

MY FOURTEEN MONTHS AT THE FRONT

An American Boy's
Baptism of Fire

By WILLIAM J. ROBINSON

Copyright, Little, Brown & Co.

The most graphic account of the great war that has yet been written comes from the pen of a twenty-two-year-old Boston boy, who has just returned from France, where as dragoon guardsman, dispatch rider and motor-car driver he served fourteen months under the British flag. Out of thirty-one motorcycle dispatch riders he was one of four survivors.

It seems that the Germans had run an armored train through and had begun shelling the town from the train. Our artillery went into action right away, and instead of hitting the train first they shelled the tracks behind the train and tore the road all up so that the train could not get back. Then they took their time and blew the train off the map.

Sunday morning the shells began to fall in the town again, and they were big ones this time—twelve inch, I heard later. We knew that it was no armored train this time, and we knew that we were in for a hot time.

I was detailed with my car for the field cashier, which meant that if the order came to move I would have an officer, armed escort and all the money belonging to the headquarters, amounting to \$40,000. All I had to do at the time was to stand by and wait for orders.

They kept up the shell fire all day, but at night they quit. There were quite a few of our chaps killed and many civilians too.

The chaplain of No. 3 casualty clearing station had taken over a building and started a soldiers' home. It was a place where a fellow could go when he was off duty, and there were books, magazines, cake, tea, etc., to be had for the asking. It was a fine thing, and it was always crowded, for the fellows enjoyed it immensely.

This was the first building to be hit, and it was full of fellows at the time. A twelve inch shell crashed through the roof and exploded on the second floor. The building caved in like a house built of cards. The marvelous part of it was that, although there must have been fully 100 men in there at the time, not a single one was killed. A few had some scratches and other minor injuries, and one had his arm broken, but those were the only casualties from this shell.

I lost all my belongings during the bombardment. I had been keeping my kit bag in the loft of a stable, and a



No Sooner Had That Shell Landed Than the Civilians Commenced to Move.

shell came through and laid the building to the ground.

All day Monday the shelling continued, and still no orders came for us to move. Things were beginning to look serious now, and we wondered how much longer we would have to stick it out. It was the most unsatisfactory duty one could imagine. There we were doing absolutely nothing and the Germans throwing shell after shell into us. We had no chance to hit back, and there was nothing except to stand by and take our chances.

When the order did come to move the field cashier was the last one to be notified, but even though we were the last to get the order we were the first ones out, and I was happy to say goodby to

that place. We went about six kilometers down the road and took over temporary headquarters in a little village.

It was just after we moved down to this village that I got the only scratch I had during the whole campaign. I was on the Dieckbusch road with a staff colonel, and we had been visiting some regiments that were out of action at the time. While we were there the Germans started shelling, and we decided it would be better for us if we moved to a healthier locality. The colonel was sitting in the tannan of the car, while I, of course, was in the driving seat.

As we swung out into the main road we heard a shell coming, and automatically I put on more speed. The shell burst right on the side of the road. One piece of it flew through the bottom of the car and tore the footboard right from under the colonel's feet. It didn't bother him the least bit. He simply swung his feet right up on to the seat and advised me to crowd on a little more speed.

Another little piece of the shell grazed my right leg just above the knee. It was a mere scratch, but it scared me as nothing ever has since, and I guess I thought my whole leg was gone.

The same shell that came so close to us caught another poor fellow and wounded him in the back in twenty-nine different places, and with all this he walked a quarter of a mile to a dressing station.

CHAPTER XI.

Preferred Firing Line to Hospital.

SOON after this I reported sick for the first time since I had been in the British army. I had a growth in my throat, and they sent me to a hospital in Armentieres. There they removed the growth and put me to bed on a stretcher.

I was in the hospital only three days, and during my stay there the Germans shelled the town the entire time. I felt awfully sorry for the poor fellows there who were helpless and didn't know at what moment a shell might come through and wipe them off the face of the earth.

I stood it for three days, and when I saw that they had made no move to discharge me from hospital I asked the orderly in my ward when I would be likely to get out.

"Oh," he said, "you won't be out of here for a week yet!"

"Won't it?" I asked. "Well, you just go down to the other end of the ward and turn your back for a few moments and see whether I will get out or not!"

He said he couldn't do a thing like that, but the next time he was down there I simply got up and walked out. In these hospitals so near the firing line there are no such things as beds, and one simply lies on a stretcher with his clothes all on.

