

AMERICA IN FRANCE

V-Soissons

The first three definite spots in France to leap into the story of the headlines in back-home newspapers as the habitats of American fighting troops in the line were Lorraine, Toul and Soissons.

Lorraine was the whole region in itself, and merely put "somewhere in France" in a good-sized corner without trapping it. Toul, though, a city and therefore a little more specific than a whole slice of country, represented a wide stretch of front and was itself so many kilometers behind the lines that its fame as a combat center was somewhat vicarious.

Soissons was not only a spot to be indicated by a pin on the map, but it was also very much in the war. Anybody who lived there between the first recoil of the Germans from the Marne to the Aisne—not quite four years ago and the capture of the city in the end of May of this year can tell you that.

Looking Down on City

Today, American troops on the northern end of the line that has overrun the Soissons-Chateau-Thierry road can look down into the city from the heights that dominate it. Yesterday—or to be exact, February 8, 1918—a New England division marched through Soissons to take its place in the line.

Soissons owns the unfortunate distinction of having been an age-long battle ground.

"All Gaul," wrote Caesar, "is divided into three parts," and his official Roman commentaries aver that the whole of Belgium inhabited one of the parts, and that Noviodunum was one of the Belgic strongholds. Noviodunum was Soissons. The latter name came from the Suevones, a battling branch of the Belgae who got their name written very much into Caesar's Commentaries.

Saw Roman Downfall in Gaul

But it is with Roman downfall rather than Roman domination that the name of Soissons is the more closely associated. For it was near Soissons that, in the year 486, the great king of the Merovingian Franks, Clovis, a youth of 20, obliterated in one fierce battle the last trace of Roman usurpation of Gaul—that is, France.

Clovis had the misfortune to be the father of four sons, among whom his newly-won realm had to be divided. The kingdom of the Franks became four kingdoms, and one of the four was the kingdom of Soissons, a broad region bounded roughly by the Seine, the Ouse and the lower Rhine.

Soissons, then, became early a name to conjure with. It was natural that, when the last half of the 12th and first half of the 13th centuries saw cathedral after cathedral towering into a proudly wrought and magnificent sky, they saw after the way the crozier and buttresses and spires of Rheims, Chartres, Langres, Bourges, and of Our Lady of Paris itself—it was natural that Soissons should be among them.

Nobles Repair to Soissons

It was to Soissons that, in 1616, the rebellious nobles repaired during their bitter quarrel between them and the government during the regency of Marie de Medicis. Louis XIII was king, but as he was only 15, he was not supposed to count. The nobles were proclaimed guilty of high treason. Soissons was besieged, and the downfall of the nobles seemed imminent when Cardinal Richelieu, the seller of the queen-mother and regent, was slain virtually at the young king's bidding. The nobles thereupon sped back to Paris, thinking that their power had returned to them. They were mistaken, but that is a story which has nothing to do with Soissons.

In 1870 Soissons became a fortified city, forming a part of the Ile de France. It was still a fortified city when, on September 11, 1870, the 13th corps of the German army stood before it and demanded its surrender.

"I will bury myself under the city walls," the commander-in-chief, General de Metz, said to his lieutenants, who had heard from their fathers and grandfathers the story of the three hours' pillage of the city in 1811 at the hands of a foreign enemy, backed up the commander in favoring resistance. Feeble though the garrison was.

Siege Lasts 37 Days

A methodical Prussian siege began. The Soissonais were counting on the arrival of Bazaine, who was getting himself into a trap at Metz. The city was already suffering when the real bombardment began on October 12. Forty-five heavy guns plowed up its streets and buildings, setting the flames, and kept up their deluge of shell for three days and nights. The surrender came on October 16, after 37 days' investiture.

The Prussians made prisoner in Soissons 99 officers and 4,633 men of the garrison, captured 128 cannon and made off with a strong box containing 192,000 francs. Soissons, when the peace conference sits after this war, will have a little grievance of its own to air.

A city does not have to be large to be famous, especially when its fame is spread by an official war report. "It is a tragic destiny for a little town when it was the glory of being cited in the communiques," especially when, engaged in the heart of battle it finds the right to its possession disputed by two adversaries; yesterday it was only a little town without a name; today the whole universe knows it. But it no longer exists."

Population Only 10,000

This is not quite true, perhaps, of Soissons. It is not large—its population, not counting the garrison, is a little more than 10,000—but it is perhaps too big to be wiped quite off the earth even in such a town-blasting war as the present.

