

# NEWSPAPER MEN'S EXPERIENCES WITH FRENCH ARMY

**T**ANTALUS endured no punishment to compare with that undergone by the regular Paris correspondent of an American newspaper since the early days of the war. Events of the first magnitude going on about him, he found himself prevented by the rigid censorship from sending even pieces of news which could in no way aid the enemy.

For a few days a German aeroplane came sailing over Paris each afternoon and dropping a few bombs. The first came on a bright Sunday, and one correspondent at least tracked out each spot where a bomb had fallen, saw the damage done, interviewed the relatives of a woman who had been killed and culled a story. When his paper reached him some three weeks later, he found to his surprise that the German aeroplane had dropped several bombs which caused only negligible material damage. And yet since that time he has seen the official photograph of the woman killed, her body marked by nearly twenty wounds.

Two afternoons the correspondent spent on the heights of Montmartre, right up by the Sacre Cour cathedral crowding them, sweeping the landscape which is the scene of Charles Chaplin's opera "Loulise" in the hope of witnessing the first aerial battle. He was not so fortunate or so imaginative as some brother reporter who described such a battle as having occurred over Paris.

Then came the fear—for him the hope—that Paris would be besieged. He sent his wife and family away and waited patiently. At last the great event was chronicled. He pictured himself organizing an aeroplane mail service with London to convey his valuable impressions and congratulated himself on being at work in modern conditions and not being forced to rely on balloons, as during the former siege. So he registered his office and home in the American Embassy so as to receive some distinctive mark when the Germans were entering and awaited the day when he would compose the finest story he had ever written.

But that passed away, the Germans turned aside from Paris, and those whom important business had compelled to leave Paris during the panic days quietly back, explaining how their wives had made them leave or their business had forced them to follow the Government.

Life dropped back to its old routine, more depressing than ever, as the street lights were diminished in number to avoid furnishing landmarks at night to visiting aeroplanes and Zeppelins. And graves and the little cafe-restaurants in the Rue Drouot, which up till then could be entered at all hours—if you knew the proprietor, and promised not to talk loud enough to be heard in the street—was tightly lidded by the police, and it was no longer possible to get a bite after 9:30 at night. The departure of the newspapers to Bordeaux was the direct cause of this last catastrophe, as the little restaurants—how hot it used to become about 2 in the morning, with windows and doors hermetically sealed—lost the protection of its powerful friends, the staffs of the neighboring *Figaro* and *Temps*, who acted as a shield between it and the police.

Life had again reached this gray monotony when one Thursday the American Ambassador, ever ready to be of service to his countrymen, suggested to a trio of Paris correspondents that they might like to visit the scenes of recent fighting and investigate the stories of German atrocities on the spot even if they could not see the battles still raging along the Aisne. It was a great temptation, and the three correspondents, at least should have prohibited them from being absent from Paris for more than a day or two. But to men reduced to their state of mind the opportunity could not be refused.

With heartfelt gratitude they received the permit obtained by the Ambassador from the office of the Military Governor of Paris, Gen. Gallieni, which allowed them to visit "the zone of military operations" for the space of seven days. An automobile was hired, the American firm of Packard supplying a four seated car at the reasonable rate, considering the risks to be run, of 1.50 francs a kilometer (not 50 cents a mile), with chauffeur included.

Now two of these correspondents were married—they may be called Mr. Stout and Mr. Slim—and one, the writer, was not. The married amateur war correspondents, remembering that their kitchens had been stocked with all kinds of preserved meats and delicacies at the time Paris was threatened with a siege, proposed to take a selection along with them. The expedition was a French lot of a yard long and a foot wide. Every one bought a real field-knife and the latest thing in field-glasses. The car was also stocked with fifty copies of the day's papers, cigars and cigarettes, four bottles of red wine (at 50 cents a bottle, rather dear, but excellent) and two bottles of mineral water.

At 5 o'clock the expedition got under way and found its road out of Paris by the Vincennes gate, still left open. Signs of war appeared at once. The old fortifications which have so often been threatened with destruction had been put into a state of defence. Sacks placed so as to allow loopholes for firing stretched them on each side of the gates. Sentries demanded to see the permit every hundred yards, and some were not satisfied at finding no mention of the automobile and chauffeur on it, and it required some eloquence to convince them that a permit to circulate would be useless unless it covered the means to circulate.

