

FIGHTING IN ARGONNE

AEROPLANES AND WIRELESS TELEGRAPHY.

During our stay at the front (writes a correspondent of an English paper) we were shown much that was interesting, and the military authorities took care that we should see as much as possible; but there was one place to which we were not taken, in spite of our appeals to the staff officer who was in charge of our party, and to whose kindness and courtesy the success of our trip was due. That place was the first line of trenches. I think we all came to realise at last that the refusal was justified, in so far as this particular portion of the line is concerned. The thick woods and broken nature of the ground in the Argonne Forest provide such admirable cover for both sides that the two lines have crept up till they are almost touching. In few places are the opposing trenches more than fifty yards apart: in many they are only twenty or thirty yards, while in some they are separated by less than ten yards. The civilian is apt to imagine that if he is willing to accept the risk there can be no objection to his penetrating to the most dangerous points. He forgets that it is

Not Merely a Question of His Own Life but of imperilling the existence of the men in the trenches. It is difficult to realise the terrific tension to which these men are continually subjected in conditions like those which prevail in the Argonne. They stand there with their rifles in their hands straining their eyes through loopholes on watch for the slightest movement from the enemy a few yards distant. A moment's inattention may mean instant death. This relentless struggle has been going on for week after week and month after month, with never a moment's relaxation. In such circumstances the presence of journalists on the look-out for 'copy' seems misplaced, to say the least. Moreover, their presence could hardly pass unobserved by the enemy, who would probably send over some extra bombs, and would thus directly cause the killing and maiming of men who might otherwise have escaped. We were told, by the way, that the Germans frequently employ

Professional Jugglers for Throwing Bombs, which would explain the remarkable skill which they sometimes display. Although we were not allowed to go quite to the front, we were permitted to visit the second line of trenches, situated about 1500 yards behind the first line. They have been constructed as a precautionary measure, and run for a distance of about six miles through the forest. Though less elaborate in their ramifications, they resemble in other respects first line trenches, and are protected in front with barbed wire entanglements. The trenches are more irregular in the Argonne than on other parts of the front. They never run in a straight line for more than a short distance, but are broken up with sections running at right angles. The advantage of this system is, as General Sarrail explained, that if the trench is taken by the enemy it can immediately be made untenable by enfilading fire from another trench. We gained some idea of the labyrinth of trenches in this region from photographs taken from aeroplanes at a height of 6000 feet by means of telephotography. There is a special department in the army which, working with magnifying glasses, is able with the aid of these photographs to reproduce on a large scale maps of the whole system of trenches exactly to scale. The German trenches are marked in a blue book like a maze of delicate veins, while the French trenches are marked in red.

The French Flying Corps.

We got a glimpse into the working of the French Flying Corps in the visits which we paid to two aviation stations. In no department of military science have the French asserted their superiority over the enemy more completely. One had only to watch the Taube which hovered over St. Meneshoult early on the last morning of our stay. The German appeared indifferent

to the efforts of the 75's to reach him, and the white puffs of bursting shrapnell were generally short, but directly a French machine rose in the air to challenge him to a duel he made a hasty retreat to the German lines. This repugnance to accepting an engagement with the French aircraft is curious when it is remembered that the Maurice Farman machine generally employed by the French has a speed of only 95 or 100 kilometres, as against 115 kilometres possessed by the Taubes, and the average superiority of the French aeroplane over the German consists in its arrangement, which enables the observer, using either carbine or mitrailleuse, to fire in any direction—in front, behind, above, below, or on either side; whereas that of the enemy, owing to the tractor screw in front and the disposition of the planes, can only fire to the rear, and thus is only of use in a running fight. This may explain the evident disinclination of the Germans to accept duel with the French aviator.

Wonders of Wireless.

One of the most useful functions performed by the air service is sending wireless messages from a height thousands of feet in the air. We were shown one of the machines which was just going to mount for observation purposes. To the right of the observer there was seen an ordinary telegraph transmitter, while passing through the floor of the car was a wire which could be lowered when in the air. By this means the observer is able to send messages to a wireless station to the rear of the trenches, which is in telephonic communication with all the batteries, and thus he can direct the artillery fire. We saw this machine rise and become a speck in the air, and then we were taken to a wireless station in the woods. It was simply a little wooden hut, so small that we had to stand outside while the general talked to the operator. The latter explained the nature of his work. When the machine went up to direct artillery fire he was warned by telephone, 'Be on the look-out for messages.'

'Do you get any communiques,' was asked, and the reply was, 'Yes; we always look out for the French communique from Eiffel Tower, and occasionally we intercept the German fairy tales from the Nordeineh and Nauen Stations; but up till now we have never managed to pick up the Turkish communique.'

'Can you tell where the message comes from?'

'Yes; we can distinguish them, as a rule, by their varying power. For example, this morning early we intercepted a message from Madrid.'

Cut Off from the World.

It was curious to think that this little hut in the woods was able to gather the world's news before it was known to the cities. And here again we got a glimpse into the attitude of the men towards what is happening in the world outside. We came prepared to find that they would be intensely interested in the Lusitania disaster, in the waverings of Italy, even in the gossip of the boulevards; but when we began to tell them these things they listened politely, but with a detached air, as to a tale which had little meaning and less interest to them. Their lives are filled with the grim realities of war. Each man has his own particular job, which fully absorbs his attention, and he is doing it with a thoroughness which is steadily making for victory.

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