

**August 21, 1914.** --- So far as we can learn we are still as completely cut off from the outside world as we were yesterday. The General promised the Minister that there would be no difficulty in sending his telegrams, either clear or in cipher, but when we came to sending them off, it was quite another story.

The first thing this morning I made an attempt to hand them in, but found all the telegraph offices closed. At ten o'clock I went down to the Hôtel de Ville to see the General, who has taken over the duties of Military Governor, and see what was the matter. He was away somewhere and so was the Burgomaster, so I contented myself with seeing one of the Echevins, whom I had met a number of times. He could not do anything about it on his own responsibility, but made a careful memorandum and said that he would take it up with the General, through the Mayor, when they both got back. I also asked for *laisser-passeurs* for everybody in the shop, and he promised to attend to that.

By lunch time we had received no answer from General von Jarotzky, so I got in the motor with my pocket full of telegrams and went down to the Hôtel de Ville once more. It is a depressing sight. The Grande Place, which is usually filled with flower venders and a mass of people coming and going, is almost empty. At the lower end there are parked a number of small guns; in the centre, some camp kitchens, with smoke rising from the chimneys. The courtyard of the Hôtel de Ville itself, where so many sovereigns have been received in state, was filled with saddlehorses and snorting motors. The discarded uniforms of the Garde Civique were piled high along one side, as if for a rummage sale. Beer bottles were everywhere. In the beautiful Gothic room, hung with the battle flags of several centuries, there are a hundred beds---a dormitory for the officers who are not quartered at the neighbouring hotels.

The marvelous order and system which so compelled our admiration yesterday were not in evidence. There were a lot of sentries at the door and they took care to jab a bayonet into you and tell you that you could not enter; but any sort of reply seemed to satisfy them, and you were allowed to go right up to the landing, where the General had established himself in state at a couple of huge tables. Here confusion reigned supreme. There were staff officers in abundance, but none of them seemed to have the slightest authority, and the old man had them all so completely cowed that they did not dare express an opinion or ask for a decision. The General himself is a little, tubby man, who looks as though he might be about fifty-five; his face is red as fire when it is not purple, and the way he rages about is enough to make Olympus tremble.

The crowd of frightened people who came to the Hôtel de Ville for *laisser-passers* and other papers, all found their way straight to his office; no one was on hand to sort them out and distribute them among the various bureaus of the civil administration. Even the staff officers did very little to spare their chief and head off the crowd. They would come, right up to him at his table and shove a *pièce d'identité* under his nose, with a tremulous request for a visé; he would turn upon them and growl, "*Bas bossible; keine Zeit; laissez mois dranquille, nom de D---*!" He switched languages with wonderful facility, and his cuss words were equally effective in any language that he tried. Just as with us, everyone wanted something quite out of the question and then insisted on arguing about the answer that they got. A man would come up to the General and say that he wanted to get a pass to go to Namur. The General would say impatiently that it was quite impossible, that German troops were operating over all that territory and that no one could be allowed to pass for several days. Then Mr. Man would say that that was no doubt true, but that *hemust* go because he had a wife or a family or a business or something else that he wanted to get to. As he talked, the General would be getting

redder and redder, and when about to explode, he would spring to his feet and advance upon his tormentor, waving his arms and roaring at him to get the ----- out of there. Not satisfied with that, he invariably availed of the opportunity of being on his feet to chase all the assembled crowd down the stairs and to scream at all the officers in attendance for having allowed all this crowd to gather.

Then he would sit down and go through the same performance from the beginning. I was there off and on for more than two hours, and I know that in that time he did not do four minutes' continuous, uninterrupted work. Had it not been for the poor frightened people and the general seriousness of the situation, it would have been screamingly funny and worth staying indefinitely to see.

I had my share of the troubles. I explained my errand to an aide-de-camp and asked him to see that proper instructions were given for the sending of the telegrams. He took them and went away. Then after a few minutes he came gravely back, clicked his heels, and announced that there was no telegraph communication with the outside world and that he did not know when it would be reëstablished. I asked him to go back to the General, who in the meantime had retreated to the Gothic room and had locked himself in with a group of officers. My friend came back again, rather red in the face, and said that he had authority to stamp my telegrams and let them go. He put the rubber stamp on them and said I could take them. I said that was all very well, but where could I take them, since the telegraph offices were closed. He went off again and came back with the word that the office in the central bureau was working for official messages. I got into the motor with the Italian Secretary, who had a similar task, and together we went to the central bureau. It was nailed up tight, and the German sentries on guard at the door swore to us by their *Ehrenwort* that there was absolutely nothing doing.

