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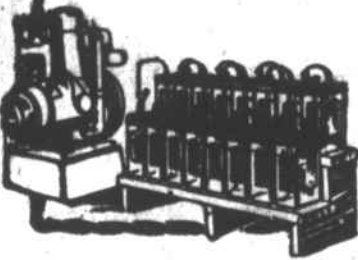
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"When it Pours, it Reigns"

"OVER THE TOP"

BY

AN AMERICAN SOLDIER
WHO WENT

Arthur Guy Empey

slipped off the sandbag, and was on his knees in the mud, the glass still at his eye. He was muttering to himself and slapping his thigh with his disengaged hand. At every slap a big round juicy cuss word would escape from his lips followed by:

"Good! Fine! Marvelous! Pretty Work! Direct hits all!"

"Then he turned to me and shouted: 'Wilson, what do you think of it? Did you ever see the like of it in your life? D—n a fine work, I call it.'"

"Pretty soon a look of wonder stole over his face and he exclaimed:

"'But who in h—l gave them the order to fire, Range and everything correct, too. I know I didn't. Wilson, did I give you any order for the battery to open up? Of course I didn't, did I?'"

"I answered very emphatically, 'No, sir, you gave no command. Nothing went through this post. I am absolutely certain on that point, sir.'"

"Of course nothing went through," he replied. Then his face fell, and he muttered out loud:

"But, by Jove, wait till Old Pepper gets wind of this. There'll be fur flying!"

Just then Bombardier Cassell cut in on the wire:

"General's compliments to Captain A—. He directs that officer and signaler report at the double to brigade headquarters as soon as relieved. Relief now on the way."

"In an undertone to me, 'Keep a brass front, Wilson, and for God's sake, stick.' I answered with, 'Rely on me, mate,' but I was trembling all over."

"I gave the general's message to the captain, and started packing up."

"The relief arrived, and as we left the post the captain said:

"Now for the fireworks, and I know they'll be good and plenty. They were."

"When we arrived at the gun pits the battery commander, the sergeant major and Cassell were waiting for us. We fell in line and the funeral march to brigade headquarters started."

"Arriving at headquarters the battery commander was the first to be interviewed. This was behind closed doors. From the roaring and explosions of Old Pepper it sounded as if raw meat was being thrown to the lions. Cassell, later, described it as sounding like a bombing raid. In about two minutes the officer reappeared. The sweat was pouring from his forehead, and his face was the color of a beet. He was speechless. As he passed the captain he jerked his thumb in the direction of the lion's den and went out. Then the captain went in, and the lions were once again fed. The captain stayed about twenty minutes and came out. I couldn't see his face, but the droop in his shoulders was enough. He looked like a wet hen."

"The door of the general's room opened and Old Pepper stood in the doorway. With a roar he shouted:

"Which one of you is Cassell? D—n me, get your heels together when I speak! Come in here!"

"Cassell started to say, 'Yes sir,'"

"But Old Pepper roared, 'Shut up!'"

"Cassell came out in five minutes. He said nothing, but as he passed me he put his tongue into his cheek and winked, then, turning to the closed door, he stuck his thumb to his nose and left."

"Then the sergeant major's turn came. He didn't come out our way. Judging by the roaring, Old Pepper must have eaten him."

"When the door opened and the general beckoned to me, my knees started to play 'Home, Sweet Home' against each other."

"My interview was very short."

"Old Pepper glared at me when I entered, and then let loose."

"Of course you don't know anything about it. You're just like the rest. Ought to have a nursing bottle around your neck and a nipple in your teeth. Soldiers—by gad, you turn my stomach to look at you. Win this war, when England sends out such samples as I have in my brigade! Not likely! Now, sir, tell me what you don't know about this affair. Speak up, out with it. Don't be gaping at me like a fish. Spit it out!"

"I stammered, 'Sir, I know absolutely nothing.'"

"That's easy to see,' he roared; 'that stupid face tells me that. Shut up. Get out; but I think you are a d—d liar just the same. Back to your battery.'"

"I slinked and made my exit."

