

FERREE BARR

THE BOMBARDMENT OF
REIMS

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The Bombardment of Reims:

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Barr Ferree

The Bombardment of Reims

The bombardment of Reims, and the attendant destruction of its cathedral, is an event that has particularly excited the indignation of the civilized world. The sacrifice has seemed so wanton and so unnecessary that the souls of those who have not known the great church by personal observation have cried out in indignation against the outrage, while to those who have known it, its long continued passion has aroused the feeling of an intense personal loss. No other episode of the Great War has accomplished such complete destruction of so great a work of art. Its blackened walls and broken statues are the most formidable indictment the Germans have yet raised against themselves. As an event in the War it stands unique among countless other inexcusable horrors, and it has, therefore seemed worth while to summarize briefly the dreadful doings at Reims, that the real nature of the hideous tragedy may be made apparent.

For an American, remote from the seat of war, to attempt a survey of the bombardment of Reims is a hazardous task. Yet I have ventured to do so because the continued dreadfulness of this great siege, which has lasted more than three years, is quite unknown in this country, and, even in the meagre details here set forth, not fully known in France. The bombardment of Reims has continued from September 3, 1914, without interruption, save

for the few days of the German occupation in that month, and some days designated as "calm" in the daily reports. But these "calm" days form part of the history of the siege, since no one could tell at what hour the bombardment might be renewed.

Little as to the bombardment of Reims has appeared in the American papers, and not much more in the Paris papers. The official bulletins give so small space to it that they have been entirely neglected in the preparation of this chronology. More than once the papers published in Reims have complained of the silence of the Paris papers on the attacks on their beloved city, and have frequently referred to the importance attached to minor details elsewhere, while nothing at all has been said as to more important events at Reims.

The hand of the censor has at all times rested heavily on Reims, the local censor sometimes not permitting the publication of details that have appeared in the few references in Paris newspapers. At the beginning of the bombardment the papers of Reims published quite full details, giving the names and addresses of persons killed or wounded, and the location of buildings burned or otherwise injured in the bombardment. These items were speedily suppressed, and the greater part of the record in available publications is not much more detailed than is given in these pages.

But if details are wanting it is not impossible to draw an outline picture of the whole bombardment. This I have undertaken to do; and while I cannot hope, from an accurate

point of view, that this work can have any value, I am not without hope that as a general review of the bombardment from the beginning, this little book may find a place in the vast literature of the war. Certainly the facts here gathered are quite unknown in America, and, in their entirety, are almost as little known in France, since no one in that besieged land as yet attempted a similar undertaking.

The present record covers the three years of the bombardment from September 3, 1914 to September 3, 1917. A siege extending over so considerable a period of time, attended as it has been, with months of ferocious assaults, with great loss of life, and the useless destruction of great works of art, may well be chronicled for that period. And this is the more the case since the details here gathered have not before been grouped together in their entirety.

It is much too soon to attempt a full history of the bombardment of Reims, but the outlines of the dreadful story may now be brought together. It should be sufficiently obvious that the bombardment of Reims is not a small episode in the war, but an event continuous from the very beginning.

The chronology here published has been compiled from the local newspapers published at Reims and at Paris. I have made use of "Le Courrier de la Champagne", published in Reims, "Le Petit Rémois", published in Paris from December 15, 1915, and the journal "Reims à Paris", also published in Paris from December, 1914. The editor of the latter paper having been

called to the colours, it was merged with "La Marne" and has appeared as "Reims à Paris et la Marne" since October 4, 1916. The daily records of the bombardment, printed in "Le Courrier de la Champagne", are those compiled by its own staff. The records printed in the other papers are compiled from "Le Courrier de la Champagne" and "L'Éclaireur de l'Est", also printed in Reims. "Le Petit Rémois" has made free use of both these papers, and in addition has published the reports of its editor, M. Pierre Bienvenue, residing in Reims. Owing to the fury of the bombardment in April "Le Courrier" was forced to suspend publication for the time being, but "L'Éclaireur" was able to continue in a much reduced form.

The French Republic paid a fine tribute to this journalistic heroism when President Poincaré pinned the Cross of the Legion of Honour on the breast of M. Paul Dramas, the managing editor of "L'Éclaireur de l'Est" on June 18, 1917, when the same distinction was given to Cardinal Luçon, Archbishop of Reims, and Deputy Mayors J. de Bruignac and E. Charbonneaux, and some other heroic citizens. It is impossible to turn over the pages of these little Reims papers without a heartening sense of the courage that permitted their publication daily throughout a harrowing siege. Heroic journalism in a very true sense.

