



"OVER THE TOP"

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

1917 BY
ARTHUR GUY EMPEY

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 Fritz.

CHAPTER III—Empey attends his first church services at the front while a German Fokker circles over the congregation.

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER VIII—Back in the front-line trench, Empey sees his first friend of the trenches "go 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 trench.

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" bombing squad which is called.

CHAPTER XIII—Each Tommy gets an official bath.

CHAPTER XIV—Empey helps dig 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.

CHAPTER XVII—Empey has narrow escape while on patrol duty in No Man's Land.

CHAPTER XVIII—Back in rest billets Empey writes and stages a farce comedy.

ten the Saxons, and immediately a volley of "Donner und Blitzen" could be heard and it was Fritz's turn to get a crack in his back from stooping, and the people in Berlin would close their windows.

Usually when an Irishman takes over a trench, just before "stand down" in the morning, he sticks his rifle over the top, aimed in the direction of Berlin, and engages in what is known as the "mad minute." This consists of firing fifteen shots in a minute. He is not aiming at anything in particular—just sends over each shot with a prayer, hoping that one of his strays will get some poor unsuspecting Fritz in the napper hundreds of yards behind the lines. It generally does; that's the reason the Boches hate the man from Erin's Isle.

The Saxons, though better than the Prussians and Bavarians, have a nasty trait of treachery in their makeup.

At one point of the line where the trenches were very close, a stake was driven into the ground midway between the hostile lines. At night when it was his turn, Tommy would crawl to this stake and attach some London papers to it, while at the foot he would place tins of bully beef, fags, sweets, and other delicacies that he had received from Blighty in the ever looked-for parcel. Later on Fritz would come out and get these luxuries.

The next night Tommy would go out to see what Fritz put into his stocking. The donation generally consisted of a paper from Berlin, telling who was winning the war, some tinned sausages, cigars, and occasionally a little beer, but a funny thing, Tommy never returned with the beer unless it was inside of him. His platoon got a whiff of his breath one night and the offending Tommy lost his job.

One night a young English sergeant crawled to the stake and as he tried to detach the German paper a bomb exploded and mangled him horribly. Fritz had set a trap and gained another victim which was only one more black mark against him in the book of this war. From that time on diplomatic relations were severed.

Returning to Tommy, I think his spirit is best shown in the questions he asks. It is never "who is going to win" but always "how long will it take?"

CHAPTER XX.

"Chats With Fritz."

We were swimming in money, from the receipts of our theatrical venture, and had forgotten all about the war, when an order came through that our brigade would again take over their sector of the line.

The day that these orders were issued, our captain assembled the com-

pany and asked for volunteers to go to the Machine Gun school at St. Omar. I volunteered and was accepted.

Sixteen men from our brigade left for the course in machine gunnery. This course lasted two weeks and we rejoined our unit and were assigned to the brigade machine gun company. It almost broke my heart to leave my company mates.

The gun we used was the Vickers, Light .303, water cooled.

I was still a member of the Suicide club, having jumped from the frying pan into the fire. I was assigned to section 1, gun No. 2, and the first time "in" took position in the front-line trench.

During the day our gun would be dismounted on the fire step ready for instant use. We shared a dugout with the Lewis gunners. At "stand to" we would mount our gun on the parapet and go on watch beside it until "stand down" in the morning. Then the gun would be dismounted and again placed in readiness on the fire step.

We did eight days in the front-line trench without anything unusual happening outside of the ordinary trench routine. On the night that we were to "carry out," a bombing raid against the German lines was pulled off. This raiding party consisted of sixty company men, sixteen bombers, and four Lewis machine guns with their crews.

The raid took the Boches by surprise and was a complete success, the party bringing back twenty-one prisoners.

The Germans must have been awfully sore, because they turned loose a barrage of shrapnel, with a few "Minnies" and "whizz bangs" intermixed. The shells were dropping into our front line like hailstones.

To get even, we could have left the prisoners in the fire trench, in charge of the men on guard and let them click Fritz's strafing but Tommy does not treat prisoners that way.

Five of them were brought into my dugout and turned over to me so that they would be safe from the German fire.

In the candlelight, they looked very much shaken, nerves gone and chalky faces, with the exception of one, a great big fellow. He looked very much at ease. I liked him from the start.

I got out the rum jar and gave each a nip and passed around some fags, the old reliable Woodblues. The other prisoners looked their gratitude, but the big fellow said in English, "Thank you, sir, the rum is excellent and I appreciate it, also your kindness."

He told me his name was Carl Schmidt, of the Sixty-sixth Bavarian Light infantry; that he had lived six years in New York (knew the city better than I did), had been to Coney Island and many of our ball games. He was a regular fan. I couldn't make him believe that Hans Wagner wasn't the best ball player in the world.

From New York he had gone to London, where he worked as a waiter in the Hotel Russell. Just before the war he went home to Germany to see his parents, the war came and he was conscripted.

