



"OVER THE TOP"

AN AMERICAN SOLDIER WHO WENT

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MACHINE GUNNER, SERVING IN FRANCE

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Overhead shrapnel was bursting. I could hear the fragments slap the ground. Then I went out once more. When I came to everything was silence and darkness in No Man's Land. I was soaked with blood and a big flap from the wound in my cheek was hanging over my mouth. The blood running from this flap choked me. Out of the corner of my mouth I would try and blow it back, but it would not move. I reached for my shell dressing and tried, with one hand, to bandage my face to prevent the flow. I had an awful horror of bleeding to death and was getting very faint. You would have laughed if you had seen my ludicrous attempts at bandaging with one hand. The pains in my wounded shoulder were awful and I was getting sick at the stomach. I gave up the bandaging stunt as a bad job, and then fainted.

When I came to, hell was let loose. An intense bombardment was on, and on the whole my position was decidedly unpleasant. Then, suddenly, our barrage ceased. The silence almost hurt, but not for long, because Fritz turned loose with shrapnel, machine guns, and rifle fire. Then all along our line came a cheer and our boys came over the top in a charge. The first wave was composed of "Jocks." They were a magnificent sight, kilts, flapping in the wind, bare knees showing, and their bayonets glistening. In the first wave that passed my shell hole, one of the "Jocks," an immense fellow, about six feet two inches in height jumped right over me. On the right and left of me several soldiers in colored kilts were huddled on the ground, then over came the second wave, also "Jocks." One young Scottie, when he came abreast of my shell hole, leaped into the air, his rifle shooting out of his hands, landing about six feet in front of him, bayonet first, and stuck in the ground, the butt trembling. This impressed me greatly.

Right now I can see the butt of that gun trembling. The Scottie made a complete turn in the air, hit the ground, rolling over twice, each time clawing at the earth, and then remained still, about four feet from me, in a sort of sitting position. I called to him, "Are you hurt badly, Jock?" but no answer. He was dead. A dark red smudge was coming through his tunic right under the heart. The blood ran down his bare knees, making a horrible sight. On his right side he carried his water bottle. I was crazy for a drink and tried to reach this, but for the life of me could not negotiate that four feet. Then I became unconscious. When I woke up I was in an advanced first-aid post. I asked the doctor if we had taken the trench. "We took the trench and the wood beyond, all right," he said, "and you fellows did your bit; but, my lad, that was thirty-six hours ago. You were lying in No Man's Land in that bally hole for a day and a half. It's a wonder you are alive." He also told me that out of the twenty that were in the raiding party, seventeen were killed. The officer died of wounds in crawling back to our trench and I was severely wounded, but one fellow returned without a scratch, without any prisoners. No doubt this chap was the one who had sneezed and improperly cut the barbed wire.

In the official communique our trench raid was described as follows:

"All quiet on the western front, excepting in the neighborhood of Gommecourt wood, where one of our raiding parties penetrated into the German lines."

It is needless to say that we had no use for our persuaders or come-alongs, as we brought back no prisoners, and until I die Old Pepper's words, "Personally I don't believe that that part of the German trench is occupied," will always come to me when I hear some fellow trying to get away with a fishy statement. I will judge it accordingly.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Blighty.

From this first-aid post, after inoculating me with antitetanus serum to prevent lockjaw, I was put into an ambulance and sent to a temporary hospital behind the lines. To reach this hospital we had to go along a road about five miles in length. This road was under shell fire, for now and then a flare would light up the sky—a tremendous explosion—and then the road seemed to tremble. We did not mind, though no doubt some of us wished

that a shell would hit us and end our misery. Personally, I was not particular. It was nothing but bump, jolt, rattle, and bang.



In "Blighty."

Several times the driver would turn around and give us a "Cheero, mates, we'll soon be there—" fine fellows, those ambulance drivers, a lot of them go West, too.

We gradually drew out of the fire zone and pulled up in front of an immense dugout. Stretcher-bearers carried me down a number of steps and placed me on a white table in a brightly lighted room.

A sergeant of the Royal Army Medical corps removed my bandages and cut off my tunic. Then the doctor, with his sleeves rolled up, took charge. He winked at me and I winked back,

and then he asked, "How do you feel, smashed up a bit?"

I answered: "I'm all right, but I'd give a quid for a drink of Bass."

He nodded to the sergeant, who disappeared, and I'll be darned if he didn't return with a glass of ale. I could only open my mouth about a quarter of an inch, but I got away with every drop of that ale. It tasted just like Blighty, and that is heaven to Tommy.

