ALONG THE FIGHTING FRONT FROM SOISSONS TO BELOW THE MARNE

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IN its first drive an American platoon, after advancing several kilometers, came into possession of a building which had been a German regimental headquarters. Personal effects scattered about, a half-cooked meal, maps and documents on tables and in racks told of the precipitate departure of the commander and his staff.

In the room which had been the office of the commandant was a dead dog. Attached to his collar was a metal tube. In the tube was a message calling for assistance from a German machine gun nest which, at the time of reading, had long since fallen into American hands.

The dog, trained as a message bearer, had been dispatched with the call for help, had been struck by a shell fragment, as was evidenced by a wound in his side, and had struggled on to the headquarters, only to find it abandoned. He will be remembered and respected by the American platoon as one servant of the Kaiser who nobly did his duty and died.

A private of the buck species was watching a plane duel in the skies.

"Quite a sight," said a voice beside him, and his head nearly dropped off when he saw that it belonged to the general commanding the division.

There is a story in that same division, about the same general, which describes how he was seen one day recently walking along and chatting with a top sergeant. This shows that a use has at last been found for top sergeants.

That division did its share and paid its price for the doing, when it helped to drive the Hun back across the Marne. That night someone softly opened the general's door, and then as softly closed it. And the word went around that he sat with his face buried in his hands, and his frame quivering with sobs.

A long line of German prisoners, four abreast, in which were some Germans who admitted riding frontward not many weeks ago in trains bearing the placard, "Nach Paris," marched southward along a dusty French road in charge of a detachment of Americans from the unit which had captured them. The population of each succeeding village turned out to see the procession, watching it for the most part in silence, but always with a smile for the American guards.

There was one diminutive French soldier who stood exuberantly at a corner where the line turned.

"*Tout droit à Paris*," he explained, "tout droit"—which is the French road direction for straight ahead.

But the Germans couldn't see the joke.

Burly, dirty, whiskered, all in, but enthusiastic, a sergeant recounted the exploits of his platoon to his colonel.

His was a tale of the Boche infantry met and beaten, of machine gun nests cleaned up at the point of the bayonet, of Germans killed and Germans captured.

"Makes a fellow feel pretty good, doesn't it?" observed the colonel.

"Yes, and it makes a fellow feel pretty glad that he's on this side, too, sir," said the sergeant.

An M.P. was standing in the doorway of the hotel de ville. It had been a quiet day, as days go a little way behind the lines. And just then the quietness came to an abrupt end, for a shell landed outside the hotel de ville, and the force of it knocked the M.P. down.

The M.P. got up and sniffed. He smelled gas.

The gas alarm was the bell in the village church. The M.P. ran to the church. While he was running another shell landed close enough to send him sprawling again.

Once more he got up, and this time made the church without any further Charlie Chaplin incidents. And he began to ring the bell like all getout. He hadn't been ringing it long before a shell hit the belfry, put the bell out of business, and blew the M.P. all the way back to the altar.

He got up, ran out of the church, stumbled on a man who had been stunned and took him into a dugout.

It was all in the day's work. And to prove how very workaday it all was, the M.P.'s name happens to have been Smith—Private Smith.

All kinds of things happen to helmets, and almost as many kinds of things happen to canteens. A cavalryman who was relaying messages had a piece of shrapnel relayed to him that flattened his canteen like a pancake. He was wearing the canteen on his hip at the time, so he didn't mind the water's running down all over his pants.

"And then I ran into some gas," he said. "We got through it all right, both of us. Of course it didn't bother the horse, because he's got more room for it in his lungs."

Easy come, easy go.

One of the German regiments opposite the Americans, the members of which are, by this time, probably listed as "missing, believed prisoner," had just been paid when the curtain went down on their activity in *la guerre*.

Exactly 48 hours after the Germans marched before their paymaster and got their pay, they marched before an American officer, who relieved them of the modest collection of marks, pfennigs, and other things they had received.

American regulations for the handling of prisoners provide that all money shall be taken from them and placed in a fund which is devoted to the common needs of prisoners.

