



# "OVER THE TOP" AN AMERICAN SOLDIER WHO WENT ARTHUR GUY EMPEY MACHINE GUNNER, SERVING IN FRANCE

WRITTEN 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 Frits.

**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 "true" as the bombing squad 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.

**CHAPTER XIX**—Soldiers have many ways to amuse themselves while "on their own."

**CHAPTER XX**—Empey volunteers for machine gun service and goes back into the front-line trenches.

**CHAPTER XXI**—Empey again goes "over the top" in a charge which cost his command 21 killed and 21 wounded.

about, and occasionally a sweet smile could be seen sticking out of the mud.

At one point, just in the entrance to a communication trench, was a stretcher. On this stretcher a German was lying with a white bandage around his knees, near to him lay one of the stretcher-bearers, the red cross on his arm covered with mud and his helmet filled with blood and brains. Close by, sitting up against the wall of the trench, with head resting on his chest, was the other stretcher-bearer. He seemed to be alive, the posture was so natural and easy; but when I got closer I could see a large, jagged hole in his temple. The three must have been killed by the same shell-burst.

The dugouts were all smashed in and knocked about, big square-cut timbers splintered into bits, walls caved in and entrances choked.

Tommy, after taking a trench, learns to his sorrow that the hardest part of the work is to hold it.

In our case this proved to be so.

The German artillery and machine guns had us taped (ranged) for fair; it was worth your life to expose yourself an instant.

Don't think for a minute that the Germans were the only sufferers; we were clicking casualties so fast that you needed an adding machine to keep track of them.

Did you ever see one of the steam shovels at work on the Panama canal? Well, it would look like a hen scratching alongside of a Tommy "digging in" while under fire. You couldn't see daylight through the clouds of dirt from his shovel.

After losing three out of six men of our crew we managed to set up our machine gun. One of the legs of the tripod was resting on the chest of a half-buried body. When the gun was firing, it gave the impression that the body was breathing. This was caused by the excessive vibration.

Three or four feet down the trench, about three feet from the ground, a foot was protruding from the earth. We knew it was a German by the black leather boot. One of our crew used that foot to hang extra bandoliers of ammunition on. This man always was a handy fellow; made use of little points that the ordinary person would overlook.

The Germans made three counter-attacks, which we repulsed, but not without heavy loss on our side. They also suffered severely from our shell and machine-gun fire. The ground was spotted with their dead and dying.

The next day things were somewhat quieter, but not quiet enough to bury the dead.

We lived, ate and slept in that trench with the unburied dead for six days. It was awful to watch their faces become swollen and discolored. Towards the last the stench was fierce.

What got on my nerves the most was that foot sticking out of the dirt. It seemed to me, at night, in the moonlight, to be trying to twist around. Several times this impression was so strong that I went to it and grasped it in both hands, to see if I could feel a movement.

I told this to the man who had used it for a hatrack just before I lay down for a little nap, as things were quiet, and I needed a rest pretty badly. When I woke up the foot was gone. He had cut it off with our chain saw out of the spare parts' box, and had plastered the stump over with mud.

During the next two or three days, before we were relieved, I missed that foot dreadfully; seemed as if I had suddenly lost a chum.

I think the worst thing of all was to watch the rats, at night, and sometimes in the day, run over and play about among the dead.

Near our gun, right across the parapet, could be seen the body of a German lieutenant, the head and arms of which were hanging into our trench. The man who had cut off the foot used to sit and carry on a one-sided conversation with this officer, used to argue and point out why Germany was in the wrong. During all of this monologue I never heard him say anything out of the way—anything that would have hurt the officer's feelings had he been alive. He was square all right; wouldn't even take advantage of a dead man in an argument.

To civilians this must seem dreadful, but out here one gets so used to

awful sights that it makes no impression. In passing a butcher shop you are not shocked by seeing a dead turkey hanging from a hook. Well, in France, a dead body is looked upon from the same angle.

But, nevertheless, when our six days were up, we were tickled to death to be relieved.

Our machine gun company lost seventeen killed and thirty-one wounded in that little local affair of "straightening the line," while the other companies clicked it worse than we did.