He told me he was very sorry to hear that London was in ruins from the Zeppelin raids. I could not convince him otherwise, for hadn't he seen moving pictures in one of the German cities of St. Paul's cathedral in ruins.

I changed the subject because he was so stubborn in his belief. It was my intention to try and pump him for information as to the methods of the German snipers, who had been causing us trouble in the last few days.

I broached the subject and he shut up like a clam. After a few minutes he very innocently said:

"German snipers get paid rewards for killing the English."

I eagerly asked, "What are they?"

He answered:

"For killing or wounding an English private, the sniper gets one mark. For killing or wounding an English officer he gets five marks, but if he kills a Red Cap or English general, the sniper gets twenty-one days tied to the wheel of a lumber as punishment for his carelessness."

Then he paused, waiting for me to bite, I suppose.

I bit all right and asked him why the sniper was punished for killing an English general. With a smile he replied:

"Well, you see, if all the English generals were killed, there would be no one left to make costly mistakes."

I shut him up, he was getting too fresh for a prisoner. After a while he winked at me and I winked back, then the escort came to take the prisoners to the rear. I shook hands and wished him "The best of luck and a safe journey to Blighty."

I liked that prisoner, he was a fine fellow, had an Iron Cross, too. I advised him to keep it out of sight, or some Tommy would be sending it home to his girl in Blighty as a souvenir.

One dark and rainy night while on guard we were looking over the top from the fire step of our front-line trench, when we heard a noise immediately in front of our barbed wire. The sentry next to me challenged, "Halt, who comes there?" and brought his rifle to the aim. His challenge was answered in German. A captain in the next traverse climbed upon the sand-bagged parapet to investigate—a brave but foolhardy deed—"Crack" went a bullet and he tumbled back into the trench with a hole through his stomach and died a few minutes later. A lance corporal in the next platoon was so enraged at the captain's death that he chucked a Mills bomb in the direction of the noise with the shouted warning to us: "Duck your nappers, my lucky lads." A sharp dynamite report, a flare in front of us, and then silence.

We immediately sent up two star shells, and in their light could see two dark forms lying on the ground close to our wire. A sergeant and four stretcher-bearers went out in front and soon returned, carrying two limp bodies. Down in the dugout, in the flickering light of three candles, we saw that they were two German officers, one a captain and the other an "unteroffizier," a rank one grade higher than a sergeant general, but below the grade of lieutenant.

The captain's face had been almost completely torn away by the bomb's explosion. The unteroffizier was alive, breathing with difficulty. In a few minutes he opened his eyes and blinked in the glare of the candles.

The pair had evidently been drinking heavily, for the alcohol fumes were sickening and completely pervaded the dugout. I turned away in disgust, hating to see a man cross the Great Divide full of booze.

One of our officers could speak German and he questioned the dying man.

In a faint voice, interrupted by frequent hiccoughs, the unteroffizier told his story.

There had been a drinking bout among the officers in one of the German dugouts, the main beverage being champagne. With a drunken leer he informed us that champagne was plentiful on their side and that it did not cost them anything either. About seven that night the conversation had turned to the "contemptible" English, and the captain had made a wager that he would hang his cap on the English barbed wire to show his contempt for the English sentries. The wager was accepted. At eight o'clock the captain and he had crept out into No Man's Land to carry out this wager.

They had gotten about halfway across when the drink took effect and the captain fell asleep. After about two hours of vain attempts the unteroffizier had at last succeeded in waking the captain, reminded him of his bet, and warned him that he would be the laughing stock of the officers' mess if he did not accomplish his object, but the captain was trembling all over and insisted on returning to the German lines. In the darkness they lost their bearings and crawled toward the English trenches. They reached the barbed wire and were suddenly challenged by our sentry. Being too drunk to realize that the challenge was in English, the captain refused to crawl back. Finally the unteroffizier convinced his superior that they were in front of the English wire. Realizing this too late, the captain drew his revolver and with a muttered curse fired blindly toward our trench. His bullet no doubt killed our captain.

Then the bomb came over and there he was, dying—and a good job too, we thought. The captain dead? Well, his men wouldn't weep at the news.

Without giving us any further information the unteroffizier died.

We searched the bodies for identification disks but they had left everything behind before starting on their foolhardy errand.

Next afternoon we buried them in our little cemetery apart from the graves of the Tommies. If you ever go into that cemetery you will see two little wooden crosses in the corner of the cemetery set away from the rest.

They read:

Captain
German Army
Died—1916
Unknown
R. I. P.

Unteroffizier
German Army
Died—1916
Unknown
R. I. P.

CHAP. XXII.
About Turn.
The next evening we were relieved

and once again returned to rest billets. Upon arriving at these billets we were given twenty-four hours in which to clean up. I had just finished getting the mud from my uniform when the orderly sergeant informed me that my name was in orders to leave, and that I was to report to the orderly room in the morning for orders, transportation and rations.

