



OVER THE TOP AN AMERICAN SOLDIER WHO WENT ARTHUR GUY EMPEY MACHINE GUNNER, SERVING IN FRANCE

CHAPTER XXIV.

The Firing Squad. A few days later I had orders to report back to divisional headquarters, about thirty kilos behind the line. I reported to the A. P. M. (assistant provost marshal). He told me to report to billet No. 78 for quarters and rations.

It was about eight o'clock at night and I was tired and soon fell asleep in the straw of the billet. It was a miserable night outside, cold, and a drizzly rain was falling.

About two in the morning I was awakened by some one shaking me by the shoulder. Opening my eyes I saw a regimental sergeant major bending over me. He had a lighted lantern in his right hand. I started to ask him what was the matter, when he put his finger to his lips for silence and whispered:

"Get on your equipment, and, without any noise, come with me."

This greatly mystified me, but I obeyed his order.

Outside of the billet, I asked him what was up, but he shut me up with: "Don't ask questions, it's against orders. I don't know myself."

It was raining like the mischief.

We splashed along a muddy road for about fifteen minutes, finally stopping at the entrance of what must have been an old barn. In the darkness, I could hear pigs grunting, as if they had just been disturbed. In front of the door stood an officer in a mack (macintosh). The R. S. M. went up to him, whispered something, and then left. The officer called to me, asked my name, number and regiment, at the same time, in the light of a lantern he was holding, making a notation in a little book.

When he had finished writing, he whispered:

"Go into that billet and wait orders, and no talking. Understand?"

I stumbled into the barn and sat on the floor in the darkness. I could see no one, but could hear men breathing and moving; they seemed nervous and restless. I know I was.

During my wait, three other men entered. Then the officer poked his head in the door and ordered:

"Fall in, outside the billet, in single rank."

We fell in, standing at ease. Then he commanded:

"Squad—'Shun! Number!"

There were twelve of us.

"Right—Turn! Left—Wheel! Quick—March!" And away we went. The rain was trickling down my back and I was shivering from the cold.

With the officer leading, we must have marched over an hour, plowing through the mud and occasionally stumbling into a shell hole in the road.

When suddenly the officer made a left wheel, and we found ourselves in a sort of enclosed courtyard.

The dawn was breaking and the rain had ceased.

In front of us were four stacks of rifles, three to a stack.

The officer brought us to attention and gave the order to unpile arms. We took a rifle. Giving us "Stand at ease" in a nervous and shaky voice, he commanded:

"You are here on a very solemn errand. You have been selected as a firing squad for the execution of a soldier, having been found guilty of a serious crime against king and country. You have been regularly and duly sentenced to be shot at 3:28 this date. This sentence has been confirmed by the reviewing authority and carried out. It is our duty to see you go with the sentence of the court."

Then he took a rifle, one of the stacks, and handing a blank cartridge, the

other eleven containing ball cartridges. Every man is expected to do his duty and fire to kill. Take your orders from me. Squad—"Shun!"

We came to attention. Then he left. My heart was of lead and my knees shook.

After standing at "attention" for what seemed a week, though in reality it could not have been over five minutes, we heard a low whispering in our rear and footsteps on the stone flagging of the courtyard.

Our officer reappeared and in a low, but firm voice, ordered:

"About—Turn!"

We turned about. In the gray light of dawn, a few yards in front of me, I could make out a brick wall. Against this wall was a dark form with a white square pinned on its breast. We were supposed to aim at this square. To the right of the form I noticed a white spot on the wall. This would be my target.

"Ready! Aim! Fire!"

The dark form sank into a huddled heap. My bullet sped on its way, and hit the whitish spot on the wall; I could see the splinters fly. Some one else had received the rifle containing the blank cartridge, but my mind was at ease, there was no blood of a Tommy on my hands.

"Order—Arms! About—Turn! Pile—Arms! Stand—Clear."

The stacks were re-formed.

"Quick—March! Right—Wheel!" And we left the scene of execution behind us.

