

The LIFE of the LEGION.

Notes and Pictures from a Legionary,
who Conceals his Identity
Beneath the Initials
J. A. K.



COURT-MARTIAL: The examination of a deserter at the Poste de Police—an almost inevitable aftermath of letters from home

That veritable "legion of the lost ones, that cohort of the damned," hymned by the poet of Empire, was never so lost nor so damned as the Foreign Legion of France, which draws out its miserable existence under the brazen sun-struck days and frigid starlit nights of Morocco. The regiment has already found its Homer in Major Wren, whose epic is too well known to need recapitulation; but the "pioneers of civilisation," as they have with more truth than romanticism been styled, have another aspect than that portrayed so vividly and brilliantly in *Beau Geste*.

In the endless, treeless plains, the deep valleys and ravines of Morocco, these men, officers, non-commissioned officers, and common soldiers—many of whom in all ranks have enlisted out of a lust for adventure, many of whom are the scum of the earth fleeing from the police—do their work, fighting, coercing, maintaining order, and carrying out all sorts and conditions of necessary labour to promote the elements of culture.

After four months' training the legionaries are shipped out to Africa's coral strand, and despite the strenuous and often dangerous character of the work on which they are engaged, it is a welcome relief from the shattering monotony they otherwise undergo.

Every May sees the withdrawal of the companies from the stations they have occupied in the past, and put into field trim to carry the *tricolor* against the invisible, tenacious, and ruthlessly malignant enemy in the unsubdued territories, bringing them under the sway not only of France but also of the Sultan.

The first task consists of the repairing or making of the roads (*pistes*) 4 metres wide, along which munitions and the commissariat (for even the Legion marches, in Napoleon's immortal aphorism, on its stomach) can be transported. Thereafter a "column" (*anglice*, probably "party") is formed, the troops meeting at a given spot. Here they rest until late in the evening until, at eleven o'clock, orders are whispered, camp is struck, and within half-an-hour man after man is marching towards "death or glory."

Like a gigantic snake the troops march southward, while in the Far East the dawn of a new day streaks the sky with blood. With the advent of the sun the Flying Corps goes into action, human eagles with a terrifying range of vision and an uncanny accuracy of recording. The human snake of men divides into three or four separate portions, each instinct with life, for all the world like a worm severed with a spade. Rifles at the port, bayonets fixed, the men strike for their objective—a large hill. The ground trembles under the thunder of the cavalry, and with a clash the armies shock together.

The summit of the hill is finally attained, rough emplacements are rapidly thrown up, and machine-guns dominate the field, annihilating with a "steel whip of bullets" (to quote Aldington's immortal phrase) any unwary Arab who would cross the plain.

A short rest, and the troops are no longer soldiers, but labourers; one party clears the top of the hill of trees and brushwood, another carries stones, a third transforms the stones into a wall. Telephone wires are laid, roads are made, streams are bridged. Every man works with febrile haste, and like the master mason of medieval days, "bears in either hand a trowel and a sword"—or gun.

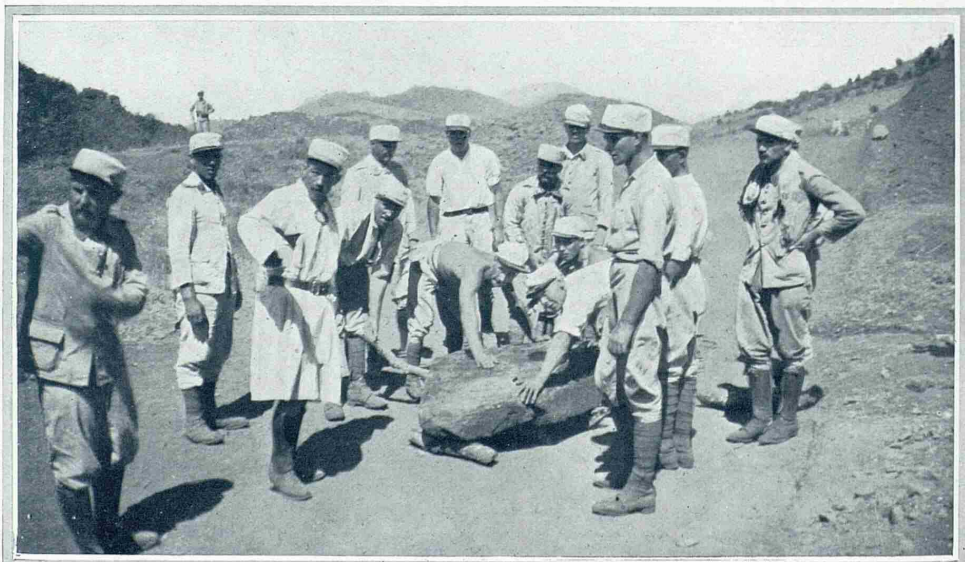
At night the men gather together in groups and sing the songs of their native lands—proof, were it needed, of the nostalgia that makes their



COVER FOR THE WORKERS: One of the 1914 model Hotchkiss machine-guns which are used to protect the labouring parties

lives a hell. So acute is this *heimweh*, indeed, that any intensification of it is usually the herald of an outbreak in the literal sense of the word. With the advent of the mail—that rare and precious break in the ghastly monotony, which is yet perhaps the most painful incident in the routine of the Legion—the thought of home becomes so poignant that the life in the desert takes on of a sudden an unbearable quality it did not possess but a moment before. Frequently the stimulus of one letter, recalling the dear and familiar things of what is tantamount to a previous incarnation, has incited Legionaries to attempt an escape out of the eternity of sand and sun, out of the monotony of war and work. The attempt usually ends in failure owing to the vigilance of the *Goums*, and such a failure is punished by the severest penalties in the service short of death.

Then sounds "Lights out," and the weary men lie down, the *lieder* are hushed, and sleep spreads its wing for a space—sleep fraught with dreams of what might have been interspersed with what will be—"to-morrow is another day."



ROAD-MAKERS AND SOLDIERS IN ONE: Legionaries working on stone transport in one of the most desolate tracts of the enemy-ridden country. This and the other pictures reproduced here were carried out of Africa with great difficulty by the writer