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"Over the Top"

By An American Soldier Who Went

ARTHUR GUY EMPY Machine Gunner Serving in France

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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—Fired by the news of the sinking of the Lusitania by a German submarine, Arthur Guy Empey, an American, leaves his office in Jersey City and goes to England where he enlists in the British army.

CHAPTER II—After a period of training, Empey volunteers for immediate service and soon finds himself in rest billets "somewhere in France," where he first makes the acquaintance of the ever-present "coolies."

CHAPTER III—Empey learns to adopt the motto of the British Tommy, "If you are going to get it, you'll get it, so never worry."

CHAPTER IV—Back in rest billets, Empey gets his first experience as a mess orderly.

CHAPTER V—Empey attends his first church services at the front while a German machine gunner circles over the congregation.

CHAPTER VI—Empey's command goes into the front-line trenches and is under fire for the first time.

CHAPTER VII—Empey learns how the British soldiers are fed.

CHAPTER VIII—Back in the front-line trenches, Empey sees his first friend of the trenches "no West."

CHAPTER IX—Empey makes his first visit to a dugout in "Suicide Ditch."

CHAPTER X—Empey learns what constitutes a "day's work" in the front-line trenches.

CHAPTER XI—Empey goes "over the top" for the first time in a charge on the German trenches and is wounded by a bayonet thrust.

CHAPTER XII—Empey joins the "suicide club" as the bombing squad is called.

CHAPTER XIII—Each Tommy gets an official bath.

CHAPTER XIV—Empey gets an advanced trench under German fire.

CHAPTER XV—On "listening post" in No Man's Land.

CHAPTER XVI—Two artillerymen "put one over" on Old Pepper, their regimental commander.

skipped 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 crackling overhead, I reached my 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 fumed 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.

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

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 smack into our wire, and a sharp challenge. "Alt, who comes there?" rang out. I gasped out the password, and, groping my way through 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 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 Ikey Cohenstein comes along, and Abe engages him for cashier. After engaging Ikey they meet an old Southern negro called Sambo, and upon the suggestion of Ikey he is engaged as porter. Then the three of them, arm in arm, leave to take possession of this wonderful palace which Abe has just paid \$8,000 for. (Curtain.)

In the second act the curtain rises on the interior of the Diamond Palace saloon, and the audience gets its first shock. The saloon looks like a puppet, two tramps lying drunk on the floor, and the bartender in a dirty shirt with his sleeves rolled up, asleep with his head on the bar.

Enter Abe, Sambo and Ikey, and the fun commences.

One of the characters in the second act was named Broadway Kate, and I had an awful job to break in one of the Tommies to act and talk like a woman.

Another character was Alkali Ike, an Arizona cowboy, who just before the close of the play comes into the saloon and wrecks it with his revolver.

We had eleven three-hour rehearsals before I thought it advisable to present the sketch to the public.

The whole brigade was crazy to witness the first performance. This performance was scheduled for Friday night and everyone was full of anticipation; when bang! orders came through that the brigade would move at two that afternoon. Cursing and bawling was the order of things upon the receipt of this order, but we moved.

That night we reached the little village of S— and again went into rest billets. We were to be there two weeks. Our company immediately got busy and scoured the village for a suitable place in which to present our production. Then we received another shock.

A rival company was already established in the village. They called 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 Etassie. 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 torry.

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—!"

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 barn 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 Amuro 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

and all 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 one 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 Ikey Cohenstein. Why not use the rafters overhead, call them boxes, and charge two francs for a seat on them? The only difficulty was how were the men to reach these boxes, but to Ikey this was a mere detail.

He got long ropes and tied one end around each rafter and then tied a lot of knots in the ropes. These ropes would take the place of stairways.

We figured out that the rafters would seat about forty men and sold that number of tickets accordingly.

When the ticketholders for the boxes got a glimpse of the rafters and were informed that they had to use the rope stairway, there was a howl of indignation, but we had their money and told them that if they did not like it they could write to the management later and their money would be refunded; but under these conditions they would not be allowed to witness the performance that night.

After a little grousing they accepted the situation with the promise that if the show was rotten they certainly would let us know about it during the performance.

Everything went lovely and it was a howling success, until Alkali Ike appeared on the scene with his revolver loaded with blank cartridges. Behind the bar on a shelf was a long line of bottles. Alkali Ike was supposed to start on the left of this line and break six of the bottles by firing at them with his revolver. Behind these bottles a piece of palated canvas was supposed to represent the back of the bar, at each shot from Alkali's pistol a man behind the scenes would hit one of the bottles with his entrenching tool handle and smash it, to give the impression that Alkali was a good shot.

Alkali Ike started in and aimed at the right of the line of bottles instead of the left, and the poor boob behind the scenes started breaking the bottles.

I spent a week trying to teach some of the Tommies how to play poker, but because I won thirty-five francs they declared that they didn't "fawncy" the game.

Tommy plays few card games; the general run never heard of poker, euchre, seven up, or pinochle. They have a game similar to pinochle called "Royal Bezique," but few know how to play it.

Generally there are two decks of cards in a section, and in a short time they are so dog-eared and grubby, you can hardly tell the ace of spades from the ace of hearts. The owners of these decks sometimes condescend to lend them after much coaxing.

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(To Be Continued.)

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L. O. O. M.—La Grande Lodge No. 850, Loyal Order of Moose holds regular meetings every Wednesday night at 8 p. m. in Eagle hall next to Elks' Bldg. on Washington Ave. Visitors always welcome. Dues payable at Young's Sweets.

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B. P. O. E. ELKS, La Grande Lodge No. 432. Lodge meets each Thursday evening at 8 o'clock. Home and club privileges cheerfully extended to all Brother Elks.

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O. E. S.—Hope Chapter No. 13, O. E. S. holds stated communications the second and fourth Wednesday of each month. Visiting members cordially welcomed.

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