Among other sources of information special mention should be made of "Le Martyre de Reims", published anonymously in parts. It began with the admirable purpose of presenting a detailed summary of life and events in Reims during the

bombardment, giving the names of persons killed or wounded, and the locality of buildings injured. The censor speedily fell afoul of this useful summary: names of persons and buildings were stricken out, as well as other details, and finally the diary came to a temporary end with Part 41.

I must mention also the "Journal d'un Rémois" by M. Henri Jadart, which appeared in "Les Champs de Bataille, Collection du Tour de France, Les Cités Meurtries", edited by M. Octave Beauchamp. M. Jadart is librarian and curator of the Museum of the City of Reims, and has kept in close touch with everything relating to his city. His "Bibliographie Rémoise", read before the Academy of Reims, of which he is the Secretary-General, at a meeting in Paris in June, 1916, is a useful record of the extensive literature produced by the bombardment. The series "Les Cités Meurtries" also includes "Reims sous les obus en 1915" by Mlle. Alice Martin, carrying the story into that year. Mention should also be made of the publication "Reims et la Marne. Almanach de la Guerre, 1914-1915", published in Paris by M. Jules Matot. This book contains no calendar of the bombardment, but a daily summary of general events at Reims, and therefore it is more particularly of local interest. The article "Trois Semaines à Reims" by General Dubois, published in "La Revue" for Oct. – Nov., 1914, contains some useful notes on the first weeks of the bombardment. Just as my chronology had been completed I obtained the new book by M. Jules Poirier "Reims (1 Août – 31 Décembre, 1914)", giving a survey of the early events of the

war as they related to Reims, and summarizing the daily events in diary form. It has given me some additional facts on the first five months of the bombardment. "Sous les Bombes" by Mlle. Clotilde Jehanne Remy, of which two parts have appeared, is a personal diary of life in Reims during the bombardment.

Although I have been obliged to place complete dependence on printed records, it should be pointed out that there is often a wide divergence between them. The statements printed in the two Reims newspapers do not always agree for the same day, and "Le Petit Rémois", in endeavouring to present a fair and just account, has more than once printed the divergent reports, and clarified the matter by adding its own summary, which often differed from the other two! I fancy, however, that many of these differences are apparent only, and are perhaps not so striking as they first appear.

It has seemed desirable to give the details of the bombardment as far as the local reports permit. That is to say, the hours of the bombardment, the number of shells, the number of persons killed or wounded. The hours of the bombardment are an interesting index to the agitated daily life at Reims. The number of shells is also of interest as indicating the possible intensity of the attack. But as ammunition of all kinds and sizes, huge and small shells, shrapnel, incendiary and asphyxiating bombs and many other kinds of projectiles have been used in the siege, a mere statement of number of shells hardly gives a proper index to the horror of any one bombardment. But the shell records as

to kind are highly incomplete in the published reports, and it has not seemed worth while to make an effort to indicate them. In the dreadful days of March, April, May and June, 1917, when the fall of shells was colossal, even the newspapers gave up attempts at numbering them, and it is probable the actual totals will never be known. The number of persons killed and wounded help also to show the severity of the bombardments, and have no other purpose in this survey. I can scarcely hope that my records of these items approach completeness, and they have been omitted from April, May and June, 1917. The number of persons killed or wounded are, for the most part, those of the civilian population of Reims.

In addition to bombardment from guns Reims has suffered from the German aviators. I have designated these birds of prey as "Taube", as an economical form of expression. Every considerable bombardment was preceded by these visitors. Nearly every day one or more of them appeared above Reims, and they seem to have been looked upon as so much matter of course that I suspect their presence was often unnoted in the reports. Whenever possible they were eagerly welcomed by the guns of Reims, and hence it followed that, not only was the city subject to the bombardment of the enemy, but on several occasions injury was done in it by antiaerial shells falling back.

A mere glance at the daily records shows that, until March, 1917, no definite purpose was behind this bombardment. It was continued for two years and a half for no other purpose than

to annoy the French. Else why these daily bombardments of a few shells only, these days of calm or of little doing, these spurts of agony, bringing sudden death or useless destruction, only to be followed by lapses into silence? Had the destruction of Reims been seriously undertaken it might, I suppose, have been accomplished long since. But it pleased the enemy to irritate rather than to destroy; a little harm day by day, a little annoyance, more or less, spread over a considerable period of time, with occasional outbursts of great violence, this was the programme. Or, more dreadful still, when the German forces met with defeat, the guns were opened afresh on the helpless cathedral, that it might be wounded again for disasters it had in no sense been party to. While doubtless all this has been thoroughly understood by the French military authorities, little was known of it to the outside world, for little that went on at Reims was known anywhere. There were many other and more important things in the Great War that affected the future of France and of the world. Humanity held its breath while the heroic battle of Verdun was in progress, because it was a military event of the first magnitude. But so little has been heard of Reims that a revelation of its daily martyrdom must come as a shock to those who have closely followed the war.

