

THE READERS'
PICTURE ALBUM

THE WAR BEHIND THE FRONT

A PICTURE story in the January issue of CLICK stirred the memories of Leo Kober, a German refugee now in New York, so much that he dug into his trunk and brought forth his album of the first World War taken when he served the Fatherland. His war was not fought, for the most part, on the French front. Among the first to be called, he was assigned to the air force in 1914, took part in hazardous flights over London.

At the end of three years he was assigned to Berlin where, with 80 other men, he became part of the Imperial and Osmanic-Balloon Division. This Division was ordered to Turkey, then a German ally, to teach Turks how to use the "captive-balloon" as a special weapon. The fourteen-day trip through Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, Serbia and Macedonia was a sight-seeing holiday; backstage with war, though, was a catastrophe.



LEO KOBER

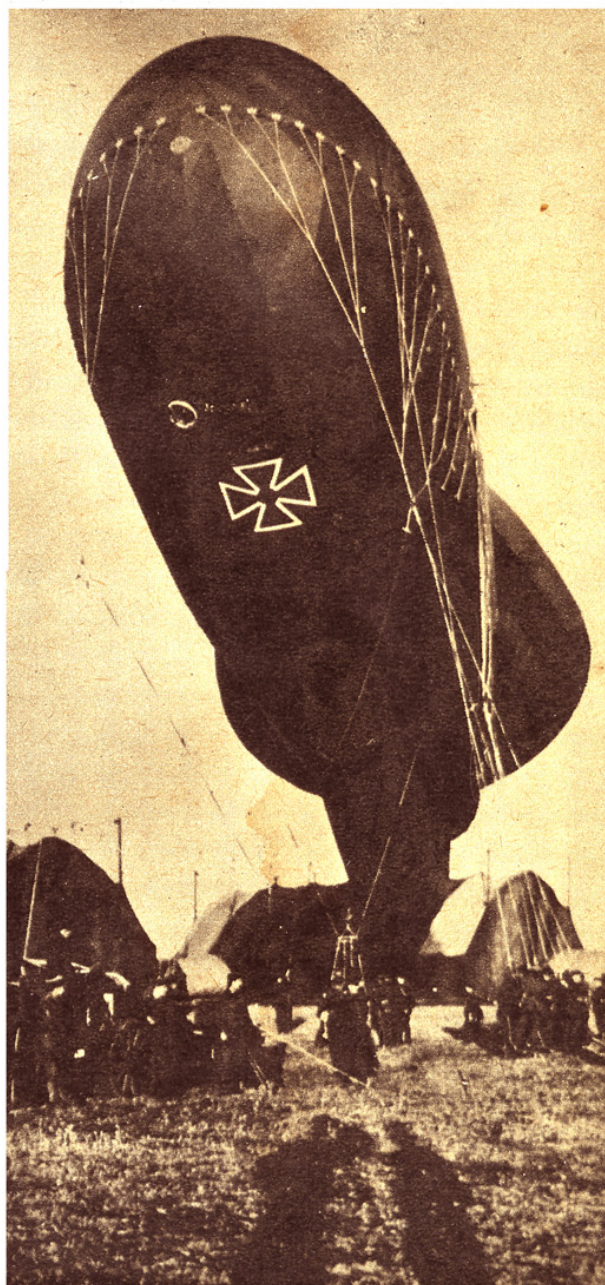


THESE TENTS, covering a gas-filled balloon, caved in from snow.



ALTHOUGH THE IMPERIAL AND OSMANIC-BALLOON DIVISION was not under immediate danger of guns, it was not without its hardships. After the tent caved in, Kober volunteered for the perilous task of crawling into the collapsed tent, letting the gas out of the balloon. Under

great difficulty the Division filled two captive balloons, made two smaller balloon covers. To do this work, it produced its own hydrogen on a miniature factory mounted on an automobile chassis. After a severe Winter, the Division was transferred to Asia Minor.



THESE MEN IN THE BALLOON DIVISION would have preferred sudden death on the front to the lingering dangers to which they were exposed. Extreme and unrelenting heat paralyzed their nerves. Rapidly the men succumbed to malaria and dysentery. Military order and discipline became corrupt. The strain and fear became so great that one day, when only twenty-five were left, they decided they must return to Germany. Weeks of marching through mud and sand, fighting with bandit Arabs, and endless fatigue brought them back to Constantinople at the point of exhaustion. A train took them home to Berlin. That was more than 20 years ago. Today, more young men like Leo Kober (right, in this picture) are being sacrificed, will never again find an enthusiasm for life.