

Apollinaire's Trepanned Skull

by Con Chapman

In the spring of 1916, Apollinaire was sitting in a trench near Berry-au-Bac, reading *Mercure de France*, to which he contributed an anecdotal column.

A shell landed near him; he ducked to cover himself from the blast, then returned to his paper. It was only when blood began to drip onto the page



SOUS-LIEUTENANT GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE

that he realized he'd been hit, his helmet pierced by shrapnel. Fragments were removed, but because of his symptoms—vertigo, depression, paralysis, fatigue—



his skull was trepanned; a hole was bored into his head with the trephine, to remove pieces of bone. The operation was a medical success, but the ghost had fled the



grotto. He ceased to write to his young fiancée, Madeleine, the daily dispatches from his soul with which he'd wooed her. His outré conversation—the motley flag under which



he sailed through the salons—was lowered. Now, he spoke with circumspection. He no longer strove to startle, as in his youth. He wanted to join the Legion of Honor.



He took up with a redhead and settled down
to a contented domestic life. No longer a
poet, he became a censor of newspapers,
like the one he'd been reading with pleasure,
and contributing to from the front lines,
when a German shell hit his brain.

