

AMERICAN BOYS WAIT HOPEFULLY FOR HELL TO BREAK

A "Strafe" in the Wee Hours Gives Excitement and a Mud Bath, But No Real Casualties

By George H. Seldes

WITH THE AMERICAN FORCES IN LORRAINE, May 2.—Forty feet under this front line trench the walls of our dugout are shaking with the fury of a German bombardment somewhere on the distant left. Our sector itself is quiet. We have had hours of firing and flares, and only a German barrage can outnoise this roaring night.

Outside our men are alert, tense, ready everywhere. These young boys from many states, from New York, and Chicago, and Boston, and Cleveland and Milwaukee, and from many ways of life, are holding the line in Lorraine, with rifles tight in steady fingers and heads pressed against the wet parapets.

Captain K— has just guided me from one end of his sector to the other. In the last fifteen minutes I have spoken to men who a few months ago were peaceful citizens, laborers or business men, or practicing professions in our cities, or farmers of the East and West. To-day they are the veterans of our army.

"Mad hell may break loose at any time," said the captain, "so if you want to rest up for it, or write a bit, better stop in the dugout and do so now. The boys below will be glad to have you here because you are the first correspondent of the home papers to spend a day and night with this division. We want you to tell the folks what it's really like. They're scared about us, judge!" from their letters.

So here we are, waiting for "mad hell." Perhaps at midnight. Perhaps in two or three hours.

It is late in the afternoon. A few hours ago, in a peaceful French village, Colonel —, who has his father's reputation as a general to excel in this war, fortified my pass with a note to the commandant. We motored peacefully on, passing our reserves on the road, and came to another village where few red-tiled roofs remained, for German shells had ripped the houses to pieces until they look like crazy stage settings for a maniac's drama in the open. The major's headquarters proved to be a hole in the ground, with some stone and concrete on top as extra precaution.

"This is a quiet sector," said the major, when — zizzzzz — zizzzzzzz — zizzzzzzzzzz — boom.

Not far away one big shell had fallen and others followed it. . . . and, besides, 50 per cent of the Boche shells are duds. Also you will have to walk from here on, a distance of — miles, because the road happens to be under fire and an auto would attract attention. Give my compliments to Captain K—, and tell him you stay to-night in the trenches at your own risk. Sergeant, show the way."

Bursting shells, ruins, torn-up roads, shrapnel puffs in the air were as eloquent as the guide to the American trenches. A Boche aeroplane seemed to fall upon us. Straight down he came. Then away he sped, pursued by a row of smoke circles from our guns.

"Trying to take photos," said the guide. "Wait till we get our airmen going." He shook his fist at the fleeing plane.

The sun splashed the rolling hills with yellow. Birds were carolling to an early spring, and the smell of wet earth was impressive.

Ten Seconds To Save Life

Soon we came to the end of the road. The mud began. Deep red mud where the grass was thin, reddish brown mud in the woods, maroon where the shells had torn ugly wounds in the hillsides, golden red where the sun played upon it. We reached the duckboards, that long row of little ladders laid flat on the ground, leading from here to the front line and broken only by enemy shells, which, even now, were coming closer.

"Better put on your helmet and get your gas mask ready," said the sergeant. "I suppose you know how to use it in case of an attack."

I didn't. He showed me. "Got to do it in ten seconds, and hold your breath meanwhile."

We entered a bit of woods where six men were cooking in a shanty, and came out into the open again closer to the trenches. The duckboards now were badly broken up and dud shells were lying about.

"The Boche," explained the guide, "shells this cowpath at every meal, the damned joy-killer. Let's beat it or he might think we are the mess boys."

We ran to the entrance of the trenches. They meant safety. Looking back, I saw rows of wire entanglements, mud reserve lines and older ones, untenanted. In front there was a ditch growing narrower, but deeper every step, deep enough, ten feet away, to shelter walking soldiers.

This muddy ditch was the entrance to the line America had sent her men to hold until they were strong enough to break the enemy. There was nothing bold, nothing heroic, nothing noble, nothing romantic about it. Just a ditch, with mud on top and wet sides and slimy water underfoot, and the smell of damp, fresh earth and green grass.

