

The Nurse's Story



BY ADELE BLENEAU
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(Continued.)

One morning about 5 o'clock the matron came to my room and said that a telephone message from B. a place some forty kilometers away, reported they were in desperate need of an interpreter. They had asked already three other hospitals for a nurse who spoke German, but none was available, and she wished me to be ready in half an hour to go there for the day. The road was in pretty good condition and clear of sentries, so we reached B. by 7 o'clock.

There had been only one thing of unusual interest on our way. From the top of a hill a mile or so across the valley we saw an ambulance train creeping along. Flaming red crosses covered the sides of the coaches. Before our amazed eyes, a few moments later, light puffs of smoke danced around them. Shells fell before and behind the train, but still the engine kept moving. Would it reach the next station and get beyond range? We asked each other breathlessly, the chauffeur and I. We followed it for fully ten minutes, and then it vanished behind a slope. It was like a cinematograph with its inevitable train and engine, but with the difference that the train looked small and distant, while the report of the guns was near and very real. We learned later that only one shot had found its mark, but that that one had killed three helpless men as they lay.

When we arrived we met the head surgeon. He was a straight, upstanding Englishman, and even under such stress his uniform looked spick and span, his boots polished, and he was wearing a glistening monocle. But above all his clear eyes, looking directly at you, gave an idea of energy, vitality and superiority.

It was the station from which the English ambulance trains went down to Roulogne. It seemed as if there must be hundreds of ambulances already there, as well as dozens upon dozens of ambulance cars. As fast as one train was filled it pulled out, and other cars were pushed in to take their places. There was such perfect method and system that by mid-afternoon we saw the last train slowly depart.

The surgeon knew we had been ordered to return by way of the battle front and bring with us a load of wounded, as there had been a perfect ambulance day previous. As he bade us goodby and thanked us for helping him, he asked me:

"Have you ever been on the field after a battle?"

I replied in the negative. Shaking his head sadly, he said:

"It is too horrible to attempt to describe, and I advise you to remain in your ambulance."

I assured him if it were possible I should.

We took a long time getting to the rendezvous, as there were sentries everywhere, and we had to pick out roads that were sheltered from shell fire. At last, when as near as we possibly could get, the two men left the car and myself in a shelter behind a little hill among the trees, for I did as the Englishman had advised, remained in the ambulance. The English major needed a nurse for a particular case and sent for me. Going to him I passed a battery of 75 about a hundred yards away, firing at intervals, and a platoon of men standing motionless, ready for orders. Ammunition wagons drawn by mules were passing to and from the guns, while a fanfare of all sorts was being hurried on their way to the lines.

The French had captured some trenches, and a counter attack was expected. Even then the fire was so heavy it was not possible to move, but about dusk it ceased somewhat. Soon the moon rose, and the night was a fantastic one. We were in a clearing—the moon was full, and by its light we could plainly see the ridge against the sky line a few hundred yards away on which the French had successfully repulsed the onslaught. All about us were officers and soldiers of every kind and condition. Among the trees were several hundred bayoneted men mounted or standing by their horses. Threading their way everywhere were the stretcher bearers bringing in their pathetic burdens. The ambulances came up one at a time, were loaded and sent off a little distance to wait until all was ready. Many of the wounded lay still and quiet; others were moaning, shrieking, praying or cursing, and almost all of them begging for water. Some of the wounds were so indescribably horrible that for the poor victims' sake we almost hoped they would not live.

In sharp contrast to this scene were standing about quietly talking and smoking as though such a thing as war did not exist. The medical major would occasionally, after a brief businesslike examination, give orders for a stretcher to be moved aside under the trees. It was the death warrant for its wretched occupant. Many did not seem to be in great pain, and I noticed that this often was a bad sign. One poor fellow smiled up at me, pressed my hand in gratitude for a mouthful of warm wine and said, "There is no use to pray for the nurses—because he is waiting for them," and in an hour he, too, had joined the little band beneath the pines.

