

GOOD ROADS,
GOOD HOMES,
BEST CHEESE

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Time.

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WILLIAM J. ROBINSON

MY FOURTEEN MONTHS AT THE FRONT

An American Boy's
Baptism of Fire

By WILLIAM J. ROBINSON

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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 motorcycle driver he served fourteen months under the British flag. Out of thirty-one motorcycle dispatch riders he was one of four survivors.

CHAPTER I.

Sent to the Front.

EXACTLY one week from a certain day when I landed in England from the United States I was notified that my job was gone, as the company that I represented was in the hands of receivers.

I was disappointed, of course, but tried to look at the thing philosophically and to make the best of it. I bought my ticket for home, but as the boat on which I intended sailing did not leave for several days I proceeded to enjoy the remainder of my stay in England.

Things were certainly moving at that time. Very soon I was as enthusiastic as any of them, and in London I made inquiries as to whether I could join the army.

I was told that I would have no difficulty at all, but on second thought I decided to let well enough alone. The day before I was to sail from Liverpool I hesitated again and talked it over with an army officer. He was so nice about explaining everything to me that I decided that I might do lots of worse things than to see a little of the biggest scrap the world had ever known.

That night I thought about the matter some more and came to the conclusion that if they would take me into a cavalry regiment I would have a try at it. The next morning I enlisted and was made a trooper in the Fifth Dragoon guards. That same afternoon I was on my way to Aldershot, but had I known what I was going to go through I don't think I would have been so light hearted as I was. In the evening I was fitted out with my entire kit and informed that from now on I was a soldier.

I was assigned to a bed in the barracks, and from that time my troubles commenced. I was in with a

crowd of old soldiers, men who had served from two to twenty years in the army, and, while they were very decent chaps, they seemed to resent the fact that a "civvie" had been pushed in on them. I was at once christened "Yank," and I believe they found a few other things to call me too.

The next morning at 5 o'clock the sergeant came around and dug me out. He took me down to the stables and put me in with a bunch of rookies who weren't any happier than I was. We were then instructed in the gentle art of grooming a horse. I couldn't seem to do anything right, and they didn't hesitate to tell me so either.

Then we were marched down to a breakfast of bread, bacon and tea, but we had as much as we wanted. I felt a whole lot better after eating. Breakfast over, we had room inspection, and as soon as that was over we who were rookies were marched down to the riding school and handed over to the tyrant who ruled there.

I had expected to find horses all saddled, and it certainly was quite a shock to learn that we got our saddles only when we had earned them. In other words, we had to pass the bareback test before we even felt a saddle. There were no long explanations as to how a thing should be done. We were told once and in as few words as possible. Then we had to do it.

After we had mastered the art of vaulting on a horse's back we got the "walk march," then the "trot march." Then we had to drop the reins and ride with folded arms, and so it went until 12 o'clock, when we got an hour's rest. It was the same thing in the afternoon.

All one could hear was the riding master singing his commands: "Walk, march. Trot, march! Halt!" And every once in awhile he'd yell: "Hollow your backs! Hollow your backs! You're not driving a cab now. That's a horse you're on. He's got a



I Was Christened "Yank," and They Found Other Things to Call Me.

head and tail and legs and everything. Why, I wouldn't trust you blighters to drive my duck to water. There isn't one of you who could ride a table," etc. We were dismissed at 4:30 and told that this was our routine for every day until we had passed out and earned our saddles.

I don't think I was ever so tired in my life as I was that night, and I decided to turn in right after supper. That shows how much I knew about a barrack room. After supper all those who couldn't get permission to go out seemed to blame it on me, for I was battered around until they were tired of it, and when I finally got into my bed I was in a pretty bad way.

I soon found out that it was futile to try to get even. Such an attempt only made matters worse, and the only thing to do seemed to be to grin and bear it. The next morning we went down to riding school again and had the same old drill all day, except that in the afternoon they turned us around so that our backs were toward the horses' heads and made us ride that way the rest of the day.

As I was crossing the parade ground in the evening a fellow who was in my room asked me how I felt. I told him in two words.

"Well," he said, "if you want to be let alone you do as I tell you. Tonight when you go into the room pick out the biggest man you can find and don't say anything, but just walk up and paste him with all your might. You may get licked, and you may not, but you won't have much trouble afterward, whichever way it comes out."

A Good Provider for the Home

A widow in speaking of her late husband said: "He was always a good provider." In the mind of this bereaved woman, this was a high tribute to her husband's character. It is often true that the best husband is the one who saves a part of his income for the future. By this plan he is able to provide all necessities and many of the luxuries; but constantly accumulate money and property that will safeguard his family against want when he is unable to work or after his death.

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Well, I didn't know whether I'd have the nerve to do it or not, but the more I thought about it the more I thought he might be right. I hadn't passed through the door to the barracks before the kidding started again, and I knew what would follow.

So I screwed up all the courage I had, and, seeing a big chap who was making a lot of talk, I swung as hard as I could and let him have it. I won't say anything about what happened to me, but the next afternoon I found I'd been unlucky, as usual. The man I had picked was a heavyweight champion of the British army in South Africa during the Boer war! Things were much better after that, though, and I made some mighty good friends among those fellows.

At first it amused me greatly to hear the men talk about the regiments they belonged to, but later I came to understand that their regiments meant more to them than anything else. In peace time when a man joins the army he is obliged to learn the history of the regiment he joins from the day it was formed to the present day. Tradition plays a great part in the life of a regular soldier, and if there is a delicate spot in the history of his regiment he

is bound to hear of it from the men of other units, and if any derogatory remarks are passed he feels himself honor bound to fight the one who is responsible for the remark.

If you should chance to ask a Royal Horse artilleryman what regiment he belonged to he would immediately straighten up and answer you somewhat after this fashion:

"I belong to the Royal Horse artillery, the extreme right of the line and the pride of the British army." Then he would go on to tell when his regiment was formed, what it had accomplished, how many honors it has, how many Victoria crosses the men belonging to it have won, how many titled officers belong to it, and so on, almost indefinitely.

Nearly all the regiments have nicknames, and these names are very popular. The Royal Scots claim to be the oldest regiment in the British army, so they are popularly known as "Pontius Pilate's bodyguard." The Gloucester regiment is the only one in the British army entitled to wear cap badges in the back as well as in the front, and the reason this privilege has been granted them is that in some pre-

Continued on last page.

PREFACE.

Prior to my arrival in England the idea of participating in the great war had never entered my head. I went abroad on business, and I expected to return to this country as soon as my work was completed. It seemed, though, that fate decreed otherwise. I had been in England a good many times before, and in France and Belgium, too, for that matter. My father was a sea captain, and I was born aboard his ship. In fact, I lived the first six years of my life on shipboard. This last trip across the Atlantic made the twenty-third time for me, so I was quite at home in the British Isles. Almost before I knew it I had taken the step that was responsible for the most terrible yet wonderful experience that ever came to me.

In telling my story I have tried to take the important events and set them down in chronological order. I have endeavored also to link them together so as to make it possible for the reader to follow me through the principal happenings during my time of service. Many of the more sordid details of this great war I have been obliged to leave out. I have dwelt neither on the horrors of war nor yet on the glory, but I have tried to picture the daily routine of the fighting man's life as it really is.

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