

OBSERVATION BALLOONS - SHERLOCKS OF FRONT

Watchful Eyes Quickly Detect Any Unusual Event Behind Enemy's Lines—Parachutes Handy if Big Bag is Punctured

BY AN AIR SERVICE CAPTAIN

Hardly a train moves within five miles back of the German trenches, or a squadron of men comes up for relief, or digging is begun on a new series of emplacements, but a pair of keen eyes, steadily watching from great observation balloons just behind the Allied front, takes notice of it. Every movement, every activity, is registered until a schedule of the usual enemy routine is built up and the average amount of motion known. Any departure from this schedule is suspicious. A train running late or with more cars than usual, men in the trenches being relieved too frequently, new roads or emplacements being built too earnestly give the first hint that "Eritz," across the line, is up to something.

A keen balloonist notes any of these changes, and at once telephones down to the ground. "An extra train of six cars passed — at 10.40." Half a mile farther down the line another pair of eyes reports, "Large convoy moving up to front, range so-and-so." Still a little farther down another suspicious circumstance is noted, until the General Staff down below, assembling all these straws, foresees the beginning of a big offensive across the line. Counter measures are taken, batteries directed, convoys and trenches smashed up, and the enemy's plans thrown askew.

Offensive on "Our Side"

Possibly, however, the offensive is to come from the balloonist's own side. The observer ascends with full knowledge of all the details of action, emboldened, probably, to move up much nearer the German lines than usual, in the belief that the enemy's artillery will be driven off. The opening bombardment is a time of ceaseless and vital work, spotting shot by shot, watching for new enemy batteries to open up, moving the barrage fire back and forth with the advance of the troops. Any error here may send the steel wall into the observer's own trenches or cost scores of lives later by failure to make a complete demolition of the enemy's defense.

"Hostile airplane overhead" is apt to break in through the telephone wire at any moment. A German aviator, more adventurous than his fellows, is swooping down, perhaps under a protecting cloud, in an attempt to put the observer's watchful eyes. The observer makes ready his parachute, the machine guns on the ground below click off a rain of lead at the invader, and the windless men start bringing the big envelope to ground with all possible speed. Perhaps the invader is driven off; perhaps the balloon is stricken into flames and the balloonist forced to parachute to the ground. In either case it is all a part of the day's work which adds adventure and romance to the responsible work done by the balloonist.

Time Brings Its Reward

Such is, briefly—very briefly—the duty and work of the balloon observer. Calm, patient, ever watchful, he rides far above the ground as the great envelope sways on its long cable. Hours pass, perhaps, but finally, as inevitably as fate, the reward comes. A single flash, a slight movement across the line, and another tiny claw of the German eagle reveals itself for the Allied artillerymen beneath.

The vital importance and development of this work has hardly as yet been suspected in America. "Over there" balloon observation has become a science which, while perhaps less spectacular than airplane observation, is none the less essential. The balloonist, riding steadily for hours at a time with the German lines spread out before him, and in direct telephone communication

with the ground, with his batteries, and with other balloons, amasses a maze of details and accurate knowledge which his more vicarious and longer-winged air brother cannot hope to secure.

The United States is building up such a force literally from nothing. Last November the old field out West was overgrown with weeds, the gas reservoir out of repair, the whole place stagnant. In the last few months, however, the field has been cleared and brought back to activity, the air once again is filled with big, friendly balloons, and keen-faced men are being trained for immediate service abroad. Already the first American detachments are in



"Peeps at Germany! All 'board!"

France, the vanguard of a large American balloon force which ultimately will be as complete as any other branch of the Army.

High in Air for Hours

Few of us here realize that the big envelopes commonly ascend as high as 4,500 feet and that they stay for hours poised in mid-air, to perform the responsible duties assigned them. Usually the ascent is made anywhere from two-and-a-half to four-and-a-half miles from the enemy's front-line trenches, depending on the power of his artillery, the direction of the wind, and the activity of the salient. In any case the observer has a circle of vision of about eight miles, and is able to pierce far back into the enemy's lines. The most detailed and up-to-the-minute maps, the finest kind of field glasses, and instant communication with the ground make the balloonist a master of everything spread out before his gaze.

When the American troops are preparing to go "over the top" an unusual large number of balloons will be concentrated as secretly as possible in masked camp in order not to betray what is about to take place. At the appointed moment they will take the air and divide up every detail of the battle amongst them. Some will record the heavy artillery fire, shot by shot; others will see to it that the work of demolition behind the enemy's lines is effective; others will guard against any reinforcements or traps.

As the troops go over they will check closely the German batteries, the shift-

object or of percussion shells endeavoring to blow up the windless below and set the big bag adrift in a wind blowing across the German lines. Naturally, every precaution in the way of protecting airmen and anti-aircraft guns are on hand, but even at that constant vigilance is essential.