They had been hours in the work, but all the field had still not been searched, and I insisted on joining a party of stretcher-bearers who were just starting out. It was no time for faint heartedness, there was too much

to be done. The moon was still bright, and objects were visible some distance away. The fight had been a fierce one and the German dead were nearly three times the number of the French. The bearers moved quickly but silently from body to body, some of the poor fellows were contorted into fantastic attitudes, others apparently asleep. The whole scene in the silence of the forest was inconceivably majestic.

We had covered the ground and were just turning back when by chance a little further on we saw a young fellow with his head pillowed on the breast of a German soldier. He was conscious, and his first words were, as so often happens, "How far did we get?" He told us as we carried him back that he and the German had lain there together twenty-four long weary hours, wondering whether the bearers would come, and if so, would they find them? That was a story we heard again and again, the anxiety, the torture, hour after hour, of fearing the persistent fire would prevent the bearers coming in, or that, if they did come, of being overlooked. We hurried back over the corpse strewn ground, buffed to the cheerful wagon-officers mired in blankets—guns, weapons and ambulances creeping along in the half light—the champing of bits—the occa-



The Bearers Moved Quickly, Silently, From Body to Body.

sional glow of a pipe or cigarette—a friendly offer of a swallow of brandy from the doctor's flask—a hurried adjournment to the staff car for a bite of bread and thinned meat that are carried for emergencies, and then the slow, bitter cold spray in the dense blackness just before the dawn, over the well worn demolished roads to the hospitals.

CHAPTER X. Close Quarters.

A FEW days after Colonel B's decision that I return to them, a decision that proved a momentous one to me, the Germans facing our left wing made a number of determined assaults, which our men, re-enforced by new troops, were fortunately able to beat off. These assaults resulted, however, in the taking of a number of German officers; for the attacking troops were landsturm and proved none too eager in the attack, and it was necessary for their officers to lead them. As a result many were taken prisoners and among them a number of wounded. We managed to find places in our hospital for all the worst cases—that is, for all except a certain Captain von Schulling.

While Von Schulling's hurt was a serious one—a wound in the heart cavity and a shattered shoulder blade—it was not necessarily fatal, but required close care and quiet. Under these conditions he could not with any humanity be sent to a base. But where to find a place for him, that was the difficulty.

Officers are never put in wards with the men, and besides these were already full and overflowing. After a consultation the matron and Dr. Souchon decided that he should be put on the cot in Captain Frazer's room, that being absolutely the only available spot.

As soon as I knew this I asked permission to inform Captain Frazer that he was about to be invaded by "the enemy."

"If he is pretty badly off I don't mind," he laughed.

A few moments later Von Schulling was comfortably installed on the cot in the little room where Captain Frazer was gradually regaining his grip on life.

He was a Prussian, tall, slender and fair haired, with a certain youthful charm that might have made an attractive man of him were it not for the incision of his hearing. He spoke English well, as I discovered when he was first brought in, though he very

UNCLE SAM'S DEFENDERS.

Next Monday will be the 124th birthday of the Militia of the United States, that body of citizen soldiers who would be first called on to reinforce Uncle Sam's little army in case of war. The present widespread agitation for a greater army and an improved and enlarged force of home defenders lends interest to this anniversary.

As at present constituted the organized militia of the United States comprises but a mere handful of men as compared with the total population. As we always found that the men of the militia of the United States now includes 132,208 officers and men. Adding to these the 87,348 officers and men of the regular army organization, the United States government has at its disposal in case of conflict a force of about 220,000 trained soldiers.

The present militia law of the United States makes every able-bodied man between the ages of 18 and 45 a member of the "reserve militia," but it is probable that few citizens are aware of that fact. It is true, however, that "every able-bodied and male citizen of the respective States, and every able-bodied male of foreign birth who has declared his intention to become a citizen, who is more than 18 and less than 45 years of age," is a militiaman. The law further sets forth that these "shall be divided into two classes—the organized militia, to be known as the National Guard or by such other designations as may be given them by the laws of the respective States, and the remainder to be known as the reserve militia."

