

C. C. RAMAGE DESCRIBES MARCH THROUGH BELGIUM TO THE RHINE

Meets S. Grey Boys at Mons—Beautiful Scenery en Route—No Friendships Allowed with German Girls—Christmas at Cologne.

(Publication delayed three weeks for lack of space—Ed) Urbach, Near Cologne, Germany, Dec. 27, 1918

Dear Friends, In a recent letter I spoke of our kind reception by the Belgian people and the wondrous manner in which they received us. In this write up I propose to touch upon, in as small a space as possible, a few incidents of our 300-mile zigzag tramp across Belgium and thru Germany as far as the Rhine River. Then perhaps a few details of the army of occupation east of the great German river and the attitude towards the population and their relations to us might be interesting.

for Heine and saved the edifice from destruction. The enemy had played great havoc with the railway lines, roads and bridges around Mons. Every farthing of rail was blasted, the cross roads had great rents in them and all the traffic bridges were down. There was plenty of work for Engineers and Railway troops and they accomplished wonders in re-establishing the lines of communication. These Canadian Construction battalions cannot be surpassed when it comes to an emergency. The men earn their \$1.10 per.



A section of the large bridge across the Rhine at Cologne, known as the Hohenzollern bridge. In his letter accompanying, C. C. Ramage says 'our 1st Division marched across in full battle strength, taking seven hours to cross the bridge.' In the distance is seen the famous Cologne Cathedral.

My diary tells me that after crossing the Franco-Belgian border on 15 Nov., and passing through several gaily decorated towns, we reached the vicinity of the pretty and historical little city of Mons on the 18th. The 3rd Can. Division had been there for nearly a week and were 'in jake' with the people. The Belgians could not do enough for the Canucks and when money was found in plenty among the soldiers we found they could also raise their prices to us! The Mayor in a public letter, deprecating this selfish act on the part of the big merchants. The restaurants were wide open, waiters in white fronts and frock coats, tipped about as usual. No one would guess that times were hard and that the city was pecked with p or refugees on route to their homes, scarcely knowing where their next meal was to come from.

reached the Rhine. The inhabitants of the country, old and young, overcome the cobble by wearing wooden shoes called Sabaux. It is an amusing sight to watch them slop around in them. The next town of importance we stopped at was Nivelles, about 20 miles south of Brussels. Here we received a wonderful reception and on Sunday a celebration was held in honor of 'Les Braves Canadiens.' Preparations for the Fete were on a monstrous scale but unfortunately, the brigade received orders to march forward the same morning and put a damper on the enthusiasts. Nevertheless the few hundreds who remained pat in the day of their lives. Nothing was too good for us and our money was worthless. We were backed with Belgian ribbons, flags and buttons. One soldier was good for a dozen girls any time and they were extended out six on each arm, and the parties played 'crack the whip' in the main square of the town. In the evening, the rejicings were continued, the narrow streets were densely packed and 'all went merry as a marriage bell.' Great stores of German very lights and star shells had been collected and were set off all over the town, making a night performance of fireworks at the Toronto Exhibition a tame display in comparison. A month previous, our soldiers watched similar displays of star shells and lights under entirely different conditions. In the war days in the trenches, one would become an immovable statue to escape notice when a bright light went up. But now—what a contrast!

TOMORROW'S MAN

What is done in childhood days to enrich the blood and build up rugged health often makes or breaks the man of tomorrow. The growing youth, with nervous energy overwrought, needs constant care and

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armistice conditions. The eggs were of all colors from the 3-inch to the 15-inch—and still retaining the camouflage war dress. The aerodrome was the largest I ever saw, and the planes were of superior types. Some were small single seaters, pretty as butterflies and as gaudily painted. The Germans have a mania for brilliant coloring on their flying machines and the work executed on some of these graceful birds resembled Futurist Art designs. I tried for a relief for a souvenir, but failed, as the trophies are closely guarded from each would be souvenir scalper as I.

The battlefield of Waterloo is about 15 miles from Nivelles but no opportunity was available to visit the historic battlefield of 100 years ago. However I was told the Huns had not destroyed nor touched any of the great monuments erected by England, France and Russia in memory of the heroes of liberty and of those who bled for Napoleon on the decisive field of Waterloo. Our road, however, was thru Quatre Bras, where Wellington was repulsed and forced to retire before the big struggle took place. On the field there is a monument of a British lion in heroic posture, erected to the memory of Britain's sons who fell there. We were surprised to see this piece of sculpture untouched by the enemy.

Through the eastern side of Belgium we had strenuous marching days. We came to the Meuse river, close to the pretty city of Huy, which nestles in a giant river valley similar to the Kimberly valley in East Grey. We follow the river road, sometimes at the foot of great precipices and then again within a yard of the swish river. The scenery is naturally fine and it helps one to forget the fatigues of the march. Every twist in the road presents a new panorama for us to admire and thus we come to the Valley of the Lourdes, in the Lower Ardennes, a mountain area which becomes high as you proceed further south.

ing garrison duty. There are Scotch New Zealand and English troops in our area. The 2nd Canadian Division is at Bonn, 20 miles south, the Belgians are north of us around Dusseldorf, the Americans are at Coblenz and the French guarding the frontier at Mainz, Frankfurt to the Swiss border. Thus with Germany's military stores in our hands, the bulk of her navy surrendered, her air fleet turned over, the Rhine river, the pride of the German people, guarded by our arms, the great chain of commercial and industrial cities on the Rhine, which spell influence, power, wealth and national interests to the Huns, behind us, the do we feel confident that the enemy is powerless to renew war activities and that his rifle lies a relic and helpless cripple in Allied hands.