Selected Men Observers

Men who are being selected as observers, and who will all be commissioned as officers, should have physical endurance, acute vision, and appreciation of distances and localities, and, above all, a sense of responsibility and thoroughness in keeping with the importance of the work assigned to them. They may be somewhat older than aviators—preferably from 25 to 35—and of somewhat less severe physical requirements. A special training is given in winds, military observation, meteorology, and ballooning before a cadet is given his officer's commission and his post above the trenches in France, in order that the high standards prevailing throughout the air service generally may be upheld.

For the enlisted men who will form the squadrons, gas-works employees, rope riggers, cordage workers, and mechanics are especially fitted. The number of men trained through their civilian occupations to do this delicate and highly specialized work is limited indeed, and the difficulty of establishing contact with them is great. Nevertheless the forces are being brought together with gratifying rapidity and give every promise of becoming an efficient part of the air establishment which is to help the Allies blind the German forces in France.

BASE PORTS BID SHIPS TO HUSTLE

New Docks and Tracks Put An End to Terminal Congestion

BIG CHANGE IN SIX MONTHS

Bulk of Stevedore Work Is Now Handled By Negro Troops and War Prisoners

"Keep sending those ships along—we can handle them!"

That is the message which Uncle Sam's hired men, up to their waists in work at our ports of debarkation in France, can now send back to their fellow workers on the other side of the duck-pond.

Six months ago they couldn't have sent such a message, and been truthful about it. They did send, "Keep sending those ships," but the people on the other side, working from more ports than there were ports available on this side, choked these particular ports to the point of congestion. For a while there, not even twenty-four hour shifts seemed at all availing against the tie-up of war materials that seemed fairly aching to get at Germany.

There was nothing left to do but to enlarge the ports, to make the docks bigger, to build more docks with storage warehouses to care for the overflow—yes, and to dredge the harbors themselves, so they would accommodate more ships and bigger ones. It was done—done so thoroughly and so well that now these base ports are able, actually, to handle more tonnage than is now coming to them, be the tonnage in terms of men or in terms of supplies.

Railroad facilities, too, for handling the men and supplies have been doubled in certain base ports during the time the Americans have been there on the job, in order that there may be no pile-up on and around the waterfront. But even that has not been enough.

Build Auxiliary Port

With an eye to future needs, American engineers have built up in one instance what is practically an auxiliary port of their own, utilizing a big tract of land some miles back of the port itself. On that tract is a huge basin, into which ships may be towed and unloaded, and by the side of which dozens of parallel spur tracks are being laid.

This laying out of yards to the rear of the port proper avoids congestion of freight, and makes it easier to make up supply trains bound for the interior. Cars can be filled from barges brought into the basin, and sped on their way on the tracks adjacent to it; or, in case cars are being loaded rapidly at the port

itself, they can easily be shunted out to the spur tracks in the rear of the port and there assembled into trains.

It has been a big job to effect all this, but the resultant saving of time and elimination of confusion has made it well worth while. To keep the works going, now that they are set up, takes a big force. Where a small contingent of the Q.M.C. was able to take care of the traffic last July, to superintend the unloading and distributing of the ships' contents, a whole department, that of railway transportation, now has the work in charge, and is kept eternally at it.

Negroes From Our Levees

To man the ports, to do the heavy heaving, a numerous force is required. Huskies from the waterfronts of the Middle Atlantic and Southern States have been brought over in large numbers, the bulk of the work being done by regiments of colored soldiers, accustomed to similar work on the levees. All the able-bodied citizens of the port towns who want such employment have gotten it at wages that made them rub their eyes and say "Great impossible!" Women, too, who care to do like work are welcomed; and as if that were not enough, a sizeable body of German prisoners turns out in the early morning, to load and unload until late at night.

A DOUGHBOY'S DICTIONARY

Commissioned Officer.—One who has to be saluted.
 Non-Com.—One who does not have to be saluted, but who has to be obeyed on the job.
 Private.—The only man in the army who enjoys any real liberty.
 Cook.—The one man (with the exception of the mess sergeant) who can spill the beans.
 Mess Sergeant.—See Cook.
 Second Cook.—See Mess Sergeant.
 Third Cook.—See Cook.
 K.P.—See Top Sergeant, to find out what you've done to deserve getting it.
 Sailor.—A person wearing a non-camouflaged blue uniform, commonly supposed to be having a helluva good time sailing round and marrying pretty Irish and French girls in every port, and to be getting better grub than is obtainable in an army mess.
 Aviator.—A college graduate turned trapeze performer from choice; in other words, a nut.
 Red Cross Man.—A bird who'd like like the devil to be in the army, but can't get in.
 Red Cross Woman.—An angel in disguise.

