

"HAMLET" AT THE FRONT

How Part of the British Army, "Somewhere in France," Gave Shakespeare

Here is a story of a Shakespearean production made within sound of the German guns. How the soldiers gave "Hamlet," with themselves as costumers, scene painters and actors, is told in this account, sent by a special correspondent to the London Times.

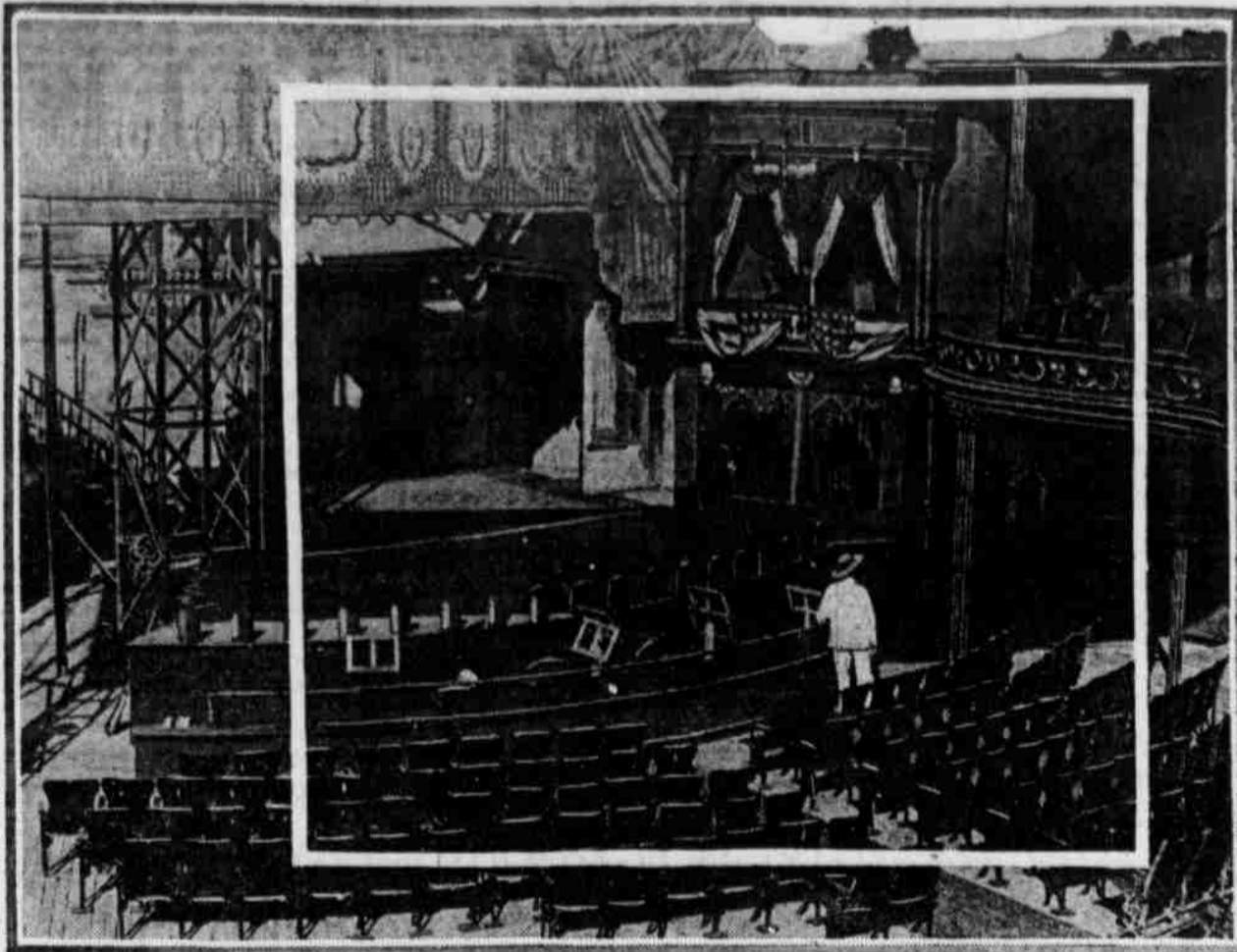
It is difficult to realize that before leaving France I saw "Hamlet" performed by soldiers of the British Expeditionary Force within a few hours' distance of the firing line. An officer of high standing who saw the play hit off the situation: "Our men do not live by bully beef alone; they need some food for the mind, and there is nothing better for them than the great thoughts of our great writers." The play was performed in costume, with scenery painted in camp, and with not a word misplaced or forgotten in the rendering.

Four scenes were chosen—the ghost scene, the room in the castle where Hamlet decides on revenge, the great soliloquy and the graveyard. The cast was chosen on the spot, neighboring towns and libraries were scoured for copies of the play, as there was no time to send to England. Luck turned our way, copies were secured, and in a town close by was a branch of a Paris theatrical costumier.

The colonel commanding the base was informed of what was in progress on the Saturday evening; he suggested scenery. Imagine the burst of joy when we discovered a sergeant major who had been stage carpenter. We went altogether to the Y. M. C. A., where the play was to be performed; there we found two A. S. C. men working at the stage, and actually preparing footlights. The thrilling moment in the preparations came when two privates of the London Scottish offered to paint the scenery if we could find paint and brushes. The difficulty of bringing together all the equipment left us until Monday morning before we began, and I still wonder if there is anything in military or civil life to approach the calm confidence of these men who were to play Hamlet that night, and at 10 a. m. of the same day were faced with a few boxes of dry paint, some brushes, and several square yards of canvas stretched on tent poles; but they did it, and just before the play began the last scene was carefully stung up, still wet.

Long before the time of starting a

FORD'S THEATRE—IN THE CALIFORNIA HILLS



As every one knows, D. W. Griffith built a life-size copy of Ford's Theatre when he staged the scene of Lincoln's assassination in "The Birth of a Nation." But how many people who see the stage, balcony and parquet on the screen at the Forrest suspect that the structure was set up out among the hills of California with only a canopy of white cloth to break and diffuse the light? The photograph shows the ragged edge of seats, proscenium and roof. The space within the white line is all that the lens of the picture camera shows on the screen.

great queue assembled. The colonels and officers of the battalions represented honored the production by their presence; also the matrons and nursing staff of the hospitals, and over a thousand men gained admission. The doors and windows of the hut were opened so that the crowd outside could hear. Yet during this growing excitement we were shutting out the thought that any one of our company of actors and stagehands might be called on duty any minute, for most of them were standing by waiting to go

to the firing line. The curtains were drawn and, instead of the usual respectful silence that greets the opening of a scene in Hamlet, there were yells of full-throated applause.

Hamlet was embarrassed by the cheers of the gods at the splendid fresh colors in the scenery, for many of these men had not seen stage colors since they left home, and for the time being Hamlet's scenery outshone Hamlet. Before the play was half through we breathed easily and knew the experiment to be justified.

The company got itself together in an

hour; it learned its parts from two books in the spare time allowed in three days; it painted and erected its scenery in less than 12 hours, and acted, in a way that baffled the keenest critics, to an audience whose vociferous approval would make any actor—Shakespearean or variety—green with envy. Hamlet will long be remembered; a six-foot two-inch Horatio and limping with a convalescent ankle could not, through physical disparity, keep himself within his shadow; the Ghost wore a fine suit of old French armor shrouded in white muslin.

THE DAYS OF REAL SPORT



Bridges

THE DEATH OF LITTLE EVA