Splashing into The First Line

Further in the trenches were lined with twigs, twined about and supported by poles driven into the mud. Where the duckboards were broken we stepped

AMERICAN SOLDIERS HOLDING THEIR OWN LINES ON THE WEST FRONT



A group of American boys in the front line trenches



Resting behind the lines after a tour of duty at the front



On the way to the bath which follows front line duty

or fell knee-deep into the ooze. But we journeyed rapidly through windings and sharp turnings until we came to the captain's dugout. At the door was a line of rockets, red and green and white, star shells and others, each either bearing a message or a warning. Smoke was rising gently from the flue protruding from the oiled paper dugout window, and voices of men grew louder as we came to the door. The captain closed his portfolio of secret papers and orders, maps and notes, and rose to meet us.

"Want to see what the front line's like? I'll take you there myself." He put on his helmet and swung his gas mask over his shoulder. Then he clasped a well filled cartridge belt around his hips and examined his belt automatic.

"Here, Macey, better give your gun to our visitor," he said, "this isn't exactly like a promenade on Euclid Avenue, and if Fritz ever comes over in superior numbers I'm going to take as many as I can along with me."

We went through the trench mud, slesh-slesh-slesh—then splash-zip, and, meantime and always, the whizz-whizz-whizz—boom—of big shells. Occasionally we stopped and waited for the explosions. Frequently there was none. I believe we counted seven whizzes and only four booms.

"Duds," said the captain. "I believe the Boche is using up some old munitions he got from the Russians."

We walked out of the trenches into the open again.

"Better go than by the communicating trench, so long as the firing is not direct."

We had not gone fifty yards when we heard the zip-zip-zip-zip-zip of a machine gun. At the same instant there were puffs of sand only four or five yards to our left.

"They've spotted us. Let's go in," said the captain, and it didn't take either of us very long to tumble into the trench. "If there is anything I don't like," continued Captain K—, "it's a machine gun. Just so long as the big shells and the little shells and the grenades and mortar bombs keep coming over they don't bother me. They're out for no one in particular. But when the machine gun starts, it's like a regiment of infantry forming a firing squad against you personally."

We began passing men in the trenches, some at ease, others with rifles close to the parapet. Several yards further on the parapet was not very high, so I quit following the captain and climbed up a few inches to see what was on the other side.

"Better not do that," said the captain, who had turned around for me. "It's dangerous!"

"But this isn't!"

"Yes. This is the front line. You were looking into No Man's Land. Luckily we've disposed of the snipers hereabouts. Better come to an O. P. and have a good, safe look."

We had arrived at the front line suddenly, after many puzzling twists and turns. It was no thrill for the captain. He and his men had been in line for four days. For me it was almost unbelievable that we had gone from safety to the front line—the black line that on all our maps has meant for three years and more the barrier be-

tween decency and plain humanness and the land of madness.

Trenches a Real Melting Pot

I stepped down quickly. The captain then led the way from strong point to strong point. We stopped at a machine gun station. The weapon was set for the night, as were its companions in this sector, each dominating a certain small strip before it. Our boys were ready for the Germans, even if they came by fours or by hundreds. Three men were standing by. The first question they asked is the question men at the front always ask: "Where are you from?" I repeated the question in turn.

"I'm from Cleveland," said the first soldier, the one whose duty it was to supply food for the gun. "Lived there all my life until I started my European tour."

"Me? I'm from Philadelphia," said the gunner. "Thompson Street."

"What business or profession before the war?"

"None. I was a student."

"Where?"

"St. Andrew's Theological Seminary," the gunner replied after some hesitation. "I gave up the ministry to come here."

In these trenches you find lawyers and business men, students, prizefighters, delivery boys, rich sons and poor men actually elbowing each other, for there is barely room for passing. We speak of America as a melting pot of the nations, but the trenches and the dugouts are surely the friendship crucible of the classes.

We stopped a moment at a rocket station, similar to that before the captain's door. "Fritz," he said, "has been trying to monkey with our signals. As a result, he sent up one of our kind the other day and our artillery received it and promptly began a barrage. That'll teach him."

