



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

WILLIAM J. ROBINSON

Very quietly we crawled back in the direction from which the report had come. After going about 100 yards we lay still and waited. Pretty soon we heard the rifle crack again, and it wasn't very far away, but was still behind us. We went a little farther, and the lieutenant whispered: "Keep your eyes skinned. Watch the trees."

I could see no sign of life anywhere, but I knew that the sniper must be very close. After several minutes' wait the report came again, and this time it was so close that I jumped. We heard the ejector fly back and the bolt snap home again. And then I saw him!

The sniper was well up in a tree, and he was almost invisible, so well was a screen of branches drawn up around him. His rifle was fitted up in a tripod, and the legs of this tripod were nailed to the branches of the tree. All he had to do was to sit there and pull the trigger. I eased back the bolt of my rifle so as to make no noise, and I eased it home again. The lieutenant drew his revolver, and we took a steady aim together.

"Fire," he said softly, and the two shots rang out as one. Mr. Sniper came down like a thousand brick.

I climbed the tree to have a look at his nest, and it certainly was ingenious. That rifle was fixed dead across the center of the bridge, so all he had to do was to pull the trigger when he heard anything strike the wooden planking of the bridge. It was a pretty little scheme, but it came to an end, as all things, good or bad, must.

Other traps such as this were all too common along this road, but eventually we cleared the most of them out. Many of the snipers would wear civilian clothes, some would be wearing the British uniform, and some would have the nerve to use their own uniforms.

We captured a few of these beauties alive. Their admissions were almost

unbelievable. They confessed to having patrolled the road every night and actually greeted any of our chaps they chanced to pass. They knew the names of most of the regiments in that vicinity, and some of them even knew the nicknames our fellows had for their officers. It is a job that requires heaps of nerve, but it is a dirty, despicable game.

A German sniper was killed one night, and the fellows who brought him down decided to play a joke on an Irishman in their regiment. They took the body of the sniper and carried it about a hundred yards off the road, where they propped it up against a tree and also fixed a rifle to its shoulder. Then they went in search of the Irishman. When they found him they told him that he had been ordered to go up the road and hunt for a sniper who was potting at the passing traffic.

The Irishman took his rifle and went out in search of the German. Of course he found him, for he couldn't have passed without seeing the trap which had been laid for him. The minute he caught sight of the gray uniform he dropped behind a bale of hay which was lying on the side of the road and started firing at the supposed sniper. The fellows who had sent him up there came along and without being observed by the object of their joke proceeded to enjoy the fun. The Irishman couldn't understand how it was possible for him to miss his mark at such a short range, and at each shot he was swearing at his luck. Finally he hit the body so many times it fell over, and it was not until then that he realized how he had been fooled.

CHAPTER IV.

The Boy Sniper.

ANOTHER sniping incident was the case of a Belgian boy only fourteen years old. On a road

which was much used for transport we noticed that nearly every night some of our officers would be shot. This went on for some time, and no one could explain it. One day one of our fellows brought in this kid and said that he had found him with a German rifle and ammunition in his possession.

The boy was cross examined and finally admitted that it was he who had been shooting officers on the Ouderdom road. He said that he had been furnished with the rifle and told where he got his ammunition every day. He said he had instructions not to shoot any officers with red on their uniform (staff officers). Now, why he should have received such an order as this was a mystery to me.

He said that he had been at it for two weeks, and during that time he had bagged sixteen officers. He said he received 6 francs (about \$1.20) for every officer he shot. He was taken to the rear and shot at once. We tried to follow up the information he had given as to where he had received his ammunition, but his friends had all gone, so I suppose they had been warned.

About this time, too, we caught an old man eighty-two years old. In broad daylight he was out with a pair of nippers cutting our wires. We caught men dressed as women and women dressed as men. We caught people flying pigeons from their houses. In fact, we caught spies doing almost everything to give information.

We were always trying to make the trenches we had taken over from the French a little more comfortable. We made wooden gratings for the bottom of them, besides the lookout platform. From empty oil drums we made braziers, and these in particular were mighty agreeable at night.

The country for a couple of miles back of the trenches was deserted. The people had fled, leaving practically everything. Chickens and pigs were running wild, and it was surprising how quickly they got almost as wild as the wildest animals.

A pig hunt with fixed bayonets is a very amusing thing to watch. Get about twenty fellows after a pig and they have their work cut out for them. The pig gives them a good run for their money, but in the end they generally get him, and then comes the march back to camp with the pig held aloft on the ends of several bayonets.

Chicken fishing is great fun, too, but it requires patience. You take a long piece of string and tie a little piece of bread to the end of it. You find a spot where there are chickens about. Scatter some crumbs around and also drop the piece of bread you have on the end of the string. Then you find a convenient tree and sit down with the other end of the string in your hand and wait for the chickens to "bite." When one comes to your piece of bread you begin jerking it nearer to the tree behind which you are hiding. When it

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I had taken a shorter way coming back, and it was along a very narrow road. Dave was sitting in the front with me, and the captain was in the tonneau. We were bowling along at a fairly good pace, and I had visions of being back in time for dinner.

