GOOD ROADS,
GOOD HOMES,
BEST CHEESE

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MY FOURTEEN MONTHS AT THE FRONT

An American Boy's Baptism of Fire

By WILLIAM J. ROBINSON

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.

One of the most terrible things I ever witnessed was the destruction of the chateau at Hooge. The chateau was in a very peculiar position, being on the dead ground between our trenches and the Germans. Sometimes we would hold it and sometimes they would, and it offered great chances to both for sniping.

Sometimes we held part of it, and they would hold the other part. Then there was some great hand to hand fighting. Our fellows in one room would be digging holes through the wall to pot at Germans in the next. It was so close to our trenches that we did not dare to shell it, and the same thing applied to the Germans. It was decided to mine the thing and blow it off the face of the earth. I think the Germans had decided the same thing, and it was simply a case of who would get their mines laid first.

We got the jump on them, and when everything was ready our boys enticed the Germans into it, and then the work of destruction started. I was sitting on horseback behind some staff officers. We were about half a mile from the place, but we had our ears stuffed with cotton to prevent the explosion from injuring our hearing.

When the mines were set off we saw a sight such as one observes only once in a lifetime. The earth trembled, a low, growling rumble ensued, then a mighty crash, and the air was filled with smoke, flame, bricks, dust, flying bodies, heads, legs and arms. Our fellows let out a mighty cheer and charged across the crater formed by the explosion. The Germans seemed stunned by the awful sight they had witnessed, and we took several lines of trenches from them with very little trouble. The losses on the German side were terrible, and we lost heavily ourselves. The chateau at Hooge will always be remembered by those who saw it.

The King Mounted the Beautiful Horse That Was Waiting For Him.

His majesty the king paid his armies a visit in the fall, and as I had never seen King George I was much interested. I had seen the king of Belgium and also President Poincare of France, but up to this time I had never seen the king for whom I was fighting.

We were warned the day before, and every one had to be bright and shining for the big event. The king drove up in a car bearing the royal standard on it, and you may be sure that car was given the right of way over everything. Two dispatch riders had dashed along the road ahead of the car, clearing the way so that nothing should delay the royal party. I was one of a large detail of mounted men who acted as escort to his majesty.

When he left the car he mounted the beautiful horse that was waiting for him, and, escorted by the guard, he rode out to the reviewing stand. He made a speech to the men, who were formed up on the parade, and he thanked them for their loyalty and devotion to England in her time of need.

I could only hear a few words of his address, as I was stationed quite a distance away from him. As he finished the speech he saluted. The fellows threw their hats into the air and let out a mighty cheer. When this happened every horse on the ground, including my own, stood right up on his hind legs and reached for the blue skies above.

The king was thrown in some way and sustained injuries that were rather serious. The accident acted as a damper to the enthusiasm, and the king's visit ended much differently than was expected.

CHAPTER XII.

Last Day at the Front.

THE last engagement of any importance that I was in was the big attack at Loos in September. In a big attack like this no one knows but the commanders just where the real thrust is coming. Several attacks are made, and for all we knew ours might be the real one, or the real one might be twenty miles away from us.

It happened that at the time of the last attack we were almost sure that the big drive was coming through us. We were ordered to be ready to move at a moment's notice, and all preparations were made for a big shift. When the attack came we thought that we were on our way at last, and everybody was "counting chickens."

There certainly was some terrible fighting, and if all we were supposed to do was to keep the Germans interested on our front we were very successful. Several things in this engagement deserve mention, and among the first is the famous charge of the London Irish.

They had not been heard of very much up to this time, but I don't think there are many who don't know of them now. They received orders to take certain trenches at a certain time, and on the face of it the thing looked impossible. The odds were all against them, and they knew it, but there was nothing for it but to obey their orders.

Nearly all the regiments have footballs with which they amuse themselves while in rest camp, and when they go into action these footballs are taken right along with them. When the whistle blew for the London Irish to charge they threw their footballs over the parapet and made their charge dribbling the footballs in front of them.

It was the most reckless, daredevil thing I ever saw, and it accomplished the impossible for them. As I said, by all rights the entire regiment should have been wiped out, as the odds were against them and they were running right into a death trap. The fact that they went at it in such a devil may care way as to joke and play with footballs in the very face of certain death broke the Germans' nerve, and they gave way with practically no resistance at all. Instead of the regiment being wiped out, as it should have been, the men took the trenches with losses of under 100. It was wonderful.

I have referred to the work of our aeroplanes in various parts of this story, but I think that noncombatants sometimes fail to realize what an important and effective part the Royal Flying corps is playing in this war. Aeroplanes themselves are still pretty dangerous modes of locomotion, and when it comes to running other risks for the sake of gaining information or doing material damage it needs a man who does not know what the slightest qualm of fear is and who is cool and ready for action in the case of emergency to make a good military aviator.

We have several aviators in our squadrons who have made big names for themselves. Among them are Captain Strange, D. S. O.; Lieutenant Hawker, V. C., D. S. O., M. C., and also Robert Lorraine, the popular actor, who is commonly known as the "actor-airman."

These three in particular have distinguished themselves on our little front. Captain Strange has a lame foot, but he has done some of the finest work of the war. In three days he destroyed three stations or big rail centers which were of great importance to the Germans. In each case he employed the same methods. He flew over the point he was aiming for, stopped his engine, did a nose dive to within a few hundred feet of the place, dropped his bomb and got away safely. Each time he came back with the planes of his machine riddled with bullets. It takes an awful lot of nerve to do a thing like that.

Lieutenant Hawker was the terror of the "Avatiks" and taubes, and he has been known to fight three of these big machines single handed, destroying two and putting the other one to flight. Mr. Hawker longed for a chance to get mixed up with a Zeppelin, and on one occasion he nearly realized his wish.

It was a bright moonlight night last summer when everything was as quiet and peaceful as one could wish it to be. A scattering rifle fire could be heard from the trenches, but there was really nothing doing at all. About 9 or 10 o'clock we heard the hum of an engine away above us, and we thought, of course, it was an aeroplane. As it came nearer we realized that no aeroplane engine could make so much noise as that, and very soon word was passed around that there was a Zeppelin above us.

Very few of us had ever seen a Zeppelin, and we were more than straining our eyes to catch a glimpse of this one. Judging from the noise of the engine, it seemed as though the thing kept circling around over our encampment; but, try as hard as we could, we were unable to catch sight of it.

It had not been over us so very long before we heard a motor engine start up at the flying grounds, and word came around that Lieutenant Hawker was going up after it. Soon we saw an aeroplane shoot up over the tree tops and commence to circle around, gaining altitude every moment. It was quickly lost to view, though, and soon the engines of the Zeppelin could be heard no longer, so we concluded that it had made off. Lieutenant Hawker flew until daylight; but, much to his disappointment, he failed to find the Zeppelin.

Another aviator who became famous was Commander Sampson of the Royal Naval Air Service. At the beginning of the war he did so much damage with his aeroplane that a price was put upon his head by the German authorities. We heard that the sum of £1,000 was offered for Commander Sampson, dead or alive. This did not make any difference to him so far as his work was concerned, and he did just as much damage after the fact became known as he did before.

Nor was his activity confined to air work. He had an armored car that he used to go out in, and the exciting event of the day used to be to watch Commander Sampson's return. He seldom failed to bring back prisoners, and the damage he did to the Germans with the machine gun was fearful.

Last spring we had a new type of aeroplane come out, and it was a beau-

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