



"OVER THE TOP"

AN AMERICAN SOLDIER WHO WENT

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MACHINE GUNNER, SERVING IN FRANCE

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CHAPTER XIII.

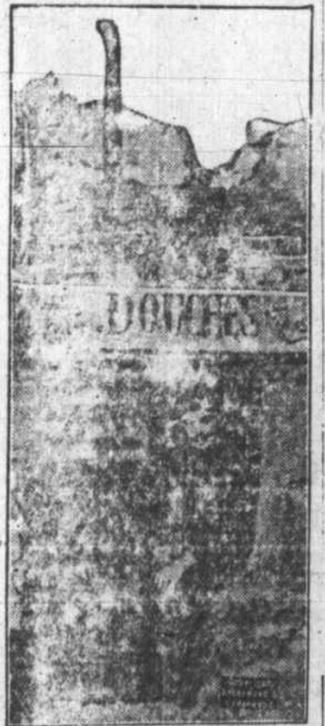
My First Official Bath.

Right behind our rest billet was a large creek about ten feet deep and twenty feet across, and it was a habit of the company to avail themselves of an opportunity to take a swim and at the same time thoroughly wash themselves and their underwear when on their own. We were having a spell of hot weather, and these baths to us were a luxury. The Tommies would splash around in the water and then come out and sit in the sun and have what they termed a "shirt hunt." At first we tried to drown the "cooties," but they also seemed to enjoy the bath.

One Sunday morning the whole section was in the creek and we were having a gay time, when the sergeant major appeared on the scene. He came to the edge of the creek and ordered: "Come out of it. Get your equipment on, drill order, and fall in for bath parade. Look lively, my hearties. You have only got fifteen minutes." A howl of indignation from the creek greeted this order but our wame. Discipline is discipline. We lined up in front of our billet with rifles and bayonets (why you need rifles and bayonets to take a bath gets me), a full quon of ammunition, and our tin hats. Each man had a piece of soap and a towel. After an eight-kilo march along a dusty road with an occasional shell whistling overhead, we arrived at a little stone frame building upon the bank of a creek. Nailed over the door

of the building was a large sign which read "Divisional Baths." In a wooden shed in the rear we could hear a wheezy old engine pumping water. We lined up in front of the baths, soaked with perspiration, and piled our rifles into stacks. A sergeant of the U. S. M. C. with a yellow band around his left arm on which was "S. P." (sanitary police) in black letters, took charge, ordering us to take off our equipment, unroll our puttees and unlace our boots. Then, starting from the right of the line, he divided us into squads of fifteen. I happened to be in the first squad.

We entered a small room, where we were given five minutes to undress, then filed into the bathroom. In here



A Bathroom at the Front.

there were fifteen tubs (barrels sawed in two) half full of water. Each tub contained a piece of laundry soap. The sergeant informed us that we had just twelve minutes in which to take our baths. Scrubbing ourselves all over, we took turns in rubbing each other's backs, then by means of a garden hose, washed the soap off. The water was ice cold but felt fine.

Pretty soon a bell rang and the water was turned off. Some of the slower ones were covered with soap, but this made no difference to the sergeant, who chased us into another room, where we lined up in front of a little window, resembling the box office in a theater, and received clean underwear and towels. From here we went into the room where we had first undressed. Ten minutes were allowed in which to get into our "clubber."

My pair of drawers came up to my chin and the shirt barely reached my diaphragm, but they were clean—no stragglers on them, so I was satisfied. At the expiration of the time allotted we were thrust out and finished our dressing on the street.

When all of the company had bathed it was a case of march back to billets. That march was the most uncontentious one I imagined, just cussing and blinding all the way. We were covered with white dust and felt greasy from sweat. The woolen underwear issued was itching like the mischief.

After eating our dinner of stew, which had been kept for us—it is now four o'clock—we went into the creek and had another bath.

If "Holy Joe" could have heard our remarks about the divisional baths and army red tape he would have fainted at our wickedness. But Tommy is only human after all.

I just mentioned "Holy Joe" or the chaplain in an irreverent sort of way, but no offense was meant, as there were some very brave men among them.

There are so many instances of heroic deeds performed under fire in rescuing the wounded that it would take several books to chronicle them, but I have to mention one instance performed by a chaplain, Captain Hall by name, in the brigade on our left, because it particularly appealed to me.