I noticed a few cavalymen away ahead of us, but they were so far ahead I didn't pay much attention to them. The first that I knew we were striking anything out of the ordinary was when Dave grabbed my rifle out of the bucket and began firing over the wind shield. Then I took another look and saw the cavalymen were Germans, and there were seven of them.

The road was so narrow that there wasn't a ghost of a chance to turn around, and I figured that if we rushed them we could bluff our way through, whereas if we stopped they would see that they outnumbered us two to one and the chances were we would get the worst of it. I was so excited I was trembling all over, and the captain was shouting orders at the top of his voice.

Dave was the only cool man in the car, and he was sending shot after shot at them as calmly as if he were on a rifle range. He shouted to me: "Go like h—! Crowd 'em off the road!"

When they saw how we were gaining three of them left the road and hit out across country. I thought Dave must have hit the other fellow, for he simply put the spurs to his horse and stuck right to the middle of the road. He didn't attempt to fire at us at all. He was just going for all he was worth.

When I saw this I started after him in earnest, and he didn't have a chance in the world. That car had done seventy-eight miles an hour on her test, and I hardly gave German horses credit for such speed as that. As we got closer to him Dave quit firing, for it would have been murder to shoot a man in a trap such as he was in. He kept to the center of the road, though, and he wouldn't give an inch.

I was blowing that old siren for all it was worth, and I opened the cut-out to make all the noise I could, trying to scare his horse off the road, and the animal wanted to get out of the way, too, but the rider held him in.

At last Dave said, "I'll make him move," and he sent a bullet so close I'll bet he could have kissed it as it went by. He gave way then all right, and as he did I pulled up alongside of him. As we came up he pulled a revolver and fired two shots, which just went over my head. Dave leaned over and caught him by the belt. He yanked him clear of the saddle and slung him into the back of the car. He landed on top of the captain, and those two were so mixed up you couldn't tell one from the other.

I stopped the car as quickly as I could, and we soon had him "saying Uncle," though he fought like a wildcat for a few minutes. The captain got the worst of it, for he had a beautiful "shiner" and the skin off his knuckles. When we searched him we found thirty-three English ten shilling notes on him. He had taken them from some of our fellows, of course, but what made us mad was that the captain would not allow us to keep them.

He said it would not be honest, but I noticed that when we handed him over to some French cavalry a little later they didn't hesitate about taking them and Dave and I sat in the car and watched them splitting it among themselves. I felt rather sorry for the poor devil, for he said that he and the rest of his squad had been hiding for five days and five nights and that they didn't know where they were. They had become desperate and decided to run for it in the open. The others came in and surrendered late in the day.

Supplies are brought across the channel daily. The railway lines run straight down to the docks, so the goods are put on the trains as they are taken out of the ship. Each division, army corps and army has its own supplies, or, in other words, each one of these units has its own station in which its supplies are delivered. Every unit has its own supply column, which is made up of any number of motor trucks, the total varying according to the strength of the unit. These motor trucks pull up on each side of the train, and the supplies are shifted in a very short space of time. Each motor truck is loaded with only one kind of goods, and as the column leaves the station yard all vehicles carrying the same kind of goods group themselves together, so that when they finally move off ten trucks of meat may be leading the column, followed by various numbers of truck loads of bread, groceries, clothing, hay and grain, petrol and mechanical supplies. In this way the goods are all dumped together, and they practically form separate little stores for each article.

The "first dump," as it is called, is a place cleared away on the side of the road where the men may deposit the supplies so that it will be convenient for the horse transport to come and get them. Here the goods are unloaded, and the motor column returns to headquarters. After it is dark the horse transport comes down from the trenches, loads its wagons and immediately returns to the trenches, where the supplies are issued to each unit for distribution to the smaller units.

The motors complete their work in an incredibly short time. They have seven or eight miles to carry their loads and in some cases even farther, yet within two or three hours from the time they leave their camps in the morning they are back again, and the army has been provided for another day.



Then I Took Another Look and Saw the Cavalymen Were Germans.

comes within striking distance you jump as if you were falling on a football, and if you are lucky you will have chicken for dinner.

I was out one day in a motor with a staff captain and Dave Smith, the heavyweight champion, whom I bumped against during my first days in the army. We had been up to a brigade headquarters and were on return trip,



The Horse Transport Comes Down From the Trenches.

To each motor vehicle three men are assigned. They are known as the first, second and third drivers and are all of them qualified chauffeurs. In case anything happens to the first driver the others are there to take his place. The first driver has the care of the engine and the driving of the truck, while the other two men have the greasing and oiling and cleaning of the vehicle, and they also assist in the loading and unloading of supplies. The motors are in-

Continued on last page.

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