The story presented from the month of March, 1917, is quite different from anything that preceded. Very obviously the foolish game of play-war was abandoned, and a real effort made to accomplish the destruction of the city. The mind pales before the

needless horrors of these months, so inefficiently indicated by a record of continuous and continued bombardment. So full of horror has been this time that the local papers speak of a daily fall of 600 shells, or even 1000 shells, as a welcome relief from days just passed!

And the cathedral. That, of course, is the one central overpowering thing that excites the interest of the world in the bombardment of Reims. This is not so with the unfortunate people of Reims, who have seen their loved ones killed, their houses ruined, their occupations gone, and who have suffered daily privation and martyrdom. Reims is not alone among the cities and districts of France in such horrors, but its cathedral is one of the treasures of the world, and in this war of great crimes no greater crime has been attempted than the destruction of this splendid church.

Three years ago its vast bulk and massive towers rose grandly above its surrounding buildings in all the pride of lasting permanency. For seven hundred years these stones had cried aloud to the glory of God and the supreme genius of its French builders and decorators. France – that treasure-house of architectural masterpieces – had no more noble building than this, so dear to the French people by reason of the supremacy of its art and as the coronation church of their kings, and once the emblem and the expression of their nationality.

In its present dismantled, battered, more than half-ruined state, the cathedral of Reims is of all the unnecessary sacrifices

in the War the most unnecessary. It has been too great and too good a thing to disappear from the world without leaving an empty place that cannot be filled. Once, in far back September, 1914, the merciless barbarian encamped before its holy portals. There he stayed for nine days, and, leaving in haste, presently bombarded it, so that his own wounded, temporarily placed within it for safety, were burned alive under the protecting flag of the Red Cross. A pitiable comment on his regard for great churches and the well-being of the wounded.

Since then – September 12, 1914, to be exact – no good news has come out of Reims. Yet of this we may be certain: devoted as the French are to their great national church, they will gladly sacrifice it utterly if that sacrifice be required to thrust out the barbaric invading hordes that know only hate of the good, the true, the beautiful.

The catastrophe of Reims supplies a very sure index as to what passes as the quality of the German mind. Although of all churches the most French, the cathedral of Reims belongs to the whole world, a rare, beautiful and precious structure, hallowed with great memories and endowed with exquisite art. The question is thus very simple: is the world better with the cathedral of Reims or without it? The Germans seem unquestionably to have decreed its destruction. Of this the record of the bombardment offers ample proof. But as yet the cathedral-destroyers have offered no word, no hint, no suggestion, as to how or why the world will be bettered by the wilful destruction

of this matchless church.

1914

September, 1914

2 French army evacuated Reims in the night.

3 Taube dropped 2 bombs 9:15 A. M.; Dr. Langlet, Mayor of Reims, issued proclamation announcing the approach of the Germans and urging calm. German officers enter Reims 8:30 P. M.

4 First bombardment 9:22 A. M., 176 shells, many killed and wounded; minor injuries to the cathedral, glass broken; St. Remi and St. André injured; German troops enter in afternoon; anniversary of the German occupation of 1870.

5 German occupation.

6 German occupation.

7 German occupation.

8 German occupation.

9 German occupation.

10 German occupation.

11 German occupation.

12 German troops evacuate Reims in afternoon; French officers appear 6:30 P. M.

13 French troops re-enter Reims 6 A. M.; Taube 5 P. M.; last

vespers in the cathedral (in chapel of the Cardinal): Te Deum for Benedict XV.

14 Cannonade from 5 A. M.; bombardment 9:45 A. M. to 12:15 P. M.; renewed 1 to 3:30 P. M.; 59 killed, many wounded; cannonade all night.

15 Taubes 5 A. M.; bombardment 9:30 to 11 A. M.; renewed 4 P. M., 13 killed.

16 Bombardment 3:30 A. M. to 6:30 P. M., 30 killed.

17 Bombardment from 9 A. M.; renewed 2:30 to 4 P. M., 3 shells on cathedral.

18 Cannonade from 2 A. M.; bombardment from 8:15 A. M., 13 shells on cathedral, 37 killed; Sous-Préfecture burned.

19 Bombardment 7:45 A. M. to 4 P. M., 16 shells on cathedral; cathedral took fire from incendiary bomb 2:30 P. M.; cathedral and Archiepiscopal Palace burned; 32 killed; artillery all night.

