome Germans who care to make an attempt against Paris are in for a hot reception.

Two days after my arrival the officer whom I was to take back to the front said he was ready to start and to prepare the car for the return journey on the morrow. The ride back was uneventful, but when we arrived we found that the headquarters were going to be moved north across the Belgian frontier the next day. We were to take over the job of holding the town of Poperinghe, which the French had been occupying. We were then taking over more front than we had been holding previously.

At this time the roads were in a terrible condition. They are made of cobbles in the middle, but either side is nothing but mud, so after a few days' rain if one slips off the stones he finds himself in a regular quagmire and will sink in over the axle.

We took Poperinghe from the French, and while we were moving in they were moving out, and the two lines of transport, each going over the same road, resulted in some fine mixups.

Eventually we arrived all right and found that this place was much better than Hazebrouck, which we had left. Hazebrouck was the junction of seven railroad lines and consequently a popular target for German aircraft.

There was every facility for quartering the men and horses, good offices for the staff, and we were much nearer the firing line at Poperinghe. In my car I have made the run from our trenches to Poperinghe in less than twenty minutes, so you can see that we were not very far behind the actual fighting.

Leland B. Erwin

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