It was now daylight. After marching about five minutes, we were dismissed with the following instructions from the officer in command:

"Return, alone, to your respective companies, and remember, no talking about this affair, or else it will go hard with the guilty ones."

We needed no urging to get away. I did not recognize any of the men on the firing squad; even the officer was a stranger to me.

The victim's relations and friends in Blighty will never know that he was executed; they will be under the impression that he died doing his bit for king and country.

In the public casualty lists his name will appear under the caption "Accidentally Killed," or "Died."

The day after the execution I received orders to report back to the line, and to keep a still tongue in my head.

Executions are a part of the day's work, but the part we hated most of all, I think—certainly the saddest. The British war department is thought by many people to be composed of rigid regulations all wound around with red tape. But it has a heart, and one of the evidences of this is the considerate way in which an execution is concealed and reported to the relative of the unfortunate man. They never know the truth. He is listed in the bulletins as among the "accidentally killed."

In the last ten years I have several times read stories in magazines of cowards changing, in a charge, to heroes. I used to laugh at it. It seemed easy for story-writers, but I said, "Men aren't made that way." But over in France I learned once that the streak of yellow can turn all white. I picked up the story, bit by bit, from the captain of the company, the sentries who guarded the poor fellow, as well as from my own observations. At first I did not realize the whole of his story, but after a week of investigation it stood out as clear in my mind as the mountains of my native West in the spring sunshine. It impressed me so much that I wrote it all down in rest billets on scraps of odd paper. The incidents are, as I say, every bit true; the feelings of the man are true—I know from all I underwent in the fighting over in France.

We will call him Albert Lloyd. That wasn't his name, but it will do:

Albert Lloyd was what the world terms a coward.

In London they called him a slacker. His country had been at war nearly eighteen months, and still he was not in khaki.

He had no good reason for not enlisting, being alone in the world, having been educated in an orphan asylum, and there being no one dependent upon him for support. He had no good position to lose, and there was no sweetheart to tell him with her lips to go, while her eyes pleaded for him to stay.

Every time he saw a recruiting sergeant he'd sink around the corner out of sight, with a terrible fear gnawing at his heart. When passing the big recruiting posters, and on his way to business and back he passed many, he would pull down his cap and look the other way from that awful finger pointing at him, under the caption, "Your King and Country Need You!" or the boring eyes of Kitchener, which burned into his very soul, causing him to shudder.

Then the Zeppelin raids—during them, he used to crouch in a corner of

his boarding-house cellar, whimpering like a whipped puppy and calling upon the Lord to protect him.

Even his landlady despised him, although she had to admit that he was "good pay."

He very seldom read the papers, but one morning the landlady put the morning paper at his place before he came down to breakfast. Taking his seat he read the faring headline, "Conscription Bill Passed," and nearly fainted. Excusing himself, he stumbled upstairs to his bedroom, with the horror of it gnawing into his vitals.

Having saved up a few pounds, he decided not to leave the house, and to sham sickness, so he stayed in his room and had the landlady serve his meals there.

Every time there was a knock at the door he trembled all over, imagining it was a policeman who had come to take him away to the army.

One morning his fears were realized. Sure enough, there stood a policeman with the fatal paper. Taking it in his trembling hand he read that he, Albert Lloyd, was ordered to report himself to the nearest recruiting station for physical examination. He reported immediately, because he was afraid to disobey.

The doctor looked with approval upon Lloyd's six feet of physical perfection, and thought what a fine guardsman he would make, but examined his heart twice before he passed him as "physically fit;" it was beating so fast.

From the recruiting depot Lloyd was taken, with many others, in charge of a sergeant, to the training depot at Aldershot, where he was given an outfit of khaki, and drew his other equipment. He made a fine-looking soldier, except for the slight shrinking in his shoulders and the hunted look in his eyes.

At the training depot it does not take long to find out a man's character, and Lloyd was promptly dubbed "windy." In the English army "windy" means cowardly.

The smallest recruit in the barracks looked on him with contempt, and was not slow to show it in many ways.