When I reached the gate of the hospital I found a policeman on duty there, but I simply said the magic word "Duty" and walked right by him. I got a lift on a motor lorry for fourteen miles, and I walked the other eight back to camp.

When I returned and reported myself they asked me for my discharge sheet, but I said I had lost it, so there was nothing they could do about it.

In the spring of 1915 the kaiser paid a visit to the German trenches. I guess he came very quietly, for the first we knew of it was when the Germans in the trenches opposite us raised a big board above their parapet, on which was printed something like this:

THE EMPEROR WAS HERE YESTERDAY.

HAD YOU ONLY KNOWN!
THE ENGLISH WERE EVER SLOW!

Our chaps printed a board which went them one better. It said:

THE KING HAS BEEN HERE TWICE.
TOMORROW THE PRESIDENT
OF FRANCE COMES.

WE ARE NOT AFRAID TO TELL YOU NOW.

FRITZ, YOU ARE HARMLESS!

To carry the joke to the end, somebody dug up a silk hat from somewhere, and about 1 o'clock all the fellows began to cheer. They stuck the hat on the end of a stick and carried it along the trench so that it could be seen.

That hat was absolutely riddled with bullets, but they carried it clear to the end of the trench, and then they threw both hat and stick over the parapet, so that the Germans could see how they had been fooled. And how our fellows howled!

The Germans were so mad I think they would have done us violence had they had the opportunity. A little thing like that means a lot to the boys in the trenches, and it is the subject of conversation for days and days afterward.

Later we began to have more trouble with spies. We caught bunches of them, but there always seemed to be more about. Occasionally there would be a Belgian among them, but for the most part they were Germans, and we could not understand it. We caught them in all guises, but for the greater part they seemed to fancy kilts as being above suspicion. On the face of the thing this is ridiculous, for who can imitate the Scotch accent so as to get by in the British lines?

In one week we caught fourteen Germans who were wearing the kilt, and

they all seemed very much surprised that they should have been captured while posing as Scotchmen.

To put a stop to this spying it was decided to close all roads for a period of twenty-four hours. All men were warned that from 9 o'clock on such and such a night until 9 o'clock the following night they were not to leave their units without the special pass provided for these twenty-four hours.

Sentries were placed 200 yards apart on all the roads in the daytime and 100 yards at night. All these preparations were made very quietly and the greatest secrecy preserved. I was detailed with my car to patrol certain roads during the twenty-four hours, and, of course, all the other roads were patrolled too. We had orders to stop every one we met, and if they were not provided with the special pass we were to take them prisoners regardless of what uniform they were wearing. It looked like tiresome work, but it proved to be rather exciting.

I started over my route promptly at 9 o'clock, and you may be sure I was all on edge to make a capture. My car was flying the flag of the army corps headquarters, so I was not bothered by the sentries stopping me. I went over the route the first time without meeting a soul who wasn't quite all right. I was much disappointed, for I thought I would be picking up spies wholesale. On the second trip I began to think that I was going to have about the same luck as I did on the first, for everything seemed very quiet and peaceful.

I came to the village of Herzeele and turned into the road which leads to Watou, and, as I said, I was beginning to be sick of my job. There was rather a sharp curve in this road, and as I turned it I saw by the light of my electric headlights two men standing in the middle of the road. The minute they caught sight of my car they started out across a field as hard as they could go.

I yelled at them and jammed on my brakes. They didn't stop, so I pulled my revolver and sent a couple of persuaders after them. That brought them to a halt all right, and they started yelling "Friend!" at the top of their voices. I twisted the searchlight on my car around until the light shone full on them, and then I called to them to keep their hands in the air and come back on the road.

They didn't seem very anxious about it, but I assured them if they didn't I would fill them full of holes. I certainly felt fierce enough to do it. They came up on to the road, and I made them stand one on each side of the car. Then I noticed that one of them had on a pair of German soldiers' boots, and then I knew that I had a fish for sure. I got out and searched them, but they were unarmed.

What was worrying me was the fact that in taking them back one of them would have to sit behind me in the car. I took off my spare tires and put them in the back of the car, and with the straps I bound one fellow's feet and hands. I piled him into the tannan and made the other sit in front with me. I assured him if he made a single move I didn't like I would pump him full of lead P. D. Q.

In this way I took them into camp without accident. They were shot as spies two days later. Our haul for the twenty-four hours was thirty-one spies, and every one of them was a German.

