NED PORTER, FORMER UNIVERSITY STUDENT, WRITES OF WAR SCENES

Was in Germany Just Couple of Days Before Formal Declaration of War Was Made—Sends Intensely Interesting Letter Anent His Experiences.

Note: The following interesting note was written by Ned Porter, a graduate of the University of North Dakota. He is an Ellendale resident, and formerly edited The Student. Mr. Porter was awarded a Rhodes scholarship, and has been studying at Oxford for the past year. The letter describes his experiences on the continent of Europe during the few days preceding the declarations of war. He and a fellow student, Conrad E. Snow—who is mentioned several times in the letter, made a trip to Germany at that time. Mr. Porter's letter graphically describes the scenes they saw. His letter follows:)

We can't say we wern't warned. The newspapers had developed a decidedly grave tone, and our genial friend, the secretary of the Atlantic Union, said, "you'd better come out to Harrow with me for some tennis. What! you're all ready to go- Well, good bye. I suppose you'll be shot as spies. Good bye." With which cheerful prediction to lighten the way, we went off for our luggage, and made a grand rush for Fenchurch station. It show how the little things count, for if we had come round an hour earlier, we should have accepted that invitation to tennis, and if my taxi driver had not been obviously an ex-artillery man, to judge by the way he missed the wheels of other vehicles and tore through every narrow opening that presented itself in the ever-crowded streets near the bank, I should not have got into the station just one minute before the train started. If Snow had not been the god from another car or Johnny on the spot with the exact change I should have wasted that precious minute, should not have been able to jump into the moving train, and should have missed some of the most interesting and bizarre scenes it has ever been my fortune to observe. It isn't every day that one sees history so conspicuously in the making, even at the expense of much valuable time, money and perspiration.

A paper purchased at Tilbury (6 p. m., Friday, July 31) furnished the pleasing information that Russia had ordered a general mobilization, and that Germany was under martial law. A la J. Caesar, however, we felt that if we had not already crossed the Rubicon, alias the English channel, it was up to us to do so at once, and consigning our impedimenta to a porter, stepped on board the tug, which took us out to the waiting Batavier II.

Slept on Deck.

The boat was crowded. Returning Dutch and Germans filled it to overflowing, and our chance of any sort of a berth was, as the Dutch steward said, absolutely "nix." Every boat going either way was loaded to the guards. We descended to the dining salon and draping ourselves over a section or two of the table, prepared to get a bit of sleep. No chance, however; a fiery Swiss was proclaiming to the world in general and a gross-beaked German Jew in particular his willingness to bet any amount that his salary as sauce cook in a Frankfort hotel was really 300 marks per month. Deprived of his auditor by the snores of the Jew, the valiant cook proclaimed the doctrine of patriotism with a fiery zeal probably inspired by the consumption of an overdose of his own extracts: "Your country is your country. Any man who would not fight for her is no man!" He glared around challenging contradiction, and was promptly taken up by a fat coarse prosperous Briton who sneered at the garden variety of patriotism, and sardonically growled rank socialism, curses at the aristocracy, and praises of Lloyd George—"wot's yer country ever done fer you? he querled. This meant another sustained argument, so hastily extracting from the Swiss the information that he was called home as a reservist, and that in a short time Switzerland would have an army of 500,000 mobilized to defend her borders, we went up on deck and slept out the rest of the stilly chilly night. Occasionally the melodious strains of a violin-mandolin concert in one of the state rooms drifted up to us—it didn't sound much like war.

The boat docked at about 7 o'clock the next morning at Rotterdam. As soon as we had got our baggage through the customs, we took it down to the Maas station, intending to leave it until some time in the afternoon. Military guards stopped us at the outside gates and asked our destination they waved us on, when we gave it as Cologne. The man in charge of the garde-robe advised us to go on if we wished to get through to our destination. "This may be the last train," he said. Much questioning elicited the fact that there would probably be another at twelve—no one was sure. The line might be broken at the frontier at any time. Uncertainty was the keynote; no one seemed to know just what was going to happen.

