



"OVER THERE"

The Thrill and the Hell of the Trenches, Described by an American Boy.

Sergeant Alexander McClintock of Lexington, Ky., and the Canadian Army Has Greeting Tale That Every American Will Read, For He Tells the Facts—Unadorned. Wounded, a Distinguished Conduct Medal Man, He Was Invalided Home, but Is Going "Out There" Again to Fight For Uncle Sam and His Allies. An Inspiring, Interesting, Personal Narrative, Full of the Spirit and Atmosphere of the Trenches.

No. 2. The Bomb Raid

By Sergeant Alexander McClintock, I. C. M., 87th Overseas Batt., Canadian Gren. Guards.

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Sergeant McClintock is an American boy of Lexington, Ky., who has seen service in France, was decorated for bravery, wounded, invalided home and now is returning to accept a commission. This is the second article in the series. In the first article he described his training up to the point where he reached the front line trenches.

WHEN we took our position in the front line trenches in Belgium we relieved the Twenty-sixth Canadian battalion. Scouts from that organization came back to the villages of Dinkelbusch and Renningheist to tell us how glad they were to see us and to show us the way in. As we proceeded overland, before reaching the communication trenches at the front, these scouts paid us the hospitable attention due strangers—that is, one of them, leading a platoon, would say:

"Next 200 yards in machine gun range. Keep quiet, don't run and be ready to drop quick if you are warned."

There was one scout to each platoon, and we followed him single file, most of the time along roads or well worn paths, but sometimes through thickets and rugged fields. Every now and then the scout would yell at us to drop and down we'd go on our stomachs while away off in the distance we could hear the "put-put" of machine guns, the first sound of hostile firing that had ever reached our ears.

"It's all right," said the scout. "They haven't seen us or got track of us. They're just firing on suspicion."

Nevertheless, when our various platoons had all got into the front reserve trenches at about two hours after midnight, we learned that the first blood of our battalion had been spilled. Two men had been wounded, though neither fatally. Our own stretcher bearers took our wounded back to the field hospital at Dinkelbusch. The men of the Twenty-sixth battalion spent the rest of the night instructing us and then left us to hold the position. We were as nervous as a lot of cats, and it seemed to me that the Germans must certainly know that they could come over and walk right through us, but outside of a few casualties from sniping, such as the one that befell the Fourteenth platoon man, which I have told about, nothing very alarming happened the first day and night, and by that time we had got steady on our job. We held the position for twenty six days, which is the longest period that any Canadian or British organization has ever remained in a front line trench.

In none of the stories I've read have I ever seen trench fighting as it was carried on in Belgium adequately described. You see, you can't get much of an idea about a thing like that making a quick tour of the trenches under official direction and escort as the newspaper and magazine writers do. I couldn't undertake to tell anything worth while about the big issues of the war, but I can describe how soldiers have to learn to fight in the trenches, and I think a good many of our young fellows have that to learn now. "Over there" they don't talk of peace or even of tomorrow. They sit back and take it.

We always held the fire trench as lightly as possible, because it is a demonstrated fact that the front ditch cannot be successfully defended in a determined attack. The thing we did and the thing to do is to be ready to jump on to the enemy as soon as he has got into your front trench and is fighting on ground that you know and he doesn't and knock so many kinds of tar out of him that he'll have to pull his head for a spot that isn't so warm. That system worked first rate with us. During the day, we had only a very

few men in the fire trench. If an attack is coming in daylight there's always plenty of time to get ready for it. At night we kept prepared for trouble all the time. We had a night sentry on each firing step and a man sitting at his feet to watch him to see he wasn't secretly snoring. Then we had a sentry in each "bay" of the trench to take messages.

Orders didn't permit the man on the firing step or the man watching him to leave post on any excuse whatever

during their two hour "spell" of duty. Hanging on a string, at the elbow of each sentry on the fire step was a siren whistle or an empty shell case and a bit of iron with which to hammer on it. This, whichever it might be, was for the purpose of spreading the alarm in case of a gas attack. Also we had sentries in "listening posts," at various points from twenty to fifty yards out in "No Man's Land." These men blackened their faces before they went "over the top" and then lay in shell holes or natural hollows. There was always two of them, a bayonet man and a bomber. From the listening post a wire ran back to the fire trench to be used in signaling. In the trench a man sat with this wire wrapped around his hand. One pull meant "All O. K.," two pulls, "I'm coming in," three pulls, "Enemy in



That System Worked First Rate With Us.

sight," and four pulls, "Sound gas alarm." The fire step in a trench is a shelf on which soldiers stand to look out and shoot between the sand bags on top.