About an hour from Paris a loud rattle made us think that we had reached the firing line prematurely, but the sight of a back tire trundling along ahead of us showed us the trouble was not serious. The delay caused by repairing a tire made us abandon the hope of reaching Meaux that night, and with the darkness came heavy rain, which with the state of the road, along which there had been tremendous traffic for days, made speed impossible. At the first made speed impossible. The road was barricaded, and as we approached a sentinel briskly took up his position in the centre of the road, and holding his bayoneted rifle ready to smother the Packard if we persisted. Condemned us with "Qui vive?" making a perfect battle picture in the dark. His companion, with a corporal or sergeant ordered one of the occupants of the car to descend and show his permit. This performance meant step back out into the rain, and one of the sentries into which were placed in every non-occupied spot in the car always in an accompanying the exit. The

permit examined and the gasoline re-placed, we proceeded.

That day we got as far as Lagny-sur-Marne, where we found a hotel open, a satisfactory dinner, rooms and breakfast on Saturday morning, at the cost of less than \$5 for the four, including the chauffeur. We had not reached the region touched by the war as yet, being only fifteen miles, as the crow flies, from Paris. The car was left that night in an open shed, yet none of its miscellaneous contents was missing in the morning, and it should be recorded here that often as it was abandoned to itself in the course of the two following days we never lost a thing, although the chocolate, cigars, &c., must have been a temptation to the soldiers who gathered around it.

Through Meaux, with its bridge destroyed by the English as a precautionary measure, and its cathedral, fortunately undamaged by bombardment, we hastened north toward Soissons. Almost all signs of the severe fighting that had been carried on in this district had been cleared away. An occasional dead horse could be seen, but no dead soldiers.

When we reached the heights about Mareuil even an untrained eye could see that shot and shell had swept over the road. Trees were shot off or scorched with deep lines, huge holes marked where shells had fallen. Close by the road at one spot were the remains of a German Taube aeroplane which had been brought down, and dozens of unfired German shells lay piled up in rows. Beautiful pieces of work, they were each covered with wicker basket work and had leather attachments to carry them by. Two or three French soldiers stood by them, presumably to see that the regulation against removing anything from the battlefields was not broken. But their interest in a newspaper given them by the war correspondents was so absorbing that they did not seem to notice when two shells were removed from their wicker cases, "which

eight days the people who had not left the city had undergone the nervous tension of not knowing at what moment a shell would fall near them. At first they had kept to their cellars, but now a few were at their doors, indifferent to fate.

We ran across two men with remains of English khaki uniform on. One wore a regulation coat and a peasant's trousers, the other a regulation overcoat. Both had regulation caps. They told us they had been captured by the Germans and had succeeded in escaping by jumping through a window. They were not interesting, had little to say, but gladly took cigarettes and a franc piece to buy a drink.

As we returned to the hotel we met an English correspondent whose speciality is photographing and who had been some days at Soissons for the *Daily Mail*. We were just about to begin lunch when four soldiers arrived and notified us we were under arrest and must go to the city hall. We started with the idea that it was a mere formality, a question of showing our permit.

The people we met in the street looked askance at us. We could tell from the remark of those following us that they believed we were German spies. It was fortunate for us that they were not numerous, as any crowd could have lynched us without trouble. Rightly or wrongly, the people of Soissons were convinced that German spies were still in the town.

On reaching the city hall we had to wait a little in the entry, the crowd

## Receiving Permission to Visit Zone of Military Operations, They Witnessed the Bombardment of Soissons, Ran Into a General Headquarters and Were Made Prisoners for Three Days

a couple of hours later for another look round, again attracting the enemy's fire. Two thirty came, but we could not drag ourselves away from more excitement than we had had in Paris for weeks. Under the guidance of our *Daily Mail* friend we went down the street leading to the river, where there is a bridge. From the last house we could see the German position.