Back we went to the Hôtel de Ville. Our friend, the aide-de-camp, had disappeared, but we got hold of another and asked him to inform himself. He went away and we spent a few minutes watching the General blow up everybody in sight; when the aide-de-camp came back, he smilingly announced that there was no way of getting the messages out on the wire; that the best thing we could do would be to send a courier to Holland and telegraph from there. I told him to go back and get another answer. When he came back next time, he had the glad news that the office had really been established in the post office and that orders had been sent over there to have our cables received and sent at once. Away we went again, only to find that the latest bulletin was just as good as the others; the post office was closed up just as tight as the other office, and the sentries turned us away with a weary explanation that there was not a living soul inside, as though they had explained it a thousand times since they had been on duty.

By this time the wild-goose chasing was getting a little bit monotonous, and when we got back to the headquarters, I announced with some emphasis to the first aide-de-camp that I could reach, that I did not care to do any more of it; that I wanted him to get me the right information, and do it right away, so that I should not have to go back to my chief and report any more futile errands. He went away in some trepidation and was gone some time. Presently the General came out himself, seething in his best manner.

*"A qui tout ce tas de dépêches?"* roars he.

*"A moi,"* says I.

He then announced in a voice of thunder that they were all wrong and that he was having them rewritten. Before I could summon enough breath to shout him down and protest, he had gone into another room and slammed the door. I rushed back to

my trusty aide-de-camp and told him to get me those telegrams right away; he came back with word that they would be sent after correction. I said that under no circumstances could they send out a word over the signature of the American Minister without his having written it himself. He came back and said that he could not get the cables. I started to walk into the office myself to get them, only to bump into the General coming out with the messages in his hand. He threw them down on a table and began telling a young officer what corrections to make on the telegraph form itself. I protested vigorously against any such proceeding, telling him that we should be glad to have his views as to any errors in our message, but that he could not touch a letter in any official message. At this stage of the game he was summoned to the office of the Burgomaster and rushed off with a string of oaths that would have made an Arizona cow-puncher take off his hat. The young officer started calmly interlining the message, so I reached over and took it away from him, with the statement that I would report to my chief what had happened. He was all aflutter, and asked that I remain, as the General would not be long. I could not see any use in waiting longer, however, and made as dignified a retreat as possible under the circumstances. There were a number of cables in the handful I had carried around that were being sent in the interest of the German Government and of German subjects, and I took good care to tell the young man that while we were glad to do anything reasonable for them or for their people, we had stood for a good deal more than they had a right to expect, and that these cables would stay on my desk until such time as they got ready to make a proper arrangement for our communications. Now we shall settle down and see what happens next.



German officers and soldiers were always ready to oblige by posing for the camera.



"Mitt Gott für Kaiser und Reich." This trio had a mania for being photographed.



Count Guy d'Oultremont, Adjutant of the Belgian Court. French howitzer in the background.



From left to right: colonel DuCane, Captain Ferguson, and Colonel Fairholme

When I got back to the Legation I found the Argentine and Brazilian Ministers and the Mexican Chargé d'Affaires waiting to hear the news of my mission. I was rather hot under the collar, and gave an unexpurgated account of what had

happened. By this time I was beginning to see some of the humor in the situation, but they saw nothing but cause for rage, and left in a fine temper.

Just to see what would happen, we then proceeded to put our cable in its original form into cipher, and send it back to the General with a written request that it be sent immediately to Washington. It will be interesting to see what reply he makes. The Spanish Minister left some telegrams with him last night to be sent, and is quite sure that they were held up, as he has received no answers to any of them. Tomorrow he expects to put on his uniform and make a solemn official call on von Jarotzky to demand that he be granted free communication with his government.

During the afternoon a lot of correspondents came in and gave an amusing account of what the General had done for them. He had received them cordially and had given them a very pleasing interview, making an extended statement about the alleged German atrocities. Could they send their messages through to their papers? Certainly! Of course the General would have to read the stories and approve the subject matter. Naturally! The boys sat down in great enthusiasm and wrote out their stories, giving full credit to the German army for the orderly way they got in, the excellence of their appearance and behaviour, and the calm that prevailed in the city. They took these messages back and let the old chap read them. He plowed his way carefully through them and expressed his great satisfaction at the friendly expressions of approval. He put his O.K. on them and handed them back with the remark that they might send them. The boys ventured to inquire how. "Oh," said the General, "you can either send a courier with them to Holland or to Germany and have them telegraphed from there." Whereupon he rose and, bowing graciously, left the bunch so flabbergasted that they did not wake up until he was gone. He was most amiable and smiling and got away with it.

