

Cantigny—A Corner of the War

George's Lone Air Raid Has Surprising Result

● This is the second instalment taken from the book "Cantigny, a Corner of the War," by Captain Evarts, 18th infantry, 1st division, A. E. F., and reprinted by courtesy of the author and Charles Scribner's Sons, the publishers.

By CAPT. JEREMIAH M. EVARTS
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I WAS slightly gassed the latter part of May, 1918, during the taking of Cantigny.

It was pleasant to be evacuated on the 2d of June to a French hospital at Cempuis. By that time I loved France, and I was not above admiring a French countess who took care of me. The Germans commenced the Montdidier-Noyon offensive on the 9th of June, and the hospital began to fill up promptly with French wounded. The following morning the doctor told me it would take three weeks to cure me. He said there would not be room enough there and that I would have to take the train from Grandvillers to a base hospital that afternoon. I hated the idea, as there loomed the possibility of a reassignment to another outfit, which seemed almost more than one could stand. The doctor wrote out in French on a large tag, bearing my name, various medical terms and instructions for treatment. He tied the tag through a button hole of my blouse. The tag constituted my clearance papers.

At Grandvillers that afternoon I got on the train, accompanied by an artillery officer from the 7th field, who was also partially cured of some sort of gas. We sat down in a couple of vacant chairs near the door of what was like an American parlor car, and I surveyed the other occupants of the car. It was full of Senegalese and other colonials. All of them were badly wounded and many had lost a leg or arm. The car smelled of stale blood and dressings. I immediately felt well and told the artilleryman that I was not going to a base hospital in that car and that there was nothing the matter with either of us. I suppose I said the latter because I wanted his company, though I did not know him well. He agreed, and when the orderlies and doctor were at the farther end of the car it was a simple matter to slip out of our end, tear up our tags, and crawl under the car to the other side of the train. We then ran to the high road, where we met a lorry going south. We stopped it and climbed in. It contained three British sergeants, a whole ham, a loaf of bread, some jam, and a bottle of real whisky. The sergeants were very nice and turned it all over to us, and we ate and drank to our hearts' content. Eating and drinking had by that time become about the only fun in the war.

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The lorry was bound for Paris. It was arranged that the sergeants should get some burlap to wrap us in and take us to Paris. They were to meet us again at some appointed place three days later and drop us behind the sector. It was a scheme, and by the time the bottle was empty its success seemed not only possible but probable.

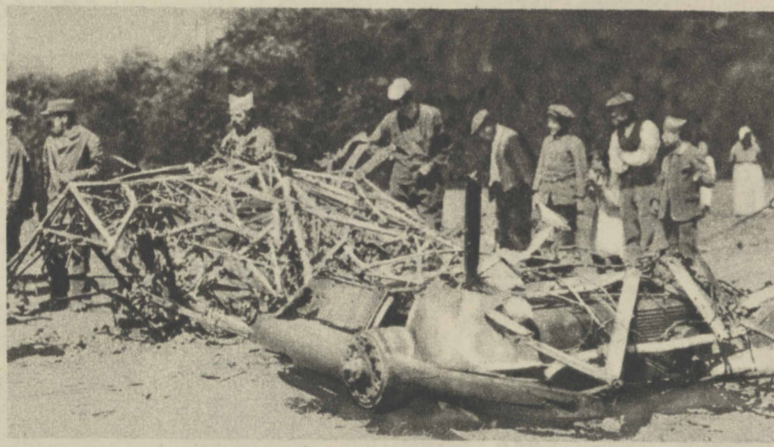
It is not particularly far from Grandvillers to Beauvais. Before we ever got to Beauvais I thought I would die, and I remember that the lorry stopped at least once so that the artilleryman and I could get some brandy. I don't know whether he knew what was the matter with him. I was ignorant of the nature of my disease until the following October, when I was cured of arsenic poisoning, and I don't suppose alcohol is a prescribed antidote.

