

BELGIUM UNDER THE GERMAN OCCUPATION.

A PERSONAL NARRATIVE 1

Chapter XLVII. The bombardment.

MORE and more loudly every minute, as it seemed, the great siege-guns boomed around Antwerp ; there were constant movements of troops through the city, a constant drumming of those heavy iron-shod heels on the pavements, the great grey automobiles for ever dashing about, and at last, ambulances rolling in and up to the doors of the Royal Palace and of the Palais des Académies on the boulevard, which the Germans had transformed into a vast military hospital*, dismantling the other Red Cross hospitals that had been too numerous established everywhere in the city. There were crowds, always at a respectful distance from the great iron gates, watching the wounded as they were brought in — those forms on stretchers with faces almost as pale as the bandages around their heads, and with the wan, indifferent expression that suffering gives to the eyes of the very ill.

It was a rather pitiful sight ; and there was, one of these mornings, another sight to which we were destined to grow too accustomed — that of an *affiche* giving a list of *condamnations à mort***. The crowds stood before the gruesome *affiche*, transfixed somehow by its lugubrious suggestion, as they stood and watched the wounded borne in, or as they stood on the esplanade at the Montagne de la Cour and gazed almost vacantly off to the west, where there were column-s of smoke, indicating they knew not what. They were all idle to begin with, and all dumb and dulled with tare, and there were always the shame and the grief of the occupation ; one never saw a happy or a cheerful face, except the faces of the children who played at war, carrying the American flag and flourishing wooden swords and lustily singing "*La Brabançonne*" under the very noses of German soldiers.

They were the only happy ones, those children, who so wisely lived in a world of their own, so much more wisely ordered than ours that it had once been likened to the Kingdom of Heaven. Happiness, indeed, was a word we no longer used in the midst of such universal sorrow — not even when word came that our mothers had safely reached The Hague, or when one morning, to our relief, Cobb, McCutcheon, and Bennet arrived from Aix-la-Chapelle. They were in the khaki uniforms that befitted them as war correspondents, and they seemed to have been the guests rather than the prisoners of the Germans ; they had been hospitably treated, and now they came as the first of those journalists who were shown over Belgium by German officers, who were most scrupulous in seeing that their parties were indeed personally conducted.

We were still having trouble getting our English nurses away ; the train had been arranged and the nurses had repaired to the Gare du Nord, but at the last moment, for some reason, the authorities refused to let them depart, and the train pulled out without them, leaving them sitting there on their boxes weeping.

And all this while the deep detonations of the cannons north of us sounded heavily in the ear and on the heart, rising steadily to its terrible crescendo that was to mark the finale of another movement in the great fugue. On the 5th, *Les Nouvelles publiées par le Gouvernement*

allemand announced that the outer forts of Lierre, Waelhem, Koningshoyckt, and the intermediary redoubts had fallen, and that through the breach in the circle of exterior forts the Germans were now able to push the attack against the inner circle of forts and against the city itself. The people had been convinced that Antwerp was impregnable ; they had awaited the issue of the siege with confidence, thinking that relief would come. But now among those classes which, if not the more intelligent, had better means of information, doubt had grown, and they began to consider the possibility of the fail of Antwerp. And then — what would become of the King and the Queen, the Court and the Government ? No one could envisage the situation, it was impossible to take any large view of it, the mind refused longer to receive any impression of this vast epopee that was being enacted on the huge theatre of Europe. We simply could not realize it, that was all ; and we turned from the war to talk of the price of grapes, or of the fact that the bread was dark, or of the latest *affiche* ordering that German money be accepted on the basis of a mark at 1 fr. 25 c ***. Coin had long since disappeared and paper certificates were beginning to appear — and, somehow, life went on.

Brand WITHLOCK

London ; William HEINEMANN ; 1919.

*** AVIS**

1. Conformément à l'article 15 de la Convention de Genève du 6 juillet 1906, je défends aux ambulances de la Croix Rouge belge et autres institutions semblables de recevoir dorénavant des blessés allemands ou belges. Les blessés doivent être dirigés aux hôpitaux militaires allemands, c'est-à-dire :

Hôpital n° 1, avenue de la Couronne, 183 ;

Hôpital n° 2, palais des Académies ;

Hôpital n° 3, hôpital de Schaerbeek ;

Hôpital n° 4, caserne Baudouin.

2. Le drapeau de la Croix Rouge est à enlever, sous peine de poursuites judiciaires, des ambulances, à l'exception du Palais Royal et des hôpitaux Saint-Pierre et Saint-Jean (art. 21 de la Convention de Genève).

3. Pour des raisons d'humanité, les militaires belges gravement malades ou blessés qui, d'après l'opinion des médecins allemands, ne seront plus capables de faire le service de guerre, seront dorénavant confiés aux soins des médecins belges, dès qu'ils pourront être transportés. Le gouvernement renonce à les retenir comme prisonniers.