"If we all go on to the bridge the Germans will send a shell at us," said the *Daily Mail* man, "there is no danger, as the time it takes to get the range will allow us to get back behind the street. At first if one person went on the bridge they would fire at him, but now they wait for several at a time, not being willing to waste a shell on one." But we were willing to accept the statement without testing its truth.

We wandered round to the city hall again and found Mme. Machez outside receiving the wounded, who were now arriving in rapid succession. As each stretcher was carried past she said a cheerful word to the occupant if he were French and made some friendly motion if he were African, then directed the bearers where to take their burden, but the Germans were approaching in force and that we had better leave.

We went into the college court to see the damage done by a shell which had fallen while we were in the town, fortunately not on the wing occupied by wounded men. The college had been made into a hospital, but we at once noticed that no Red Cross flag flew over it.

The next morning, Sunday, we visited the town and admired the efficiency of the shell that had gutted the Elephant Hotel. We recognized also the progress shown by modern artillery. One house showed two cannon balls that had embedded themselves in the wall half way in the war of 1814, which date had been painted round them. A shell of 1914 had passed through that wall and left little place for painting dates on that section.

Had we been superstitious we would have turned back that Sunday morning, as our car stewed on the road, slippery with the rain, and gallantly glided over the ditch into a vegetable garden. Fortunately there was no hedge to run into and no telegraph pole to hit, as all such things had been cut down to help to make a bridge to replace one blown up. It was a long job getting the car on the road again, and we had a lonely drive through woods before we reached Dormans, also on the Marne. We did not know the risk we ran in motoring through these lonely woods. Little parties of Germans who had lost their regiments abounded in them. They still had ammunition and would not probably try to kill the chauffeur and occupants of a passing automobile, with the idea of taking their papers and clothes and escaping in the automobile. A few days before a Colonel and his chauffeur had been killed in these same woods in this way late in the evening.

At Dormans we had a dispute with the chauffeur. He insisted on taking the road to Rheims by way of Epernay, two sides of a triangle, while we, strong in our faith in the map, insisted on the direct road by Ville-en-Tardenois. It is wonderful how a chauffeur driving a car on a mileage basis loves the long and roundabout route which consumes the gasoline. We took the high hand with him and ordered him to follow the direct route, but he had his revenge.

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ated champagne and cognac, and gold topped empty bottles along the road added their testimony. It suggested a new form of defence for France in the future. Instead of forts round the frontier, huge stores of champagne and barrels of cognac might be kept, beyond which it seemed no German army would pass.

Proud of overruling our chauffeur we bowled along merrily till about 11 o'clock, when we approached a village. The sentry outside held us up, but after a glance at our permit saluted and let us proceed.

"That's a marvelous pass," one of us was saying when suddenly we were told to halt again.

The little village swarmed with soldiers of all kinds and empty automobiles jammed the street by dozens where the movement should have been. The new arrival was made by an officer, a Major, who seemed unimpressed by our magic paper.

"Descend and follow me," he said, and led us to what in peace days was probably the village school. He left us outside and as he entered I heard him say, "More journalists"; then the door shut.

In two minutes he was out again and told us to follow him again, ordering two soldiers to come as well. He led us into a farmyard. The centre was occupied by the usual manure heap and farm buildings occupied three sides. On the side opposite the entry were the cow-houses and pigsties. One cowhouse door was open and the ominous word "prison" was chalked on it in large letters. We were told that these were our quarters, but that we had the freedom of the yard and adjoining garden.

The Major who had captured us saluted with a charming and highly amused smile and left us. Another officer took charge of us, dressed in a different uniform. He asked us at once: "Have you any provisions with you?" We said yes, in our automobile. "One of you may fetch them." But

He was willing, but later went upstairs and found an empty barn in which he granted us as a bedroom. The four Italians asked to join us and we bought a dozen bolts of straw from the farmer at five cents apiece for beds. We found a good supply of empty grain sacks quite clean; some we filled with grain for pillows and others we used to sleep in and on.