One of the most terrible things I ever witnessed was the destruction of the chateau at Hooge. The chateau was in a very peculiar position, being on the dead ground between our trenches and the Germans. Sometimes we would hold it and sometimes they would, and it offered great chances to both for sniping.

Sometimes we held part of it, and they would hold the other part. Then there was some great hand to hand fighting. Our fellows in one room would be digging holes through the wall to pot at Germans in the next. It was so close to our trenches that

we did not dare to shell it, and the same thing applied to the Germans. It was decided to mine the thing and blow it off the face of the earth. I think the Germans had decided the same thing, and it was simply a case of who would get their mines laid first.

We got the jump on them, and when everything was ready our boys enticed the Germans into it, and then the work of destruction started. I was sitting on horseback behind some staff officers. We were about half a mile from the place, but we had our ears stuffed with cotton to prevent the explosion from injuring our hearing.

When the mines were set off we saw a sight such as one observes only once in a lifetime. The earth trembled, a low, growling rumble ensued, then a mighty crash, and the air was filled with smoke, flame, bricks, dust, flying bodies, heads, legs and arms. Our fellows let out a mighty cheer and charged across the crater formed by the explosion. The Germans seemed stunned by the awful sight they had witnessed, and we took several lines of trenches from them with very little trouble. The losses on the German side were terrible, and we lost heavily ourselves. The chateau at Hooge will always be remembered by those who saw it.

His majesty the king paid his armies a visit in the fall, and as I had never seen King George I was much interested. I had seen the king of Belgium and also President Poincare of France, but up to this time I had never seen the king for whom I was fighting.

We were warned the day before, and every one had to be bright and shuffling for the big event. The king drove up in a car bearing the royal standard on it, and you may be sure that car was given the right of way over everything. Two dispatch riders had dashed along the road ahead of the car, clearing the way so that noth-

ing should delay the royal party. I was one of a large detail of mounted men who acted as escort to his majesty.

When he left the car he mounted the beautiful horse that was waiting for him, and, escorted by the guard, he rode out to the reviewing stand. He made a speech to the men, who were formed up on the parade, and he thanked them for their loyalty and devotion to England in her time of need.

I could only hear a few words of his address, as I was stationed quite a distance away from him. As he finished the speech he saluted. The fellows threw their hats into the air and let out a mighty cheer. When this happened every horse on the ground, including my own, stood right up on his hind legs and reached for the blue skies above.

The king was thrown in some way and sustained injuries that were rather serious. The accident acted as a damper to the enthusiasm, and the king's visit ended much differently than was expected.

CHAPTER XII.

Last Day at the Front.

THE last engagement of any importance that I was in was the big attack at Loos in September. In a big attack like this no one knows but the commanders just where the real thrust is coming. Several attacks are made, and for all we knew ours might be the real one, or the real one might be twenty miles away from us.

It happened that at the time of the last attack we were almost sure that the big drive was coming through us. We were ordered to be ready to move at a moment's notice, and all preparations were made for a big shift. When the attack came we thought that we were on our way at last, and everybody was "counting chickens."

Continued next week

Special offer for December only, The Herald and the Dallas Itemizer, both 1 year for \$2.00

Holiday Fares

Reduced round trip fares to California, Oregon, Washington and Idaho points will enable you to go home for Christmas and New Years

California

Sale dates to California points December 21 to 23rd and 25th to 28th, inclusive. Return limit January 15th.

Oregon Washington Idaho

Sale dates between all stations in Oregon and from all stations in Oregon to stations on other lines in Oregon, Washington and Idaho December 22nd to 25th, inclusive. Return limit January 3rd. In addition tickets will be sold from Monmouth Dec. 21st and 22nd, return limit January 7th.

Between points in Oregon only, additional sale dates Dec. 29th to 31st and January 1st. Return limit January 3rd.

Ask nearest S. P. agent for particulars

JOHN M. SCOTT
General Passenger Agent
Portland, Oregon

Southern Pacific Lines



THANK HEAVENS THAT MONKEY IS STUFFED! SO ARE SOME MEN WHEN THEY SWALLOW THAT JUST AS GOOD JOKE AND LET SOMEBODY HAND THEM ORDINARY PLUG INSTEAD OF REAL GRAVELY



LOOK FOR THE PROTECTION SEAL-IT IS NOT REAL GRAVELY WITHOUT THIS SEAL