By the time we reached Beauvais I knew I would never get to Paris, and requested to be dropped off. The artilleryman decided he would stop also, so the sergeants took us up to the Hôtel Angleterre. There we got a room and a bottle of cognac and went to bed. We drank the bottle and slept well. In the morning we felt better, or thought we did. My companion got a book from somewhere and read in bed. I had nothing to read and finally got up to see

what was going on downstairs. In the courtyard of the hotel, under a portico, there were a number of small drinking tables, and I sat down at one with some anisette. On the afternoon of the 22d of April I had drunk anisette with some French officers and the following day had gone into the line opposite Cantigny. Lots of things had happened in seven weeks. It was rather fun to be alive and drinking anisette again, even if one's freedom were gained by being A. W. O. L. from the base hospital or the railroad train, I never could figure out which.

In a short time a young British aviator walked through the archway into the courtyard. He was about my age. We looked each other over, and he came up to the table and we started to talk. He drank an extraordinary mixture of some sort colored with grenadine. Two or three aviator friends of his joined us, and soon everybody began to enjoy himself. It developed that they were part of two wings sent down to bother the Germans in their offensive, which was still going on. We had a number of arguments about using airplanes against infantry, etc., and I remember shocking them greatly by telling how a couple of infantrymen had killed a German aviator who had fallen back of the French uninjured. I reminded them that we thought it an equally dirty trick for aviators to direct artillery fire and shoot their machine guns at us.

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We got along pretty well, and soon they asked me if I wouldn't like to adjourn to their camp. We did so, and I stayed all afternoon, to dinner, and part of the night. The next morning they were kind enough to send a car to the hotel to ask me to come out, which I did. By that time I was acquainted with about twenty of them; they were great fellows. While some were flying, others would be on the ground, and it was about the best day I spent in France. There appeared to be more fun in their war, and there certainly was far more food and liquor than in mine.



German bombing plane brought down near Francastil, France, May 30, 1918.

One morning a supply officer from the division appeared at the hotel and told me that the sector was pretty active. The artillery officer returned to the line. I decided I had better go back to the line the next afternoon. One of the aviators came in, and I told him I was going back, but that I would like to return their kindnesses by giving about twelve of them a farewell dinner that night at the hotel. He said they would come in to dinner at 7. I went down to the bank and exchanged \$400 worth of express checks for a bundle of francs, which I took to the innkeeper. I explained to him that out of the bundle he was to take my board, etc., and with the balance he was to give fourteen of us the best possible dinner his kitchen and wine cellar could put on. He seemed quite pleased, and in the afternoon he and I selected the wines. The dinner was, I suppose, a successful one. The wines were excellent; the quantity was far greater than all of us, even in our most ambitious moments, could hope to drink. The dinner was



Machine gun battalion of the 18th infantry, 1st division, passing through St. Baussant, France, in advance on St. Mihiel front, Sept. 13, 1918. (Photos by U. S. Army Signal Corps.)

broken up about 2 a. m. by a couple of sergeants who had been waiting since 11 to take the officers home in a lorry. After a small amount of difficulty the officers were counted off by the innkeeper and sergeants and taken home. The next day about 1 in the afternoon I managed to get downstairs and was trying to drink some coffee while listening to the innkeeper's account of the dinner, when in walked one of my guests of the night before.

He came to the table and sat down with some cognac, and the conversation was about like this: "Well! Did you hear what happened to George?" I said no, that I hadn't, but that I would like to. "Well," he said, "we got to bed about 2:30, and at 4 we were ordered to fly. I knew that if I couldn't fly I would be court-martialed, so I told my orderly to get me a pick-me-up. I drank it and finally got dressed and into my plane (a one-seater). I decided that my only salvation would be to fly up to the line, drop my bombs, shoot my machine guns, and come home as fast as I could. Afterward I found that each of us had the same idea. Well, I got home somehow and was in bed by 5:30. But what do you think happened to George?" I said I hadn't the faintest idea. He went on: "Well, it seems that George had the same idea as the rest of us, but he got lost and flew around for a long time until he thought he had missed the line. Finally he came to what looked like