Near by, at a grenade station, a sergeant was "playing the trombone."

This is an instrument producing more noise than music, for it is an attachment for a rifle in which grenades are placed and shot out by means of the ordinary rifle bullet, which also sets off the grenade's time fuse over the enemy. The captain fired one. The rifle tried to leap out of his hand with the shock. The grenade itself we saw start its whistling journey, then disappear. It whistled in fits. Two more shrieks and we heard it explode.

"That's that," said the captain. Our automatic rifle stations were equipped with excellent French guns, very sensitive and a bit temperamental, but effective. "Fire three shots," said Captain K—.

The young soldier placed his hand on the trigger and the rifle blazed away. Three evenly spaced identical vicious spurts from the gun.

"That's that," said the captain. We arrived at the observation post after passing various minor stations with shelves cut in the trench walls for grenades, bullets and other stores. A hidden trench led us into and under No Man's Land a certain distance, where, in a slightly wider cave, we were welcomed by men whose business by day and by night it is to watch for Germans.

Through a slit in the earth I looked into the valley. In front of us was our wire. Rows of it. Near by the barbs were visible and the posts. In the gray distance it was a black line, and beyond it more and more black lines.

To our right and left I could see our own trenches, only a rifle muzzle visible over the parapet. On the left wing our front took a long curve and

ran into a wood. There, the captain said, men from an Eastern metropolis were in the trenches, and men from a Middle Western metropolis were working the artillery behind them. East and West, in fact, had met in France. Our right wing fell into a valley. There were gaps in the lines, for the front nowhere consists of unbroken trenches. Barbed wire and strong points on the trench flanks amply protected the gaps.

I looked toward the Germans. They were on the crest of the opposite hill, 200 yards away. To the naked eye it was merely a rolling hill, with black patches of wire before it. Through the field glass it was a trench line, parallel to our own, silent, deserted, dead. That was all. Our men in one slit in the earth, the enemy in another, close by. For three years these slits had been the homes of enemies, and so they will remain until—the captain stopped such speculation.

"Look at that chateau," he said. "The Boche had a regimental band playing 'Deutschland über Alles' there the other day. We could hear the music. Sounded here like the little German bands in the saloons at home. Well, some day when we are ready for it, blooey! our artillery will just kick that chateau and all the Boches in it out into the air. It'll be 'Deutschland über Alles' all right, in bits."

I took a last look at the chateau in the distance, the German lines before it, and the valley between, where men had fought for three years, bled and died in craters and attacks, and which was still the land of no one. Red and brown it was with the mud and winter's ruin, but green patches announced

Life in the Trenches Consists in Waiting in Ditch and Dug-out Till Something Happens

The resurrection of spring and the singing of the meadow larks was like a faint protest against the uninterrupted boom, boom of the guns.

Terrors of Boche Bombardment

We went back to the front line dug-out and passed the hours in talking to the patrols and listening to the snores of the sleepers, which were more real to us than the shells breaking far away.

About 2 o'clock in the morning we received intimation that "hell might break loose." The bursts of Boche shells began to outnumber and outear all other sounds. First they came one, two or three at a time, boom—boom—boom—boom—boom. More Boche guns entered the concert each minute. It was soon impossible to tell one boom from another. It was a long quiet "trough" of "no-noise" or "mangled, doubled explosions, ceasing only a second, which was filled with rasping splutters of machine guns. The shells and bullets were over us.

Through the opening we could see the machine gun steel pattering on the parapet and behind it. The grenades and big shells were falling on or near our trenches, in our wire and behind us. There was no doubt it was our company front they were trying to obliterate.

Our walls shook. The candle which trembled and the flame danced hysterically. The sleepers on the banks were jarred into awakening.

"Is it an attack?"

Each waking man asked the question. Some opened a mouth, but only one or two were heard to speak amidst the thunder.

"Damn the Boche!"

The sergeant's expression filled one slight pause in the bombardment.

"... won't attack—men weren't ready—trenches empty—sure—yes!"

These bits of sentences from members of the patrol party of that evening.

But the shelling grew stronger, nearer. The greater the noise outside, the quieter it was in the trench. Cigarettes were passed, accepted thankfully.

