



# OVER THE TOP

## AN AMERICAN SOLDIER WHO WENT

### ARTHUR GUY EMPEY

MACHINE GUNNER, SERVING IN FRANCE

© 1917 BY ARTHUR GUY EMPEY

The next day the battalion took over their part of the trenches. It happened to be a very quiet day. The artillery behind the lines was still, except for an occasional shell sent over to let the Germans know the gunners were not asleep.

In the darkness, in single file, the company slowly wended their way down the communication trench to the front line. No one noticed Lloyd's white and drawn face.

After they had relieved the company in the trenches, Lloyd, with two of the old company men, was put on guard in one of the traverses. Not a shot was fired from the German lines, and no one paid any attention to him crouched on the firing step.

On the first time in, a new recruit is not required to stand with his head "over the top." He only "sits it out," while the older men keep watch.

At about ten o'clock, all of a sudden, he thought hell had broken loose, and crouched and shivered up against the parapet. Shells started bursting, as he imagined, right in his trench, when in fact they were landing about a hundred yards in rear of them, in the second line.

One of the older men on guard, turning to his mate, said:

"There goes Fritz with those d—d trench mortars again. It's about time our artillery 'taped' them, and sent over a few. Well, I'll be d—d, where's that blighter of a draft man gone to? There's his rifle leaning against the parapet. He must have legged it. Just keep your eye peeled, Dick, while I report it to the sergeant. I wonder if the fool knows he can be shot for such tricks as leavin' his post?"

Lloyd had gone. When the trench mortars opened up, a maddening terror seized him and he wanted to run, to get away from that horrible din, anywhere to safety. So quietly sneaking around the traverse, he came to the entrance of a communication trench, and ran madly and blindly down it, running into traverses, stumbling into muddy holes, and falling full length over trench grids.

Groping blindly, with his arms stretched out in front of him, he at last came out of the trench into the village, or what used to be a village, before the German artillery razed it. Mixed with his fear, he had a peculiar sort of cunning, which whispered to him to avoid all sentries, because if they saw him he would be sent back to that awful destruction in the front line, and perhaps be killed or maimed. The thought made him shudder, the cold sweat coming out in beads on his face.

On his left, in the darkness, he could make out the shadowy forms of trees; crawling on his hands and knees, stopping and crouching with fear at each shell-burst, he finally reached an old orchard and covered at the base of a shot-scarred apple tree.

He remained there all night, listening to the sound of the guns and ever praying, praying that his useless life would be spared.

As dawn began to break, he could discern little dark objects protruding from the ground all about him. Curiosity mastered his fear and he crawled to one of the objects, and there, in the uncertain light, he read on a little wooden cross:

"Pte. H. S. Wheaton, No. 1670, 1st London Regt. R. F. Killed in action, April 25, 1916. R. I. P." (Rest in Peace).

When it dawned on him that he had been hiding all night in a cemetery his reason seemed to leave him, and a mad desire to be free from it all made him rush madly away, falling over little wooden crosses, smashing some and trampling others under his feet.

In his flight he came to an old French dugout, half caved in and partially filled with slimy and filthy water.

Like a fox being chased by the hounds, he ducked into this hole, and threw himself on a pile of old empty sandbags, wet and mildewed. Then—unconsciousness.

On the next day, he came to; far distant voices sounded in his ears. Opening his eyes, in the entrance of the dugout he saw a corporal and two men with fixed bayonets.

The corporal was addressing him: "Get up, you white-livered blighter! Curse you and the day you ever joined D company, spolling their fine record! It'll be you up against the wall, and a good job too. Get hold of him, men, and if he makes a break, give him the bayonet, and send it home, the cowardly sneak. Come on, you, move, we've been looking for you long enough."

Lloyd, trembling and weakened by his long fast, tottered out, assisted by a soldier on each side of him.

They took him before the captain, but could get nothing out of him but:

"For God's sake, sir, don't have me shot, don't have me shot!"