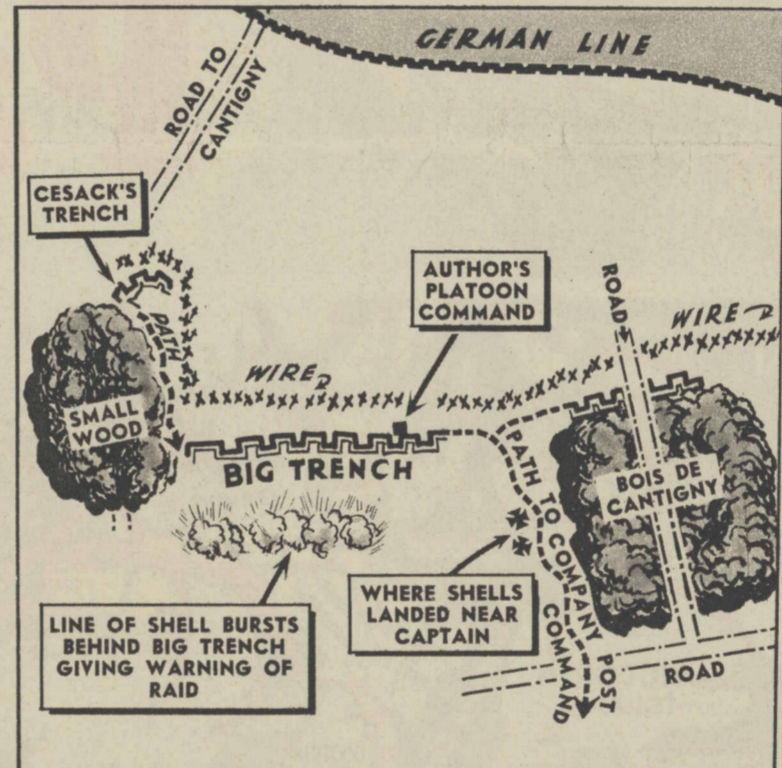
the archway to the street was, I suppose, about thirty feet long and fairly dark in the middle. I thought rapidly as to the best method of escape. Then, leaving the innkeeper without, I think, even saying good-by, I walked as fast as possible across the courtyard, so that when I was at the courtyard entrance the officer was about in the middle of the archway. I saw he was a major, and very efficiently saluted him and if anything increased the pace. I got even with him. He halted and said, "Where are you going, lieutenant?" "To the front, sir." By that time I was past him and he

captain from the 6th field came out of the woods on the right and down the trench to me.

"Lieutenant, I know you are hungry, and I brought you two bars of real chocolate I got from home this morning."

"I'll cook some, captain, and we'll drink it together when you finish range finding."

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The captain moved off down the trench to do his observing and came back in about three-quarters of an hour. The chocolate was ready, and we drank and talked and had a nice time. At about five minutes of 6 the



Map of the area described in Captain Evarts' story "A Cup of Chocolate."

following me. "What regiment do you belong to?" (We had long since taken off the regimental numbers on our crossed rifles.) "Eighteenth infantry, sir." By that time I had reached the sidewalk and glanced hastily up the street. A French lorry was coming down the street, headed the way I wanted to go. The inspector said, "What's your name?" I replied, "I'm sorry, sir, but I haven't time to talk any more; I have to go back to the front," and, running, I jumped on the driver's step of the lorry, shouting, "Vite, vite, vite!" The driver took the situation in promptly and complied. The major ran after us, but could not catch us. Fortunately he had no side car or automobile handy.

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I passed through brigade headquarters that evening on the way up to the line. They were still talking about George, and I got their end of the story. I am sorry to say that I never had the pleasure of giving George another dinner.

II. A CUP OF CHOCOLATE

One afternoon about 4 o'clock in front of Cantigny I was forgetting my hunger by trying to spot a German machine gun across the valley through my field glasses. An artillery cap-

much better than even that you won't go one hundred feet down that path. I can't stop you from going, but I know what I am talking about." The captain stopped and turned around to look at me. I felt like saying: "For heaven's sake, don't go down that path now. You gave me some chocolate. I don't want to see you go out." Before the captain could say anything we both ducked. The evening bombardment had started, and four shells landed in the path—the nearest about twenty feet from where the captain stood. He turned around and looked at the smoking holes in the path. Then, smiling rather nervously at me, he said, "I guess you do know."

We went back and drank some more chocolate until it was all right for him to go.

III. The Same Cup of Chocolate

It was a few days later at the same place at about 2 o'clock in the afternoon. I was walking down from the west end of the big trench, talking to Sergeant James. At least two hundred shells whistled over and burst in a solid line about 150 feet back of the big trench and parallel to it. It was over in less than a minute. They came from the northwest of Cantigny. The whole business was very strange.