The doctor said something to an orderly, the only word I could catch was "chloroform," then they put some kind of an arrangement over my nose and mouth and it was me for dreamland.

When I opened my eyes I was lying on a stretcher, in a low wooden building. Everywhere I looked I saw rows of Tommies on stretchers, some dead to the world, and the rest with fags in their mouths.

The main topic of their conversation was Blighty. Nearly all had a grin on their faces, except those who didn't have enough face left to grin with. I grinned with my right eye, the other was bandaged.

Stretcher-bearers came in and began to carry the Tommies outside. You could hear the chug of the engines in the waiting ambulances.

I was put into an ambulance with three others and away we went for an eighteen-mile ride.

I was on a bottom stretcher. The lad right across from me was smashed up something horrible.

Right above me was a man from the Royal Irish rifles, while across from him was a Scotchman.

We had gone about three miles when I heard the death-rattle in the throat of the man opposite. He had gone to rest across the Great Divide. I think at the time I envied him.

The man of the Royal Irish rifles had had his left foot blown off, the jolting of the ambulance over the rough road had loosened up the bandages on his foot, and had started it bleeding again. This blood ran down the side of the stretcher and started dripping. I was lying on my back, too weak to move, and the dripping of this blood got me in my unbandaged right eye. I closed my eye and pretty soon could not open the lid; the blood had congealed and closed it, as if it were

glued down. An English girl dressed in khaki was driving the ambulance, while beside her on the seat was a corporal of the R. A. M. C. They kept up a running conversation about Blighty which almost wrecked my nerves; pretty soon from the stretcher above me, the Irishman became aware of the fact that the bandage from his foot had become loose; it must have pained him horribly, because he yelled in a loud voice:

"If you don't stop this bloody death wagon and fix this d— bandage on my foot, I will get out and walk."

The girl on the seat turned around and in a sympathetic voice asked, "Poor fellow, are you very badly wounded?"

The Irishman, at this question, let out a howl of indignation and answered, "Am I very badly wounded, what bloody cheek; no, I'm not wounded, I've only been kicked by a canary bird."

The ambulance immediately stopped, and the corporal came to the rear and fixed him up, and also washed out my right eye. I was too weak to thank him, but it was a great relief. Then I must have become unconscious, because when I regained my senses, the ambulance was at a standstill, and my stretcher was being removed from it.

It was night, lanterns were flashing here and there, and I could see stretcher-bearers hurrying to and fro. Then I was carried into a hospital train.

The inside of this train looked like heaven to me, just pure white, and we met our first Red Cross nurses; we thought they were angels. And they were.

Nice little soft bunks and clean, white sheets.

A Red Cross nurse sat beside me during the whole ride which lasted three hours. She was holding my wrist; I thought I had made a hit, and tried to tell her how I got wounded, but she would put her finger to her lips and say, "Yes, I know, but you mustn't talk now, try to go to sleep, it'll do you good, doctor's orders." Later on I learned that she was taking my pulse every few minutes, as I was very weak from the loss of blood and they expected me to snuff it, but I didn't.

From the train we went into ambulances for a short ride to the hospital ship Panama. Another palace and more angels. I don't remember the trip across the channel.

I opened my eyes; I was being carried on a stretcher through lanes of people, some cheering, some waving flags, and others crying. The flags were Union Jacks, I was in Southampton. Blighty at last. My stretcher was strewn with flowers, cigarettes, and chocolates. Tears started to run down my cheek from my good eye. I like a booby was crying. Can you beat it?

Then into another hospital train, a five-hour ride to Paignton, another ambulance ride, and then I was carried into Munsey ward of the American Women's War hospital and put into a real bed.

This real bed was too much for my unstrung nerves and I fainted.

When I came to, a pretty Red Cross nurse was bending over me, bathing my forehead with cold water, then she left and the ward orderly placed a screen around my bed, and gave me a much-needed bath and clean pajamas. Then the screen was removed and a bowl of steaming soup was given me. It tasted delicious.

Before finishing my soup the nurse came back to ask me my name and number. She put this information down in a little book and then asked:

"Where do you come from?" I answered:

"From the big town behind the Statue of Liberty;" upon hearing this she started jumping up and down, clapping her hands, and calling out to three nurses across the ward:

"Come here, girls—at last we have got a real live Yankee with us."

They came over and besieged me with questions, until the doctor arrived. Upon learning that I was an American he almost crushed my hand in his grip of welcome. They also were Americans, and were glad to see me.

The doctor very tenderly removed my bandages and told me, after viewing my wounds, that he would have to take me to the operating theater immediately. Personally I didn't care what was done with me.

