



"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 a Gripping 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 in France.

SERGEANT McCLINTOCK.

No. 5. Wounded In Action.

By Sergeant Alexander McClintock, D. C. M., 87th Overseas Bati., Canadian Gren. Guards

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Sergeant McClintock, an American boy of Lexington Ky., has seen service in France, was decorated for bravery, wounded and invalided home. He is telling his story, a thrilling one, and this is the fifth article of the series. In the preceding ones he described how he reached the front, fighting in Belgium, and then the great preparations for the Somme battle. In this installment he tells of conditions and describes first hand the fighting in that greatest of all battles.

OUR high command apparently meant to make a sure thing of the general assault upon the Regina trench, in which we were to participate. Three times the order to "go over the top" was countermanded. The assault was first planned for Oct. 19. Then the date was changed to the 20th. Finally, at 12:10 noon of Oct. 21, we went. It was the first general assault we had taken part in, and we were in



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a highly nervous state. I'll admit that.

It seemed almost certain death to start over in broad daylight, yet, as it turned out, the crossing of No Man's Land was accomplished rather more easily than in our night raids. Our battalion was on the extreme right of the line, and that added materially to our difficulties, first by compelling us to advance through mud so deep that some of our men sank to their hips in it and, second, by giving us the hottest little spot in France to hold later.

I was in charge of the second "wave," or assault line. This is called the "mopping up" wave, because the business of the men composing it is thoroughly to bomb out a position crossed by the first wave, to capture or kill all of the enemy remaining and to put the trench in a condition to be defended against a counterattack by reversing the fire steps and throwing up parapets.

Our artillery had given the Germans such a battering and the curtain fire which our guns dropped just thirty to forty yards ahead of us was so powerful that we lost comparatively few men going over—only those who were knocked down by shells which the Germans landed among us through our barrage. They never caught us with their machine gun sweeping until we neared their trenches. Then a good many of our men began to drop, but we were in their front trench before they could get us in any where near

by shell fragments on the hand and leg, but the wounds were not severe enough to stop me. In fact, I did not know that I had been wounded until I felt blood running into my shoe. Then I discovered the cut in my leg, but saw that it was quite shallow and that no artery of importance had been damaged. So I went on.

I had the familiar feeling of nervousness and physical shrinking and nausea at the beginning of this fight, but by the time we were halfway across No Man's Land I had my nerve back.

After I had been hit I remember feeling relieved that I hadn't been hurt enough to keep me from going on with the men. I'm not trying to make myself out a hero. I'm just trying to tell you how an ordinary man's mind works under the stress of fighting and the danger of sudden death. There are some queer things in the psychology of battle. For instance, when we had got into the German trench and were holding it against the most vigorous counterattacks the thought which was persistently uppermost in my mind was that I had lost the address of a girl in London along with some papers which I had thrown away just before we started over and which I should certainly never be able to find again.

Hold Regina Trench at Last.

The Regina trench had been taken and lost three times by the British. We took it that day and held it. We went into action with 1,500 men of all ranks and came out with 600.

I have said that because we were on the extreme right of the line we had the hottest little spot in France to hold for awhile. You see, we had to institute a double defensive, as we had the Germans on our front and on our flank, the whole length of the trench to the right of us being still held by the Germans. There we had to form a "block," massing our bombers behind a barricade which was only fifteen yards from the barricade behind which the Germans were fighting. Our flank and the German flank were in contact as fiery as that of two live wire ends. And meanwhile the Fritzies tried to rush us on our front with nine separate counterattacks. Only one of them got up close to us, and we went out and stopped that with the bayonet. Behind our block barricade there was the nearest approach to an actual fighting hell that I had seen.

And yet a man who was in the midst of it from beginning to end came out without a scratch. He was a tall chap named Hunter. For twenty-four hours, without interruption, he threw German "eggshell" bombs from a position at the center of our barricade. He never stopped except to light a cigarette or yell for some one to bring him more bombs from Fritz's captured storehouse. He projected a regular curtain of fire of his own. I've no doubt the Germans reported he was a couple of platoons, working in alternate reliefs. He was awarded the D. C. M. for his services in that fight, and, though, as I said, he was unwounded, half the men around him were killed, and his nerves finished in such condition that he had to be sent back to England.

The Big Blunder and What It Cost.

One of the great tragedies of the war resulted from a bit of carelessness when a couple of days later the effort was made to extend our grip beyond the spot which we took in that first fight. Plans had been made for the Forty-fourth battalion of the Tenth Canadian brigade to take by assault the trench section extending to the right from the point where we had established the "block" on our flank. The hour for the attack had been fixed. Then headquarters sent out a countermanding order. Something wasn't quite ready.