"That night the captain sent for us. With fear and trembling we went to his dugout. He was alone. After saluting we stood at attention in front of him and waited. His say was short."

"Don't you two ever get it into your heads that Morse is a dead language. I've known it for years. The two of you had better get rid of that nervous habit of tapping transmitters; it's dangerous. That's all!"

"We saluted, and were just going out the door of the dugout when the captain called up back and said:

"Smoke Goldflakes? Yes? Well, there are two tins of them on my table. Go back to the battery, and keep your

tongues between your teeth. Understand?"

"We understood."

"For five weeks afterwards our battery did nothing but extra fatigues."

We were satisfied and so were the men. It was worth it to put one over on Old Pepper, to say nothing of the injury caused to Frits' feelings."

When Wilson had finished his story I looked up and the dugout was jammed. An artillery captain and two officers had also entered and stayed for the finish. Wilson spat out an enormous quid of tobacco, looked up, saw the captain, and got as red as a carnation. The captain smiled and left. Wilson whispered to me:

"Blime me, Yank, I see where I elck for crucifixion. That captain is the same one that chucked us Goldflakes in his dugout and here I have been 'chucking me weight about in his hearing.'"

Wilson never clicked his crucifixion. Quite a contrast to Wilson was another character in our brigade named Scott; we called him "Old Scotty" on account of his age. He was fifty-seven, although looking forty. "Old Scotty" had been born in the Northwest and had served in the Northwest Mounted police. He was a typical cumpuncher and Indian fighter and was a dead shot with the rifle, and took no pains to disguise this fact from us. He used to take care of his rifle as if it were a baby. In his spare moments you could always see him cleaning it or polishing the stock. One betide the man who by mistake happened to get hold of this rifle; he soon found out his error. Scott was as deaf as a mule, and it was amusing at parade to watch him in the manual of arms, stily glancing out of the corner of his eye at the man next to him to see what the order was. How he passed the doctor was a mystery to us; he must have bluffed his way through, because he certainly was independent. Beside him the Fourth of July looked like Good Friday. He wore at the time a large sombrero, had a Mexican stock saddle over his shoulder, a lariat on his arm, and a "forty-five" hanging from his hip. Dumping this paraphernalia on the floor he went up to the recruiting officer and shouted: "I'm from America, west of the Rockies, and want to join your d—d army. I've got no use for a German and can shoot some. At Scotland Yard they turned me down; said I was deaf and so I am. I don't hanker to ship in with a d—d mud-crunching outfit, but the cavalry's full, so I guess this regiment's better than none, so trot out your papers and I'll sign 'em." He told them he was forty and slipped by. I was on recruiting service at the time he applied for enlistment."

It was Old Scotty's great ambition to be a sniper or "body snatcher," as Mr. Atkins calls it. The day that he was detailed as brigade sniper he celebrated his appointment by blowing the whole platoon to fags."

Being a Yank, Old Scotty took a liking to me and used to spin some great yarns about the plains, and the whole platoon would drink these in and ask for more. Ananias was a rookie compared with him."

The ex-plainman and discipline could not agree, but the officers all liked him, even if he was hard to manage, so when he was detailed as a sniper a sigh of relief went up from the officers' mess."

Old Scotty had the freedom of the brigade. He used to draw two or three days' rations and disappear with his glass, range finder and rifle, and we would see or hear no more of him until suddenly he would reappear with a couple of notches added to those already on the butt of his rifle. Every time he got a German it meant another notch. He was proud of these notches."

But after a few months Father Rheumatism got him and he was sent to Blighty; the air in the wake of his stretcher was blue with curses. Old Scotty surely could swear; some of his outbursts actually burned you."

No doubt, at this writing, he is "somewhere in Blighty" pussy footing it on a bridge or along the wall of some munition plant with the "G. R." or Home Defense corps."

CHAPTER XVII.

Out in Front.

After tea Lieutenant Stores of our section came into the dugout and informed me that I was "for" a reconnoitering patrol and would carry six Mills bombs."

At 11:30 that night twelve men, our lieutenant and myself went out in front on a patrol in No Man's Land."