The General commanding the forces now coming through---von Arnim---got out a proclamation to-day which was posted in the streets, warning the inhabitants that they would be called upon for supplies and might have troops quartered upon them, and that if they ventured upon hostile acts they would suffer severely.

**PROCLAMATION.**

BRUSSELS, August 20, 1914.

German troops will pass through Brussels to-day and the following days, and will be obliged by circumstances to call upon the city for lodging, food, and supplies. All these requirements will be settled for regularly through the communal authorities.

I expect the population to meet these necessities of war without resistance, and especially that there shall be no aggression against our troops, and that the supplies required shall be promptly furnished.

In this case I give every guarantee for the preservation of the city and the safety of its inhabitants.

If, however, as has unfortunately happened in other places, there are attacks upon our troops, firing



upon our soldiers, fires or explosions of any sort, I shall be obliged to take the severest measures.

The General Commanding the  
Army Corps,  
SIXT VON ARNIM.

The strongest thing so far was the series of demands made upon the city and province. The city of Brussels has been given three days to hand over 50 million francs in coin or bills. The Germans also demand a tremendous supply of food to be furnished during the next three days. If the city fails to deliver any part of it, it must pay in coin at a rate equal to twice the market value of the supplies. The Province of Brabant must hand over, by the first of next month, 450 millions of francs---90 million dollars. When you consider that the total war indemnity imposed by Germany upon France in 1870 was only five milliards, the enormity of this appears. Upon one little province of a tiny country they are imposing a tax equal to one-tenth that imposed on the whole of France. How on earth they are ever to arrange to pay it, I cannot possibly see. I do not know what is to happen if they fail to make good, but I have no doubt that it will be something pretty dreadful.

This afternoon the Germans went into the Ministry of War and the Foreign Office, and searched through the archives. It must have been an entirely futile proceeding, for all papers of any interest were removed to Antwerp when the Government left. The higher officials who were still here were kept in the buildings to witness the search---a needless humiliation. There is talk now of a search of the British Legation, but we have heard nothing of it and expect that will not be done without asking our permission first.



In GIBSON, Hugh (Secretary of the American Legation in Brussels, 1914) ; *A journal from our Legation in Belgium* ; New York ; Doubleday, Page & Company Garden City; 1917 :

<http://net.lib.byu.edu/~rdh7/wwi/memoir/Legation/Gibs onTC.htm>

**Footnotes.**

It would be interesting compare with what **Roberto J. Payró** told about the same day in his *Diario de un testigo (La guerra vista desde Bruselas)* :

Original Spanish version :

<http://www.idesetautres.be/upload/19140821%20PAYRO%20DIARIO%20DE%20UN%20INCOMUNICADO.pdf>

Original Spanish version about the Belgian fortresses of Namur :

<http://www.idesetautres.be/upload/19140821-25%20PAYRO%20TOMA%20DE%20NAMUR%20FORTALEZAS%20BELGAS.pdf>

Original Spanish version about Dinant :

<http://www.idesetautres.be/upload/19140821%20PAYRO%20DINANT%20SP%20DOS%20REPRESENTANTES%20ARGENTINOS%20MUERTOS%20EN%20LA%20GUERRA.pdf>

French version :

<http://www.idesetautres.be/upload/19140821%20PAYRO%20DIARIO%20DE%20UN%20INCOMUNICADO%20FR.pdf>

French version about the Belgian fortresses of Namur :

<http://www.idesetautres.be/upload/19140821-25%20PAYRO%20PRISE%20DE%20NAMUR%20FORTERESSES%20BELGES.pdf>

French version about Dinant :

<http://www.idesetautres.be/upload/19140821%20PAYRO%20DINANT%20FR%20DOS%20REPRESENTANTES%20ARGENTINOS%20MUERTOS%20EN%20LA%20GUERRA.pdf>

It would be also interesting compare with what **Paul MAX** (cousin of the *bourgmestre Adolphe MAX*) told about the same day in his *Journal de guerre* (*Notes d'un Bruxellois pendant l'Occupation 1914-1918*) :

[http://www.museedelavilledebruxelles.be/fileadmin/user\\_upload/publications/Fichier\\_PDF/Fonte/Journal\\_de%20Oguerre\\_de\\_Paul\\_Max\\_bdef.pdf](http://www.museedelavilledebruxelles.be/fileadmin/user_upload/publications/Fichier_PDF/Fonte/Journal_de%20Oguerre_de_Paul_Max_bdef.pdf)