It required four days to trek through the mountain area and in that time we had our fill of mountain climbing. Incidentally we cursed the Kaiser more than ever. Not satisfied with that we strafed King and Army, and one day when food rations failed to come, the troops set it and refused to march. Napoleon said 'An army marches on its stomach,' and we know now he was right. When rations failed, there was a general refusal to march as we knew the substitute, bully and biscuits is poor stomach fare. The supply column failed us again a week later, so we were two days behind schedule reaching the Rhine.

Notwithstanding the failure of the commissariat with supplies and adverse weather conditions, the trek through eastern Belgium was extremely interesting on account of gorgeous scenery in the Lower Ardennes. The roads wind and curve continuously at the base of mountain and hill. Frequently the trail would horse shoe on the inner circle of a swirling range of hills, allowing the head of the column to be but a stone's throw from the rear of the party. The longest climb was 5 kilometres (over 3 miles). It was raining at the base of the mountain, half way up we were wretched in mist and at the top it was shining brightly. The villages in the mountain area are very old fashioned and the people more than usually kind to the crusaders.

We missed Liege, Namur and Charleroi to our great regret. We especially wanted to see the forts at Liege as they are renowned for the heroic defence of the city in August 1914. We crossed the border into Germany on Dec 6th, a short distance north of the state of Luxembourg. It was a strange feeling for all of us to pass that black and white pole and the armed English guard at the gateway of the enemy's country. Yet it was a feeling of victory and that the efforts of four years of struggle had not been in vain. The first night in Germany we spent in a village schoolhouse as a billet. It was warm and comfortable with plenty of straw on the floor. About the only thing I remember now, was a framed picture of the Kaiser on the wall, which one of the boys took down and hung in the lavatory facing the wall. An artist that took colored chalk and sketched the Union Jack on the black-board!

Western Germany is a fertile rolling country and there are some fine views to be obtained. The country is densely populated hereabouts, villages and towns being never more than three miles apart. At one point on the march, I could count as many as 12 towns. Church spires and factory chimneys broke the sky-line at numerous intervals but as for the places themselves they are as much alike as Monday and Tuesday. Marching through scores of them in six days without pause, one can grasp few distinctive features. On the 11th of December we saw the Rhine for the first time in our lives and knew we were close to our journey's end. Two days later the 1st Division marched through the city of Cologne and across the great German river in full battle strength. The procession took seven hours to cross the bridge and it made an imposing showing of our strength.

Gen. Plumer of the 2nd British Army, Gen. Currie of the Canadians, stood at the bridgehead and reviewed the march past. The division was headed by a Montreal battalion band which played 'When we wind up the watch on the Rhine,' an American innovated war parody on the famous German song. We are now posted on the east side of the river, performing

German is most heart-rending for in this language we are completely at sea. For example, in one German village I was looking for a billet and I said to the lady of the house 'Ayez vous a bed fur schlafen.' (Have you a bed to sleep in?) Her reply was a shake of the head added to some gibberish I could not understand. There was a pair of us.

We have had several fine trips to the city of Cologne, 600,000 population and the queen of Rhineland cities. It is a beautiful and well-constructed city, substantially built and edifices of modern style. One great drawback is the narrow streets in the business section; they would not average more than 40 feet. We were there during the Christmas season and I will say that during this period, the German people seemed to throw off all thought of defeat and of the losses of the war. They entered into the spirit of Christmas with great keenness and thronged the streets and shops buying gifts as we do at home. There is lots of money here—lots of it. The people are well dressed, women parade in costly furs, the glittering jewelry stores were always crowded and the big restaurants, cafes and cabarets were all doing well. Every family has a Christmas tree, decorated it lavishly with tinsel and covers it with presents. One thing I have noticed is the almost absence of automobiles; this is owing to the shortage of rubber and petrol in Germany, especially rubber.

Two friends and myself are billeted with a small family in this village and we would not ask for a better home. In one sense we will be sorry when we depart in a week's time knowing the people as we do, it would be certainly a great injustice to lay the charge of crimes and cruelties at their door—rather put it down to an organized system of autocratic Prussianism.

But really, friends, this is an awful country for good and well-intentioned soldiers to be in! Now, so as you can get my 'drift' I am going to 'snow' real hard. Being in an enemy country, discipline among the troops is strict and the military have 'verboten' that soldiers have lady friends while in this country, which is, of course, contrary to the law of true love. The blond lassies are most adorable, one friend describing them 'pretty as a peach, round as an apple, sound as a dollar.' He went to church Christmas morning with two 'Frauiliens' who live in the house where he is billeted. That day he was in the line, for he was seen, brought before the colonel next morning, sentenced to three extra pickets and made to change his billet!

The language is of course, another barrier to friendship and in conversation a mixture of English, French, Dutch and a little Yiddish is passed up. The transition from French to

General Currie took up a post on the centre of this bridge to take the salute as the boys marched over with fixed bayonets. Some South Grey boys have crossed over this bridge, of which they have sent home picture post cards.

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