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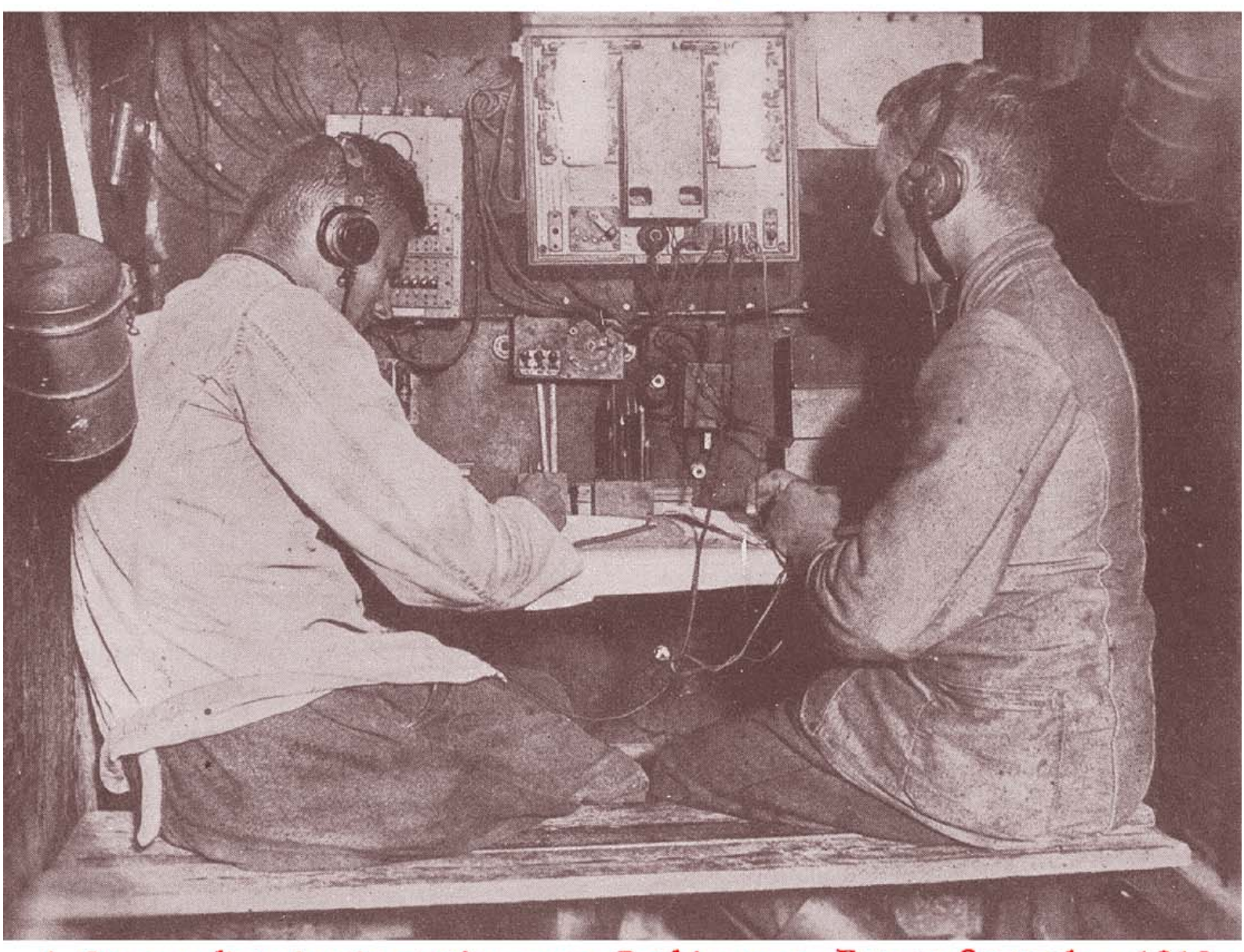
# Beyond NO MAN'S LAND



A German listening-in station near Bethincourt, France, September, 1918.

