



WILLIAM J. ROBINSON

MY FOURTEEN MONTHS AT THE FRONT

An American Boy's
Baptism of Fire

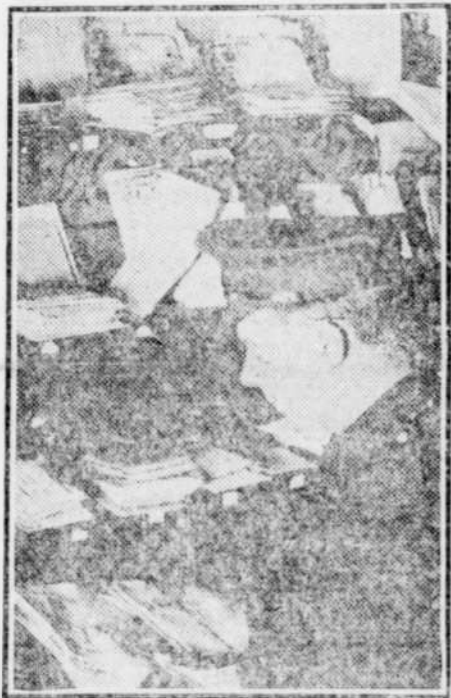
By WILLIAM J. ROBINSON

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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 dragon 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.

CHAPTER V. The "Mad Major."

THE nurses in the hospitals are worshiped and adored by the soldiers, and surely this is as it should be, for they are suffering almost as much as the men, and yet they keep cheerful and supply the tender womanly sympathy which means so much when in physical anguish. They are a wonderful body of women, and their work is appreciated. Some of



When a Man Has Been Killed His Letters Are Marked "Killed."

them are close enough to the front to be under fire, and they are as brave as the men when it comes to facing danger.

During an aeroplane raid last fall I

had a chance to watch some of the nurses. We had about thirty German aeroplanes over our encampment dropping bombs. As they went back to their own lines they flew over a hospital located in an open field. There were huge red crosses painted on the top of every tent, so it would seem that any mistake as to the nature of the camp would be impossible. Nevertheless as the taubes passed over they dropped several bombs in the hospital and killed quite a number of the poor chaps who were already wounded. The nurses worked as hard as they could trying to quiet the rest of the men, and it is no easy task, for, while a soldier may face almost anything when he is well, it is a very different matter when he is lying helpless, wounded and in pain, on a stretcher.

I was very much interested to learn how a man's mail was taken care of when anything had happened to him. It seemed to me that the chance of his letters being returned before his people could be notified was very great. On asking about this I found that when a man has been killed his letters are marked "Killed," but instead of being sent directly to his people they are returned to the war office and are sent from there, after the casualty has been made known, to his relatives. In this way many people are saved a great deal of premature worry and uneasiness.

I shall never forget the time I saw the Royal Horse artillery go into action for a more thrilling sight would be hard to imagine. I was out alone in the car, and I had been doing patrol duty. I went rather closer to the firing line than I intended to, but decided to push on until I struck the "route nationale," so I would have a good road all the rest of the way back to camp.

I had to go through the village of Diekebusch, and as I came to the cross-

roads just outside the village a sentry stopped me and said I could not go on. It seems that some Germans had got a machine gun in the steeple of the church and were cleaning up everything that tried to pass. The horse artillery had been sent for, and I learned that they were on their way even then.

I decided to wait around and see what happened, so I pulled in to the side of the road. I had hardly stopped when I heard a rush and rattle that sounded like an old flyover in the distance. Around the curve dashed eight horses on the dead gallop, pulling an eighteen pounder behind them. They dashed by, but about fifty yards ahead of me they swung around and trained that gun on the church.

There was a moment's pause, and then she spoke, and away went steeple, Germans, machine gun and all. The first shot had been a direct hit, and it couldn't have been better if they had tried a thousand years.

It was the very next day after this event that I got into as tight a fix as I ever care to find myself. I was ordered to take three officers to a place called Kemmel. I had been there before, and from what I had seen then I wasn't eager about making the trip again.

We started off about 1 o'clock and expected to be back by 5. I noticed as I came to the Kemmel road that there were two sentries on duty there, but as they only saluted the officers and didn't say anything I thought no more about it. Now, Kemmel lies at the foot of a hill and is tucked in between Mount Noir and Mount Kemmel. It would be a cozy little place in peace time, but it is an awful trap to get caught in when there is a war on.

I sent the car up the hill as fast she could go, and it was a long climb. As we went over the brow and started on the down grade we ran right under the nose of the German artillery observers. This road was officially closed, and those sentries should have stopped us.