With mingled feelings of perplexity and curiosity we set out for the American consulate. Things had evidently been happening during our night trip. Everywhere were posted notices of varying size: "Alle miliciens unt landveermen met spoed oopkomen," signed Wilhelmina. A summons from the queen to the militia and reserves to instant mobilization. Even as we read the notice the streets near the station were filling with men in the most unmilitary of crumbled blue uniforms clumping stolidly and as silently as their clumsy brogues would allow to the entraining point. There was none of that spick and spanness, that swing or snap that characterizes nearly every nation's soldiery the world over, at least on its first day of mobilization. Most were men from the outlying country districts, their ungraceful figures and immobile faces moulded by the unending toil necessary to wring from an unwilling soil a precarious existence. It was easy to see that they were descendants of the men who never fought as long as they could trade, but when they did fight—verbum sat. We still have to read about the siege of Leyden, and Van Tromp's broom. There was less bustle among the military in Holland than in Germany, or everything considered, even than in England. They were matter of fact about the fighting. It was not until we turned the corner toward the Wijnhaven that we saw the reason for the emptiness of the streets elsewhere, and the relative insignificance of the military preparations. The thrifty burgers—that term burgers is perfectly good; saw it on a proclamation, the only word I could read—had started a very pretty little run on the Nederlandsche bank. Even at 8 o'clock the line was a block long, and when we came back a couple of hours later, it had grown to huge proportions. So insistent were the good folk for their geld that a mounted policeman rode his horse through the mass into the very doorway in order to check them, and with a couple of assistants on each side managed to regulate their entrance. Even then he had to work. Snow started to photograph the crowd, thus exciting the keen suspicion of a Dutch boy scout, who was, however, disarmed by a six-inch grin.

No Information From Consul.

Even the American consul was unable to give us any definite information. But it was interesting to find that he was an old pioneer of the west of 30 years ago, having built the first house of Breckenridge, Minn., a town I have passed through a great many times, and which is probably more or less known to most who read this. The vice consul was a keen-looking, agreeable chap from Fargo. Both were as courteous and helpful as possible, giving us directions and a line to the German consulate, where they advised us to have our passports vise'd.

Arrived at the German consulate, "official consultation" was found to be the order of the hour, so we walked about a bit while awaiting his excellency's pleasure. Trains full of soldiers were continuously leaving the town, and outside cafe seats commanding a view of the main viaduct were at a premium. Bear in mind, though, that the Dutch for the most part took their excitement quietly. There was a little cheering for and from the troops passing in the trains but that was about all from the mass of the people. But a more extended walk brought us the pleasing spectacle of "soldiers having a last drunken carousal, or wandering about with a wench in either arm" (a coarse description I beg you to believe not my own—quoted from Snow's front page article—with woodcut— in the Rochester (N. H.) Courier). (See original for exciting details). But finally our passports were vise'd, and having received them, together with the information that we were at liberty to go on into Germany, we took our departure for Emmerik, on the German frontier, at 4 in the afternoon. In spite of the permission of the German consul, the railroad officials would by no means give us tickets any farther than the frontier.

Rushed Past Guard.

They had reason. As we came to the frontier, the word came to close all the windows, and presently, through the gathering dusk, we saw the rounded outlines of a Dutch fort, part on either side of the line. The precaution was probably to prevent our surreptitiously dropping bombs or banana skins into the fortifications. These bulwarks of the country having been preserved there was no excuse for further delay, and we were soon at Emmerik. Fortunately, there were still plenty of porters about, and they hauled our luggage out and through the customs in short order. But that was not all. A stocky, well-dressed man with prominent facial scars from the schlager-bouts on either cheek, was standing at the door, and beside him an officer whose gold-hilted sword and shoulder straps indicated rather advanced rank — probably major. They were questioning every man who tried to pass. Snow flashed his American passport under the secret service man's nose, and went by without two words. Burdened with luggage, I was too slow, and two foreigners got in ahead of me. They looked Russian, but talked English. The official was imperative: "No! You cannot go in! Two days! A week, maybe. We shall see. But now, go back to Amsterdam and stay!" He was immovable, but they argued, and I was wondering when my turn came, and why a German porter was making wild signs toward my luggage and the train, when in jumped Snow. "Hurry up," he shouted, cutting in on the official, whose English had been rendered much more fluent by his long practice with the two preceding. "The train's going!"

