

## MY FOURTEEN MONTHS

### AT THE FRONT

Continued from first page

right, so I decided to take a chance on the rest of it holding together until I got my officer through the city anyway. I pulled around in front of the headquarters, and the officer jumped in.

It seemed as though the whole city was being torn from its very foundations so terrible was the din. The

houses were going down in every quarter, and on the face of it it looked like pure madness to go through at all. Wagons, horses, autos, bicycles, were piled up everywhere. Men, women and children, soldiers and civilians were lying dead and dying in every street. I should say that about 50 per cent of the shells were landing in the Grand place, and the buildings were falling all around and practically covering up the road.

We had a straight run of about 200 yards before we got to the worst part of it, and I certainly saw to it that the old bus made the most of what she had. We were going at a pretty good pace when we hit the main square of the city, but it seemed to me that we were just crawling.

There is a sharp corner as one turns out of the square, and I knew it would be impossible to twist her around it at the pace we were going, so I tried a stunt I had read about racing drivers doing on the hairpin curves. I gave her more power, jammed on the brake, and we skidded around on two wheels. We were between the devil and the deep sea, and I felt that no chances we could take were too long considering the fix we were in.

The bacon boxes held together all right, and we got out of it without being touched, but it was more by pure luck than anything else. What got my goat was that during the whole thing the officer sat there with a cigar in his mouth and a monocle in his eye and didn't even look as though he was nervous.

When we got back to our own headquarters he said "Thank you" and remarked to another officer that "one d—d fool" had escaped wearing a wooden uniform that day "by the breadth of a gnat's eyelash." I presume he was referring to me, and I agree with him heartily. Believe me, that ride did me out of a year's growth.

I certainly pitied our transport men during this time as I never pitied them before. They could not help being nervous while waiting to go through the city, which they had to do, as there was no other way for them to go. The ambulances, too, suffered heavily.

All night the bombardment continued with unabated fury, yet our supplies went through the city to the men just the same.

The next morning I was ordered to report in my car to a young officer of the intelligence department. The officer told me that he had orders to go through Ypres to a little place called Potijze and to report himself to the divisional commander there.

There was absolutely no other way to get to Potijze except through Ypres, and you may be sure we were feeling none too pleasant about the prospects. We had to go slowly, even at the start, as the road was filled with all kinds of transports. After we got through the village of Vlamertinghe we found the going a little better, and we got along faster. The road from Vlamertinghe to Ypres is almost straight, and one can see right into the city before one comes within two kilometers of it.

As we swung into this straight stretch I noticed several German aeroplanes over the city, and it was plain to be seen that they were dropping bombs. This time they were dropping petrol bombs, and the instant they exploded they would spray petrol all over the place and a flame would shoot up into the air. In this way they were setting fire to the city.

It was a sight that I shall never forget. The shells were falling just the same, and, what with the ground fairly trembling from the terrific explosions, the smoke from the bursting shells and burning houses, the flames and dust that filled the air, it made a scene that would need a Dante to describe and do it justice.

The thought that we were to attempt the passage through all this was terrifying. An awful fear, almost panic, seemed to grip me, and I longed to jump from that car and hide my face from the flaming hell which seemed to be stretching out its tentacles of fire to draw us into its gaping maw.

I felt weak all over and was wet with cold perspiration. I looked at the officer, almost praying that he would give the order to stop, but even as I looked I knew there was no chance of that. He was as white as death, but there was a look of determination on his face, and the clenched teeth and set jaws gave no promise of his backing down.

I think the bulldog grit that he was showing helped me, for I resolved that, while I might get so weak as to be unable to drive that car, I would stick by him as long as I could hold out. And he certainly showed that he was "white" clear through, for he told me to stop a moment. I did, and he got out of the car.

"Robinson," he said, "I've just been thinking that there won't be any need for you to come any further. It is a rotten business, and as there are ambulances going up all the time, I can get a lift in one and will stand just as much chance of getting through as though you were to take me. I don't believe in any one taking unnecessary risks, and in this case it would be risking an extra man and a car, too, and I don't mind going on in an ambulance the least bit."

I thought it was just about one of the finest things I had ever heard of a man doing, and I want to say right here that such things as this are typical of the true British officer. There are men holding commissions who couldn't do such a thing as this to save their necks, but they are the "pikers" found in every country, "temporary gentlemen," as they are called by the real men who are obliged to associate with them.

My officer's generosity did not help me any, but I appreciated it more than I can tell. I had orders to take him to Potijze and to bring him back, and if I stayed behind and anything happened to him I would be worse off than if I were lying beneath the ruins of Ypres.

I explained this to him and said that I would rather take him. God knows whether it was true or not, but I said it, anyway. While we were talking another car passed us, and as my officer jumped in I resolved to follow the man who was now ahead of me.

I noticed as the car passed us that there were two officers in it. One, a major, was sitting beside the driver and the other, a colonel, was in the back. The car was about 200 yards ahead of us, and I let him keep about that much ahead all the way up to the outskirts of the city. As we got nearer the noise became deafening and the smoke began to bother us too.

Before one enters the city proper one must cross a double line of railroad tracks. The machine ahead of us had just crossed these when a big fifteen inch shell screamed over and burst just beside the car in front. From where we were it looked as if the car and its occupants must have been wiped off the face of the earth.

I stopped our car to wait until the smoke cleared away before going on. It seemed like hours before we saw the spot again, but when the smoke was finally gone you can imagine our surprise at seeing the car turned completely around and coming toward us.

The chauffeur was gathering speed all the time, and when he passed us his car was going at a fairly decent pace. We had time enough, though, to see one of the most horrible sights that I witnessed during the whole time I was at the front.

The car itself was in awful condition. The two rear doors were torn away, the body was full of jagged holes, the front and rear mud guards and the running board on one side were torn off and the wind screen had been swept away.

The major, who was sitting with the driver, had his head and the whole side of his body torn away, and the rest of him was leaning on the driver, who was being covered with the blood which was gushing from this awful thing beside him. The colonel, who had been sitting in the back of the car, was curled over on the seat, and his head and part of his shoulder were lying in a pool of blood in the bottom of the car. To me the most terrible part of it was the driver. He was as white as a ghost, and his eyes seemed to be sticking an inch out of their sockets. His teeth were bared, and his whole face was twisted into the most hellish expression one could imagine.

"Good God, he's gone mad!" cried my officer. And I was sure of it. The officer ordered me to turn around and follow him and to catch him if possible. The car was away down the road by the time I got turned around, but I set out after him for all I was worth. I gained on him, too, but as I went through Vlamertinghe he was just stopping in front of the field dressing station there.

The orderly rushed out when he



I Resolved to Follow the Man Who Was Now Ahead of Me.

heard the car, and I heard that driver say, "For God's sake take this thing away from me!"

It was horrible beyond description. I saw that poor fellow a couple of weeks later, and he was bad enough to look at even then. He was walking around alone all right except that his face was continually twisting and twitching horribly. His nerve was completely gone, and he was discharged almost at once. For all the shock he had his was a miraculous escape.

When we saw that the driver was being taken care of we started back to make our attempt to pass through the burning city.

Continued Next Week.

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