THROUGH the years we have come to know in this department something of most of the various branches of service comprising our armed forces during the World War. Through pictures and stories we have visited camps here at home, stations in Hawaii, the Canal Zone, the Philippines and other outposts, many corners of the A. E. F., North Russia, Siberia and Italy and have been up in the Occupied Area in Germany. Recently we even got as far as Berlin—after the Armistice, of course.

But we have seldom had a look behind the enemy lines while the war was still in progress. Now, however, with the help of a veteran who fought on the other side, we get a glimpse of activities beyond No Man's Land. You may remember this man, Fritz Ibrügger, who lives in a suburb of Berlin, Germany, as a letter from him appeared in Front and Center in the August, 1936, Monthly. He wrote that he had been a prisoner of war in the American prison camp at Aigrefeuille, France, and wanted to locate 1st Lieutenant Edward R. Davis, once of Peoria, Illinois, and Captain R. A. Gordon, who commanded the 33d P. W. E. Company, whom he had learned to know. While Ibrügger received letters from many American veterans, these two former officers did not respond.

At any rate, with one of his letters to us, he enclosed the above picture which shows him, on the right, and Bantlin, a sergeant, on duty in the German Listening-In Station No. 215 near Bethincourt, France, just behind the German front lines above Verdun. We asked Ibrügger to tell us something about this station and he sent us an extract from his war story, "Germans on Both Sides," with this translation:

"Before us in the Forges valley lies the former village of Bethincourt, or what remains of it. In the background, Dead Man's Hill, and to the left, Hill 304. There were times when these figured daily in Headquarters reports. A death trap for countless regiments, they were conquered and lost, reconquered and lost

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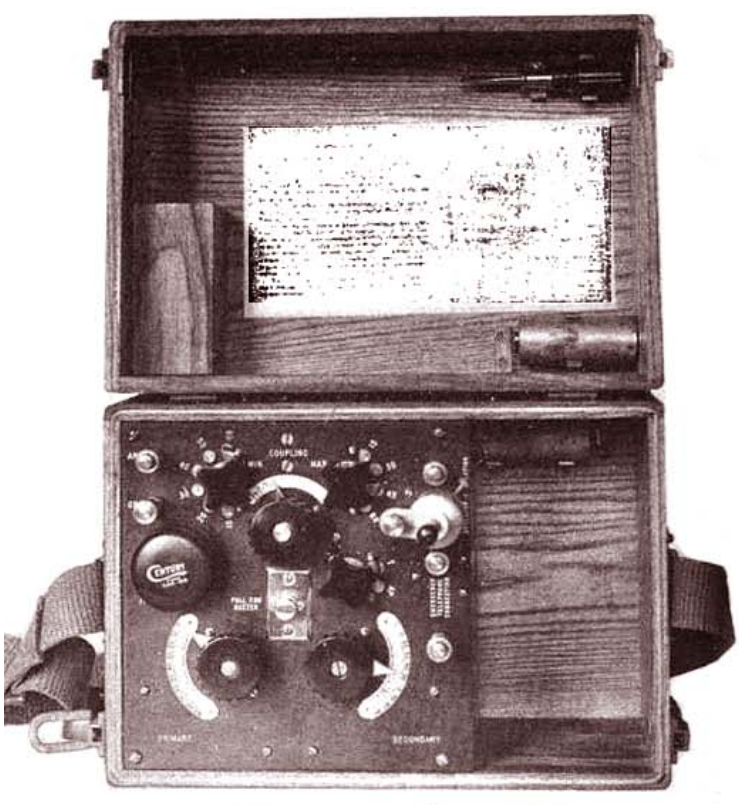
"Before us in the Forges valley lies the former village of Bethincourt, or what remains of it. In the background, Dead Man's Hill, and to the left, Hill 304. There were times when these figured daily in Headquarters reports. A death trap for countless regiments, they were conquered and lost, reconquered and lost

again, until at last in the great battle around Verdun during the autumn of 1917, the French succeeded in regaining both positions, never to give them up again.