In addition to these men, we had patrols and scouts out in "No Man's Land" the greater part of the night, with orders to gain any information possible which might be of value to battalion, brigade, division or general headquarters. They reported on the condition of the Germans' barbed wire, the location of machine guns and other little things like that which might be of interest to some commanding officer twenty miles back. Also they were ordered to make every effort to capture any of the enemy's scouts or patrols, so that we could get information from them. One of the interesting moments in this work came when a star shell caught you out in an open spot. If you moved you were gone. I've seen men stand on one foot for the thirty seconds during which a star shell will burn. Then when scouts or patrols met in "No Man's Land" they always had to fight it out with bayonets. One single shot would be the signal for artillery fire and would mean the almost instant annihilation of the men on both sides of the fight. Under the necessities of this war many of our men have been killed by our own shell fire.

The Daylight Hour.

At a little before daylight came "stand-to," when everybody got buttoned up and ready for business because at that hour most attacks begin, and also that was the regular time for a dose of "morning and evening hate," otherwise a good, lively fifteen minutes of shell fire. We had some casualties every morning and evening, and the stretcher bearers used to get ready for them as a regular matter of course. For fifteen minutes at dawn and dusk the Germans used to send over "whizzbangs," "coal boxes" and "minewerfer" (shells from trench mortars) in such a generous way that it looked as if they liked to shoot 'em off, whether they hit anything or not. You could

always hear the "heavy stuff" coming, and we paid little attention to it, as it was used in efforts to reach the batteries back of our lines. The poor old town of Dinkelbusch got the full benefit of it. When a shell would shriek its way over, some one would say, "There goes the express for Dinkelbusch," and a couple of seconds later, when some prominent landmark of Dinkelbusch would disintegrate with a loud detonation, some one else would remark:

"Train's arrived!" About the only amusement we had during our long stay in the front trenches was to sit with our backs against the rear wall and shoot at the rats running along the parapet. Poor Macfarlane, with a flash of the old humor which he had before the war, told a "rookie" that the trench rats were so big that he saw one of them trying on his greatcoat. They used to run over our faces when we were sleeping in our dugouts, and I've seen them in ravenous swarms burrowing into the shallow graves of the dead. Most of the soldiers' legs are scarred to the knees with bites.

The one thing of which we constantly lived in fear was a gas attack. I used to wake in the middle of the night in a cold sweat dreaming that I heard the clatter and whistle blowing all along the line which meant that the gas was coming. And finally I really did hear the terrifying sound, just at a moment when it couldn't have sounded worse. I was in charge of the daily ration detail, sent back about ten miles to the point of nearest approach of the transport lorries to carry in rations, ammunition and sand bags to the front trenches. We had a lot of trouble returning with our loads. Passing a point which was called Shrapnel Corner, because the Germans had precise range of it, we were caught in machine gun fire and had to lie on our stomachs for twenty minutes, during which we lost one man, wounded. I sent him back and went on with my party, only to run into another machine gun shower a half mile farther on. While we were lying down to escape this a concealed British battery of five inch guns, about which we knew nothing, opened up right over our heads. It shook us up and scared us so that some of our party were now worse off than the man who had been hit and carried to the rear. We finally got together and went on. When we were about a mile behind the reserve trench, stumbling in the dark through the last aid most dangerous path overland, we heard a loud siren whistle, followed by a wave of metallic hammering and wild tooting which seemed to spread over all of Belgium a mile ahead of us. All any of us could say was:

"Gas!"

As you could see in the dark was a collection of white and frightened faces. Every trembling finger seemed awkward as a thumb as we got out our gas masks and helmets and put them on, following directions as nearly as we could. I ordered the men to sit still and sent two forward to notify me from headquarters when the gas alarm was over. They lost their way and were not found for two days. We sat there for an hour, and then I ventured to take my mask off. As nothing happened, I ordered the men to do the same. When we got into the trenches with our packs we found that the gas alarm had been one of Fritz's jokes. The first sirens had been sounded in the German lines, and there hadn't been any gas.

Our men evened things up with the Germans, however, the next night. Some of our scouts crawled clear up to the German barbed wire, ten yards in front of the enemy fire trench, tied empty jam tins to the barricade and then, after attaching small telephone wires to the barbed strands, crawled back to our trenches. When they started pulling the telephone wires the Fritz's nose. Immediately the Germans opened up with all their machine gun and rifle fire, began bombing the spot from which the noise came and sent up "S O S" signals for artillery fire along a mile of their line. They fired a \$10,000 salute and lost a night's sleep over the noise made by the discarded containers of 5 shillings' worth of jam. It was a good tonic for the Tommies.