After the attack we went into reserve billets for six days, and on the seventh once again we were in rest billets.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### Punishments and Machine-Gun Stunts.

Soon after my arrival in France; in fact, from my enlistment, I had found that in the British army discipline is very strict. One has to be very careful in order to stay on the narrow path of government virtue.

There are about seven million ways of breaking the king's regulations; to keep one you have to break another.

The worst punishment is death by a firing squad, or "up against the wall," as Tommy calls it.

This is for desertion, cowardice, mutiny, giving information to the enemy, looting, rape, robbing the dead, forcing a safeguard, striking a superior, etc.

Then comes the punishment of sixty-four days in the front-line trench without relief. During this time you have to engage in all raids, working parties in No Man's Land, and every hazardous undertaking that comes along. If you live through the sixty-four days you are indeed lucky.

This punishment is awarded where there is a doubt as to the willful guilt of a man who has committed an offence punishable by death.

Then comes the famous field punishment No. 1. Tommy has nicknamed it "crucifixion." It means that a man is spread-eagled on a limber wheel, two hours a day for twenty-one days. During this time he only gets water, bully beef and biscuits for his chow. You get "crucified" for repeated minor offenses.

Next in order is field punishment No. 2.

This is confinement in the "clink," without blankets, getting water, bully beef and biscuits for rations and doing all the dirty work that can be found. This may be for twenty-four hours or twenty days, according to the gravity of the offense.

Then comes "pack drill" or defaulters' parade. This consists of drilling, mostly at the double, for two hours with full equipment. Tommy hates this, because it is hard work. Sometimes he fills his pack with straw to lighten it, and sometimes he gets caught. If he gets caught, he grouches at everything in general for twenty-one days, from the vantage point of a limber wheel.

Next comes "C. B." meaning "confined to barracks." This consists of staying in billets or barracks for twenty-four hours to seven days. You also get an occasional defaulters' parade and dirty jobs around the quarters.

The sergeant major keeps what is known as the crime sheet. When a man commits an offense, he is "crimed," that is, his name, number and offense is entered on the crime sheet. Next day at 9 a. m. he goes to the "orderly room" before the captain, who either punishes him with "C. B." or sends him before the O. C. (officer commanding battalion). The captain of the company can only award "C. B."

Tommy many a time has thanked the king for making that provision in his regulations.

To gain the title of a "smart soldier," Tommy has to keep clear of the crime sheet, and you have to be darned smart to do it.

I have been on it a few times, mostly for "Yankee impudence."

During our stay of two weeks in rest billets our captain put us through a course of machine-gun drills, trying out new stunts and theories.

After parades were over, our gun's crews got together and also tried out some theories of their own in reference to handling guns. These courses had nothing to do with the advancement of the war, consisted mostly of causing tricky jams in the gun, and then the rest of the crew would endeavor to locate as quickly as possible the cause of the stoppage. This amused them for a few days and then things came to a standstill.

One of the boys on my gun claimed that he could play a tune while the gun was actually firing, and demonstrated this fact one day on the target range. We were very enthusiastic and decided to become musicians.

After constant practice I became quite expert in the tune entitled "All Conductors Have Big Feet."

When I had mastered this tune, our two weeks' rest came to an end, and once again we went up the line and took over the sector in front of G-wood.

At this point the German trenches ran around the base of a hill, on the top of which was a dense wood. This wood was infested with machine guns, which used to harass our line at

will, and sweep the streets of a little village, where we were billeted while in reserve.

There was one gun in particular which used to get our goats. It had the exact range of our "elephant" dugout entrance, and every morning, about the time rations were being brought up, its bullets would knock up the dust on the road; more than one Tommy went West or to Blighty by running into them.

This gun got our nerves on edge, and Frits seemed to know it, because he never gave us an hour's rest. Our reputation as machine gunners was at stake; we tried various ruses to locate and put this gun out of action, but each one proved to be a failure, and Frits became a worse nuisance than ever. He was getting fresher and more careless every day, took all kinds of liberties with us—thought he was invincible.

Then one of our crew got a brilliant idea and we were all enthusiastic to put it to the test.