The captain, utterly disgusted with him, sent him under escort to division headquarters for trial by court-martial, charged with desertion under fire.

They shot deserters in France. During his trial, Lloyd sat as one dazed, and could put nothing forward in his defense, only an occasional "Don't have me shot!"

His sentence was passed: "To be shot at 3:38 o'clock in the morning of May 18, 1916." This meant that he had only one more day to live.

He did not realize the awfulness of his sentence; his brain seemed paralyzed. He knew nothing of his trip, under guard, in a motor lorry to the sandbagged guardroom in the village, where he was dumped on the floor and left, while a sentry with a fixed bayonet paced up and down in front of the entrance.

Bully beef, water and biscuits were left beside him for his supper.

The sentry, seeing that he ate nothing, came inside and shook him by the shoulder, saying in a kind voice:

"Cheero, laddie, better eat something. You'll feel better. Don't give up hope. You'll be pardoned before morning. I know the way they run these things. They're only trying to scare you, that's all. Come now, that's a good lad, eat something. It'll make the world look different to you."

The good-hearted sentry knew he was lying about the pardon. He knew nothing short of a miracle could save the poor lad.

Lloyd listened eagerly to his sentry's words, and believed them. A look of hope came into his eyes, and he ravenously ate the meal beside him.

In about an hour's time, the chaplain came to see him, but Lloyd would have none of him. He wanted no parson; he was to be pardoned.

The artillery behind the lines suddenly opened up with everything they had. An intense bombardment of the enemy's lines had commenced. The roar of the guns was deafening. Lloyd's fears came back with a rush, and he covered on the earthen floor, with his hands over his face.

The sentry, seeing his position, came in and tried to cheer him by talking to him:

"Never mind them guns, boy, they won't hurt you. They are ours. We are giving the Boches a dose of their



He Betrayed His Country.

own medicine. Our boys are going over the top at dawn of the morning to take their trenches. We'll give 'em a taste of cold steel with their sausages and beer. You just sit tight now until they relieve you. I'll have to go now, lad, as it's nearly time for my relief, and I don't want them to see me a-talkin' with you. So long, laddie, cheero."

With this, the sentry resumed the pacing of his post. In about ten minutes' time he was relieved, and a D company man took his place.

Looking into the guardhouse, the sentry noticed the cowering attitude of Lloyd, and, with a sneer, said to him:

"Instead of whimpering in that corner, you ought to be saying your prayers. It's hally conscripts like you what's spollin' our record. We've been out here nigh onto eighteen months, and you're the first man to desert his post. The whole battalion is laughin'

and pokin' fun at D company, bad luck to you! but you won't get another chance to disgrace us. They'll put your lights out in the mornin'."

After listening to this tirade, Lloyd, in a faltering voice, asked: "They are not going to shoot me, are they? Why, the other sentry said they'd pardon me. For God's sake—don't tell me I'm to be shot!" and his voice died away in a sob.

"Of course, they're going to shoot you. The other sentry was just a-kiddin' you. Jest like old Smith. Always a-tryin' to cheer some one. You ain't got no more chance o' bein' pardoned than I have of gettin' to be colonel of my 'batt.'"

When the fact that all hope was gone finally entered Lloyd's brain, a calm seemed to settle over him, and rising to his knees, with his arms stretched out to heaven, he prayed, and all of his soul entered into the prayer.

"O, good and merciful God, give me strength to die like a man! Deliver me from this coward's death. Give me a chance to die like my mates in the fighting line, to die fighting for my country. I ask this of thee."

A peace, hitherto unknown, came to him, and he crouched and covered no more, but calmly waited the dawn, ready to go to his death. The shells were bursting all around the guardroom, but he hardly noticed them.

While waiting there, the voice of the sentry, singing in a low tone, came to him. He was singing the chorus of the popular trench ditty:

I want to go home, I want to go home. I don't want to go to the trenches no more. Where the "whizzbangs" and "sausages" roar galore. Take me over the sea, where the Allemand can't get at me. Oh, my, I don't want to die! I want to go home.

