GERMANS DESTROY LOUVAIN

BY RICHARD HARDING DAVIS, NEW YORK TRIBUNE

For two hours on Thursday night I was in what for six hundred years had been the city of Louvain. The Germans were burning it, and to hide their work kept us locked in the railroad carriages. But the story was written against the sky; was told to us by German soldiers incoherent with excesses; and we could read it in the faces of the women and children being led to concentration camps and of the citizens on their way to be shot.

The Germans sentenced Louvain on Wednesday to become a wilderness, and with the German system and love of thoroughness they left Louvain an empty, blackened shell. The reason for this appeal to the torch and the execution of non-combatants, as given to me on Thursday morning by General von Lutwitz, military governor of Brussels, was this: On Wednesday, while the German military commander of the troops in Louvain was at the Hôtel de Ville talking to the burgomaster, a son of the burgomaster with an automatic pistol shot the chief of staff and German staff surgeons. Lutwitz claims this was the signal for the Civil Guard, in civilian clothes on roofs, to fire upon the German soldiers in the open square below. Fifty Germans were killed and wounded. For that, said Lutwitz, Louvain must be wiped out….

Money can never restore Louvain. Great architects and artists, dead these six hundred years, made it beautiful, and their handiwork belonged to the world. With torch and dynamite the Germans have turned these masterpieces into ashes, and all the Kaiser’s horses and all his men cannot bring them back again.

When by troop train we reached Louvain, the entire heart of the city was destroyed and fire had reached the Boulevard Tirlemont, which faces the railroad station. The night was windless, and the sparks rose in steady, leisurely pillars, falling back into the furnace from which they sprang. In their work the soldiers were moving from the heart of the city to the outskirts, street by street, from house to house….

On the high ground rose the broken spires of the Church of St. Pierre and the Hôtel de Ville, and descending like steps were row beneath row of houses, roofless, with windows like blind eyes. The fire had reached the last row of houses, those on the Boulevard de Jodigne. Some of these were already cold, but others sent up steady, straight columns of flame. In others at the third and fourth stories the window curtains still hung, flowers still filled the window-boxes, while on the first floor the torch had just passed and the flames were leaping.
The entrance of the German army into Brussels has lost the human quality. It was lost as soon as the three soldiers who led the army bicycled into the Boulevard du Régent, and asked the way to the Gare du Nord. When they passed the human note passed with them.

What came after them, and twenty-four hours later is still coming, is not the men marching, but a force of nature like a tidal wave, an avalanche, or a river flooding its banks. At this minute it is rolling through Brussels as the swollen waters of the Conemaugh Valley swept through Johnstown.

At the sight of the first few regiments of the enemy we were thrilled. After, for three hours, they had passed in one unbroken steel-gray column, we were bored. But when hour after hour passed and there was no halt, no breathing time, no open spaces in the ranks, the thing became uncanny, unhuman. You returned to watch it, fascinated. It held the mystery and menace of fog rolling toward you across the sea.

The gray of the uniforms worn by both officers and men helped this air of mystery. Only the sharpest eye could detect among the thousands that passed, the slightest difference. All moved under a cloak of invisibility. Only after the most numerous and severe tests at all distances, with all materials and combinations of colors that give forth no color, could this gray have been discovered. That it was selected to clothe and disguise the German when he fights is typical of the German staff in striving for efficiency to leave nothing to chance, to neglect no detail.

After you have seen this service uniform under conditions entirely opposite, you are convinced that for the German soldier it is his strongest weapon. Even the most expert marksman cannot hit a target he cannot see. It is a gray-green, not the blue-gray of our Confederates. It is the gray of the hour just before daybreak, the gray of unpolished steel, of mist among green trees.

I saw it first in the Grande Place in front of the Hôtel de Ville. It was impossible to tell if in that noble square there was a regiment or a brigade. You saw only a fog that melted into the stones, blended with the ancient house fronts, that shifted and drifted, but left you nothing at which you could point.

Later, as the army passed below my window, under the trees of the Botanical Park, it merged and was lost against the green leaves. It is no exaggeration to say that at a hundred yards you can see the horses on which the Uhlans ride, but cannot see the men who ride them.

If I appear to overemphasize this disguising uniform it is because, of all the details of the German outfit, it appealed to me as one of the most remarkable. These men passing in the street, when they reached the next crossing, become merged into the gray of the paving-stones and the earth swallows them.
Yesterday Major-General von Jarotsky, the German Military Governor of Brussels, assured Burgomaster Max that the German army would not occupy the city, but would pass through it. It is still passing. I have followed, in campaigns, six armies, but, excepting not even our own, the Japanese, or the British, I have not seen one so thoroughly equipped. I am not speaking of the fighting qualities of any army, only of the equipment and organization. The German army moved into this city as smoothly and as compactly as an Empire State Express. There were no halts, no open places, no stragglers.

This army has been on active service three weeks, and so far there is not apparently a chin-strap or a horseshoe missing. It came in with the smoke pouring from cook-stoves on wheels, and in an hour had set up post-office wagons, from which mounted messengers galloped along the line of column, distributing letters, and at which soldiers posted picture postcards.

The infantry came in files of five, two hundred men to each company; the Lancers in columns of four, with not a pennant missing. The divisions of quick-firing guns and field pieces were one hour at a time in passing, each gun with its caisson and ammunition-wagon taking twenty seconds in which to pass.

The men of the infantry sang “Fatherland, My Fatherland.” Between each line of song they took three steps. At times two thousand men were singing together in absolute rhythm and beat. When the melody gave way, the silence was broken only by the stamp of iron-shod boots, and then again the song rose. When the singing ceased the bands played marches. They were followed by the rumble of siege-guns, the creaking of wheels, and of chains clanking against the cobblestones, and the sharp, bell-like voices of bugles.

For seven hours the army passed in such a solid column that not once might a taxicab or trolley-car pass through the city. Like a river of steel it flowed, gray and ghostlike. Then, as dusk came and as thousands of horses’ hoofs and thousands of iron boots continued to tramp forward, they struck tiny sparks from the stones, but the horses and the men who beat out the sparks were invisible.

At midnight, pack-wagons and siege-guns were still passing. At 7 this morning I was awakened by the tramp of men and bands playing jauntily. Whether they marched all night or not I do not know; but now for twenty-six hours the gray army has rumbled by with the mystery of fog and the pertinacity of a steam-roller.

**TASK:**

Select three quotes from the reading above that illustrate Germany’s military might at the start of World War I. Copy each quote and then explain its meaning. In explaining each quote, you should focus on answering:

- What does the quote tell you about the German Army or about Europe?
- What does the quote tell you about militarism or nationalism?
- What effective imagery does the author use?
Answer below **or** attach a separate sheet of paper as necessary.