We cruised around in the dark for about two hours, just knocking about looking for trouble, on the lookout for Boche working parties to see what they were doing."

Around two in the morning we were carefully picking our way about thirty yards in front of the German barbed wire, when we walked into a Boche covering party nearly thirty strong. Then the music started, the fiddler rendered his bill, and we paid."

Fighting in the dark with a bayonet is not very pleasant. The Germans took it on the run, but our officer was no novice at the game and didn't follow them. He gave the order "down on the ground, hug it close."

Just in time, too, because a volley skimmed over our heads. Then in low tones we were told to separate and crawl back to our trenches, each man on his own."

We could see the flashes of their rifles in the darkness, but the bullets were going over our heads."

We lost three men killed and one wounded in the arm. If it hadn't been for our officer's quick thinking the whole patrol would have probably been wiped out."

After about twenty minutes' wait we went out again and discovered that the Germans had a wiring party working on their barbed wire. We returned to our trenches unobserved with the

information and our machine guns immediately got busy."

The next night four men were sent out to go over and examine the German barbed wire and see if they had



A Hidden Gun.

cut lanes through it; if so, this presaged an early morning attack on our trenches."

Of course I had to be one of the four selected for the job. It was just like sending a fellow to the undertaker's to order his own coffin."

At ten o'clock we started out, armed with three bombs, a bayonet and revolver. After getting into No Man's Land we separated. Crawling four or five feet at a time, ducking star shells, with strays cracking overhead, I reached their wire. I scouted along this inch by inch, scarcely breathing. I could hear them talking in their trench, my heart was pounding against my ribs. One false move or the least noise from me meant discovery and almost certain death."

After covering my sector I quietly crawled back. I had gotten about half way when I noticed that my revolver was missing. It was pitch dark. I turned about to see if I could find it; it couldn't be far away, because about three or four minutes previously I had felt the butt in the holster. I crawled around in circles and at last found it, then started on my way back to our trenches, as I thought."

Pretty soon I reached barbed wire, and was just going to give the password when something told me not to. I put out my hand and touched one of the barbed wire stakes. It was iron. The British are of wood, while the German are iron. My heart stopped beating; by mistake I had crawled back to the German lines."

I turned slowly about and my tunic caught on the wire and made a loud ripping noise."

A sharp challenge rang out. I sprang to my feet, ducking low, and ran madly back toward our lines. The Germans started firing. The bullets were biting all around me, when bang! I ran smash into our wire, and a sharp challenge, "Alt, who comes there?" rang out. I gasped out the password, and, groping my way through the lane in the wire, tearing my hands and uniform, I tumbled into our trench and was safe, but I was a nervous wreck for an hour, until a drink of rum brought me round."

CHAPTER XVIII.

Staged Under Fire.

Three days after the incident just related our company was relieved from the front line and carried. We stayed in reserve billets for about two weeks when we received the welcome news that our division would go back to the line "to rest billets." We would remain in these billets for at least two months, this in order to be restored to our full strength by drafts of recruits from Blighty."

Everyone was happy and contented at these tidings; all you could hear around the billets was whistling and singing. The day after the receipt of the order we hiked for five days, making an average of about twelve miles per day until we arrived at the small town of O—."

It took us about three days to get settled, and from then on our cushy time started. We would parade from 8:45 in the morning until 12 noon. Then except for an occasional billet or brigade guard we were on our own. For the first four or five afternoons I spent my time in bringing up to date my neglected correspondence."

Tommy loves to be amused, and being a Yank, they turned to me for something new in this line. I taught them how to pitch horseshoes, and this game made a great hit for about ten days. Then Tommy turned to America for a new diversion. I was up in the air until a happy thought came to me. Why not write a sketch and break Tommy in as an actor?"

One evening after "lights out," when you are not supposed to talk, I imparted my scheme in whispers to the section. They eagerly accepted the idea of forming a stock company and

could hardly wait until the morning for further details."