Rules specify that no PG shall be deprived of his personal effects—Iron Crosses and the like — but almost any captured German is willing to sacrifice anything he has for real tobacco.

When one Boche arrived before the examining officer and was told to empty his pockets, he laid out five partly filled sacks of American makin's, and not much else. For it he had traded off an Iron Cross, his helmet, a trench knife, and all the buttons he could spare.

A certain American private wasn't satisfied, however, with any modest, vest pocket souvenirs of the battle. Nothing would do for him, he explained, but a German machine gun.

After his unit was relieved he went to a salvage pile, selected a weapon in good order, and carried it, in addition to his full pack and rifle, all the long, weary kilometers back to *repos*.

It was not until after he had arrived that he discovered it was a French and not a German gun he had seized. We won't repeat his remarks when he made the discovery.

The composition of the perfect M.P. is as follows: Suspicion, 90 per cent; more suspicion, 10 per cent; total, 100 per cent and then some. All men, according to the M.P. at the front, are created equally suspicious characters. Rank, or the lack of it, mean absolutely nothing.

If you have any doubts, you can ask a certain French lieutenant colonel who is attached to a certain American division. He was going along a road toward the front when an M.P. stopped him. Most people do get stopped.

The colonel tried to explain, but the M.P. simply couldn't see him, and the colonel was at the end of his wits and his language. As a last resort he sent for his orderly, who happened to be a little Irishman of the combative variety common to the A.E.F.

The little Irishman came flying over the roads, via motor, and cleared his superior in short order. But if it hadn't been for the little Irishman, there is no telling where the French colonel would be now.

All of which goes to prove that no officer is a hero to his dog-robber.

A cavalryman who was doing Paul Revere work between a headquarters and the line tied his horse to a tree and proceeded on foot to his destination, where things were rather hot.

While he was gone things began to grow rather hot around that tree, too. He has pretty good evidence that they did, anyway. For when he returned, there was a gaping hole in the earth where the horse had stood. A bit of rope was dangling from the tree.

Be he a private or a general, "writing home" usually occupies the first leisure minutes of a soldier just out of action.

Parked near the headquarters of a unit back from the line was an impressive limousine, and in it sat a major general, pounding the keys of a small portable typewriter held on his lap. He had sought the privacy of his automobile to write home.

The Q.M. Corps has fallen down on the job. It is rather tough to have to admit this, but it is proved by the fact that the mahogany Louis Quatorze writing desks ordered for individual soldiers with brass studded legs—the desks, of course—have never shown up.

So everybody uses the next best thing—a 20-gallon gasoline can, preferably empty. It sometimes rolls off your knees when you are trying to write on it, but otherwise it's O.K.

When he reached the gas hospital he was in a state of extraordinarily good humor.

"What are you so happy about? they asked him.

"That's easy," he replied between smiles. "I'm going to get some clean underwear."

How much stuff does a Yank take into the line? It all depends on the Yank.

In one squad you will see a man carrying full pack, including extra shoes and overcoat, and wearing a whole string of corned Willie cans much as a Fiji Islander wears a loin cloth. Another man in the same squad will go up minus his blouse, and carrying only a blanket, gas mask and helmet.

Nothing makes an American soldier prouder of his organization than being in action with it. Any man up front will tell you that his platoon is the best in the company, that his company is the best in the regiment, and his regiment is the best in the Army—that the artillery of his division is infallible and the officers are unbeatable. The colonel always comes in for praise.

"Our colonel," said one doughboy, "may be stout and not much for height, but you ought to soldier under him. He's a regular fellow. Why, he's the kind of a guy that if he was in the ranks would make a good private!"

Which is about the highest tribute a private can pay to his colonel.

A French officer stood on a hilltop south of the Marne and trained his glasses on the field where Yank and Boche were having it out.

As he looked he smiled. For through the smoke he could see doubled Yankee fists finding their desired target on the tips of Hun noses and the points of Hun jaws.

He belonged to that five per cent slice of the Army that doesn't smoke. His unit was stationed in a wood, and as he had all the Yankee's skill with a pocket knife, he whittled himself a pipe in his spare time. Now he smokes. If the chance of war had stationed him in a marble quarry, he would probably have turned into a sculptor.