Lloyd listened to the words with a strange interest, and wondered what kind of a home he would go to across the Great Divide. It would be the only home he had ever known.

Suddenly there came a great rushing through the air, a blinding, a deafening report, and the sandbag walls of the guardroom toppled over, and then—blackness.

When Lloyd recovered consciousness, he was lying on his right side, facing what used to be the entrance of the guardroom. Now, it was only a jumble of rent and torn sandbags. His head seemed bursting. He slowly rose on his elbow, and there in the east the dawn was breaking. But what was that mangled shape lying over there among the sandbags? Slowly dragging himself to it, he saw the body of the sentry. One look was enough to know that he was dead. The soldier's head was missing. The sentry had had his wish gratified. He had "gone home."

He was safe at last from the "whizzbangs" and the Allemand. Like a flash it came to Lloyd that he was free. Free to go "over the top" with his company. Free to die like a true Briton fighting for his king and country. A great gladness and warmth came over him. Carefully stepping over the body of the sentry, he started on a mad race down the ruined street of the village, amid the bursting shells, minding them not, dodging through or around hurrying platoons on their way to also go "over the top." Coming to a communication trench he could not get through. It was blocked with laughing, cheering and cursing soldiers. Climbing out of the trench, he ran wildly along the top, never heeding the rain of machine-gun bullets and shells, not even hearing the shouts of the officers, telling him to get back into the trench. He was going to join his company who were in the front line. He was going to fight with them. He, the despised coward, had come into his own.

While he was racing along, jumping over trenches crowded with soldiers, a ringing cheer broke out all along the front line, and his heart sank. He knew he was too late. His company had gone over. But still he ran madly. He would catch them. He would die with them. Meanwhile his company had gone "over." They, with the other companies had taken the first and second German trenches, and had pushed steadily on to the third line. D company, led by their captain, the one who had sent Lloyd to division headquarters for trial, charged with desertion, had pushed steadily forward until they found themselves far in advance of the rest of the attacking force. "Bombing out" trench after trench, and using their bayonets, they came to a German communication trench, which ended in a blindsp, and then the captain, and what was left of his men, knew they were in a trap. They would not retire. D company never retired, and they were D company. Right in front of them they could see hundreds of Germans preparing to rush them with bomb and bayonet. They would have some chance if ammunition and bombs could reach them from the rear. Their supply was exhausted, and the men realized it would be a case of dying as bravely as possible, or making a run for it. But D company would not run. It was against their traditions and principles.

The Germans would have to advance across an open space of three to four hundred yards before they could get within bombing distance of the trench, and then it would be all their own way. Turning to his company, the captain said:

"Men, it's a case of going West for us. We are out of ammunition and bombs, and the Boches have us in a trap. They will bomb us out. Our bayonets are useless here. We will have to go over and meet them, and it's a case of thirty to one, so send every thrust home, and die like the men of D company should. When I give the word, follow me, and up and

at them. Give them h—! Lord, if we only had a machine gun, we could wipe them out! Here they come, get ready, men."

Just as he finished speaking, the welcome "pup-pup" of a machine gun in their rear rang out, and the front line of the onrushing Germans seemed to melt away. They wavered, but once again came rushing onward. Down went their second line. The machine gun was taking an awful toll of lives. Then again they tried to advance, but the machine gun mowed them down. Dropping their rifles and bombs, they broke and fled in a wild rush back to their trench, amid the cheers of "D" company. They were forming again for another attempt, when in the rear of D company came a mighty cheer. The ammunition had arrived and with it a battalion of Scotch to re-enforce them. They were saved. The unknown machine gunner had come to the rescue in the nick of time.

With the re-enforcements it was an easy task to take the third German line.