A chaplain is not a fighting man; he is recognized as a noncombatant and carries no arms. In a charge or trench raid the soldier gets a feeling of confidence from contact with his rifle, revolver, or bomb he is carrying. He has something to protect himself with, something with which he can inflict harm on the enemy—in other words, he is able to get his own back.

But the chaplain is empty-handed, and is at the mercy of the enemy if he encounters them, so it is doubly brave for him to go over the top, under fire, and bring in wounded. Also a chaplain is not required by the king's regulations to go over in a charge, but this one did, made three trips under the hottest kind of fire, each time returning with a wounded man on his back. On the third trip he received a bullet through his left arm, but never reported the matter to the doctor until late that night—just spent his time administering to the wants of the wounded lying on stretchers.

The chaplains of the British army are a fine, manly set of men, and are greatly respected by Tommy.

CHAPTER XIV.

Picks and Shovels.

I had not slept long before the sweet voice of the sergeant informed that "No. 1 section had clicked for another blinding digging party." I snailed to myself with deep satisfaction. I had been promoted from a mere digger to a member of the Suicide club, and was exempt from all fatigues. Then came an awful shock. The sergeant looked over in my direction and said:

"Don't you bomb throwers think you are wearing top hats out here. 'Cordin' to orders you've been taken up on the strength of this section, and will have to do your bit with the pick and shovel, same as the rest of us."

I put up a howl on my way to get my shovel, but the only thing that resulted was a loss of good humor on my part.

We fell in at eight o'clock, outside of our billets, a sort of masquerade party. I was disguised as a common laborer, had a pick and shovel, and about one hundred empty sandbags. The rest, about two hundred in all, were equipped likewise: picks, shovels, sandbags, rifles and ammunition.

The party moved out in column of fours, taking the road leading to the trenches. Several times we had to string out in the ditch to let long columns of limbers, artillery and supplies get past.

The marching, under these conditions, was necessarily slow. Upon arrival at the entrance to the communication trench, I looked at my illuminated wrist watch—it was eleven o'clock.

Before entering this trench, word was passed down the line, "no talking or smoking, lead off in single file, covering party first."

This covering party consisted of 30 men, armed with rifles, bayonets, bombs, and two Lewis machine guns. They were to protect us and guard against a surprise attack while digging in No Man's Land.

The communication trench was about half a mile long, a zigzagging ditch, eight feet deep and three feet wide.

Now and again, German shrapnel would whistle overhead and burst in our vicinity. We would crouch against the earthen walls while the shell fragments "slapped" the ground above us.

Once Fritz turned loose with a machine gun, the bullets from which "cracked" through the air and kicked up the dirt on the top, scattering sand and pebbles, which, hitting our steel helmets, sounded like hailstones.

Upon arrival in the fire trench an officer of the Royal Engineers gave us our instructions and acted as guide

We were to dig an advanced trench two hundred yards from the Germans (the trenches at this point were six hundred yards apart).

Two winding lanes, five feet wide, had been cut through our barbed wire, for the passage of the diggers. From these lines white tape had been laid



Trench Digging.

on the ground to the point where we were to commence work. This in order that we would not get lost in the darkness. The proposed trench was also laid out with tape.

The covering party went out first. After a short wait, two scouts came back with information that the working party was to follow and "carry on" with their work.

In extended order, two yards apart, we noiselessly crept across No Man's Land. It was nervous work; every minute we expected a machine gun to open fire on us. Stray bullets "cracked" around us, or a ricochet sang overhead.

Arriving at the taped diagram of the trench, rifles slung around our shoulders, we lost no time in getting to work. We dug as quietly as possible but every now and then the noise of a pick or shovel striking a stone would send the cold shivers down our backs. Under our breaths we heartily cursed the offending Tommy.

At intervals a star shell would go up from the German lines and we would remain motionless until the glare of its white light died out.

When the trench had reached a depth of two feet we felt safer, because it would afford us cover in case we were discovered and fired on.

The digging had been in progress about two hours, when suddenly hell seemed to break loose in the form of machine-gun and rifle fire.

We dropped down on our bellies in the shallow trench, bullets knocking up the ground and snapping in the air. Then shrapnel butted in. The music was hot and Tommy danced.

The covering party was having a rough time of it; they had no cover; just had to take their medicine.