Lloyd was a good soldier, learned quickly, obeyed every order promptly, never groused at the hardest fatigues. He was afraid to. He lived in deadly fear of the officers and "noncoms" over him. They also despised him.

One morning about three months after his enlistment Lloyd's company was paraded, and the names picked out for the next draft to France were read. When his name was called, he did not step out smartly, two paces to the front, and answer cheerfully, "Here, sir," as the others did. He just faintly in the ranks and was carried to barracks amid the sneers of the rest.

That night was an agony of misery to him. He could not sleep. Just cried and whimpered in his bunk, because on the morrow the draft was to sail for France, where he would see death on all sides, and perhaps be killed himself. On the steamer, crossing the channel, he would have jumped overboard to escape, but was afraid of drowning.

Arriving in France, he and the rest were huddled into cattle cars. On the side of each appeared in white letters, "Homes 40, Chevaux 8." After hours of bumping over the uneven French roadbeds they arrived at the training base of Rouen.

At this place they were put through a week's rigid training in trench warfare. On the morning of the eighth day they paraded at ten o'clock, and were inspected and passed by General H—, then were marched to the quartermaster's, to draw their gas helmets and trench equipment.

At four in the afternoon they were again hustled into cattle cars. This time the journey lasted two days. They disembarked at the town of Frevent and could hear a distant dull booming. With knees shaking, Lloyd asked the sergeant what the noise was, and nearly dropped when the sergeant replied in a somewhat bored tone:

"Oh, them's the guns up the line. We'll be up there in a couple o' days or so. Don't worry, my laddie, you'll see more of 'em than you want before you get 'ome to Blighty again, that is, if you're lucky enough to get back. Now lend a hand there unloadin' them cars, and quit that everlastin' shakin'. I believe yer scared." The last with a contemptuous sneer.

They marched ten kilos, full pack, to a little dilapidated village, and the sound of the guns grew louder, constantly louder.

The village was full of soldiers who turned out to inspect the new draft, the men who were shortly to be their mates in the trenches, for they were going "up the line" on the morrow, to "take over" their certain sector of trenches.

The draft was paraded in front of battalion headquarters and the men were assigned to companies.

Lloyd was the only man assigned to D company. Perhaps the officer in charge of the draft had something to do with it, for he called Lloyd aside and said:

"Lloyd, you are going to a new company. No one knows you. Your bed will be as you make it, so for God's sake, brace up and be a man. I think you have the stuff in you, my boy, so good-by and the best of luck to you."

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 crept their way down the communication trench to the front line. No one noticed Lloyd's white and drawn face.

(To be continued next week.)

ANOTHER LETTER FROM PINSON

Mr. Editor: Again I will ask you to be kind enough to recognize another letter to your paper. The Courier is very instructive and is edited by one of the state's most popular men. A man that we have just cause to be proud of, especially the citizens of Randolph county. I think I can safely say that he has done more for the progress and uplift of our county than any other man in it and is today holding an honored position at the hands of the President of the United States.

I am unable to state what question I shall touch, but before I bring this note to a close I will promise not to say any good things about the man or woman that is not for America from head to foot in this great struggle for freedom. However, I shall try to hit the German sympathizing idiot so hard that he won't know his parents when he meets them on the street.

As I have stated heretofore, there are a large percent of the people in this section that at heart are praying for a triumph of German arms. They haven't the backbone to state their position, but you can plainly see pictured on their faces the deepest sympathy for the Kaiser and his baby murdering gang. Not one word have I heard this bunch of Kaiserites utter for America. They are so full of ignorance, prejudice and malice they rather die than speak a word in sympathy for the country they look to for protection.

There are people in this section that know more about the situation over seas than the war lords themselves. They can tell you more about the Hindenburg line than Hindenburg himself. They can tell you more about the city of Berlin than the Kaiser and his associates. They must have a wireless station direct to the Kaiser's office as they give out news that never reaches the North Carolina dailies.