In a few minutes, four orderlies who looked like undertakers dressed in white, brought a stretcher to my bed and placing me on it carried me out of the ward, across a courtyard to the operating room or "pictures," as Tommy calls it.

I don't remember having the anesthetic applied.

When I came to I was again lying in a bed in Munsey ward. One of the nurses had draped a large American flag over the head of the bed, and clasped in my hand was a smaller flag, and it made me feel good all over to again see the "Stars and Stripes."

At that time I wondered when the boys in the trenches would see the emblem of the "land of the free and the home of the brave" beside them, doing its bit in this great war of civilization.

My wounds were very painful, and several times at night I would dream that myriads of khaki-clad figures would pass my bed and each would stop, bend over me, and whisper, "The best of luck, mate."

Soaked with perspiration I would awake with a cry, and the night nurse would come over and hold my hand. This awakening got to be a habit with me until that particular nurse was transferred to another ward.

In three weeks' time, owing to the careful treatment received, I was able to sit up and get my bearings. Our ward contained seventy-five patients, 90 per cent of which were surgical cases. At the head of each bed hung a temperature chart and diagnosis sheet. Across this sheet would be written "G. S. W." or "S. W.," the former meaning gun shot wound and the latter shell wound. The "S. W." predominated, especially among the Royal Field artillery and Royal engineers.

About forty different regiments were represented, and many arguments ensued as to the respective fighting ability of each regiment. The rivalry was wonderful. A Jock arguing with an Irishman, then a strong Cockney accent would butt in in favor of a London regiment. Before long a Welshman, followed by a member of a Yorkshire regiment, and, perhaps, a Canadian intrude themselves and the argument waxed loud and furious. The patients in the beds start howling for them to settle their dispute outside and the ward is in an uproar. The head sister comes along and with a wave of the hand completely routs the doughty warriors and again silence reigns supreme.

Wednesday and Sunday of each week were visiting days and were looked forward to by the men, because they meant parcels containing fruit, sweets or fags. When a patient had a regular visitor, he was generally kept well supplied with these delicacies. Great jealousy is shown among the men as to their visitors and many word wars ensue after the visitors leave.

When a man is sent to a convalescent home, he generally turns over his steady visitor to the man in the next bed.

Most visitors have autograph albums and bore Tommy to death by asking him to write the particulars of his wounding in same. Several Tommies try to duck this unpleasant job by tell-

ing the visitors that they cannot write, but this never phases the owner of the album; he or she, generally she, offers to write it for them and Tommy is stung into telling his experiences.

The questions asked Tommy by visitors would make a clever joke book to a military man.

Some kindly looking old lady will stop at your bed and in a sympathetic voice address you: "You poor boy, wounded by those terrible Germans, you must be suffering frightful pain. A bullet, did you say? Well, tell me, I have always wanted to know, did it hurt worse going in or coming out?"

Tommy generally replies that he did not stop to figure it out when he was hit.

One very nice-looking, overenthusiastic young thing, stopped at my bed and asked, "What wounded you in the face?"

In a polite but bored tone I answered, "A rifle bullet."

With a look of disdain she passed to the next bed, first ejaculating, "Oh! Only a bullet? I thought it was a shell." Why she should think a shell wound was more of a distinction beats me. I don't see a whole lot of difference myself.

The American Women's War hospital was a heaven for wounded men. They were allowed every privilege possible conducive with the rules and military discipline. The only fault was that the men's passes were restricted. To get a pass required an act of parliament. Tommy tried many tricks to get out, but the commandant, an old Boer war officer, was wise to them all, and it took a new and clever ruse to make him affix his signature to the coveted slip of paper.

As soon as it would get dark many a patient climbed over the wall and went "on his own," regardless of many signs staring him in the face, "Out of bounds for patients." Generally the nurses were looking the other way when one of these night raids started. I hope this information will get none of them into trouble, but I cannot resist the temptation to let the commandant know that occasionally we put it over on him.

One afternoon I received a note, through our underground channel, from my female visitor, asking me to attend a party at her house that night. I answered that she could expect me and to meet me at a certain place on the

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 " " " " " " " "
" " 3:45, " " " " " " " " " "	Gerlinger 4:24, Independence 4:37, Monmouth 4:55
" " 6:00, " " " " " " " " " "	6:45, " " " " " " " " " "
" Portland 3:30, Connects with above	
" Corvallis 6:45, a m	Independence 7:35, Arrive Monmouth 7:45
" " 1:15, p m	" " " " " " " " " " " "
" 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 " " " " " "
" " 4:30, p m	" " " " " " " " " " " "
" " 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 pm
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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