Word was passed down the line to beat it for our trenches. We needed no urging; grabbing our tools and stooping low, we legged it across No Man's Land. The covering party got away to a poor start but beat us in. They must have had wings because we lowered the record.

Panting and out of breath, we tumbled into our front-line trench. I tore my hands getting through our wire, but, at the time, didn't notice it; my journey was too urgent.

When the roll was called we found that we had gotten it in the nose for 63 casualties.

Our artillery put a barrage on Fritz' front-line and communication trenches and their machine-gun and rifle fire suddenly ceased.

Upon the cessation of this fire, stretcher bearers went out to look for killed and wounded. Next day we learned that 21 of our men had been killed and 37 wounded. Five men were missing; lost in the darkness, they must have wandered over into the German lines, where they were either killed or captured.

Speaking of stretcher bearers and wounded, it is very hard for the average civilian to comprehend the enormous cost of taking care of wounded and the war in general. He or she gets so accustomed to seeing billions of dollars in print that the significance of the amount is passed over without thought.

From an official statement published in one of the London papers, it is stated that it costs between six and seven thousand pounds (\$30,000 to \$35,000) to kill or wound a soldier. This result was attained by taking the cost of the war to date and dividing it by the killed and wounded.

It may sound heartless and inhuman, but it is a fact, nevertheless, that from a military standpoint it is better for a man to be killed than wounded.

If a man is killed he is buried, and the responsibility of the government ceases, excepting for the fact that his people receive a pension. But if a man is wounded it takes three men from the firing line, the wounded man and two men to carry him to the rear to

the advanced first-aid post. Here he is attended by a doctor, perhaps assisted by two R. A. M. C. men. Then he is put into a motor ambulance, manned by a crew of two or three. At the field hospital, where he generally goes under an anesthetic, either to have his wounds cleaned or to be operated on, he requires the services of about three to five persons. From this point another ambulance ride impresses more men in his service, and then at the ambulance train, another corps of doctors, R. A. M. C. men, Red Cross nurses and the train's crew. From the train he enters the base hospital or casualty clearing station, where a good-sized corps of doctors, nurses, etc., are kept busy. Another ambulance journey is next in order—this time to the hospital ship. He crosses the channel, arrives in Blythly—more ambulances and perhaps a ride for five hours on an English Red Cross train with its crew of Red Cross workers, and at last he reaches the hospital. Generally he stays from two to six months, or longer. In this hospital, from here he is sent to a convalescent home for six weeks.

If by wounds he is unfitted for further service, he is discharged, given a pension, or committed to a soldiers' home for the rest of his life—and still the expense piles up. "When you realize that all the ambulances, trains and ships, not to mention the man power, used in transporting a wounded man, could be used for supplies, ammunition and re-enforcements for the troops at the front, it will not appear strange that from a strictly military standpoint, a dead man is sometimes better than a live one (if wounded)."

Not long after the first digging party, our general decided, after a careful tour of inspection of the communication trenches, upon "an ideal spot," as he termed it, for a machine-gun emplacement; took his map, made a dot on it, and as he was wont, wrote "dig here," and the next night we dug.

There were twenty in the party, myself included. Armed with picks, shovels and empty sandbags we arrived at the "ideal spot" and started digging. The moon was very bright, but we did not care as we were well out of sight of the German lines.

We had gotten about three feet down, when the fellow next to me, after a mighty stroke with his pick, let go of the handle, and pinched his nose with his thumb and forefinger, at the same time letting out the explosion: "Gott' strafe me plink, I'm bloody well gassed, not 'alf I ain't." I quickly turned in his direction with an inquiring look, at the same instant reaching for my gas bag. I soon found out what was ailing him. One whiff was enough and I lost no time in also pinching my nose. The stench was awful. The rest of the digging party dropped their picks and shovels and beat it for the weather side of that solitary pick. The officer came over and inquired why the work had suddenly ceased, holding our noses, we simply pointed in the direction of the smell. He went over to the pick, immediately clapped his hand over his nose, made an "about turn" and came back. Just then our captain came along and investigated, but after about a minute said we had better carry on with the digging, that he did not see why we should have

stopped as the odor was very faint, but if necessary he would allow us our gas helmets while digging. He would stay and see the thing through, but he had to report back to brigade headquarters immediately. We wished that we were captains and also had a date at brigade headquarters. With our gas helmets on we again attacked that hole and uncovered the decomposed body of a German; the pick was sticking in his chest. One of the men fainted. I was that one. Upon this our lieutenant halted proceedings and sent word back to headquarters and word came back that after we filled in the hole we could knock off for the night. This was welcome tidings to us, because—

Next day the general changed the dot on his map and another emplacement was completed the following night.

