

I

With shells whizzing over our heads and shrapnel bursting around us, ~~the enemy~~ <sup>the enemy</sup> ~~with its anti-aircraft~~ <sup>with its anti-aircraft</sup> ~~accompanied~~ <sup>accompanied</sup> ~~us~~ <sup>us</sup> ~~with~~ <sup>with</sup> ~~their~~ <sup>their</sup> ~~hands~~ <sup>hands</sup> ~~on~~ <sup>on</sup> ~~their~~ <sup>their</sup> ~~revolvers~~ <sup>revolvers</sup>, ready to pull them at any instant in case the men in the trenches who have not seen a woman in months, dared approach me. I visited the battlefield on the lower Piave which was the scene of the desperate fighting on June 23<sup>rd</sup> when the Italians forced the Austrians to give up the small fruits which their offensive had yielded.

In an Italian admiralty motor boat we passed through the lagoons, stopping first at Porte Grand, where there is a rest camp and where the Am. Red Cross has a supply base. We found ~~the~~ two Am. boys in charge of the station, in their hut - with fish nets, made of mosquito netting over their heads <sup>which</sup> ~~made~~ <sup>made</sup> them look like Orole Queens on their wedding day.

From Porte Grande it was about a twenty minutes ride to Capo Sile. We passed floating artillery along the way. The guns are mounted on pontoons and are moved to the bank of the canal.

If an enemy aeroplane or observation balloon

should discover their position - which is difficult for they are painted the same color as the reeds in which they stand, they simply move to another place.

Observation balloons are up all the time. They have observers whose business is to watch every shot fired from these batteries. The balloons are equipped with wireless and if a gun is shooting too far or too short it is wirelessed to the commanding officer of the battery who ~~tries to~~ ~~adjust~~ changes the range.

I bent over the side to dip my hands in the water. Capt. Ferrando said, "This water is not clean, there are hundreds of bodies of dead Austrians lying on the bottom of this canal."

This was the first idea I had ~~of~~ of the desperate fighting which had taken place. At Capo Sile, which five months ago was a thriving, pretty village was now a heap of bricks leveled to the ground. Just the four walls <sup>of the church</sup> ~~were~~ ~~standing~~ left ~~like~~ - like a huge ~~crust~~ crust.

We walked as far as the Piave and crossed on a <sup>new</sup> pontoon bridge built next to the old bridge, which had been destroyed by the enemy after he found out he would never hope to cross it. On the other side of the river the Italians had made their dug-outs in <sup>the</sup> ~~the~~ ~~trunk~~ <sup>trunk</sup>. There they were sleeping on the damp earth

2/ as many as twenty in one cave.

Some of the soldiers were playing cards, some were <sup>drying their clothes,</sup> others were clearing up the debris and burying the dead. All about were fresh mounds with tiny wooden shacks on top and heaps of Austrian bayonets, bullets, helmets, guns & clothing.

From here we motored in a Govt Fiat ~~to~~ to Musile, over a high embankment, which was the main road of communication to the various Italian batteries. again

The Italians had ~~retreated~~ drowned the plains on either side, which they had dated so thoroughly last November when the Austrians made their great advance.

The bad hole land was completely submerged with only here & there little fortified fractions of dry land.

On one side of this high road were huge straw mats interwoven with green, the purpose of which was to hide it from the view of the enemy.

Big guns (called 210's) which shoot shells 8 inches in diameter and <sup>almost</sup> 30 ft long were camouflaged. They were covered with big branches of trees.

Camouflage is mainly used to protect ~~the~~ against aeroplanes & balloons. The enemy sends up scouting planes to photograph the other side's lines.

As soon as the observer returns - the pictures are developed & enlarged & handed in to head quarters. With a powerful glass there

photographs are examined to find trenches, batteries, supply stations, ammunition dumps, aeroplane camps & batteries.

Artists have discovered, by painting <sup>with</sup> <sup>stagnant</sup> ~~with~~ ~~inconspicuous~~ dabs of various colored paints blended in together, that it gives the idea, from a good background of nature, and ~~from a picture~~, from a picture, the enemy is unable to discover ~~what the positions~~ important positions.

Muscle is only forty yards from the Austrian front lines. Instead of walking down the main street, we were compelled to take a side path which twisted in & out thick bushes, to prevent being seen.

We went to the church, which had only the front wall & one side one ~~left~~ standing.

Capt. Tozzi found an German map among the refuse which was marked with a blue pencil showing the distance they hoped to advance.

~~The ground had been~~ The ground bore ~~evidence~~ traces enough by its shell-pitted breath of the desperate fighting that had taken place.

It had happened so recently that there had not been time to pick up ~~the debris~~ to clear the place of its debris.

In an officers dugout I found a cane and an overcoat hanging on the wall.

3 all about weaguns, ammunition, belts helmets & bayonets.

The enemy had evidently sighted us for he sent over some shrapnels which burst only a few yards away. We had it time ~~at~~ time to be riding on.

Meolo, another little village along the road was torn to pieces by Austrian shells.

~~Some of the~~ It looked like stage settings as we passed by - just the front walls of many of the houses & shops & the church were left standing.

The heaviest fighting took place at Croce. ~~There~~ piles of corpses <sup>lying around</sup> showed how heavily the Austs lost.

The Aust. took this town four times & four times were beaten back, they finally were completely exterminated ~~here~~.

~~At~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~side~~ <sup>side</sup> of the road was a ~~stretcher~~ <sup>stretcher</sup> <sup>clotted with blood</sup> which the Ital soldiers were using to carry the dead bodies to the graves. The stench was <sup>so</sup> terrific ~~at~~ ~~the~~ ~~grave~~ ~~yards~~.

~~It~~ ~~made~~ me ill. There were new made graves everywhere we looked, with tiny wooden crosses marking them.

~~The~~ ~~big~~ As many as twenty and thirty soldiers <sup>are buried</sup> in one grave.

Italian aeroplanes whizzed over our heads and the evening aerial barrage sprung up making a ~~black~~ cloud of smoke.

The big Capronis dodged about successfully

and returned unharmied.  
Immense motor lorries passed us con-  
tinually also ammunition wagons  
and mules loaded with immense packs  
also a long line of 13 in. guns loaded  
on trucks and on each gun were  
ten or 12 men all singing favorite melodies  
from the grand operas.

At little farther on we passed  
open teams & carts loaded with household  
furnishings. These were families who  
had fled when the Aust. advanced &  
were now returning to ~~the front~~ ~~the~~  
~~front~~ their battered homes & shell pitted  
fields.

Our next stop was at a supply base  
which was seething with soldiers - long  
lines of carts and camions. We stopped  
to salute some officers in command and  
to watch the endless line of <sup>empty</sup> carts & motors  
waiting to be filled ~~before going to the front~~  
~~lines~~. The loaded ones on their way to the  
front lines.

\_\_\_\_\_ was the next pretty village we  
came to. The first man we met was  
\_\_\_\_\_ Donaldson, of the Am. Red Cross who  
has a canteen.

His kitchen is a queer arrangement on  
wheels. It has 6 big boilers. Lieut. Donaldson  
at present only serves coffee and one morning  
in one hour he served 1500 men.