Of course we expected to be examined the next day to establish our identity as peaceable Paris correspondents, and at the worst to be sent back there under pledge not to approach the firing line again. But nothing of the sort happened. We were never asked who we were or what we were, never examined in any way. The permit was taken away by the Major who arrested us and we were thrust into durance vile. If we wished to speak to the Colonel about our case he would not listen; he would talk about the weather and even about the war, but we were merely chattels he had been ordered to keep in safe custody. The sergeant in charge of the jail certainly took our names, addresses and descriptions, but that was merely for his record.

One of the Italians, the correspondent of the French paper, had had an audience with the General in command of the army and had undertaken to present the case of all. If he did no practical result came from this, we were signed a letter to the General describing our own position and asking him to telegraph to the American Ambassador at Paris, but nothing came of that either and Mr. Herrick never received our message.

It appeared later that the regulations under which our permit was issued were changed two days after we received it and its validity was no longer recognized. Why we should suffer for a change that came into effect after our leaving Paris we never found out.

Our position according to the Colonel, was that we were not prisoners, eh, no! not at all, but we must not advance or retire from the front line, and we had until a decision had been reached as to our case, nor must we leave the farmyard or garden; a gendarme sentry, gun in hand, saw to it that we did not pass through the gate. As we were not officially prisoners, he continued, he could not insert us on the list for rations, but he would allow us to draw them with the soldiers as a favor.

The headquarters staff must have moved from Rheims very hurriedly, for the gendarme officers' mess lacked everything in the way of plates and dishes or cooking utensils. The preparing of the lunch and dinner, which we could study, as we were allowed the freedom of the kitchen, was a triumph of ingenuity on the part of the gendarme cook, a nice little Breton who did everything he could to make us comfortable as long as he could escape letting the officers see he was doing anything for us. It was very clear they objected to that.

Life under these circumstances was unendurable, and the trio regretted that the freedom of Paris had moved them to quit the capital. It was impossible to wash; there was not a basin or bowl free; it was impossible to address. It was too good to take off one's overcoat at night, and impossible to sleep a few minutes of the evening when the sentry side by side proved to be expert snorers. Handkerchiefs had to serve as towels and dishcloths.

Permission to draw rations was all very well, but not of great use to those who had nothing to draw them in. Each soldier has a tin kumple, a bowl with a tin cover, but there were no saucers, and to be bothered. We had bought some flat aluminum plates and our attempts to carry a load of boiling rice and ragout from one of the three huge cauldrons on the other side of the farm yard to the kitchen proved a source of great amusement to the men.

To add to our discomfort it rained each afternoon and evening. It might be added that the food seemed excellent for men who were working hard, but it did not tempt a prisoner's appetite who had done nothing but lounge around all day.

Our automobile was requisitioned at once. It belted, whispered that it had found great favor in the eyes of the commanding General. But from the window we could watch the soldiers trying to start it. Its electric self-starter was a mystery to them and they soon put it out of gear. When anything is requisitioned, a paper is given to the owner. In this case to the chauffeur as representing the owner with a full description. The price to be paid, is settled at Paris and only becomes due at the end of the war.

Money seemed about the commonest thing around and the most useless. It was impossible to buy a cigarette or a match. Twice a day an orderly went to buy wigs, sometimes miles away, and he would bring us what we wanted, an excellent ordinary wine being obtainable at 10 cents a bottle if you could supply bottles.

Our distractions were the arrival of an aeroplane from time to time, which I noticed always caused perturbation among the half dozen cooks who had been spared by the Germans. Then prisoners would come in, two Mayors one day (one was released), three miserable looking men, French, accused of being spies (they left in chains, and I fear required no sleeping place that night) and an Alsatian deserter from the German forces. This last was a school teacher, who reported his regiment at least was utterly demoralized and in such a bad position (almost all the officers had been killed) that the French could easily have cut them up. It seems to me that this was the cause of his deserting for more than the promptings of eagerness to be under the French flag. The gendarme gathered round him and threw every atrocity they had heard of as committed by German troops at him, but he declared (and it seemed to me he was speaking truly) that he had never witnessed any acts of the character described.

