

New York Tribune
September 1, 1914

Germans Censor Notes of Envoys

*Official Dispatches to Foreign Governments Blue Pencilled—
Secretary Gibson, of American Legation, Sees Effect of Bombs Dropped in Belgium*

London, Aug. 31.—After for one week closing the railroad from Brussels to Aix-la-Chapelle, the German military authorities reopened it on Thursday to carry the wounded and prisoners. For eight days Brussels had been isolated. The mail trains and telegraph were in the hands of the invaders.

They accepted our cables, censored them and three days later told us if we still wished it we could forward them. But only from Holland. By this they accomplished three things. They found out what we were writing, delayed for three days any news leaving the city and offered us an inducement to visit Holland, so ridding themselves of our presence.

The authorities were equally severe with the dispatches of those diplomats who still remained in Brussels. With the most chilly complacency they blue penciled official dispatches to foreign governments until the diplomats discovered what they were doing and sent cables in cipher, accompanied by open cables explaining to their ministers at home that their confidential messages were being censored and delayed in transmission.

Except by messenger on foot, there was no way to get news out of the city. If a motor car appeared it was at once commandeered. This was true also of horses and bicycles all over Brussels. You saw delivery wagons, private carriages, market carts with the shafts empty and the horse and harness gone. After three days a German soldier who did not own a bicycle was poor indeed.

Every Bicycle Seen Seized

Requisitions were given for these machines, stating they would be returned after the war, by which time they would be ready for the crap heap. Anyone on a bicycle outside the city was arrested, so the only way to get messages through was by going on foot to Ostend or Holland or by automobile for which the German authorities had given a special pass. As no one knew when one of these might start, we carried always with us our cables and letters and intrusted them to any stranger who was trying to run the lines.

Three out of four times the stranger would be arrested and ordered back to Brussels and our dispatches, with their news value departed, would be returned. I got one dispatch through only by subscribing heavily to the Belgian Red Cross fund, and sent an account of the Germans entering Brussels by an English boy, who, after being turned back three times, got through by night, and when he arrived in England his adventures were published in all the London papers. They made my story, for which he had taken the trip, extremely tame reading.

Hugh Gibson, secretary of the American Legation, was the first person in an official position to visit Antwerp after the Belgian government moved to that city, and even with his passes and flag flying from his automobile he reached Antwerp and returned to Brussels only after many delays and adventures. Not knowing the Belgians were advancing from the north, Gibson and his American flag were several times under fire, and on the days he chose for his excursion his route led him past burning towns and dead and wounded and between the lines of both forces actively engaged.

Carried Dispatches for Bryan

He was carrying dispatches from Brand Whitlock to Secretary Bryan. During the night he rested at Antwerp a Zeppelin airship passed over it, dropping one bomb at the end of the block in which Gibson was sleeping. He was awakened by the explosion and heard all of those that followed.

The next morning he was requested to accompany a committee appointed by the Belgian government to report upon the outrage, and he visited a house that had been wrecked and saw what was left of the bodies of those killed. People who were in the streets when the airship passed tell me it moved without any sound, as though the motor had been shut off and it was being propelled by momentum.

One bomb fell so near the palace where the Belgian Queen was sleeping as to destroy the glass in the windows and scar the walls. The bombs were large, containing smaller bombs of the size of shrapnel. Like shrapnel, on impact they scattered bullets over a radius of forty yards. One man who from a window on the eighth story of a hotel watched the airship pass says before each bomb fell that he saw electric torches signal from the roofs, as though giving directions as to where the bombs should fall.

The indignation of Americans as expressed in American newspapers at the airship attack upon innocent and sleeping non-combatants is greatly appreciated here. This morning all the London newspapers reprint editorials from our papers and make editorial comment.

I left Brussels on Thursday with Gerald Morgan, of *The Tribune*, and Will Irwin, of "Collier's," on the train carrying English prisoners and German wounded. In times of peace the trip to the German border lasts three hours, but we were in making it twenty-six hours, and, by order of the authorities, forbidden to leave the train.

Carriages with cushions were naturally reserved for the wounded, so we slept on wooden benches and on the floor. It was not possible to obtain food, and water was as scarce. At Graesbeek, ten miles from Brussels, we first saw houses in fire. They continued with us to Liege. Village after village had been completely wrecked, and at Saventhen. Louvain, Tirlemont and Liege the destruction was the more appalling because more extended. In his march to the sea Sherman lived on the country. He did not destroy it, and as against the burning of Columbia must be placed to the discredit of the Germans the wiping out of an entire countryside.

Peasants Flee Burning Homes

For many miles we saw procession after procession of peasants fleeing from one burning village, which had been their home, to other villages, to find only blackened walls and smouldering ashes. In no part of Northern Europe is there a countryside fairer than that between

Aix-la-Chapelle and Brussels, but the Germans have made of it a graveyard. It looks as though a cyclone had uprooted its houses, gardens and orchards and a prairie fire had followed.

When we reached Holland, in view of what had befallen Belgium, I was not surprised to find the people leaning strongly toward a policy of friendship with Germany. Mobilization was going forward briskly, and it was pitiful to see the honest, eager faces of recruits, ignorant of what was before them crowding the troop trains. But their officers did not know on which side they were to fight. Their sympathies drew them toward England; their fears may force them to support Germany.