Here was his scheme:

When firing my gun, I was to play my tune, and Frits, no doubt, would fall for it, try to imitate me as an added insult. This gunner and two others would try, by the sound, to locate Frits and his gun. After having got the location, they would mount two machine guns in trees, in a little clump of woods to the left of our cemetery, and while Frits was in the middle of his lesson, would open up and trust to luck. By our calculations, it would take at least a week to pull off the stunt.

If Frits refused to swallow our bait, it would be impossible to locate his special gun, and that's the one we were after, because they all sound alike, a slow pup-pup-pup.

Our prestige was hanging by a thread. In the battalion we had to endure all kinds of insults and fresh remarks as to our ability in silencing Frits. Even to the battalion that German gun was a sore spot.

Next day, Frits opened up as usual. I let him fire away for a while and then butted in with my "pup-pup-pup-pup-pup." I kept this up quite a while, used two belts of ammunition. Frits had stopped firing to listen. Then he started in; sure enough, he had fallen for our game, his gun was trying to imitate mine, but, at first he made a

horrible mess of that tune. Again I butted in with a few bars and stopped. Then he tried to copy what I had played. He was a good sport all right, because his bullets were going away over our heads, must have been firing into the air. I commenced to feel friendly toward him.

This dust went on for five days. Frits was a good pupil and learned rapidly, in fact, got better than his teacher. I commenced to feel jealous. When he had completely mastered the tune, he started sweeping the road again and we clicked it worse than ever. But he signed his death warrant by doing so, because my friendship turned to hate. Every time he fired he played that tune and we danced.

The boys in the battalion gave us the "Ha! Ha!" They weren't in on our little frame-up.

The originator of the ruse and the other two gunners had Frits's location taped to the minute; they mounted their two guns, and also gave me the range. The next afternoon was set for the grand finale.

Our three guns, with different elevations, had their fire so arranged, that, opening up together, their bullets would suddenly drop on Frits like a hailstorm.

About three the next day, Frits started "pup-pup-pup" that tune. I blew a sharp blast on a whistle, it was the signal agreed upon; we turned loose and Frits's gun suddenly stopped in the middle of a bar. We had cooked his goose, and our ruse had worked. After firing two belts each, to make sure of our job, we hurriedly dismantled our guns and took cover in the dugout. We knew what to expect soon. We didn't have to wait long, three salvos of "whiss-bangs" came over from Frits's artillery, a further confirmation that we had sent that musical machine-gunner on his Westward-bound journey.

That gun never bothered us again. We were the heroes of the battalion, our captain congratulated us, said it was a neat piece of work, and, consequently, we were all puffed up over the stunt.

There are several ways Tommy uses to disguise the location of his machine gun and get his range. Some of the most commonly used stunts are as follows:

At night, when he mounts his gun over the top of his trench and

Trains into Monmouth	
L've Portland 7:15, a. m., Gerlinger 10:20, Independ'ce 10:32, Monm'th 10:50	
" Salem 9:35, " " " " " " " " " "	
" " 1:40, p. m., " " " " " " " " " "	Dallas 2:45, " " " " " " " " " "
" " 3:45, " Gerlinger 4:24, Independence 4:37, Monmouth 4:55	
" " 6:00, " " " " " " " " " "	6:45, " " " " " " " " " "
" Portland 8:30, Connects with above	
" Corvallis 6:45, a. m. Independence 7:35, Arrive Monmouth 7:45	
" " 1:15, p. m. " " " " " " " " " "	2:14 " " " " " " " " " "
" 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, " " " " " " " " " "
" Same as above " " " " " " " " " "	2:27, " " " " " " " " " "
" Monmouth 4:05, " " " " " " " " " "	4:40, " " " " " " " " " "
" " 9:35, a. m., " " " " " " " " " "	Dallas 10:00, " " " " " " " " " "
" " 4:30, p. m., " " " " " " " " " "	" " " " " " " " " "
" " 9:05, a. m., Independence 10:32, Corvallis 11:20	
" " 4:55, p. m., " " " " " " " " " "	6:57, " " " " " " " " " "
" " 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, 7:13	

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