The odor from the dug-up, decomposed human body has an effect which is hard to describe. It first produces a nauseating feeling, which, especially after eating, causes vomiting. This relieves you temporarily, but soon a weakening sensation follows, which leaves you limp as a dishrag. Your spirits are at their lowest ebb and you feel a sort of hopelessness and a mad desire to escape it all, to get to the open fields and the perfume of the flowers in Blighty. There is a sharp prickling sensation in the nostrils, which reminds one of breathing coal gas through a radiator in the floor, and you want to sneeze, but cannot. This was the effect on me, surmounted by a vague horror of the awfulness of the thing and an ever-recurring reflection, that, perhaps I, sooner or later, would be in such a state and be brought to light by the blow of a pick in the heads of some Tommy on a digging party.

Several times I have experienced this odor, but never could get used to it; the enervating sensation was always present. It made me hate war and wonder why such things were countenanced by civilization, and all the spice and glory of the conflict would disappear, leaving the grim reality. But after leaving the spot and filling your lungs with deep breaths of pure, fresh air, you forget and once again want to be "up and at them."

CHAPTER XV.

Listening Post.

It was six in the morning when we arrived at our rest billets, and we were allowed to sleep until noon; that is, if we wanted to go without our breakfast. For sixteen days we remained



Entrance to a Dugout.

in rest billets, digging roads, drilling, and other fatigues, and then back into the front-line trench.

Nothing happened that night, but the next afternoon I found out that a bomber is general utility man in a section.

About five o'clock in the afternoon our lieutenant came down the trench and stopping in front of a bunch of us on the fire step, with a broad grin on his face, asked:

"Who is going to volunteer for listening post tonight? I need two men."

It is needless to say no one volunteered, because it is anything but a cushy job. I began to feel uncomfortable as I knew it was getting around for my turn. Sure enough, with another grin, he said:

"Empey, you and Wheeler are due to come down into my dugout for instructions at six o'clock."

Just as he left and was going around a traverse, Fritz turned loose with a machine gun and the bullets ripped the sandbags right over his head. It gave me great pleasure to see him duck against the parapet. He was getting a taste of what we would get later out in front.

Then, of course, it began to rain. I knew it was the forerunner of a miserable night for us. Every time I had to go out in front, it just naturally rained. Old Jupiter Pluvius must have had it in for me.

At six we reported for instructions. They were simple and easy. All we had to do was to crawl out into No Man's Land, lie on our bellies with our ears to the ground and listen for the tap, tap of the German engineers or snappers who might be tunneling under No Man's Land to establish a mine head beneath our trench.

Of course, in our orders we were told not to be captured by German patrols or reconnoitering parties. Lots of breath is wasted on the western front giving silly cautions.

As soon as it was dark, Wheeler and I crawled to our post which was about halfway between the lines. It was raining bucketfuls, the ground was a sea of sticky mud and clung to us like glue.

We took turns in listening with our ears to the ground. I would listen for twenty minutes while Wheeler would be on the qui vive for German patrols.

We each wore a wristwatch, and believe me, neither one of us did over twenty minutes. The rain soaked us to the skin and our ears were full of mud.

Every few minutes a bullet would crack overhead or a machine gun would traverse back and forth.

Then all firing suddenly ceased. I whispered to Wheeler, "Keep your eye skinned, mate; most likely Fritz has a patrol out—that's why the Boches have stopped firing."

We were each armed with a rifle and bayonet and three Mills bombs to be used for defense only.

I had my ear to the ground. All of a sudden I heard faint, dull thuds in a low but excited voice I whispered to Wheeler, "I think they are mining listen."

He put his ear to the ground and in an unsteady voice spoke into my ear:

"Yank, that's a patrol and it's heading our way. For God's sake keep still."

I was as still as a mouse and was scared stiff.

Hardly breathing and with eyes trying to pierce the lanky blackness, we waited. I would have given a thousand pounds to have been safely in my dugout.

Then we plainly heard footsteps and our hearts stood still.

A dark form suddenly loomed up in front of me; it looked as big as the Woolworth building. I could hear the blood rushing through my veins and it sounded as loud as Niagara falls.