That did not in the least seem to disturb the Germanic Pinkerton. He took a fresh hold of the English language, and started to tell me how foolish I was to go into Germany at such a time, "Yes. War has actually been declared! (It hadn't.) Why do you want to go? Students, eh? Well—" But Snow was getting excited, so we made a grab at the remaining luggage and went through. No sooner out than we discovered that the box of books was left behind. Snow amalgamated his store of German and my supply of Dutch silver and by rushing back and "recklessly bribing railway officials with pennes" (an example of Yankee business ability—from the Rochester Courier) managed to get it. I hereby acknowledge my indebtedness to him; had he not courageously and munificently soaped the rails with silver tuppences (per the medium of the guard) we should in all probability have been (judiciously if not judicially) separated from large quantities of Roman law and English history.

Change in Very Atmosphere.

From the moment we entered Germany at Emmerik, we seemed to feel a change in the very atmosphere. In Holland the dominant note had, of course, been military preparation of a quiet, efficient sort, with a sort of undercurrent of wondering apprehension. The peaceful Dutch people hardly knew what their position might be the next morning, with their powerful neighbors hastening to arms. But the instant I descended to the station platform at Emmerik and felt, as it were, an electric current crackling through the former quiet of the night. There were comparatively few people, only officials and porters on the platform, but there was a determined haste, not frantic in the least—on the contrary, quite disciplined and orderly—say rather an extraordinary tenseness and alertness, mingled with a certain grimness about their movements, which gave that high pressure feeling to the very air we breathed, and made us to feel alert, excited, without knowing just why. This is not after-imagination. There was a difference as perceptible as I have noticed of coming from the vastly twilight silences of St. Paul's into the crashing roar of the traffic and the garish lights of Cannon street. The tension was as much greater than that in Holland as Germany is greater than the Netherlands. For the first time the reality, the seriousness, of the situation, struck me. This was to be no temporary showing of the mailed fist—no mere diplomatic coup. It seemed as though what we felt was the pervading spirit of a mighty nation roused and plunging into awful war.

A change awaited us at Dusseldorf, and we had to pull our own baggage out of the train, for no one else seemed to be around to do it. One cannot appreciate what it is not to have any railway porters around until he travels in a country where it is quite beneath the dignity of a gentleman (of course all Americans are rich and therefore included in that class) to carry his own luggage. I really consider it to be of the major evils of the war that we had to pack ours about half a mile at the Cologne station. So would you if any two of you had to carry eight pieces—suitcases, Gladstones, box of books, typewriter, rucksack, banjo. I perspire freely whenever I think of it. We had intended to settle down and study at a place near Bonn; hence our heavy marching order. If the kaiser could have seen the childlike trust we showed in his peaceful intentions by going into Germany in that fashion, I'm sure he would have stopped the war.

Many Troop Trains.

But to proceed—something we couldn't do just then, as every train thundered through the Dusseldorf station seemed too busy carrying troops, petrol, cattle, hogs, and munitions of war to the front, to stop for us. But we finally got into a carriage with a stout jolly Frenchman (who, with true Gallic reserve, informed us that he was a member of the secret service on his way to Cologne to get some baggage) and started on the last lap of our very checkered journey. * * * I think I owe it to the Parisian Sherlock that we got our luggae off the train at Cologne. He gave us notice just in time for me to waken Snow and get out into the corridor where our luggage was stored. The train stopped, and the waiting crowd charged. So did I, and smashed through to the platform with two bags in my grasp. Before I could turn the car doorway was jammed by would-be passengers fighting for a place—it was S. R. O. right enough—and I had to fight with the best to get back for the rest of my luggage and get it out again. I earned the hearty curses of a young lieutenant, as, yelling "Eushuldigen," "Verzening" and various other things, I barged through the crush and onto his toes, but others were more charitable and pushed me on. One stood not on the manner of his going in Germany that night, and for some days to come, but one certainly went.