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MEN FROM RANKS SOON TO GET BARS

Don't Mention Plattsburg to Any Candidate at A.E.F. Training School

Somewhere in France, at a place which, it is permissible to say, is noted for the rigors of its winters and the mud of its springs, the first training camp for officers in the A.E.F. is rounding into its third and concluding month. In a few weeks—about the time the now vanishing foot of snow is followed by the now materializing foot of mud—the several hundred men who have been studying there the latest intricacies of modern warfare will receive commissions as second lieutenants. They will be the first sizeable group of officers from the ranks of the American Army in France.

Since last December these men have been plodding through snow on wintry days, practicing the niceties of the latest evolutions in attack formations, tutored by experienced British, French, and American officers they have learned most of the theory and much of the practice of modern warfare.

A Hard School

A queer sort of a school is this first training camp—and a hard one. In an old French military post the men are quartered, in the shadow of defensive works built by the Germans so long ago that history is uncertain of the date. But the student soldiers have been too busy to give these and other historic objects more than passing attention. Eight hours drill a day, two hours study every evening, reveille at 6 a. m. in a snow-bank seven days a week—these are some of the things that have occupied their minds.

"Plattsburg?" say the men at this camp. "Why, Plattsburg was a summer vacation in comparison with this place. We didn't have any Saturday night hops or Sundays in the city or society matrons opening their homes to us and relatives coming around in automobiles to bring us cakes and candy. No, sir. What with the weather, and the work, and everything, this place has taken—well, you know what war is, so there's no use talking."

Whatever have been the trials of becoming an officer in France is made up for, however, in the results obtained. Inured to cold and certain practicable degrees of privation, thoroughly drilled and instructed, the men at the camp, which has been named the Army Candidates' School, have been, unofficially at least, described as the finest body of men in France. They will become second lieutenants—platoon leaders—in divisions already here.

The commissions of this class is par-

LAWS OF FRANCE BALK U. S. CUPID

Intending American Bridesgrooms Must Send For Birth Certificates

Cupid and the law, never amicable friends, have clashed again and the conflict is regarding scores of weddings. If reports be true, of French maids and American soldiers, law demands birth certificates and Cupid, who is not of such technicalities, is perturbed and, temporarily at least, nonplussed.

Cabled stories to the United States have told that many Americans had already married in France, news which, it is said, did not work for the peace of mind of the "girl back home." But the number of such marriages is actually small for the reason that before a marriage is performed in France, the birth certificates of both parties must be produced, and as the War Department thoughtlessly did not include birth certificates in its list of "necessities that every soldier should carry," the *soldats américains* to a man arrived in France unprepared for nuptials.

Some of the Americans wrote or cabled and have received sworn copies of their birth certificates, and more have them on the way. But there are many instances where it has been impossible for doughboys to obtain records of their births, and they, as they say, with the four kings said, are out of luck with Cupid.

PLENTY OF ROOM AT AIX

Leave Center in No Danger of Being Overcrowded

"I dowanna go to this Aix place. Me for a town where there's lots of room and where the whole Army won't follow me."

Room, however, is the strong point of Aix-les-Bains and its 70 hotels. It's a small town, just as Newport, Bar Harbor, and Lake Placid are when they're not entertaining half the United States. But if everyone in Aix lived in hotels, which everyone does, the whole population wouldn't fill all the dozen registers. With the American population of the town remaining constant at a certain number, the place of those departing being daily filled by newly arriving *permissonnaires*, there will be room enough for every visitor to engage a whole suite if he cares to. Aix, accustomed in before-the-war days to providing accommodations for as many as 70,000 guests, isn't going to get flustered at the prospect of entertaining a few thousand Americans.

JUST A PICTURE

It's a snapshot, just a snapshot of the girl I left behind.

With a background of a neatly trellised vine:
 Yet of all the so-called comforts that are given us, I find
 That the best is that wee photograph of mine.
 For her sweet face calms the terror of the vigil in the mist,
 And I seem to hear her voice so softly ask,
 "You'll come back when all is over?"
 Then I grimly clench my fist,
 Turning once again, strong-hearted,
 To my task.

It's a tattered, faded picture, is that photograph of her.
 For it's traveled some three thousand miles and more;
 It's all crumpled up and wrinkled, and at best it's quite a blur.
 But it surely keeps me solid for this war.
 For I've seen the fearful havoc that the Boches' hosts have made,
 And I know that if our line should wilt, they'd be
 Down upon us without mercy, hacking through with cruel blade.
 To wreak vengeance on our lov'd ones 'cross the sea.

Can I think of her in thralldom? Can I think of her as prey
 Of some spurred and sabred demon of a Hun?
 Can I falter in my duty to defend her night and day
 Till the menace is removed, the vict'ry won?
 One last look—I put her picture back—the section's falling in
 For to go and storm the placement on the hill!

I am summoned to fare with them through the night of toil and din
 "You'll come back when all is over?"
 Yes—I will!

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