The orders were sent by runners, as all confidential orders must be. Telephones are of no avail any more, as both our people and the Germans have an apparatus which needs only to be attached to a metal spike in the ground to "pick up" every telephone message within a radius of three miles. When telephones are used for anything important messages are sent in code. But for any vitally important communication which might cost serious losses, if misunderstood, old style runners

are used. Just as they were in the days when the field telephone was unheard of. It is the rule to dispatch two or three runners by different routes so that one at least will be certain to arrive. In the case of the countermanding of the order for the Forty-fourth battalion to assault the German position on our flank some officer at headquarters thought that one messenger to the lieutenant colonel commanding the Forty-fourth would be sufficient. The messenger was killed by a chance shot, and his message was undelivered. The Forty-fourth, in ignorance of the change of plan, "went over." There was no barrage fire to protect them, and their valiant effort was simply a wholesale suicide. Six hundred out of 800 men were on the ground in two and a half minutes. The battalion was simply wiped out. Several officers were court martialed as a result of this terrible blunder.

We had gone into the German trenches at a little after noon on Saturday. On Sunday night at about 10 o'clock we were relieved. The relief force had to come in overland, and they had a good many casualties en route. They found us as comfortable as bugs in a rug except for the infernal and continuous bombing at our flank barricade. The Germans had concluded that it was useless to try to drive us out. About one-fourth of the 600 of us who were still on their feet were holding the sentry posts, and the remainder of the 600 were having banquets in the German dugouts, which were stocked up like delicatessen shops with sausages, fine canned foods, champagne and beer. If we had only had a few ladies with us we could have had a real party.

I got so happily interested in the spread in our particular dugout that I forgot about my wound until some one reminded me that orders required me to hunt up a dressing station and get an anti-tetanus injection. The Tommies like to take a German trench, because if the Fritzies have to move quickly, as they usually do, we always find sausage, beer and champagne, a welcome change from bully beef. I could never learn to like their bread, however.

After this fight I was sent, with other slightly wounded men, for a week's rest at the casualty station at Contay. I rejoined my battalion at the end of the week. From Oct. 21 to Nov. 18 we were in and out of the front trenches several times for duty tours of forty-eight hours each, but were in no important action. At 6:10 on the morning of Nov. 18, a bitter cold day, we "went over" to take the Desire and also the Desire support trenches. These were the names given these trenches. We started from the left of our old position, and our advance was between Thiepval and Pozieres, opposite Grandcourt.

There was the usual artillery preparation and careful organization for the attack. I was again in charge of the "mopping up" wave, numbering 200 men and consisting mostly of bombers. It may seem strange to you that a noncommissioned officer should have so important an assignment, but sometimes in this war privates have been in charge of companies numbering 250 men, and I know of a case where a lance corporal was temporarily in command of an entire battalion. It happened on this day that, while I was in charge of the second wave, I did not go over with them. At the last moment I was given a special duty by Major John Lewis, formerly managing editor of the Montreal Star and one of the bravest soldiers I ever knew, as well as the best beloved man in our battalion.

The Troublesome Machine Gun.

"McClintock," said he, "I don't wish to send you to any special hazard, and, so far as that goes, we're all going to get more or less of a dusting, but I want to put that machine gun which has been giving us so much trouble out of action."

I knew very well the machine gun he meant. It was in a concrete emplacement, walled and roofed, and the devils in charge of it seemed to be descendants of William Tell and the



"This is going to be a bit hot, McClintock."

after our conversation. Both he and my pal Macfarlane were shot down dead that morning.

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When they called for volunteers to go with me in discharge of Major Lewis' order the entire company responded. I picked out twenty-five men, twelve bayonet men and thirteen bombers. They agreed to my plan, which was to get within twenty-five yards of the gun emplacement before attacking, to place no dependence on rifle fire, but to bomb them out and take the position with the bayonet. We followed that plan and took the emplacement quicker than we had expected to do, but there were only two of us left when we got there—Private Godsell, No. 177,083, and myself. All the rest of the twenty-five were dead or down. The emplacement was held by eleven

prophet Isaiah. They always knew what was coming and had their gun accurately trained on it before it came.

"If you are willing," said Major Lewis, "I wish you to select twenty-five from the company and go after that gun the minute the order comes to advance. Use your own judgment about the men and the plan for taking the gun position. Will you go?"

"I sure will," I answered. "I'll go and pick out the men right away. I think we can make those fellows shut up shop over there."

"Good boy!" he said. "You'll try, all right." I started away. He called me back. "This is going to be a bit hot, Mc-