

August 31st, 1914. --- This morning began with a troop of people in to tell us that the rough work was about to begin, and that Brussels was to go up in smoke. There is a good deal of unrest in the lower end of town and trouble may break out at any time. Bad feeling has grown a good deal in the past few days and one good row would throw the fat in the fire. I went through the rough part of town late this afternoon and found patrols everywhere, heavily armed and swaggering about in groups of four. For their own sake I hope the people will not do anything foolish.

People are making another effort to get away and are not finding it easy. At six this morning a crowd left here for Ninove, twenty kilometers to the west. Twenty five hundred of them clung all over the trams that make the trip. At Ninove they walked a mile or so, carrying their belongings, and caught a train to Alost, where they changed for another train for Ghent. Goodness knows how many changes they had ahead of them after that. The trip was supposed to end safely in Ostend some time this evening. It usually takes two hours.

Hearing that the train service was open and that boats were running from Ostend to Folkstone, we decided to verify the tidings and then get off some of our people, who should have gone long ago.

To make sure Blount and I motored down to Ninove after lunch to telephone the Consul at Ostend and learn the true state of affairs. When we reached Ninove we found the station so packed with refugees that there was no getting near the telephone bureau. The Chef de Gare, who had never in his long and honourable career had such a mob to lord it over, was so puffed up that he could not get down near enough to earth to hear our questions, so we decided to proceed to Alost and try our luck there.

We motored over in short order and got quick communication with the Consul at Ostend. He had very little news save that a lot of British Marines had been landed there and had to-day been taken away again. He gave us what we wanted in the way of steamer information.

I got the Consul-General at Antwerp on the telephone and learned that all was well there.

As I came out-of the booth from this second call, I was held up by a Garde Civique, who inquired if I was the *Monsieur de l'automobile*. He would like to see my papers. Certainly. Then I remembered that I had left all my Belgian papers at the Legation and had nothing but papers in German from the military authorities. I showed them anyway. Before he could examine us any further, three eager amateur Sherlocks came bursting into the room and took charge of the proceedings. The leader pointed an accusing finger at Blount, and exclaimed, "You have come from Ninove! " Blount admitted it. "You had a third person in the car when you left there!" "Pm du tout." "On the contrary, I have three witnesses to prove it." Aside from the fact that nobody could have got to Alost in the time we had, it made no real difference how many people we had in the car, and Blount said as much. Then our accuser changed his plan of attack. "I observed you when you arrived, and you were speaking a language which was perhaps not German, but sounded like English." "It was," said Blount. "Aha," triumphantly, "but you said you were Americans!"

By this time the Chef de Gare had come to answer our questions and we waved our persecutors aside while we talked to him. They kept quiet and meekly stood aside, as we bade them. While we talked with our functionary, I looked out on the square and saw that we were a real sensation. The Garde Civique had been called out and

was keeping the place clear. The crowd was banked up solid around the other three sides of the square. They looked hopeful of seeing the German spies brought out and shot. By signing our names on a scrap of paper, which the amateurs compared with the signatures on different papers we had about us, we convinced them that we were harmless citizens, and were allowed to go. The crowd seemed greatly disappointed to see us walk out free. The Garde Civique let them loose as we got in the car, and they came thronging around for a good close look at us.

We honk-honked our way through them, thanking our lucky stars We had not had a worse time of it.

At the edge of the town we looked up and saw two German aeroplanes snooping around. A minute later a crowd of people surged across the street to bar our way, shouting that we must go no farther, as the Germans were approaching the town and that it was dangerous to proceed. Two young officers came across the street to tell us in great glee that they had made a dash in a motor at the first German outpost and had brought in four prisoners. They were bursting with joy in their exploit, but by this time they may themselves be prisoners.

In a few minutes we came to the first German outpost, and had our papers carefully examined. From then on we were held up every few yards and nearly had our papers worn out from much handling. At one place a young Lieutenant looked over our papers and burst out into roars of laughter at the name of von Jarotzky. He called to other officers. They came up, looked at the signature, and also burst out into loud laughter. I asked them what the joke was, but they were not telling.

We got in about seven o'clock, without incident.

Went to see von Herwarth after dinner on behalf of a poor Belgian woman whose husband, a Major in the Grenadiers, is dangerously wounded and in the military hospital at Antwerp. The Germans are going to send her up to-morrow on a motor with some Belgian officers, who are being exchanged. I saw the aide-de-camp who is going through with the car and asked him to be nice to her. Then to her house, to shut up a lot of old women of both sexes who were trying- to dissuade her from going, on the ground that the Germans would hold her as a hostage. I suppose she will be off.

Mrs. Bridges ([1](#)), wife of the former British Military Attaché, was in this evening for help. A British prisoner told of seeing Colonel Bridges fall from his horse at Mons, mount again, ride a little way and fall. She cannot get to Mons, so we are getting her off to France via England, in the hope that she may find him on that side.

It is a pitiful business, and the worst of it is that they all think we have some miraculous power to do anything we like for them. I only wish we could.

Footnote

1. Colonel Bridges was badly wounded at Mons, but escaped, recovered, was wounded at Nieuport, but survived both, and having received the rank of Lieutenant-General, was the of the Balfour Mission to the United States in 1917.

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](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/19140831%20PAYRO%20DIARIO%20DE
%20UN%20INCOMUNICADO.pdf](http://www.idesetautres.be/upload/19140831%20PAYRO%20DIARIO%20DE%20UN%20INCOMUNICADO.pdf)

Original Spanish version about Leuven :

[http://www.idesetautres.be/upload/19140825-
30%20PAYRO%20DESTRUCCION%20LOVAINA.zip](http://www.idesetautres.be/upload/19140825-30%20PAYRO%20DESTRUCCION%20LOVAINA.zip)

French version :

[http://www.idesetautres.be/upload/19140831%20PAYRO%20DIARIO%20DE
%20UN%20INCOMUNICADO%20FR.pdf](http://www.idesetautres.be/upload/19140831%20PAYRO%20DIARIO%20DE%20UN%20INCOMUNICADO%20FR.pdf)

French version about Leuven :

[http://www.idesetautres.be/upload/19140831%20PAYRO%20DESTRUCTION
%20DE%20LOUVAIN.pdf](http://www.idesetautres.be/upload/19140831%20PAYRO%20DESTRUCTION%20DE%20LOUVAIN.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