After parade, the next afternoon I was almost mobbed. Everyone in the section wanted a part in the proposed

sketch. When I informed them that it would take at least ten days of hard work to write the plot, they were bitterly disappointed. I immediately got busy, made a desk out of biscuit tins in the corner of the billet, and put up a sign "Empey & Wallace Theatrical Co." About twenty of the section, upon reading this sign, immediately applied for the position of office boy. I accepted the twenty applicants, and sent them on scouting parties throughout the deserted French village. These parties were to search all the attics for discarded civilian clothes, and anything that we could use in the props of our proposed company."

About five that night they returned covered with grime and dust, but loaded down with a miscellaneous assortment of everything under the sun. They must have thought that I was going to start a department store, judging from the different things they brought back from their pillage."

After eight days' constant writing I completed a two-act farce comedy which I called "The Diamond Palace Saloon." Upon the suggestion of one of the boys in the section I sent a proof of the program to a printing house in London. Then I assigned the different parts and started rehearsing. David Belasco would have thrown up his hands in despair at the material which I had to use. Just imagine trying to teach a Tommy, with a strong cockney accent, to impersonate a Bowery tough or a Southern negro."

Adjacent to our billet was an open field. We got busy at one end of it and constructed a stage. We secured the lumber for the stage by demolishing an old wooden shack in the rear of our billet."

The first scene was supposed to represent a street on the Bowery in New York, while the scene of the second act was the interior of the Diamond Palace saloon, also on the Bowery."

In the play I took the part of Abe Switch, a farmer, who had come from Pumpkinville Center, Tenn., to make his first visit to New York."

In the first scene Abe Switch meets the proprietor of the Diamond Palace saloon, a ramshackle affair which to the owner was a financial loss."

The proprietor's name was Tom Twistem, his bartender being named Fillem Up."

After meeting Abe, Tom and Fillem Up persuaded him to buy the place, praising it to the skies and telling wondrous tales of the money taken over the bar."

While they are talking, an old Jew named Ike Cohenstein comes along, and Abe engages him for cashier. After engaging Ike they meet an old Southern negro called Sambo, and upon the suggestion of Ike he is engaged as porter. Then the three of themselves "The Bow Bells," and put on a sketch entitled, "Blighty—What Hopes?" They were the divisional concert party."

We hoped they all would be soon in Blighty to give us a chance."

This company charged an admission of a franc per head, and that night our company went en masse to see their performance. It really was good."

I had a sinking sensation when I thought of running my sketch in opposition to it."

In one of their scenes they had a soubrette called Flossie. The soldier that took this part was clever and made a fine-appearing and chic girl. We immediately fell in love with her until two days after, while we were on a march, we passed Flossie with "her" sleeves rolled up and the sweat pouring from "her" face unloading shells from a motor lorry."

As our section passed her I yelled out: "Hello, Flossie; Blighty—What Hopes?" Her reply made our love die out instantly."

"Ah, go to h—l!"

This brought quite a laugh from the marching column directed at me, and I instantly made up my mind that our sketch should immediately run in opposition to "Blighty—What Hopes?"

When we returned to our billet from the march, Curley Wallace, my theatrical partner, came running over to me and said he had found a swanky place in which to produce our show."

After taking off my equipment, and followed by the rest of the section, I went over to the building he had picked out. It was a monstrous burn with a platform at one end which would make an ideal stage. The section got right on the job, and before night had that place rigged out in apple-pie order."

The next day was Sunday and after church parade we put all our time on a dress rehearsal, and it went fine."

I made four or five large signs announcing that our company would open up that evening at the King George the Fifth theater, on the corner of Amigo street and Sandbag terrace. General admission was one-half franc. First ten rows in orchestra one franc, and boxes two francs. By this time our printed programs had returned from London, and I further announced that on the night of the first performance a program would be given free of charge to men holding tickets costing a franc or over."

We had an orchestra of seven men and seven different instruments. This orchestra was excellent, while they were not playing."

The performance was scheduled to start at 8 p. m."

At 5:15 there was a mob in front of our entrance, and it looked like a big night. We had two boxes each accommodating four people, and these were immediately sold out. Then a brilliant idea came to Ike Cohenstein. Why not use the ratters overhead, call them boxes, and charge two francs for a seat on them? The only difficulty

(Continued Next Week)