No story of Soissons would be complete without some mention of the Soissonais bean.

Boston baked beans owe their fame to the way they are cooked, but the glory of the Soissons bean is more peculiarly local. It is grown nowhere else, either in France or the rest of the world. It is large, something like our own lima, and its succulent peculiarity is that, though large, it is still tender and can be cooked after a minimum of soaking.

If you fall to order at least one *ros-bif aux soissons* before you leave France, you will have one thing less to tell about.

Birthplace of Gallic Chiefs

Soissons was the birthplace of the Gallic chiefs Diviac and Galba, who caused Caesar considerable trouble; of the Merovingian kings Charibert, Chilperic, Gontran, Clotaire II and Sigebert; and of Guinnet, inventor of the smokeless, odorless unrefined oil lamp that still survives in the more ancient and humble French households.

And it is one of the thousand and one ironies of war that Soissons, with its proud history, should now have become a spot that men die for because it is the junction of three rail lines and half a dozen roads.

SONG OF THE GUNS

This is the song that our guns keep singing,
Here where the dark steel shines;
This is the song with their big shells winging
Over the German lines—

"We are taking you home by the shortest way,
We are taking you out of this blood and slime
To the land you left in an ancient day,
Where lost lanes wander at twilight time;
We are bringing you peace
In the swift release
From the grind where the gas drifts blur;
On a steel shot track
We are taking you back,
We are taking you back to Her!"

This is the song that our guns keep roaring
Out through the night and rain;
This is the song with their big shells soaring
Over the battered plain—

"We are taking you home by the only way,
By the only road that will get you back
To the dreams you left where the dark
And the night wind sang of a long lost day
We are bringing you rest
From the bitter test,
From the pits where the great shells whirled
Through the bloody loam,
We are taking you home,
We are taking you home to Her!"



WHEN THE WOUNDED COME IN

Two soldiers lay side by side in an evacuation hospital. One was a browned, red headed doughboy with a broken arm. The other's head and face were bandaged so that only his mouth and chin were visible.

The doughboy raised on his pillow and surveyed his neighbor.

"Say, what outfit are you out of, buddy?" he asked. "Your mug looks kind of familiar and I've been trying to place you."

"Company I, Infantry," said he of the bandaged head.

"Anything else the docer are you?"

"I," said the other, "am the captain."

There was a bandage over his eye.

"Anything else the matter with you?"

asked the surgeon who was standing beside his cot.

"Well," he drawled, "I got hit up near here the eye, but that ain't much."

"Yes," persisted the surgeon, "but did you get hit anywhere else?"

"No," he admitted, "but I came to think of it, he had a broken arm, a broken leg, and a bullet in his side."

He was smiling, but pale, when they wheeled him in—a black haired youth of 20—and he was still smiling when they tenderly transferred him to a cot after the doctors had counted seven machine gun bullet wounds, one in his ankle, three in his side and three in his chest.

When a Y.M.C.A. man brought a writing paper through the ward he took a piece and asked for a pencil. An attendant found him dead half an hour later with this beginning of a letter in his hand:

"Dear Mother:

"We made an attack on the Germans today and drove them five miles. I am in a hospital tonight. I was slightly wounded in the leg."

"Oh, I don't know," said the doctor. "I haven't been working so hard. I got up at four o'clock Monday morning. I had two hours' sleep Wednesday. I had three hours' sleep Friday, and Sunday morning at eight o'clock I went to bed and had a long rest—eight hours."

"Three wounds in five minutes—each of them worth a wound strike—was one infantryman's record."

"I got a machine gun bullet in the stomach," he explained. "It was about spent when it hit me. Fritz was shooting by indirect fire from long range. It just went through the side and struck me. I squeezed it out and was just putting it in my pocket when I got another in the leg. It went right in and right out and didn't hit the bone. I hadn't any more than begun to feel it when a piece of shrapnel hit me in the same leg."

"They certainly were after me, but none of the wounds amounts to anything. I'll be back for more in three weeks."

When you have 20-odd men, all wearing Red Cross pajamas and all lying in the same kind of cots, how are you going to tell a Frenchman from an American?

"The Frenchmen have mustaches and we haven't," explained one Yank, but it isn't always as simple as that.