20 Bombardment 9:30 to 11 A. M.; renewed 3:30 to 4:30 P. M.

21 Calm; artillery at night.

22 Bombardment 12 to 3:30 P. M., 7 killed, Cardinal Luçon returned to Reims from Conclave at Rome.

23 Taube 6 A. M.; bombardment 3 to 5 P. M.

24 Taube 6 A. M.; bombardment 9:30 to 11 A. M.; renewed 3 to 5 P. M.; bomb struck cathedral and Civil Hospital; 10 killed; cannonade all night.

25 Trenches bombarded in morning; Reims bombarded 3 to

- 5 P. M.; bomb struck St. Remi, 1 killed; cannonade all night.
- 26 Bombardment 11:45 A. M. to 12:15 P. M., 13 killed; renewed 3:30 to 4:30 P. M., 17 killed.
- 27 Bombardment 3:30 P. M.; cannonade at night.
- 28 Bombardment 2:30 P. M.; cannonade at night.
- 29 Bombardment 9:30 to 10:30 A. M.; renewed 4 to 6 P. M.; again 9 P. M. to 6 A. M., 3 killed, many wounded.
- 30 Bombardment continued to 6 A. M.; renewed 8 A. M. and 4:30 P. M.

October, 1914

- 1 Some shells 9 A. M.; 2 aerial bombs 5:15 P. M.; cannonade at night.
- 2 Bombardment 4:30 P. M., 2 shells, 3 killed.
- 3 Bombardment 10:30 A. M. to 3 P. M., 1 killed, 5 or 6 wounded.
- 4 Bombardment 9 A. M.; renewed 12 to 1 P. M., 50 shells.
- 5 Aerial combat; bombardment 9 to 11 A. M., 7 killed, 7 wounded; renewed 3 P. M. to 10 A. M.
- 6 Bombardment continued to 10 A. M., 200 shells; 3 spies shot 5 A. M.
- 7 Bombardment 12:05 to 2 P. M., 50 shells, 2 killed, 2 wounded; renewed 8 P. M.
- 8 1 shell in morning; bombardment 3:30 P. M., 15 shells, 1 killed, 1 wounded.

9 Bombardment at night, 20 shells to 5 A. M.

10 Bombardment continued to 5 A. M. Taube 11 A. M.

11 Calm.

12 Bombardment 2 to 5 P. M., 3 shells on cathedral 3 P. M., 2 killed, 2 wounded.

13 Bombardment from 2 A. M., 1 shell on cathedral 3 A. M.; renewed 9:30 to 11 A. M., 2 wounded. Taube dropped bomb 2:30 P. M.; bombardment renewed; violent artillery around Reims at night.

14 Bombardment 2 to 3:30 P. M., 4 wounded, artillery at night.

15 Calm.

16 Bombardment 3:30 to 5 P. M., 2 wounded.

17 Calm.

18 Calm.

19 Calm.

2 °Calm.

21 Bombardment 2 to 5:30 P. M., 1 wounded.

22 Bombardment 3:30 P. M.; cannonade at night.

23 3 Taube bombs 11 A. M., 2 wounded; Taube 2 P. M.; bombardment 4 to 5 P. M., 1 wounded.

24 Bombardment 2 P. M.; cannonade at night.

25 Bombardment to noon; renewed 2 P. M., 4 killed, 8 wounded; distant cannonade at night.

26 Calm; violent cannonade at night.

27 Bombardment 9:15 A. M.

28 Tranquil. 127 persons wounded since September 4.

29 Bombardment 4 to 6 A. M., 50 shells; cannonade at night.

30 Bombardment 3 to 5:30 P. M., 50 to 60 shells, 1 killed, 2 wounded; renewed 9:30 P. M. to 9 A. M.

31 Bombardment continued to 9 A. M., 60 to 70 shells, 2 killed, 2 wounded; renewed 4 to 5 P. M., 20 shells.

November, 1914

1 Taube dropped 2 bombs 10:30 A. M.; bombardment 11:30 A. M., 6 shells, 2 wounded; renewed 2:30 to 5 P. M.

2 Bombardment 9:30 to 11 A. M., 20 shells. Taube dropped bomb 2:10 P. M.; bombardment renewed 2:30 to 4:30 P. M., 70 shells.

