

FIGHTING FRANCE SEEN FROM THE INSIDE

By Lincoln Eyre, Paris Correspondent of The New York World, in The World.

Lincoln Eyre, the Paris correspondent of The World, is familiar with every aspect of life in France. In the course of his duties he has written all the news of the French front, having seen more of the Battle of Verdun, for instance, than any other foreign newspaper writer. On The World's behalf he has traveled extensively in the Inter-war years, and he has come to know intimately the conditions in every section of the country. As a result of his long residence in France, The World publishes a series of articles on the economic, industrial and social state of affairs in France, which remains the most comprehensive exposition of what the French people have done in this war yet published in America.

Eyre, who has been stationed in the French capital steadily except for brief trips to England and Germany in the first year of the great struggle, came to the United States with the French Mission at the invitation of the ministry of foreign affairs. He will return with Vice Premier Viviani and Marshal Joffre to resume his work in Paris.

There is more than merely the urge for moral and numerical reinforcement in the request of France for American troops on the western front with the least possible delay. Although the French people are wholly sincere in their friendship for the United States, they do not want to take any more chances than they have to in this fight for their lives. Therefore they would be considerably relieved to receive from this country a guarantee of real cooperation in the shape of American soldiers on their soil. The French government entertains no doubt of President Wilson's will to wage war in the fashion most advantageous to the common cause, but the French people, a practical race at all times, would find in

Coal is \$32 a Ton, Eggs 80 Cents a Dozen, Steak 80 Cents a Pound and Sugar Obtainable Only by Card, But France is Not on Her Last Legs—Life Among the Fighting Men and the People Back Home Shows the Patriotic Courage and Devotion of the Race—How the Famous Foreign Legion Has Paid Its Toll on the Battlefield Until Only 4,000 of the Original 50,000 Remain.

France in her struggle rather than those upon which President Wilson's action was based. Yet they insist they are just as good Americans as ever.

The great tactical problem on the western front remains that of "breaking through" on a grand scale. It has never been accomplished, although on several occasions both sides have temporarily found themselves inside the enemy's lines and with no defending forces in front of them. It is unwise to mention the occasions on which the French penetrated into German territory, but I can safely say that in the ravine of Bras, on the evening of Feb. 18, 1915, the Crown Prince's troops had nothing between them and Verdun, six miles away, and that on June 30, 1916, a German detachment entered one of the Verdun forts without encountering resistance. Had they tried to forge ahead, however, they would probably have been annihilated, for at both places the open space was too narrow for successful penetration. In each instance they were forced to fall back a few hours later.

Casual observers picture the various "drives" that have taken place as having all been straight shoves forward. As a matter of fact, every one had a different tactical form. Some were fan-shaped, others cut in to the right or to the left, still others were designed as an encircling movement. Except the battle of the Marne, which flung the Germans back on the Aisne and forever freed Paris of their menace, none has achieved the full meaning of the term. The battles of the Yser and Verdun, which may be set down as French victories, were of course splendid tactical resistance to enemy on slaughtering, but had no immediate active result. The Somme, aside from the relief it brought the defenders of Verdun, obtained only local benefits.

In figuring out the number of effective troops engaged on either side, the most puzzling point is to estimate the total actually lining the trenches at any given time. The trench population is a constantly shifting one, increasing here one day and there the next. From the best information at my disposal I believe there have never been more than 2,000,000 men, British and French, in the first line and reserve trenches simultaneously. This of course takes no account of the divisions or regiments "in reserve" behind the front of the strategic reserve. Throughout the entire war there has never been the smallest gain of ground without some infantry fighting—although infantrymen have frequently snatched small slices from their adversaries without artillery aid. As Lieut. de Tessan, who is here now as aide-de-camp to Marshal Joffre, puts it in his book, "Quand On Se Bat," all the guns, airplanes, motor trucks, and other branches of the railroads and other branches of the army organization have only one basic object—to bring one's own infantry face to face with the opposing infantry under the best possible conditions for the former.

France is not on her last legs, as the foe would have us believe; but she is fighting with blood flowing from a host of unattended wounds, and suffering is inevitable among every element of her civilian population. Her great cities, and principally Paris, are enduring the bitterest hardships imposed upon the non-combatant folk. The coming winter, as they themselves are aware, is going to strain the fortitude of the Parisians to a degree unequalled since the "terrible year" of the siege.

The most alarming shortage will probably be coal, as it was last winter.

I haven't the slightest idea how I am going to heat either my apartment or The World's Paris office in the cold weather come. Both are supposed to have steam heat, but in the office the radiators ceased to radiate last January, and at the apartment they were working so feebly that grate fires were a necessity. Doubtless they will fail us altogether next winter. Orders for coal six months ahead are refused by both retailers and wholesalers. On three occasions, for a week at a time, I was able to keep a mild fire in the office only by having the office boy stand in line every morning for two hours to buy 10 kilos (twenty pounds) of coal, the most one could purchase at the municipal coal stations.

The magnificent courage of the Parisians has kept them from voicing their sufferings in an obstreperous manner. There have been no riots of any importance, the demonstrations being confined to small individual affairs. I know of one case in which four "pollux" returning on leave to their Paris homes and finding their children and children without means to keep them warm, marched in a body to the central yards and, with drawn revolvers, demanded coal. The terrified clerks promptly gave them all they could carry away, and only a show of resistance to the police protecting the yards. Coal in Paris, by the way, is always guarded by policemen.