A fearful concussion. The dugout not only shook, it seemed to swing from right to left from front to rear. "Minnie," said the sergeant.

One of the German mineverfers 200-pounds, had gone off near by, the blast that dug eight-foot holes, circumference 10 feet.

"Wonder if..."

At that instant another earthquake occurred. The candle was blown out. Down the entrance of our dugout plunged a ton or two of mud and debris with a rumbling thud and a crash, while upon us fell mud and boards and the loose things that hung about the cave.

In the darkness there were calls and cries and unintelligible sounds. Things were crumbling, earth was slipping and the muffled thuds of only human bodies make in falling, gave those of us who knew we were alive the sensation that death was in our dugout.

"Strike a light—light—light!"

In the quaking cave some one produced a box of matches and lit one. The flare showed us for a moment, huddled men amidst the wreckage. The light was put out. Our men were struck. Finally the candle was lit.

"Who's hurt—hurt—hurt?"

Again the sergeant's strong voice. Some one was putting the brazier up, and keeping the red coals from setting fire to the blankets. The men were extricating themselves, questioning each other. One of the sleepers on the bunk was putting mud from his face, his hands, his eyes and his mouth.

"Who's hurt?"

One of the men had an arm caught in some timber. A steel bar used as a lever raised him. He worked his arm several times. "Only a few scratches and bruises."

"Close call," said the sergeant. "We were all splattered and shaken, but every one laughed."

"Can't hit the same place twice," said the sergeant.

Some one in the trench was working at the mud with a shovel, clearing a passage. Our improvised fire having been lost, the brazier smoke blinded us, set us coughing and weeping. "It was growing quieter."

Waiting for the Raid in Vain

Every man seized his rifle. The sergeant led the way, for this dugout party was ready now to deal with Fritz's raid.

The bombardment passed, and the usual quiet came, no enemy raid developed and eventually we went back to the dugout. But not before there was a general exchange of news between all the dugout squads and men from the posts.

Ten minutes later normal dugout life had been resumed.

"Oh, boy, if I ever get back to the States, I'll head for Cleveland for the rest of my life. I'll never want to travel again," said the gun crew boy who had been relieved and had joined us.

"Oh, if I could only be walking up Chestnut Street at noon to-morrow," sighed the ex-Philadelphia theological student.

"I wish we'd get some mail," said the sergeant, as he cleared the dirt off his bed and hung up some things on a nail.

And so the night passed. We had three casualties in our company. A machine gun bullet had penetrated a helmet, but only a fracture resulted. A piece of shell had hit a man in the leg. The third was a wound through the hand.

"C'est la guerre!" ("That's a war on"), said the sergeant. "I suppose some one will get hurt before it's over."

"We'll get them for this. You just wait until our C— friends start their artillery," said a guardsman with an Italian accent.

But our guns remained silent. They have learned patience as well as precision. Sure enough the Boche would be repaid magnificently for this stratagem, but in our own good time and in our own flaming way.

BOY SCOUTS IN WAR HARNESS



By C. Vince

WHEN the war came the 150,000 boys of Great Britain who were Scouts were ready for it, not because they had been trained for war in any military sense, but because, having learned not to be lookers-on, but to take part in adventure, it was natural to them to look at once for some part to play in any crisis. They found at once and without hesitation their part in war.

The war was not a month old, and none knew what might come, when General Baden-Powell wrote to all those who led the Scouts:

"The boys should be taught to be prepared for the worst, for if the worst comes to the worst they must be the discipline and optimistic leaven for preventing panic in the nation."

That was a very proud claim to make for them, and though the worst never came to the worst, which in the beginning many feared, the worst that there was has always found them ready.

By thirty thousand Scouts and old Scouts serving in the navy and the army many heroic things have been done—some, indeed, that are already national stories.

The midshipman on board the destroyer Broke who bravely met the German boarders in the fierce battle of five minutes in the darkness of the Channel was a Boy Scout. Cornwall, who stood by the silent gun in the battle of Jutland waiting for orders, though he was mortally wounded, was a Boy Scout.