After the attack was over, the captain and three of his noncommissioned officers, wended their way back to the position where the machine gun had done its deadly work. He wanted to thank the gunner in the name of D company for his magnificent deed. They arrived at the gun, and an awful sight met their eyes.

Lloyd had reached the front line trench, after his company had left it. A strange company was nimbly crawling up the trench ladders. They were re-enforcements going over. They were Scotch, and they made a magnificent sight in their brightly colored kilts and bare knees.

Jumping over the trench, Lloyd raced across "No Man's Land," unheeding the rain of bullets, leaping over dark forms on the ground, some of which lay still, while others called out to him as he speeded past.

He came to the German front line, but it was deserted, except for heaps of dead and wounded—a grim tribute to the work of his company, good old D company. Leaping trenches, and gasping for breath, Lloyd could see right ahead of him his company in a dead-ended sap of a communication trench, and across the open, away in front of them, a mass of Germans preparing for a charge. Why didn't D company fire on them? Why were they so strangely silent? What were they waiting for? Then he knew—their ammunition was exhausted.

But what was that on his right? A machine gun. Why didn't it open fire and save them? He would make that gun's crew do their duty. Rushing over to the gun he saw why it had not opened fire. Scattered around its base lay six still forms. They had brought their gun to consolidate the captured position, but a German machine gun had decreed they would never fire again.

Lloyd rushed to the gun and, grasping the traversing handles, trained it on the Germans. He pressed the thumb piece, but only a sharp click was the result. The gun was unloaded. Then he realized his helplessness. He did not know how to load the gun. Oh, why hadn't he attended the machine-gun course in England? He'd been offered the chance, but with a blush of shame he remembered that he had been afraid. The nickname of the machine gunners had frightened him. They were called the "Suicide club." Now, because of this fear, his company would be destroyed, the men of D company would have to die, because he, Albert Lloyd, had been afraid of a name. In his shame he cried like a baby. Anyway he could die with them and, rising to his feet, he stumbled over the body of one of the gunners, who emitted a faint moan. A gleam of hope flashed through him. Perhaps this man could tell him how to load the gun. Stooping over the body he gently shook it and the soldier opened his eyes. Seeing Lloyd, he closed them again and, in a faint voice, said:

"Get away, you blighter, leave me alone. I don't want any coward around me."

The words cut Lloyd like a knife, but he was desperate. Taking the revolver out of the holster of the dying man he pressed the cold muzzle to the soldier's head and replied:

"Yes, it is Lloyd, the coward of Company D, but so help me God, if you don't tell me how to load that gun I'll put a bullet through your brain!" A sunny smile came over the countenance of the dying man and he said in a faint whisper:

"Good old boy! I knew you wouldn't disgrace our company—"

Lloyd interposed: "For God's sake, if you want to save that company you are so proud of, tell me how to load that d—d gun!"

As if reciting a lesson in school, the soldier replied in a weak, singsong voice: "Insert tag end of belt in feed block, with left hand pull belt left front. Pull crank handle back on roller, let go, and repeat motion. Gun is now loaded. To fire, raise automatic safety latch, and press thumbpiece. Gun is now firing. If gun stops, ascertain position of crank handle—"

But Lloyd waited for no more. With wild joy at his heart, he took a belt from one of the ammunition boxes lying beside the gun, and followed the dying man's instructions. Then he pressed the thumbpiece and a burst of fire rewarded his efforts. The gun was working.

Training it on the Germans he shouted for joy as their front rank went down.

Traversing the gun back and forth along the mass of Germans, he saw them break and run back to the cover of their trench, leaving their dead and wounded behind. He had saved his company, he, Lloyd, the coward, had "done his bit." Releasing the thumb-

piece, he looked at the watch on his wrist. He was still alive at "3:35."

"Ping!"—a bullet sang through the air, and Lloyd fell forward across the gun. A thin trickle of blood ran down his face from a little, black round hole in his forehead.

"The sentence of the court had been 'duly carried out.'"