Sugar, butter, milk, meat and, most of all, bread and every variety of baked flour are the chief scarcities besides coal in Paris. Cards controlling the consumption of sugar were issued last March, and since my departure from France with the French Mission meatless days have been ordained. The Paris milk supply is dangerously short. In the fashionable and well-to-do districts it is possible to get a quart of milk delivered regularly in the morning. But after that morning quart not a single additional thimbleful is purchasable, and in the poorer quarters even the morning delivery frequently fails. The price of meat is soaring. Steak costs from three to four francs a pound, and the other varieties of beef are correspondingly high. The most diminutive chicken costs eight to ten francs. Eggs are four francs a dozen, or 35 centimes (7 cents) apiece, and they are among the cheaper products, having been less than three cents apiece before the war. Fish is becoming a rarity owing to the falling off in the number of fishermen and the submarine peril. On stale bread of mixed wheat and rye flour is available under the present regulations, and pastry will probably soon be altogether suppressed. Vegetables are reasonably cheap.

French public opinion is divided as to whether it is better for a general to be a pessimist or an optimist. I've heard numerous warm arguments on the subject, even among cabinet ministers. The most pessimistic of French military leaders was the late Gen. Gallieni, who, to quote Minister of Munitions Albert Thomas, saw everything through smoked glasses. Marshal Joffre is regarded as a pronounced optimist, and Gen. Nivelle also inclined toward a hopeful viewpoint, which the "pollux" think will make him a good teammate for Gen. Petain, whose thoughts have a more pessimistic trend.

M. Albert Thomas is an imposing figure of a somewhat monkish appearance. The day after the Briand ministry gave way to that headed by M. Ribot I met the deposed Premier in the lobby of the chamber of deputies, to which he was returning as a

private member. At the same moment M. Thomas, who retained his post in the new cabinet, chanced to pass, his bushy beard flying about with the speed of his march. I asked M. Briand how the Ribot government was going to get along without him. "All is well," he replied, pointing to M. Thomas: "I am leaving them my Rasputin."

Tragedy is everywhere on the French front, but I have never seen greater agony than that of a certain young artilleryman who for more than two years has been stationed on the Heights of the Meuse overlooking his home town, Saint-Mihiel. Twenty minutes' walk across the meadows would bring him to his cottage—and to his wife and children. But between them lie the French and German trenches. I asked the man's captain why he was kept there, and learned that it had been at his own insistent request. Having made friends with the aviators, he was able to get from them photographs showing his home, and even one treasure one giving a glimpse of his wife and youngsters outside in their little garden. "Lacklusterly we hardly ever fire upon Saint-Mihiel, although it's infested with Boches," the captain told me.

Amiens leaped into prosperity through the Battle of the Somme. Its hotels are crammed with khaki-clad officers, and in all of them the bar-rooms work twenty-four hours a day.

on point might lead to the destruction of a force under the barrier fire of its own artillery.

French discipline is amazing to one accustomed to the iron distinctions between officers and men in the American army. The polli salutes his officer not because he considers him in any sense his social superior, but he is his military leader. I have seen a mud-stained private sitting at the same table in a restaurant with an immaculate general, and neither fell in the least ill at ease. When he was at Chantilly, Marshal Joffre frequently invited soldiers who had accomplished some feat of gallantry or made a valuable suggestion to their commanders to dinner with him at general headquarters. French children know more about the war than most American grown-ups. They are forever playing "offensive," a favorite game being to enact their own versions of the day's communique, which they read as closely as do their elders. Many of them are as familiar with the topography of the front as the best informed war correspondent. Their great trouble in playing war, of course, is to find a youngster willing to impersonate the "Boche." Not only is that role degrading in the extreme in the juvenile mind but it also entails severe mauling at the hands of the ever-victorious "armies of the republic." The "Boches" are generally chosen by drawing lots, and run off home rather than act the hated part.

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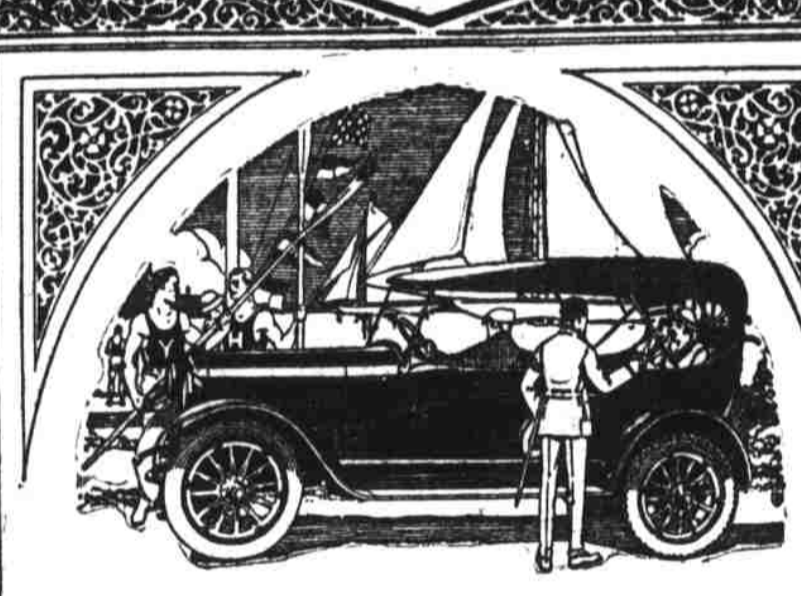
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