Forms seemed to emerge from the darkness. There were seven of them in all. I tried to wish them away. I never wished harder in my life. They muttered a few words in German and melted into the blackness. I didn't stop wishing either.

All of a sudden we heard a stumble, a muddy splash, and a muttered "Donner und Blitzen." One of the Boches had tumbled into a shell hole. Neither of us laughed. At that time—it didn't strike us as funny.

About twenty minutes after the Germans had disappeared something from the rear grabbed me by the foot. I

nearly fainted with fright. Then a welcome whisper in a cockney accent, "I s'y, myte, we've come to relieve you."

Wheeler and I crawled back to our trench; we looked like wet hens and felt worse. After a swig of rum we were soon fast asleep on the fire step in our wet clothes.

The next morning I was as stiff as a poker and every joint ached like a bad tooth, but I was still alive, so it did not matter.

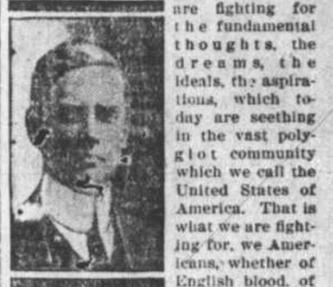
(CONTINUED NEXT WEEK)

IDEALISM REAL BASIS OF WAR ON GERMANY

Says Dr. McElroy, Educational Director of National Security League.

By DR. ROBERT M. McELROY, Educational Director of the National Security League.

Why does America fight Germany? Our ideals are threatened with destruction, and we must fight to maintain them. We are fighting for the fundamental thoughts, the dreams, the ideals, the aspirations, which today are seething in the vast polyglot community which we call the United States of America. That is what we are fighting for, we Americans, whether of English blood, of French or Italian or Russian or Spanish blood.



Dr. R. M. McElroy

What have we in common to cause us to rise at the call of a common impulse and prepare to die for a common cause? It would be easy to formulate the characteristic dreams of the Russian, the Italian, the Belgian, the Scotch, the Irish or the Portuguese. It would be possible to catch the gleam of idealism which has given to the French the glorious title of the "Hero Nation." But none of these would suffice. We must take a cross section of all of them, and a dozen more, to formulate the ideals which course in common through them all after they have been united into what we call America. For it is common ideals which have transformed the men and women of all these races and kindreds and tongues into our nation, which stands today facing the grim fact of war, a war to which no man dare call them in the name of race, or language, or previous allegiance.

World Citizenship.
The President has placed our intervention in this war upon a plane of idealism to which every citizen, of whatever race, may rally without losing hold upon the best traditions of the land from which his forefathers have come. It is not the call of a narrow nationalism, but the call of world citizenship.

Our entrance into this war is no concession to the accursed gospel of force and fraud. We wish nothing for ourselves, but have resolved (to quote the oft quoted words of our President) that "the world must be made safe for democracy—and its peace—planned upon the trusted basis of political liberty." We scorn the idea that "might is right," but we are willing to take our part in polling the world against the madmen who act upon that doctrine.

"How High Your Ideals?"

History will not ask us or any other nation, "How big was your army?" but "How high were your ideals?" Not "How vast your navy?" but "What was your devotion to duty?" Not "How quickly could you mobilize?" but "What thought have you contributed toward the betterment of mankind?" To these questions Germany can answer, "I contributed to the world the idea of representation," for, as Montesquieu tells us, the representative idea was "born in the forests of Germany." She will have to confess, however, that she cast it out, a naked infant, in order to make room for the throne of the great, black idol, military power, and today America and her allies are marching in resistless columns, carrying that founding back to its home.

WHAT THE VICTORY OR DEFEAT OF GERMANY MEANS TO EVERY AMERICAN.

(Contributed by PRINCE and PRINCESS PIERRE TROUBETZKOY to the National Security League's campaign of Patriotism Through Education.)

What the German government means by a "place in the sun" is the extermination of the peoples whose soil it covets so that Germans may replace those that have been exterminated.

The systematic destruction of civilians in Belgium, northern France, Poland, Serbia, and the acute enslavement of the survivors proves it—the frequently boasted German policy of blood and iron and the "Rhin of Hate," which has become a national hymn, proclaims it.

From the rudimentary coalition of ancient barbarism, a spiritual development was possible; from the accomplished inhumanity of Prussianism, a more rational influence is possible.