The captain slowly raised the limp form drooping over the gun and, wiping the blood from the white face, recognized it as Lloyd, the coward of D company. Reverently covering the face with his handkerchief he turned to his "noncoms" and, in a voice husky with emotions, addressed them:

"Boys, it's Lloyd, the deserter. He has redeemed himself, died the death of a hero—died that his mates might live."

That afternoon a solemn procession wended its way toward the cemetery. In the front a stretcher was carried by two sergeants. Across the stretcher the Union Jack was carefully spread. Behind the stretcher came a captain and forty-three men, all that were left of D company.

Arriving at the cemetery, they halted in front of an open grave. All about them wooden crosses were broken and trampled into the ground.

A grizzled old sergeant, noting this destruction, muttered under his breath: "Curse the cowardly blighter who wrecked those crosses! If I could only get these two hands around his neck his trip West would be short."

The corpse on the stretcher seemed to move, or it might have been the wind blowing the folds of the Union Jack.

### CHAPTER XXV.

#### Preparing for the Big Push.

Rejoining Atwell after the execution I had a hard time trying to keep my secret from him. I think I must have lost at least ten pounds worrying over the affair.

Beginning at seven in the evening it was our duty to patrol all communication and front-line trenches, making note of unusual occurrences, and arresting anyone who should, to us, appear to be acting in a suspicious manner. We slept during the day.

Behind the lines there was great activity, supplies and ammunition pouring in, and long columns of troops constantly passing. We were preparing for the big offensive, the forerunner of the battle of the Somme or "Big Push."

The never-ending stream of men, supplies, ammunition and guns pouring into the front lines made a mighty spectacle, one that cannot be described. It has to be witnessed with your own eyes to appreciate its vastness. At our part of the line the influx of supplies never ended. It looked like a huge snake slowly crawling forward, never a hitch or break, a wonderful tribute to the system and efficiency of Great Britain's "contemptible little army" of five millions of men.

Huge fifteen-inch guns snaked along, foot by foot, by powerful steam tractors. Then a long line of "four point five" batteries, each gun drawn by six horses, then a couple of "nine point two" howitzers pulled by immense caterpillar engines.

When one of these caterpillars would pass me with its mighty monster in tow, a flush of pride would mount to my face, because I could plainly read on the name plate, "Made in U. S. A.," and I would remember that if I wore a name plate it would also read, "From the U. S. A." Then I would stop to think how thin and straggly that mighty stream would be if all the "Made in U. S. A." parts of it were withdrawn.

Then would come hundreds of limbers and "G. S." wagons drawn by sleek, well-fed mules, ridden by sleek, well-fed men, ever smiling, although grimy with sweat and covered with the fine, white dust of the marvelously well-maded French roads.

What a discouraging report the German armen must have taken back to their division commanders, and this stream is slowly but surely getting bigger and bigger every day, and the pace is always the same. No slower, no faster, but ever onward, ever forward.

Three weeks before the big push of July 1—as the battle of the Somme has been called—started, exact duplicates of the German trenches were dug about thirty kilos behind our lines. The layout of the trenches was taken from airplane photographs submitted by the Royal flying corps. The trenches were correct to the foot; they showed dugouts, saps, barbed wire defenses and danger spots.

Battalions that were to go over in the first waves were sent back for three days to study these trenches, engage in practice attacks and have night maneuvers. Each man was required to make a map of the trenches and familiarize himself with the names and location of the parts his battalion was to attack.

In the American army noncommissioned officers are put through a course of map making or road sketching, and during my six years' service in the United States cavalry I had plenty of practice in this work, therefore mapping these trenches was a comparatively easy task for me. Each man had to submit his map to the company commander to be passed upon, and I was lucky enough to have mine selected as being sufficiently authentic to use in the attack.

No photographs or maps are allowed to leave France, but in this case it appealed to me as a valuable souvenir of the great war and I managed to smuggle it through. At this time it carries no military importance as the British lines, I am happy to say, have since been advanced beyond this point, so

BUSINESS NOTICES.