We stepped from the exit of the Hochbahnhof (Grand Central) into full view of the famous cathedral. It towered above us, the delicate strength of the lofty spires showing wonderfully clear in the calm bright moonlight, while from the shadows at its base came the rolling, thrilling strains of—for a moment I thought it surely "Alma Mater." Then four soldiers, arms entwined, swung across the square in columns of four, their splendid voices swelling forth in perfect unison—"Deutschland, Deutschland, uber alles; Uber alles in dem weld!" It was the "Die Wacht Am Rhein"—and a melody also used in the English church, as well as in the battle hymn of the University of North Dakota. Emperor Wilhelm thought it was a personal compliment to himself when the organ pealed it forth in the Royal chapel at Windsor on the occasion of a visit to Queen Victoria some years ago. And, for a moment, I thought I had stepped, not into Cologne, but into the home town of my own university. Such is the magic, the compelling force, of those grand familiar strains. And some of you may care to remember, the next time you sing what some times seems an ordinary, time-worn tune, that the millions of the greatest army that ever scourged mankind, are, perchance at that very moment pealing it forth as they march and countermarch, charge, retreat, conquer or perish, in the throes of Armageddon.

Buglers Summon Troops.

There was a clatter and a crash of bugles to the left as we emerged into a long street, evidently an important one, and in a moment there burst upon our sight a spectacle I shall never forget. Four abreast, two ranks of buglers with the standard bearer at the front, flashed into the moonlit brightness of the square. Rigidly erect they sat their steeds left hand on hip, while from the brazen instruments at their lips rang forth the tarantarara of such a call as should shame the very stones to action. With a final splitting fanfare, they ceased just after passing, and the battalion rode on, two by two, plumes tossing, swords clanking, lance points gleaming. The men were calling gayly to such as had braved the chill of the dawn to bid them farewell—"auf wiedersehn—auf wiedersehn!" They rode to war and death as men going to a festival.

"War is Declared."

Naturally, our first waking thought was to see the consul. By good fortune we met him just as he was leaving his office. He saw us first. "Ah," he said, "you are Americans—yes? Well, I am der consul." A statement which his marked German accent did not mar in the least; we wanted news—he had it." Yes! War was declared on Russia at 11 o'clock this morning. No! Not France. But we shall declare war on France tomorrow! The people here," he continued, getting a bit excited, "they did not want war. They were perfectly quiet and hoped this would blow over, but now the news has come of this dastardly attack by the Russians and they are furious!" He fairly hissed out the concluding words. It was not hard to see where his sympathies lay. "Now my advice to you" and the sweep of his even included three or four compatriots who had come up in the brief time we had been speaking—"my advice to you is to go to Switzerland, if you can afford it. Switzerland will be crowded. There were about 600 Americans here yesterday and I advised all who could afford it to go there. If not, stay here quietly for a few days. And don't take any snapshots! I had to get about 12 Americans out of jail yesterday for photographing places they had no business to. Trains out of here? My dear sir, how do I know? Everything is for the troops—everything!"

A trip to the station served to confirm that statement. By virtue of our strong determination to get out of the country, we attached a young chap who had been listening to the consul, with furrowed brow, and many questions as to the best way to get to Berlin. As a German teacher at home, his greater knowledge of the tongue was invaluable and we soon discovered a possible train going to Goch, on the Dutch frontier. Luckily or not, we just missed it; our accursed baggage weighed us down. We were commenting on the situation rather strongly when a pleasant-faced German volunteered some information. His brother, it seemed, had something to do with the railway company, and he knew exactly when a through train left that evening for Flushing, via Goch. That decided us. With the help of our German friend, we again stowed our luggage and went out to await the express. That was a decent chap. He evidently took us for English for he said as he left us—"well, goodbye! It is best we meet not again," meaning evidently that if we did we should probably have to shoot at each other. And yet he helped us as if we had been friends of many years 'standing. You won't find many in England do that much for a stranger, unless it's in the north.

People Read Bulletins.

Everywhere people were gathered in knots and groups, some talking, some reading bulletins which told of unprovoked attacks by the Russian patrols and incursions into German

(Continued on Page 4.)

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