"Sergeant, that must mean something. You stay here and I'll try to find out what I can." In answer to messages I learned that no machine gun emplacements were being put in back of my trench, nor was any trench being dug near that line of shells. The lieutenant of the second platoon was visited. He said that no barrage had been



Machine gun of 18th infantry, 1st division, ready for action in shell hole, May 15, 1918.

captain said, "Well, I must be going back now."

"Which way are you going back, captain?"

"Down the path through the Bois de Cantigny, the way I came up."

"But you must wait, captain. You mustn't go now."

"But, lieutenant, everything is quiet now; it'll be all right."

He started down the trench, with me following him. We entered the last bay, where the path commenced. I stopped at the corner of the traverse, and the captain was almost in the middle of the bay. The path commenced about twelve feet from where he stood.

I said: "Captain, it's my business to know how to live here. It is almost 6. The chances are

trench was more than helpless. A raid in force was something to be really feared. I went to my P. C. and changed my plan of defense. One machine gun must sweep, the other must fire a fixed fire to protect Cesak's trench on the east side. Shear's squad would have to come through the barrage if they could. If the machine guns went out? Well, what was the use of thinking about it?

There was a step in the bay, and there was the same artillery captain coming to do the evening observing. I crawled out and stopped him. "Captain, this platoon has never called for a barrage yet. If I call for a barrage tonight you will know I want one. I hope the artillery will be on their toes tonight." "What's happened, lieutenant?" I told him what little I knew.

Darkness came. Cesak was visited four times. The two machine guns were tested and one's fire fixed. The barrage signals were examined and the gun from which they were fired reexamined and left cocked. Extra bombs were distributed. Everything was ready.

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The Germans were very quiet. Eleven o'clock, 12 o'clock came, and no bombardment. One o'clock, and it started to rain. No sound from the German guns. The front was as quiet as death, only worse. About five minutes of 2 Sergeant James and I were leaning over the parapet of the bay in which the barrage gun was, listening and listening.

I whispered: "James, I had better go down to the further machine gun. You stay by the rifle, and don't hesitate a moment to call for a barrage." We stood quiet another minute or so. James whispered, "My God, lieutenant, I'll be glad when this night is over." I gritted my teeth together. My skin was all goose flesh and the silence awful. "So will I, James."

I walked around the traverse into the next bay. The whole German sky lit up in a great red glare. "Sergeant, if that lands here, call the barrage!" "All right, lieutenant!" I ducked then as what seemed like a thousand shells exploded along the parapet. It was a raid, then! As they exploded the three bright calcium stars of the barrage signal floated lazily down over the trench. One-two-three-four seconds passed, and then the blazing, crashing wall of steel from the barrage of the 6th field artillery landed just inside our wire and moved along over to Germany. Two grenades were thrown wildly into the woods near Cesak's trench. The German barrage lifted and settled down on the support trenches. The Germans in Cantigny threw flares low along the ground to show their men the way home. The attempted raid was over. The danger was present and gone in less than half a minute.

At about 10 o'clock the next morning the artillery captain appeared. "Lieutenant, you got your barrage all right?" "We did, and I thank you." "Are you all right?" "We are, thanks to you and the 6th field." We shook hands. It was my turn to smile nervously.

● "On this war," said a great man, "men will think and write for a thousand years." They will. And the things that will concern, interest, and fill the thoughts of the great bulk of humanity who do think and want to know will be not the great battles, not the tactics and the strategy of generals and mighty armies, but such human feelings and actions as fill these little stories.

● "Doubtfully, at the request of the writer, whom I commanded in the things he writes of, I picked them up to read, two or three perhaps, surely not all. I laid them down only when I had read the very last. With few words and simple he more accurately and more truly than any other that I have ever known makes us feel, take part in what he and his comrades beside him were feeling at the time of men's greatest strain, fears, and passions in perhaps all history. He felt with them, and you feel with him and them. Stories such as his will for the orator's thousand years inspire writers who would really tell of the men who fought this mighty war."

—R. L. BULLARD,
Lieutenant General, Retired.

NEXT WEEK—Death under the apple tree!