WE ARE IN THE MARKET FOR several farms, of different sizes. If you want to sell see us. Abell & Gray, Smithfield, N. C.

SAVE THE QUARTERS and SEE THE DOLLARS GROW. BUY WAR-SAVINGS STAMPS!

FRESH JERSEY COWS FOR SALE. E. F. Boyett, Smithfield, N. C.

SEVERAL VOLUMES OF RILEY'S Poems just received. Herald Book Store.

A NICE LOT OF BIBLES JUST RECEIVED. Prices from 35 cents each to \$4.00. Herald Book Store.

FOR SKIN DISEASES AND BLACK heads, use Dr. Muns' pile and eczema ointment. For sale by all druggists.

FOR THAT BAD CASE OF PILES try Dr. Muns' Pile and eczema ointment.

JUST RECEIVED AT COTTER-UNDERWOOD Company's a car load of Red Rust Proof seed oats.

ANOTHER SUPPLY "TEN NIGHTS in a Barroom" just received. Five cents each. By mail, eight cents. Herald Book Store.

SEE OUR BIG TYPE TESTAMENT, big enough for very old people to read. Herald Book Store.

1000 BAGS 8-2-2, 8-3-3 AND 8-4 fertilizer on hand. Also 50 tons cotton seed meal and acid phosphate for sale. W. M. Sanders.

IF YOU WISH TO SELL YOUR farm it will pay you to see us. Abell & Gray, Smithfield, N. C.

HOME GROWN YELLOW SOJA beans for sale. T. S. Ragsdale, Smithfield, N. C.

FOR SALE—SPANISH PEANUTS, 15c. per pound, postpaid. Pumpkin Seed 60c. per pound, postpaid. C. S. Powell, Smithfield, N. C., R. No. 2.

1000 BAGS 8-2-2, 8-3-3 AND 8-4 fertilizer on hand. Also 50 tons cotton seed meal and acid phosphate for sale. W. M. Sanders.

HOUND DOG, FEMALE, ABOUT twelve years old strayed from my hotel April 15th. Color black on back and mixture of white and brown on legs and breast. Real fat and heavy with pup. Had leather collar around her neck. Ten dollars reward for information leading to her recovery.—J. W. Barham, Selma, N. C.

MULES FOR SALE—HAVING bought a motor truck, I offer several pairs of mules for sale. W. M. Sanders, Smithfield, N. C.

MERCHANTS WILL NEED FLOUR Certificates to be signed by their customers and we have the blanks for sale 100 for 35 cents, 200 for 60 cents or 500 for \$1.25. Apply to Beaty and Lassiter, Smithfield, N. C.

OUR ARMY AND HOW TO KNOW IT for sale at THE HERALD-office. Price 25 cents.

ONE CAR LOAD OF HACKNEY buggies now on hand. Come quick. Austin-Stephenson Co.

IF YOU WANT TO SELL YOUR farm it will pay you to figure with us. Abell & Gray, Smithfield, N. C.

IF YOU WANT TO SELL YOUR farm to the best advantage see us. Abell & Gray, Smithfield, N. C.

Buy War Savings Stamps and Liberty Bonds is one way in which almost every one can have some part in helping to win the war.

FOR ALL SKIN AND FACIAL eruptions such as black heads, pimples, freckles, and sunburn, use Dr. Muns' pile and eczema ointment.

WHY SUFFER FROM ECZEMA! Get a jar of Dr. Muns' pile and eczema ointment.

FOR BURNS AND OLD SORES, DR. Muns' pile and eczema ointment is a valuable remedy.

THE SMITHFIELD BUILDING & Loan Association has helped a number of people to build homes. It will help others, and maybe you. New series of shares now open. See Mr. J. J. Broadhurst.

BUY YOUR ACID AND COTTON seed meal from the Cotter-Underwood Company, Smithfield. Full supply now on hand.