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BAKER AT FRONT; SHELL FALLS NEAR

Secretary Enters the Front
Lines and Peers Into No
Man's Land.

TALKS WITH PRIVATES

Later He Makes an Address to
the Soldiers of the Rain-
bow Division.

WITH THE AMERICAN ARMY IN FRANCE, March 20, (Associated Press.)—Secretary Baker has had his baptism of fire in the front-line trenches, and while he was returning from them a German shell burst within less than fifty yards of his motor car. He was not injured.

The Secretary went into the trenches yesterday morning in a sector the location of which must not be revealed, where American troops faced the enemy near by. For half an hour he plodded over the duckboards. The Germans maintained an active fire with heavy pieces and machine guns. Nevertheless Mr. Baker made his way to an advanced sap, entered a listening post and talked for several minutes with the soldier on duty there.

But the Secretary's narrowest escape was on his return to headquarters. The German shell, of 105 millimeters, roared down and burst cleanly less than fifty yards from the automobile containing the Secretary of War and the escorting officers. The shell hit a roadside dug-out, digging a big crater. Mr. Baker wished to stop and ascertain whether there were men in the dugout, but the chauffeur, realizing the danger, opened the throttle and made his best speed until the danger zone was passed.

Tuesday was the Secretary's hardest and most exciting day in France. On Monday evening, accompanied only by a General commanding a division and one other officer, he motored to a point accessible to the sector selected for his inspection. He dined and slept in the chateau of French friends of the officers. Retiring early, the Secretary rose at 4 o'clock in the dark of an overcast, chill March day. Taking breakfast quickly, he drove through the misty dawn to his destination.

Insists on Going to the Trenches.

As the lines were approached the steady reverberation of guns signaled great activity of the artillery. This was confirmed when, on arrival, it was found that the road selected for approach to the trenches was under brisk shellfire. Indeed, the firing was so active as to cause the General considerable apprehension for the safety of his distinguished guest. He endeavored to dissuade Mr. Baker from going on with the expedition, explaining the danger. But the Secretary overrode his protest. Accordingly another route was reluctantly selected.

The party re-entered the car and was driven to the selected point, as far forward as motoring was safe. With the General and the other officer, Mr. Baker walked over the shell-cratered region to a communication trench. He wore civilian clothes, covered with a trench coat, khaki breeches and boots borrowed from a Colonel of about his size. He also put on a shrapnel helmet.