The comparison between the "organized militia" and the "reserve militia" is ludicrous, with only 132,208 enrolled in the former body, and with something like 22,000,000 of men in the latter. While few Americans are desirous of inaugurating a system such as prevails in the Swiss republic, where the citizen soldier is called to be a soldier, yet the present war has caused many to "view with alarm" the great disparity between what the law refers to as "organized" and "unorganized" militia.

The militia of the United States of the Union save three bear the official title of National Guard. The Organized Militia of Delaware, the Massachusetts Volunteer Militia, and the Virginia Volunteers, constitute the militia of each of the other states in the militia of the republic is 123,105, led by 9,103 commissioned officers, of whom 1,525 are general and general staff officers, and 7,578 regimental and company officers. New York is headed by the other states in the number of its home defenders, with a total of 15,474 officers and men. Pennsylvania stands second, with 10,839; Ohio third, with 6,861, and Illinois fourth, with 5,000. Massachusetts occupies fifth place with 5,937. New Jersey and Missouri each have over 4,000, and California, Georgia, Iowa, Minnesota, Texas and Wisconsin each have between 3,000 and 4,000 enrolled in the National Guard. Utah, with an "army" of 485 men, and Delaware, with 502, are close competitors for the "booby" prize, which is really held by Nevada, which has no organized militia.

The Indian wars in the Northwest were responsible for the original organization of the militia. It was a difficult task, for Washington's suggestion of the necessity of such a body immediately started a process into a debate over the respective rights of the national and state governments. The President's first suggestion led to the appointment of a committee, which reported in December, 1790, and a new committee was appointed in 1790, and a bill was prepared along lines laid down by General Knox, then Secretary of War, but no action was taken. A third militia committee began its work in December, 1790, and reported a bill, which was permitted to die. At the opening of the second Congress the President again urged the organization of a militia force, and Congress appointed a committee, which reported in December, 1790, and a bill was prepared along lines laid down by General Knox, then Secretary of War, but no action was taken. A third militia committee began its work in December, 1790, and reported a bill, which was permitted to die. At the opening of the second Congress the President again urged the organization of a militia force, and Congress appointed a committee, which reported in December, 1790, and a bill was prepared along lines laid down by General Knox, then Secretary of War, but no action was taken.

As time passed rumors of impending danger came to our ears, and with them Von Schulling developed a queer exaltation, as though he felt the approach of the time when he should be in power. With it there crept into his voice and manner an arrogant and assertive tone which irritated me to the highest degree, though Captain Frazer passed it over in amused silence. Then one morning the enemy's firing grew more distinct; cars began passing the hospital lanes with household goods. Doves of battle—were they?—were girls, each with a bundle down up in a towel or pillow slip—tiny mites of four and five doing all they could to save the home; mothers with babes at the breast—came in endless streams.

Sometimes beside the roadway long rows of fugitives would sit, peering back over their shoulders. I recall one group of little children alone, unattended. It was a pathetic picture that will live in my memory forever. All this proved only too conclusively that the enemy was advancing and that our lines were hurriedly falling back.

These things seemed to stimulate, to encourage Von Schulling to make himself generally offensive. As I was changing the bandages on his wounded shoulder one morning he put his other arm about me and drew me to him until his lips touched my face. I freed myself at once, but in spite of my natural anger, the instinctive fear of what Captain Frazer would attempt to do if I disclosed the situation held me silent. Nevertheless I looked anxiously across the room to be sure he had not seen, and Von Schulling, catching my hurried glance, flung himself back on his bed, muttering with an oath something about "your schweinhund lover."

The situation was an impossible one, and I could see no better course than to leave him. What happened after I left the room I learned later from Captain Frazer.

Captain von Schulling lay muttering for some time, then gathering his strength he struggled to his feet for the first time in weeks. Clinging to the wall and to the table that was between their cots, he made his way to Captain Frazer and stood for a moment looking down at the despoiled Englishman. Perhaps some faint decency held him back for a moment, but the cold blooded indifference engendered by the scenes of suffering and torture through which he had passed choked out all better impulses, and he stooped over his desperately wounded enemy with a look of murderous hate. Captain Frazer felt from the first moment what Von Schulling intended to do and lay silently collecting all his faculties for a supreme effort when the moment came.

(To Be Continued.)

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