Sunday dragged along and ended, the nightmare of Sunday night followed, Monday seemed an eternity, and Monday night even more of a nightmare. A 5 o'clock on Tuesday morning our Italian comrades were aroused and told they were to be taken away. We learned after they were taken in automobiles to the nearest station and put on Paris by train. During Tuesday morning we heard the welcome that we were undisciplined news that we were to be moved that afternoon. After lunch, for the first time since our capture, we walked toward the yard gate which looked out on liberty. Until we knew we were to be released it only seemed rubbing it in to go and look at an open road and watch the gendarme sentry get busy to prevent our getting a dash for it.

What was our surprise to find four men, evidently English or American, seated on the other side of the road.



Belgian firing squad executing German spy.

Photo copyright Underwood & Underwood.

would make perfect umbrella stands," the married correspondents agreed. Each would have liked to carry off a shell, but ignorance as to how much or little shelling would explode them prevented such looting.

As we drew near to Soissons it became evident that we were going to give a liberal interpretation to our permit, which specified we should keep "back of the firing line." For our new field glasses showed us French artillery in position but not firing, and our ears told us that the guns were booming. Just before entering the town we met a crowd of slightly wounded men walking to the rear. All sorts of uniforms were there—Turcos, Senegalese, various types of Africans and, it seemed to me, Hindus. Our chauffeurs began giving them cigarettes, and it seemed as if we never should be able to start again. Their gratitude, if expressed in incomprehensible ejaculations, was easily understood. One wonder if these men from their distant sunny homes in Africa had any idea what they were fighting about in a distant country.

We bowled into Soissons about 11, without even being asked to show our permit, and at once we were aware that we were in a town that had been bombarded severely. The landlord of the Golden Cross unbarred his door and promised lunch in an hour if we would promise lunch with faux filet of beef as a joint. As war correspondents prepared to face anything we agreed to the menu, which included fried potatoes, salad, cheese and other items.

Before going to look at the cathedral and city we were shown what had once been a dining room in the hotel. A shell had fallen and demolished it, and in the cathedral, the floor of which was covered with glass and one chapel of which had been entirely wrecked by a shell, we heard a peculiar whistling sound in the air which even we amateurs knew at once was a shell. In a second or two it fell, not far away. Then we knew that we were in a town that had not only been but actually was being shelled.

We wandered round and saw the results on every side. Not a house had escaped, it seemed. Some had lost their windows only, others had been struck by a mine shell and only fragments of the walls remained. For

around us looking at us with sullen anger. I caught the words of one explaining to his neighbor that we were spies and adding "They have been denounced by the English soldiers." I saw there an old man I had seen at the cathedral and heard him say he had suspected as much when he saw us. Then the Mayor came out to receive us. Clad in a nurse's white dress, bearing the Red Cross armband, she told us to come in. For the acting Mayor of Soissons is Mme. Jeanne Watteau Machez.

The real Mayor and most of the municipal officers disappeared long ago when the approach of the Germans was certain. On their arrival two Prussian officers demanded the Mayor, and Mme. Machez stepped forward and said: "I am the Mayor!"

She treated with them and her energetic attitude saved the city from much ill treatment at the time.

The acting Mayor handed us over to the army officer who had been appointed Mayor for French laws will not yet allow even a Mme. Machez to become an official Mayor. The officer looked over our papers and talked with us a few minutes apologizing for keeping us but explaining that in the tense state of the city's nerves it was advisable to make a show of thoroughly examining any one accused of being a spy, and he begged us not to remain after lunch but to leave by 2:30. As he was still talking a soldier hurried in and asked him to come with him.

"An alarm! The Germans are going to attack. They are not two miles away!"

The officer hurried away and we ate an excellent luncheon, although the bombardment now was quite keen, a shell every two minutes—the firing preparatory, we supposed, to the assault. After lunch we stood in the street and saw a shell hit a house not 200 yards away. Then a French aeroplane flew into sight, high in the air, from the French lines, to inspect the German positions, which were in a stone quarry on elevated ground north of the town. The Germans launched their shells at him in vain. The shells burst high in the air, but not high enough, and huge mushroom shaped clouds of black smoke followed floating through the air. The aviator disappeared, but returned again

"No," said the head nurse, "a Red Cross only draws German fire."