Even the nurses sometimes get them mixed, and address a wounded Yank in French in perfectly good faith. And every time that happens, the doughboy gives himself away by trying to talk French back.

A boy who lay on his back with a leg wound at least has the satisfaction of knowing that he received it in action. He just missed getting one ahead of time—if you can say "just missed" of anybody in this war who doesn't get hit.

The Boche was trying to shell a battery but kept dropping them short. In this way a shell hit a house with Americans in it and wounded some of them. The rest got out and spent the night in the open.

The following night they went out into the open before the shelling was due to begin. Next morning they went back. They were pretty sure the house had been hit again, because they knew it had been there and found a few pieces of brick in the vicinity to prove it.

"Say, what on my blanket," said the boy who lay on his back. "Was a big hunk of the shell that did it."

Three of them had been in one little room for three days, an American, a Frenchman and an Italian. Came a Red Cross man on the afternoon of the third day.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the American. "You might get an interpreter. Tony and Gaston and I have been trading tobacco and showing each other our girls' pictures and saying 'oui' and 'yes' for three days now, and we've got a lot to tell each other if you can get somebody to help us out."

"Yes," he said, "I drew a full house the first time in action—two eights and a nose-high explosive. It may not be so bad, though. There's one eye left and they may save it. Anyhow, I've always wondered if a fellow enjoyed a smoke when he couldn't see the smoke and I've found out now. You enjoy it just the same, but you've got to inhale to find out, if you're pipe is lighted."

"Whoosh!" said the man on the cot, or some sound like that, winking up out of his other sleep minus a machine gun bullet that he had brought to the hospital with him. Looking toward the door, he saw a postal service man on guard.

"Say," he inquired, "have I landed in a post-office or a railway mail train?"

But it was perfectly all right. The

POLITICAL ISSUES REFUSE TO RAISE

Non-Partisan Plan Liked, But Details Are Hard to Pin Down

SOCIALISTS PLAN TO FIGHT

N6 Big Divisions in National Problems Around Which Trouble Can Be Started

[BY CABLE TO THE STARS AND STRIPES]

AMERICA, August 1.—Were it not for the war, our newspaper press would have had to fall back on the sea serpent story to provide news during the dark week.

Things went along so smoothly that nobody could unearth a single sensation of importance, and all the big news was news to which the public has already become too accustomed to cause excitement, such as continued ship launching, increased augmentation of America's armed forces, steady progress in coordinating industrial efforts and adjusting labor and financial problems.

Lacking a real sensation, we tried energetically to raise some political sea serpents. So far, the most feasible sentiment of all is the political move for non-partisan Congressional elections next autumn.

Enthusiasm for the idea, as purely an idea, is truly vast, but there is some little difference as to details. At present, the Democratic idea of the correct way to eliminate partisanship is for the Republicans to retire from the race, while the Republicans think it would be a much better idea if the Democrats did the patriotic retiring.

Some Coalitions Certain

The only thing the two parties are passionately agreed upon is that the Socialists must be beaten, and undoubtedly there will be at least some local coalitions here and there for this purpose.

Such coalitions would assuredly defeat Socialist candidates for specific offices, but the Socialist party is at least as much interested in increasing its vote as in winning offices, and coalitions may actually help them to gain the former point.

They show no intention of taking the defensive as yet, and are actually preparing for stiff fight, despite the fact that many Socialist leaders are under indictment.

As to national issues, there is so far no big division on which a fight can be made. Both old parties absolutely agree on the principles for which we are at war and both are with each other in declaring for support of the Government. The successful dispatch of a big army to Europe and the generally acknowledged success in practically all the directions of our material activities, national and industrial, have unquestionably greatly minimized as a political factor any campaign fight to be made on the conduct of the war.

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R.E.O.—The proper wines to serve with an Army dinner are: With the soup course, soup; with the meat course, coffee; with the dessert, more coffee if the tank isn't empty. Hoedainer and other wines of Germanic parentage should be studiously avoided, as they might give offense to some of your more or less pro-Ally guests—which is the kind of guest you will have to get along with for a good while over here, more or less.

P.P.H.—Croquet parties are extremely restful and soothing affairs, but should be staged with discretion, and never within seven miles of the front line. If there are any people from Philadelphia, Boston or Brooklyn in the group you purpose to entertain, it is better to substitute some other game, as the sight of the old hoops and mitts would make them unbearably homesick.

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