A number of our boys have crossed over the Atlantic to face the most barbarous set of fiends God ever let live. They are gone over to keep that gang of dirty, stinking, piratical, murdering, cut-throats from coming over here and ravishing and tearing up this country. Yet there are men in this community that won't as much as speak one word for the boys that are going over to spill their blood for them, and their country. How can any man be in sympathy with such a low down dirty bunch of pirates? There are only two classes of people today. You are either a patriot or a traitor. Any person that is not supporting our country is endorsing the murderous acts of the brutish foe that our boys are gone over to crush.

There was but one choice for us to make. We made the choice of going to war against the dirtiest crowd that ever defied God's green earth or let them trample on us, on our rights, our liberties, on all things we hold sacred. And we have a man that God picked out to lead us in this struggle. And if we fail to stand behind him it will be because we are for the Kaiser and his gang.

We have got an army that is going to make the Kaiser and Hindenburg and all the rest of that God-forsaken bunch go to their knees with their tongues hanging out. We are no, going to be defeated and don't you bullheads and traitors that love the Kaiser so well doubt that. I know it's going to be a very serious day for you fellows that have been knocking your country when the boys come marching home. You will feel like going to the woods, and I trust you will be sent over to spend your last days with the German scrap-pile.

We are going to have many months of sacrifice, but when Uncle Sam gets through with that dirty bunch of thieves Old Glory will float over Berlin. Then a new day will dawn for America.

CORRESPONDENT.

Pinson, N. C., June 20, 1918.

Four Recent Candidates for President Look at Them Now

In the last two Presidential elections there were four outstanding candidates.

One was Woodrow Wilson.

One was William H. Taft.

One was Theodore Roosevelt.

One was Charles E. Hughes.

What are these men now doing?

Woodrow Wilson is administering the affairs of state, efficiently, courageously, and with the universal confidence and applause of his countrymen.

William H. Taft is devoting all his time and strength and abilities to upholding the President and to helping the nation to win its war.

Charles E. Hughes is giving all his time and abilities to supporting the President and to helping the nation to win its war.

And what is Theodore Roosevelt doing?

Why, he is busy, by day and by night, snarling at the President, finding fault with all the government does, belittling our war preparations, ragging at everybody and at everything.

The nation has been at war with Germany for more than a year, and in all that time not one single thing that Theodore Roosevelt has said or done has been a help to the government or to the nation's prestige or to its war-making.

While the other men who recently contested for the Presidency joyfully give the full measure of devoted service to the country and its cause, all that Theodore Roosevelt does is to scold and snarl.

It is a pitiable spectacle!—Atlanta Georgian.

White Liquid

KEEP YOUR SHOES NEAT

White Cake

2 IN 1 White Shoe Dressing

for Men's, Women's and Children's Shoes

THE P. F. DALLEY CORPORATION, MILWAUKEE, WIS.

Advertisement for 2 IN 1 White Shoe Dressing, featuring an image of a shoe and text describing its benefits for men's, women's, and children's shoes.

Advertisement for LUZIANNE coffee, featuring an image of a coffee cup and text: "Start the Day Right with a Cup or Two of Luzianne. HAM-AND-EGGS and a cup of steaming, stimulating Luzianne. What better start could anybody have for the day's work!"

Advertisement for THE SOUTHERN RAILWAY COMPANY, featuring an image of a train and text: "An Ambition and a Record. THE needs of the South are identical with the needs of the Southern Railway's growth and success of one means the upbuilding of the other."

Advertisement for Ford, featuring the Ford logo and text: "Authorized Ford Agency—Standardized Ford service and repairs. Firestone and United States Tires and Tubes. Asheboro Motor Car Company. 'Service That Satisfies.'"

Advertisement for The Asheboro Pressing & Tailoring Company, featuring text: "Your Pressing Troubles will soon be over if you send your clothes to me. I specialize on women's suits and give every job special attention. The Asheboro Pressing & Tailoring Company. W. P. Royster, Prop. Phone 137"

Advertisement for SUMMER COLDS, featuring text: "rapidly reduce human strength and illness is easily contracted, but Scott's Emulsion will promptly relieve the cold and rebuild your strength to prevent sickness."