A young Lieutenant whom we had met at the city hall on our first visit came to talk to us and three or four others gathered round the group. Our two English soldiers came also and soon began to accuse us of being Germans, insisting that the *Daily Mail* man could not be English. This was too much. We told the Lieutenant we doubted their being English. He turned out the guard, ordered them to be ready to show their papers. They refused and tergiversated. They would only produce their papers before an officer, they said, they had no papers. British soldiers never had papers, &c. At last they produced a little scrap of paper, unsigned and undated, giving a certain route. The Lieutenant immediately ordered them to the city hall under guard and sent a private message by an officer that they should be sent under escort to the British headquarters staff.

Whether they were proved to be German spies or not we have not yet learned, but it seemed to us very likely. Their English when one listened carefully was peculiar. The one who was typically English in appearance said he came from Yorkshire, but spoke with a succession of accents, a sort of Scotch and a strain of cockney predominating, while the other avoided speaking as much as possible, but certainly seemed not to be English. Their game was evidently to get any English speaking person out of the way as quickly as possible lest they should be detected, while it was easy to deceive the French.

It was now nearly 4 o'clock and the question of our departure had to be answered. The stout war correspondent and the slim were unanimous in voting to slip over night and see more fun, possibly an attempt to rush the town by the Germans. The third correspondent wished to leave, not through fear of shells or Germans—war correspondents know not fear—but through fear of being shut up for an indefinite time by the roads being blocked. It was already impracticable to return by the same road we had come by, as shells were sweeping it. Immediately after a long discussion a start was made by another road out of town. This led us once more past the cath-

close. Strange to say it was a French shell which had wandered from the right road. Chateau Thierry was full of English troops, but a second hotel found us three rooms and an excellent dinner, all at peace prices. The Germans had passed through, so no liquors could be had. No tobacco remained in the town and our new two day old papers were welcomed as a boon.

The next morning, Sunday, we visited the town and admired the efficiency of the shell that had gutted the Elephant Hotel. We recognized also the progress shown by modern artillery. One house showed two cannon balls that had embedded themselves in the wall half way in the war of 1814, which date had been painted round them. A shell of 1914 had passed through that wall and left little place for painting dates on that section.

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when we explained that there was too much for one to carry he allowed two to go.

"Gendarme! Your rifle is loaded?"

"Yes, mon Colonel."

"Conduct these two to their automobile and let them bring back their effects."

The gendarme seemed impressed with the importance of his mission. As we did not go toward the side of the car he expected he seemed to think we were giving him the slip, although the street was buzzing with soldiers. We brought back our belongings and placed them in the farm kitchen.

Then we met our fellow prisoners, four Italians, one who gained fame by describing the *Matin's* round the world automobile race some years ago and was recently in Mexico, another who represented a Paris paper, the third an Italian aristocrat resident in Paris, who had supplied the car in which they had come, and the fourth a Dutchman, a friend of the three who had driven the car.

They had had two nights of detention and explained to us that we had fallen into the very thing we wished to avoid—the headquarters of the Fifth Army, and that we were in the hands of gendarmes attached to the staff to protect it from annoyance. As we talked and cursed our luck the officer came and said very severely: "These gentlemen do not seem to realize their position. They are in my quarters by my permission" (two were in the kitchen) "and yet not one even saluted when I appeared."

We hastily explained our ignorance of military matters, that we were unaware that he was a Colonel or that we were imposing on his hospitality. He accepted our excuses. "The incident is closed" was good enough to say and we were not taken out and shot.

He explained that he was glad to let us use the kitchen, but that we must sleep in the prison on the straw with the other prisoners. Fortunately he added it was not overcrowded, as he had had six spies (two being women) shot a couple of days ago and a number of German prisoners were leaving that day.

After a further inspection of the prison and hearing the account the four Italians gave of the two nights they had spent in it we petitioned the Colonel to let us pass the night in the kitchen sitting on the bench along the table

Money seemed about the commonest thing around and the most useless. It was impossible to buy a cigarette or a match. Twice a day an orderly went to buy wigs, sometimes miles away, and he would bring us what we wanted, an excellent ordinary wine being obtainable at 10 cents a bottle if you could supply bottles.

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