The Prince of Wales.

A few days after this a very young officer passed me in a trench while I was sitting on a fire step writing a letter. I noticed that he had the red tabs of a staff officer on his uniform, but I paid no more attention to him than that. No compliments, such as salutes to officers, are paid in the trenches. After he had passed one of the men asked me if I didn't know who he was. I said I didn't.

"Why, you d— fool," he said, "that's the Prince of Wales!"

When the little prince came back I stood to salute him. He returned the salute with a grave smile and passed on. He was quite alone, and I was told afterward that he made these trips through the trenches just to show the men that he did not consider himself better than any other soldier. The heir of England was certainly taking nearly the same chance of losing his inheritance that we were.

After we had been in the front line

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fifteen days we received orders to make a bombing raid. Sixty volunteers were asked for, and the whole



When the Little Prince Came Back I Stood to Salute Him.

battalion offered. I was lucky—or unlucky—enough to be among the sixty who were chosen. I want to tell you in detail about this bombing raid, so that you can understand what a thing may really amount to that gets only three lines or perhaps nothing at all in the official dispatches, and, besides that, it may help some of the young men who read this to know something a little later about bombing.

The sixty of us chosen to execute the raid were taken twenty miles to the

rear for a week's instruction practice. Having only a slight idea of what we were going to try to do, we felt very jolly about the whole enterprise starting off. We were camped in an old barn, with several special instruction officers in charge. We had oral instruction the first day, while sappers dug and built an exact duplicate of the section of the German trenches which we were to raid—that is, it was exact except for a few details. Certain "skeleton trenches" in the practice section were dug simply to fool the German aviators. If a photograph taken back to German headquarters had shown an exact duplicate of a German trench section suspicion might have been aroused and our plans revealed. We were constantly warned about the skeleton trenches and told to remember that they did not exist in the German section where we were to operate. Meanwhile our practice section was changed a little several times, because aerial photographs showed that the Germans had been renovating and making some additions to the trenches in which we were to have our frolic with them.

We had oral instruction, mostly during the day, because we didn't dare let the German aviators see us practicing a bomb raid. All night long, sometimes until 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning, we rehearsed that raid, just as carefully as a company of star actors would rehearse a play. At first there was a disposition to have sport out of it.

"Well," some chap would say, rolling into the hay all tired out, "I got killed six times tonight. S'pose it'll be eight times tomorrow night."

One man insisted that he had discovered in one of our aerial photographs a German burying money, and he carefully examined each new picture, so

that he could be sure of finding the dough and digging it up. The grave and serious manner of our officers, however, the exhaustive care with which we were drilled and, more than all, the approach of the time when we were to "go over the top" drove all sport out of our minds, and I can say for myself that the very thought of the undertaking as the fatal night drew near sent shivers up and down my spine.

A bombing raid, something originated in warfare by the Canadians, is not intended for the purpose of holding ground, but to gain information, to do as much damage as possible and to keep the enemy in a state of nervousness. In this particular raid the chief object was to gain information. Our high command wanted to know what troops were opposite us and what troops had been there. We were expected to get this information from prisoners and from buttons and papers off of the Germans we might kill. It was believed that troops were being



We Rehearsed That Raid as Carefully as a Company of Star Actors.

relieved from the big tent show up at the Somme and sent to our side show in Belgium for rest. Also it was suspected that artillery was being withdrawn for the Somme. Especially we were anxious to bring back prisoners.

In civilized war a prisoner can be compelled to tell only his name, rank and religion. But this is not a civilized war, and there are ways of making prisoners talk. One of the most effective ways—quite humane—is to tie a prisoner fast, head and foot, and then tickle his bare feet with a feather. More severe measures have frequently been used—the water cure, for instance—but I'm bound to say that nearly all the German prisoners I saw were quite loquacious and willing to talk, and the accuracy of their information, when later confirmed by raids, was surprising. The iron discipline which turns them into mere children in the presence of their officers seemed to make them subservient and obedient to the officers who commanded us. I mean, of course, the privates. In this way the system worked against the fatherland. Captured German officers, especially Prussians, were a nasty lot. We never tried to get information from them, for we knew they would lie, happily and very intelligently—well instructed in the art.

At last came the night when we were to go "over the top," across No Man's Land, and have a frolic with Fritz in his own happy home. I am endeavoring to be as accurate and truthful as possible in these stories of my soldier-