One of the regiments which took part in the "Soissons push" was relieved in the line just after nightfall, marched back, and established camp at the edge of a peaceful village. Early at 1 o'clock the next afternoon the soldiers awoke, partook of a late breakfast of coffee, bread and beans, and began to talk it over.

At 1:30 the bandmaster called his command together and marched it to headquarters to serenade the colonel. They started with "Over There," with the accent on "We won't be back till it's over." Everybody at headquarters sang the refrain, including the colonel.

"But," said the colonel, at the conclusion of the piece, "if you want to serenade somebody, serenade the men. Come on, and I'll go with you."

With the colonel marching at its head, the band made the round of the regiment, serenading each battalion in turn.

"This is my party," said the colonel, "for the best regiment of fighting men in the world."

The farther you get into France—in other words, the nearer you get to the front—the less French you hear. That explains why the headquarters troop top was discouraged.

"I've been in France three months," he said, "and I only know seven words of French. And I was in Mexico two months, and learned ten words of Spanish."

The colonel had led them into the fight, and it was the colonel's all-seeing eye which noticed that the little 18-year-old private had been gassed.

"Get back!" he shouted. "You've done your bit—get back!"

So the little private dutifully got back. On the way he passed a farm. In a shed were six Boches whom the fight had swept past without noticing.

Their hands went up in a jiffy. When the little private reported at the dressing station for treatment, the six were still with him.

Your M.P. must escort the prisoners to the rear, and there has been quite a lot of this job lately up Château-Thierry way. One captured lieutenant got quite a way down the road with a pistol hidden on him, and, in a moment of irritation at the gaying he was getting from 50 of his own men who were goose-stepping cheerfully into bondage with him, he took a pot shot at the M.P.

The M.P. was wounded, but not disabled, and a pistol duel followed; in another moment there was one less Prussian junker in this vale of tears. The outcome was greeted with unaffected delight by all the other prisoners, who were revelling in the first chance to speak their minds that they had had in all their days.

One burly and bristling examplar of German militarism with captain's knots on his shoulders and an iron cross on his chest was included in a recent bag of prisoners. He was indignant, to say the least, at the time of his capture, and the mood intensified as he was marched back to the intelligence officer.

He hadn't heard the questioning officer speak more than five words of German before he burst into the conversation.

"Do you allow privates to call officers by their first names in this Army?" he demanded witheringly.

"Why?" asked the officer.

"Well, this pig," said the Boche, "called me Heinie every time he addressed me."

A German lieutenant came before the officer who was listing and tagging prisoners.

"What's your name?" he was asked.

"Johannes Jacobi."

"Any relation to Wilhelm Jacobi?" asked the American officer.

"A brother," said the Boche in surprise.

"Well, if you look around when you get there, you'll find him in the prisoners' pen. We got him, too."

The doughboys in the push south of Soissons have the greatest respect for the French tanks that went over the top with them and almost a love for their same little French operators. From the outset the Yanks and the tanks worked well together.

"The tank I was with saved my life five times," said one admiring soldier, "and if I ever run across the Frenchman who was operating the machine gun on the nigh side I'm going right up and kiss him French fashion, whiskers and all."

A lanky private was detailed to take a captured German artillery officer to regimental headquarters. He had progressed about half a mile when the American noticed that his charge was tearing up some papers he evidently didn't want to get into American hands and scattering the pieces along the road.

"Ain't you the cute cuss?" said the American. "Now you just go back and pick them all up."

The officer may not have understood the instructions, but he did the gestures which accompanied them, and he complied. He spent the next half-hour painstakingly gathering the fragments of a map which, when pasted together, showed all the Boche artillery positions in his sector.

If the open fighting that some of the troops are undergoing keeps up we will have to invent some new slang. They still speak of going over the top, but it isn't satisfactory because, as a matter of fact, there sometimes isn't any top for the reason that there isn't any trench—or not much of a trench, anyhow.

"Going out after 'em" has been used. Anybody got any other suggestions?

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