The piper who held his company together in the battle of Loos, at the moment of crisis, by strutting up and down the parapet and piping to them under heavy fire, was an old Scout. When the hospital ship Britannic was torpedoed in the Aegean and the captain remained on the bridge till the ship sank, his orderly stood by him and went down with him. That orderly, too, was a Scout.

But it is not in any single heroic act of war that the fitness of their spirit and the value of their training is apparent, but rather in that readiness for any adventure which over 100,000 boys have shown.

This is the sort of story that you hear told of them:

At a coastguard station a petty officer was waiting in the first week of the

war for the arrival of a patrol of Scouts to take the place of the men called suddenly to the feet. He waited in some perturbation. He had got what he thought would be enough meat to feed them for that day, but he was very hard put to it to find how to have it cooked.

The patrol arrived, and at once all his difficulties were taken out of his hands. Two boys paraded without delay for lookout. The rest took over the meat, told him that it was enough—not for one, but for two and a half days—and set about preparing their camp and cooking their dinner, as if they had never done anything else in their lives.

You could collect many such stories along the coasts of Great Britain, and in the hospitals and camps, and not in Great Britain only, but in all the countries of the empire—stories that show you what it is to have learned already when you are still not much over twelve not to be a looker-on, but to take part in adventure.

"Half the fun of life," an old Scout wrote from the front, "is to be able to make bricks without straw." You have in that phrase a great deal of the spirit of the Scouts, and the reason of their success. No one could write so unless he felt that he was ready for life, not in any mechanical sense, as the Germans were ready for war, drilled, prepared, and with plans made, but in the sense of finding no unexpected duty come amiss, of having the character equipped, of having a zest to do one's share when there is great work to be done.

Ex-Scouts Known By Their Efficiency

The Scouts had already learned many things that were of value to them when war came. Scouts who were pathfinders, and blacksmiths, ambulance men, cooks and pioneers, signallers and woodmen, telegraphists and watchmen (and there are forty-six other things in which Scouts can win proficiency badges) were already in the mere technical sense partly trained for war; and they had all learned to use their senses and their hands, to be content without comforts, to know the open, to fear no weather, to take pleasure in hardship, to make shift in any circumstances.

But it was more than this proficiency that made one officer write, "I have five ex-Scouts among my men. I could pick them out with my eyes shut. They were better men to begin with than the others will ever be." It is rather their readiness for adventure and their sense of fellowship in a great company.

No medieval brotherhood ever had members in so many countries, nor had carried its spirit so far. There are Scouts in all the dominions and dependencies of Great Britain, in all the countries of the Allies, in fact in all the countries of the world; and the war has quickened that sense of fellowship and brought many more to its ranks, for in war, as at no other time, boys as well as men know that fellowship in a good company can make any man greater than himself.

Those who saw the Expeditionary Force that crossed from Southampton saw Boy Scouts at any hour of day

and why the Scout who lost his leg in the German raid on Whitby and was found lying among the ruins of the coastguard station, where he was on duty when the cruisers opened fire, sent a message that same night to the Chief Scout that he had not forgotten the law of all Scouts—"to smile in all difficulties."

And that, too, was why this letter was written to the Chief Scout at the beginning of 1915:

"I do so want to be a Scout. I am nine and as big as a boy of ten. I can shoot fairly well with an air gun, and it's awful living amongst all these troops, I being one of the few civilians."

While there are boys of nine who can write so, a country is still far from the end of its manhood even when it has called up the last man of military age.

From the first day of the war the Boy Scouts were a reserve line to the army and the navy and the police. They were mobilized more rapidly than the defence forces and assumed at once, and with the same readiness as if it had been allotted to them in some plan of defence long since drawn up and rehearsed, much of the work of guarding coasts and telegraphs, railways and public buildings.