I nearly had a fit, hustled about packing up, filling my pack with souvenirs such as shell heads, dud bombs, nose caps, shrapnel balls, and a Prussian guardsman's helmet. In fact, before I turned in that night, I had everything ready to report at the orderly room at nine the next morning.

I was the envy of the whole section, swanking around, telling of the good time I was going to have, the places I would visit, and the real, o'd English beer I intended to guzzle. Sort of rubbed it into them, because they all do it, and now that it was my turn, I took pains to get my own back.

At nine I reported to the captain, receiving my travel order and pass. He asked me how much money I wanted to draw. I glibly answered, "Three hundred francs, sir;" he just as glibly handed me one hundred.

Reporting at brigade headquarters, with my pack weighing a ton, I waited, with forty others, for the adjutant to inspect us. After an hour's wait, he came out; must have been sore because he wasn't going with us.

The quartermaster sergeant issued us two days' rations, in a little white canvas ration bag, which we tied to our belts.

Then two motor lorries came along and we piled in, laughing, joking, and in the best of spirits. We even loved the Germans, we were feeling so happy. Our journey to seven days' bliss in Blighty had commenced.

The ride in the lorry lasted about two hours; by this time we were covered with fine, white dust from the road, but didn't mind, even if we were nearly choking.

At the railroad station at F—we reported to an officer, who had a white band around his arm, which read "R. T. O." (Royal Transportation Officer). To us this officer was Santa Claus.

The sergeant in charge showed him our orders; he glanced through them and said: "Make yourselves comfortable on the platform and don't leave:

the train is liable to be along in five minutes—or five hours."

It came in five hours, a string of eleven match boxes on big, high wheels, drawn by a dinky little engine with the "con." These match boxes were cattle cars, on the sides of which was painted the old familiar sign, "Hommes 40, Chevaux 8."

The R. T. O. stuck us all into one car. We didn't care; it was as good as a Pullman to us.

Two days we spent on that train, bumping, stopping, jerking ahead, and sometimes sliding back. At three stations we stopped long enough to make some tea, but were unable to wash, so when we arrived at B—, where we were to embark for Blighty, we were as black as Turcos and, with our unshaven faces, we looked like a lot of tramps. Though tired out, we were happy.

We had packed up, preparatory to detraining, when a R. T. O. held up his hand for us to stop where we were and came over. This is what he said:



Dead Bodies Everywhere.

"Boys, I'm sorry, but orders have just been received cancelling all leave. If you had been three hours earlier you would have gotten away. Just stay in that train, as it is going back. Re-

Trains into Monmouth	
L've Portland 7:15, a. m., Gerlinger 10:20, Independence 10:32, Monm'th 10:50	
" Salem 9:35, " " " " " " " " " "	
" " 1:40, p. m., " " " " " " " " " "	Dallas 2:45 " " " " 3:10
" " 3:45, " " " " " " " " " "	Gerlinger 4:24, Independence 4:37, Monmouth 4:55
" " 6:00, " " " " " " " " " "	6:45, " " " " 6:57, " " " " 7:10
" Portland 3:30, Connects with above	
" Corvallis 6:45, a. m., Independence 7:35, " " " " " "	Arrive Monmouth 7:45
" " 1:15, p. m., " " " " " " " " " "	" " " " " " " " " " 2:30
" Dallas 7:00, a. m., Arrive Monmouth 7:25	
" Airlie 8:30, a. m. and 3:45, p. m., Arrives Monmouth 9:05 a. m. and 4:13 p. m.	
Leave Independence, 6:50 a. m., 7:35, 8:45, 10:35, 12:20, 1:30, p. m., 2:20, 3:50, 4:40, 7:00	
Trains out of Monmouth	
L've Monmouth 7:05 a. m., Independence 7:35, Gerlinger 7:49, Ar Salem 8:30	
" Same as above " " " " " " " " " "	Portland 11:10
" Monmouth 1:45, p. m., " " " " " " " " " "	2:14, " " 2:27, Salem 3:10
" Same as above " " " " " " " " " "	Portland 5:50
" Monmouth 4:05, " " " " " " " " " "	4:40, " " 4:55, Salem 5:30
" " 9:05, a. m., " " " " " " " " " "	Dallas 10:00 " " " " 11:00
" " 4:30, p. m., " " " " " " " " " "	" " " " " " 4:45, " " " " 5:35
" " 9:05, a. m., Independence 10:32, Corvallis 11:20	
" " 4:55, p. m., " " " " " " " " " "	6:57, " " " " 7:45
" " 7:25 a. m. and 3:10 p. m., Arrives Airlie 8 a. m. and 3:40 p. m.	
Leave Monmouth 7:05, a. m., 8:15 9:05, 10:50, 12:30, M., 1:45, p. m., 2:35, 4:15, 4:55, 7:10	

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