Well, it scared me so that I went down that hill so fast those officers must have thought they were in a parachute. As we entered the village the shells commenced to drop in on us, and we ran for the nearest shelter, which happened to be a brewery.

There wasn't much left of the place anyway, as it had been in German hands, and we had shelled them out of it, and when we had taken it they had shelled us out of it. Anyway, we left the car and crawled into the cellar. It was wet and filthy, but it looked just like heaven to me that day.

We lay there in all this fifth hour after hour, while the shells literally poured in all around us. They certainly wasted a lot of good ammunition trying to get us, but the best of it was that they didn't succeed. One of the officers remarked during a moment's silence that the crown prince of Germany must have made his headquarters in the place when it was in German hands. Another officer replied that he wished the crown prince was there now.

We lay there till the fire let up, which it did about 5 o'clock. I was worrying about getting back, and I was also wondering what had become of the car. If it was gone we might just as well kiss ourselves goodbye, for our chances of getting out on foot would be slim.

When the fire had abated we came out and looked around. The enemy certainly had made a mess of the place, for even the top story of the brewery had been shot away from over our heads. I went to look the car over, and you can just believe I was relieved to find that, aside from having a few holes through the body, it was all right.

The officers decided to wait until it was dark before chancing to run back. I didn't know what was going to happen to us. I wasn't very familiar with the road, and I was afraid they would have some kind of barricade up or have a few machine guns trained on us or something equally unpleasant.

I certainly was dreading that ride back, but there was no other way out, and we were between the devil and the deep sea. It was at a time like that that I wished that I had never seen the British army. I turned the car around, and as soon as it was dark we got in and started. I opened her up wide, and by the time we got to the bottom of the hill we were doing about fifty miles an hour, and I couldn't see very much, either, for of course I did not use any lights.

I didn't know what was waiting for us at the top of the hill, but I did know that if there was anything there we were going right through it, even if we didn't go any farther. The ridiculous part of it was that we went right through and never saw a thing. Absol-

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.

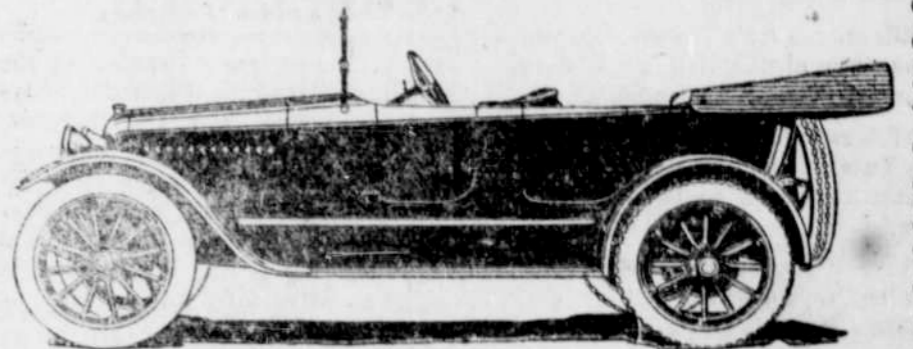
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utely nothing happened, but I don't ever want to feel again the way I felt going up that hill.

Shortly after this I learned that the



The British Tommy Will Gamble With, On or For Anything.

British Tommy is a great gambler and will gamble with, on or for anything. Trench pools used to be very popular. About ten fellows got together, and each put 10 francs in a pool just before they went into action. They left

this money with some one behind the lines, for they would be in action anywhere from six days to three weeks.

The idea of the pool was this: Those who lived to get back would take the money and split it evenly among themselves. If only one lived he would have the whole lot. Sometimes the pools would be fairly big and sometimes the reverse, but whatever they had went in.

It was the only gamble I ever saw where you couldn't lose. If you came out safely you were bound to get your own money back at least.

The Tommies are strong for carrying pets with them too. They keep canaries, rats, mice, dogs, cats, goats and even pigs, and they will go hungry themselves rather than see the object of their affections want for anything. On the march if they get tired they may throw their equipment away, but I never heard of one yet who would give up his mascot.

During the winter there was a lot of talk about the "mad major." He was an artillery officer who was just about the biggest daredevil I ever heard of. He kept an aeroplane himself, and if he wanted to correct a range he would go and drop smoke bombs over the point he wanted to get. He was absolutely fearless and would fly so low that they would be potting at him with revolvers, but it didn't seem to bother him.

I have heard that he did more damage with his battery than a whole brigade of ordinary artillery could under ordinary circumstances. I don't know

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