Telegrams went out to their headquarters to all the districts advising them to offer their services to the State. Within a few days, or even hours, of the declaration of war many of them were already on duty. In one town the telegram reached the headquarters on August 1. On August 2 plans were made. By August 4, 200 had enrolled. By August 5 the general officer in command of the district was asking for Scouts as dispatch carriers; the military hospital was asking for them as orderlies; the police were asking for them to guard the railways. By August 7 there were 750 on duty. From the county of Stafford the telegram asked for 1,000 Scouts. That same evening 4,000 were standing by waiting for orders. In Kent the Scouts had practised a war mobilization two years before, so that the one telegram from London was enough to call out the whole country, and Scouts were at once at work hunting out spies, manning coastguard stations, guarding bridges, culverts and tunnels on those vital railway lines that run from London to the south coast, and watching all the main telegraph and telephone lines that crossed Kent from London to Paris and Brussels.

Yet another detachment of Scouts was in its annual summer camp in one of the southern counties. It telegraphed an offer of its services and was ordered at once to report to the embarkation officer at the port of Southampton. Its duty was to act as guides to all troops and transports coming in by road. It was responsible and secret work and required a knowledge of all the docks and the main streets of the town. A day was spent in studying the land, and then the Scouts (blessing that training which had made them "pathfinders") took up the duty.

Those who saw the Expeditionary Force that crossed from Southampton saw Boy Scouts at any hour of day

or night marching through the town at the head of battalions and travelling to the docks on the tops of transports, or riding down with the guns on the spare horses of field batteries.

Guards and Guides Throughout Empire

So all over the country in the first weeks of war Boy Scouts were offering eager service that was as eagerly taken, in hospitals and camps, in the War Office itself, on the roads and on the railways, while all along the coast little posts of Scouts were setting up their camps.

And this that they were doing in Great Britain they were doing all over the Empire. In Gibraltar they were mobilized before the troops; in India they were enrolled at once as orderlies and messengers to the army; they tracked stations for the arrival of for-wards. On the Gold Coast they were keeping guard over public buildings. In Australia and New Zealand they were used for public services by the hundreds. In East Africa they were recognized as part of the second line defence. In Natal they were messengers and signallers, in Jamaica buglers and dispatch riders. So you can go through the full list of British dominions and dependencies. Across the whole Empire from John o' Groats to Hong Kong, they came up for service.

It has been the same in the countries of the Allies, in France, in Italy and in Rumania, they have helped in the work of mobilization, served in hospitals and government offices and guarded railways.

In Belgium the 4,000 Scouts were on duty all over the country as soon as invasion came. They worked in Brussels with the Garde Avigne. They were cyclist orderlies with the army through the siege of Antwerp and the retreat from Antwerp to Dunkirk. They had the honor of being disbanded by the Germans in Liège.

When Germany declared war at the end of July she probably did not think it worth while to remember that all the schools of Great Britain had just closed and all the boys were free. But it was this chance that made the full mobilization of the Scouts possible. They had a month before them, and by the end of that month they had established themselves as part of the country's defence.

Boys Over Fourteen Remained in Service

They had become so valuable that the full force was allowed to remain mobilized for another two months; the work that they did was counted by the education authorities as school attendance, and it was not until the beginning of November that the state forbade the employment of boys during school hours.

Since that time the Scouts over fourteen have remained on full service and are serving still in the War Office, in the hospitals, on hospital ships, in coastguard stations, and for the rest there have been the hours after school, and these they have turned to good account.

They have been fertile in resource. They have put their hands to whatever might be of use. There was a paper shortage. Scouts set themselves to collect waste paper at the houses and deliver it to the paper makers. There was a shortage of bottles. Scouts went bottle hunting, sold the bottles and gave the money to hospitals. They work in munition factories, in surveillance of visitors. They work in allotments, and in the gardens of hospitals. They collect eggs for the wounded. They have formed camps to work on the land.

At the beginning of the war they presented a motor ambulance to the army. When it was worn out they were asked to do a day's work each by raised another. In that way they have raised close on £6,000, which has provided six ambulances, and established several recreation huts for the army in France. So as each war need has come they have found something to do to meet it.

Already in the third month of the war, besides all the other work they are doing, they set themselves to form a Scouts Defence Corps, where Scouts over sixteen might learn drill and marksmanship, and be ready equipped for war, should the state lower the age of military service. By the end of 1915 there were 7,000 enrolled. There is no full record of the Scouts and old Scouts to Hong Kong, they came up for service.

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