"For some months after this last effort a sort of unofficial armistice prevailed in this sector, but we often wondered how long it would last. But these thoughts were never spoken. Hill 304 looks like a big



*Listening Post Radio Set Used by the U.S. Signal Corps*

sieve when the sun rises. Not a square yard without a shell hole.

"A few comrades from the infantry come strolling through our trench. They stop outside our dugout. A small signboard attracts their attention. It reads: 'No admittance for officers or men.' One of them exclaims, 'Well, would you believe this!' and sizes us up with astonished eyes. Telephones, telegraphs out here—almost within reach of the enemy?

"We cannot give them explanations, strict orders, but we satisfy their curiosity by dropping words like 'wireless,' etc. With a last look at the signboard they continue their stroll.

"We are an unknown squad in the big army of combatants. No dispatch from the front ever mentions our existence. But few know of our work. Who ever heard of a long chain of listening-in stations from Flanders right down south to the Vosges to protect our comrades?

"I climb down into the dugout to relieve 'Teckle.' The Frenchies seem to have a lot to say today. One is quite clearly to be heard and I hastily write down the code ticks lest I miss one. Suddenly come the call signals of another French telegraph. 'Sergeant Bantlin, quick—two Frenchies!'

"Bantlin is at my side like a shot and we both write like mad! High-pitched attention—I listen to the higher-toned buzz, Bantlin to the lower . . ."

**WE LEARNED** further from Ibrügger's book—with assistance, we'll admit—that he and his squad were on duty at Listening-in Station No. 215 in this sector in late September, 1918. Everything was peaceful—so peaceful in fact that they were worried. Early on the morning of September 25th, two of the men from the neighboring station, No. 214, awakened his squad from their sleep to warn them of threatened trouble at 5:30. The day passed, however, quietly. At nine o'clock that night, orders were received that in case of a suspected enemy attack, the two stations would withdraw, but during the night would continue listening.

None of them believed that anything would happen. About ten o'clock, Ibrügger relieved his senior, Sergeant Scholz, while the rest of the crew went to sleep. After an hour, he removed his head phones and heard a subdued commotion from outside. Leaving the dugout, he mounted to the trench and heard the sound of drum-fire over in the Argonne, but that was not unusual. Their sector was quiet. It was difficult to believe that a great battle was imminent. Had anything been impending, reinforcements would have arrived. He returned to the dugout; his companions were still fast asleep. Nothing was to be heard on the listening-in apparatus.

*British Listening Post in a Front Line Trench*

At one o'clock—now in the morning of September 26th—he again removed his head phones. The noise outside had increased greatly in volume. Again up into the trench to ascertain the situation. They were under bombardment, including their back areas. Ibrügger tells of the difficulty he had in rousing his three comrades and making them believe what was happening. Finally they were convinced, after mounting to the trench. None of their infantry was to be seen. Were the four of them to be deserted entirely?

Ibrügger sat down at the instrument and listened intently. No results. At three o'clock they suspended the listening-in—it was useless. The firing grew more severe, it was reaching their position. They withdrew to the dugout and started to destroy their apparatus. Ibrügger gathered together all papers and orders so they could be burned at the critical moment. They were prepared. Suddenly the barrage moved on. Sergeant Scholz dashed up the steps. Strange voices were heard in the trench. "Here they are!" cried Scholz. Then began the work of destruction. Nothing but splinters remained of Listening-In Station 215. The flames consumed their papers, the smoke pouring up the dugout steps.

What surprised them was that those above hadn't bestowed a bundle of hand grenades upon them. But the cry became more impatient. "Come up! Come up!" they heard in broken German.

Frenchmen? . . .

One more glance was cast at the ruins. Then they set out upon the difficult journey.

Before them stood Americans . . . .

Veterans of the 80th Division should be able to carry on this account, because it was in their sector that Ibrügger and his three companions were taken prisoner during the first morning of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. Perhaps someone will recall this particular incident and tell us more of it.