Le Gouverneur militaire, BARON VON LUTTWITZ,

BRUXELLES, le 29 septembre 1914.

Général Major.

** À la date du 14 septembre 1914, un tribunal de guerre légalement convoqué a condamné les sujets belges suivants :

1. Van der Hagen, Jean, ouvrier, domicilié à Bruxelles, né le 6 juin 1878 à Cureghem, pour résistance contre une sentinelle allemande se trouvant dans l'exercice de ses fonctions,

À SIX MOIS DE PRISON.

2. Verheyden, Hortense, veuve Robaert, domiciliée à Bruxelles, née le 9 avril 1878 à Bruxelles, pour offenses graves contre l'armée allemande et contre un de ses membres,

À UN AN DE PRISON.

3. Debonnet, Julien, ouvrier, domicilié à Strombeek, né le 23 septembre 1880 à Roubaix (France), pour coups de feu contre une sentinelle allemande,

À LA MORT.

VON LUTTWITZ, *Général* et Gouverneur.

BRUXELLES, le 16 septembre 1914.

***** ARRÊTÉ**

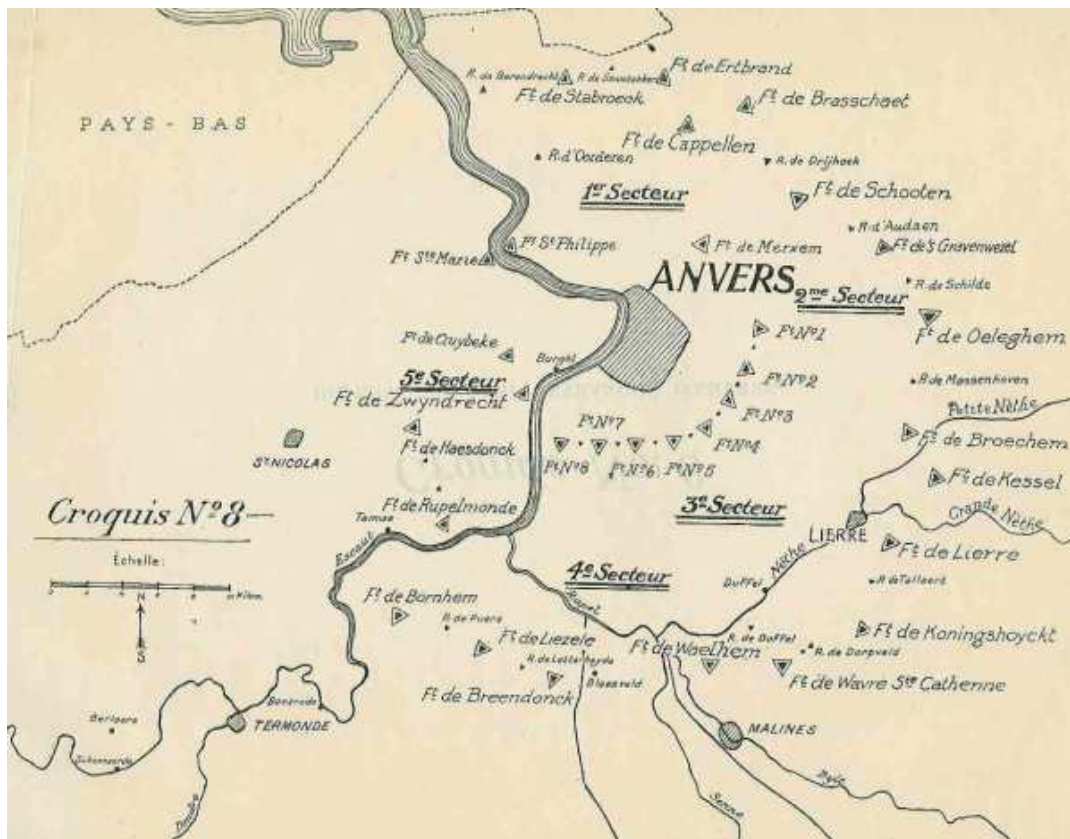
r. Il ne peut pas être dérogé par des conventions particulières à la prescription de l'arrêté royal du 3 octobre 1914 (Bulletin officiel des lois et arrêtés pour le territoire belge occupé du 5 octobre 1914, n° 6) d'après laquelle la monnaie allemande (espèces, billets de banque et papier-monnaie) doit être acceptée en paiement, et ce jusqu'à nouvel ordre, sur la base de : 1 mark valant au moins fr. 1,25.

2. Cet arrêté entre en vigueur le jour de sa publication.

Le Gouverneur général en Belgique, BARON VON DER GOLTZ,

BRUXELLES, le 15 novembre 1914.

Feld-maréchal.



Concernant les forts d'Anvers, vous pouvez consulter

http://www.sambre-marne-yser.be/article=6.php3?id_article=77