3 Bombardment from 9:30 A. M.; renewed 4 to 6 P. M.; again at 8:45 P. M., 8 killed, 2 wounded.

4 Taube dropped 4 bombs 4 P. M.; bombardment, 30 shells, 2 wounded; renewed 11 P. M.

5 Taube 7:30 A. M.; violent bombardment 2 to 6 P. M.; renewed 8 P. M. to 5 A. M.; 300 shells, 9 killed, 15 wounded.

6 Bombardment continued to 5 A. M.; renewed 11 A. M.; again 10 P. M.; 2 shells.

7 Bombardment 8 P. M. to midnight.

8 Dr. Langlet, Mayor of Reims, decorated with Legion of Honour. Bombardment 7 to 8:30 P. M.; 50 shells.

9 Calm.

10 Day calm; bombardment 10 to 11 P. M.; 20 shells.

11 Bombardment 8 to 9 A. M.; renewed 12 to 2:15 P. M.

12 Bombardment 1:30 to 5:30 P. M.; cathedral apse pinnacle demolished; shrapnel fell within near high altar; renewed 8 P. M. to 5:10 A. M.; 400 shells for the day.

13 Bombardment continued to 5:10 A. M.; some shells in morning and at 2:30 P. M.

14 Taube 7 A. M.; bombardment 9 A. M., 2 shells; Taube dropped fusées 3 P. M.; cannonade at night.

15 Taube dropped bomb 8 A. M.

16 Some shells in morning and at 2 P. M.; heavy bombardment 8:30 P. M. to 5 A. M.; apse chapel in St. Remi demolished.

17 Bombardment to 5 A. M.; renewed 2:30 P. M.; Taube dropped 2 bombs.

18 Taube dropped 2 bombs 7 A. M.; bombardment 9 A. M. to 5 P. M.

19 Bombardment 3 A. M.; day somewhat calm.

20 Some shells on interdicted zone; bombardment 10 P. M. to 4:30 A. M., 3 wounded.

21 Bombardment continued to 4:30 A. M.; renewed 2:30 P. M., 100 shells.

22 Heavy bombardment 9:30 A. M. to noon; renewed 2 to 5:30 P. M.; 2 shells on cathedral; 6 killed, 24 wounded; again 8 to 11 P. M.

23 Bombardment 8 A. M. to 6 P. M.; cannonade all night.

24 Bombardment 2:30 to 4:30 P. M., 50 shells.

25 Bombardment 6 A. M., 20 shells.

26 Bombardment 8 A. M. to 5:30 P. M., 28 killed, 23 wounded.

27 Bombardment from midnight; relatively calm to 2 P. M., bombardment renewed 2:15 to 6 P. M.; again 10 P. M. to 2 A. M.

28 Bombardment continued to 2 A. M.; renewed 3:30 A. M., 27 killed.

29 Calm.

30 Bombardment 10:30 A. M. to noon.

December, 1914

1 Intermittent bombardment.

2 Bombardment 10 A. M.

3 Bombardment 9 A. M., 2 or 3 shells.

4 Taube 11:30 A. M.; bombardment 1:30 to 8 P. M.

5 Bombardment 3:30 A. M. to noon.

6 Taube dropped 3 bombs 11 A. M.

7 Bombardment 5 to 6 P. M., 40 shells.

8 Bombardment 1 to 3 P. M., 50 shells.

9 Bombardment in afternoon, 12 shells; renewed in evening, 6 shells.

10 Shrapnel morning and afternoon.

11 Bombardment in morning, 4 shells; renewed 5:30 to 6:30 P. M.

12 Bombardment on vacant land, 10 A. M., 14 shells.

13 Bombardment 9:30 to 11 A. M., 50 shells. President Poincaré visited Reims.

14 Bombardment in morning; renewed in evening, 20 shells.

15 Bombardment 10 A. M.; renewed 4 P. M., 30 shells.

16 Bombardment 5:30 to 6 P. M., 8 shells; renewed 9 P. M.

17 Taube dropped bomb 9 A. M.; bombardment 11:10 A. M. to dawn, more than 200 shells at night, 2 killed, 9 wounded.

18 Bombardment continued to dawn; renewed morning and afternoon.

19 Bombardment 11 A. M. to 12:30 P. M., 13 wounded.

20 Bombardment 6 P. M., 50 shells.

21 Bombardment 11 A. M., 50 shells; Taube 4 P. M.

22 2 Taubes 3 P. M.; bombardment 3:30 P. M., 30 shells; artillery in evening to 9:30 P. M.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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