"OVER THE TOP"

BY AN AMERICAN SOLDIER WHO WENT ☆ ☆

ARTHUR GUY EMPEY

MACHINE GUNNER, SERVING IN FRANCE

EMPEY LEARNS, AS COMRADE FALLS, THAT DEATH LURKS ALWAYS IN THE TRENCHES

Synopsis.—Fired by the sinking of the Lusitania, with the loss of American lives, Arthur Guy Empey, an American living in Jersey City, goes to England and enlists as a private in the British army. After a short experience as a recruiting officer in London, he is sent to training quarters in France, where he first hears the sound of big guns and makes the acquaintance of "cooties." After a brief period of training Empey's company is sent into the front-line trenches, where he takes his first turn on the fire step while the bullets whiz overhead. Empey learns, as comrade falls, that death lurks always in the trenches.

CHAPTER VIII.

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The Little Wooden Cross.

After remaining in rest billets for eight days, we received the unwelcome tidings that the next morning we would "go in" to "take over." At six in the morning our march started and, after a long march down the dusty road, we again arrived at reserve billets.

I was No. 1 in the leading set of fours. The man on my left was named "Pete Walling," a cheery sort of fellow. He laughed and joked all the way on the march, buoying up my drooping spirits. I could not figure out anything attractive in again occupying the front line, but Pete did not seem to mind, said it was all in a lifetime. My left heel was blistered from the rubbing of my heavy marching boot. Pete noticed that I was limping and offered to carry my rifle, but by this time I had learned the ethics of the march in the British army and courteously refused his offer.

We had gotten half-way through the communication trench, Pete in my immediate rear. He had his hand on my shoulder, as men in a communication trench have to do to keep in touch with each other. We had just climbed over a bashed-in part of the trench when in our rear a man tripped over a loose signal wire, and let out an oath. As usual, Pete rushed to his help. To reach the fallen man he had to cross this bashed-in part. A bullet cracked in the air and I ducked. Then a moan from the rear. My heart stood still. I went back and Pete was lying on the ground. By the aid of my flashlight I saw that he had his hand pressed to his right breast. The fingers were covered with blood. I flashed the light on his face and in its glow a grayish-blue color was stealing over his countenance. Pete looked up at me and said: "Well, Yank, they've done me in. I can feel myself going West." His voice was getting fainter and I had to kneel down to get his words. Then he gave me a message to write home to his mother and his sweetheart, and I, like a great big boob, cried like a baby. I was losing my first friend of the trenches.

Word was passed to the rear for a stretcher. He died before it arrived. Two of us put the body on the stretcher and carried it to the nearest first-aid post, where the doctor took an official record of Pete's name, number, rank and regiment from his identity disk, this to be used in the casualty lists and notification to his family.

We left Pete there, but it broke our hearts to do so. The doctor informed us that we could bury him the next morning. That afternoon five of the boys of our section, myself included, went to the little ruined village in the rear and from the deserted gardens of the French chateaux gathered grass and flowers. From these we made a wreath.

While the boys were making this wreath, I sat under a shot-scarred apple tree and carved out the following verses on a little wooden shield which we nailed on Pete's cross.

True to his God; true to Britain,
Doing his duty to the last,
Just one more name to be written
On the Roll of Honor of heroes passed—

Passed to their God, enshrined in glory,
Entering life of eternal rest,
One more chapter in England's story
Of her sons doing their best.

Rest, you soldier, mate so true,
Never forgotten by us below;
Know that we are thinking of you,
Ere to our rest we are bidden to go.

Next morning the whole section went over to say good-by to Pete, and laid him away to rest.

After each one had a look at the face of the dead, a corporal of the R. A. M. C. sewed up the remains in a blanket. Then placing two heavy ropes across the stretcher (to be used in lowering the body into the grave), we lifted Pete onto the stretcher, and reverently covered him with a large union jack, the flag he had died for.

The chaplain led the way, then came the officers of the section, followed by two of the men carrying a wreath. Immediately after came poor Pete on the flag-draped stretcher, carried by four soldiers. I was one of the four. Behind the stretcher, in column of fours, came the remainder of the section.

To get to the cemetery, we had to pass through the little shell-destroyed village, where troops were hurrying to and fro.

As the funeral procession passed these troops came to the "attention" and smartly saluted the dead.

Poor Pete was receiving the only salute a private is entitled to "somewhere in France."

Now and again a shell from the German lines would go whistling over the village to burst in our artillery lines in the rear.

When we reached the cemetery we halted in front of an open grave, and laid the stretcher beside it. Forming

Lewis Gun in Action.

a hollow square around the opening of the grave, the chaplain read the burial service.

German machine-gun bullets were "cracking" in the air above us, but Pete didn't mind, and neither did we.

When the body was lowered into the grave the flag having been removed, we clicked our heels together and came to the salute.

I left before the grave was filled in. I could not bear to see the dirt thrown on the blanket-covered face of my comrade. On the western front there are no coffins, and you are lucky to get a blanket to protect you from the wet and the worms. Several of the section stayed and decorated the grave with white stones.

That night, in the light of a lonely candle in the machine gunner's dugout of the front-line trench I wrote two letters. One to Pete's mother, the other to his sweetheart. While doing this I cursed the Prussian war god with all my heart, and I think that St. Peter noted same.

The machine gunners in the dugout were laughing and joking. To them Pete was unknown. Pretty soon, in the warmth of their merriment, my blues disappeared. One soon forgets on the western front.

CHAPTER IX.

Suicide Annex.

I was in my first dugout and looked around curiously. Over the door of same was a little sign reading "Suicide Annex." One of the boys told me that this particular front trench was called "Suicide Ditch." Later on I learned that machine gunners and bombers are known as the "Suicide Club."

That dugout was muddy. The men slept in mud, washed in mud, ate mud, and dreamed mud. I had never before realized that so much discomfort and misery could be contained in those three little letters, M U D. The floor of the dugout was an inch deep in water. Outside it was raining cats and dogs, and thin rivulets were trickling down the steps. From the air shaft immediately above me came a drip, drip, drip. Suicide Annex was a hole eight feet wide, ten feet long and six feet high. It was about twenty feet below the fire trench; at least there were twenty steps leading down to it. These steps were cut into the earth, but at that time were muddy and slippery. A man had to be very careful or else he would "shoot the chutes." The air was foul, and you could cut the smoke from Tommy's fags with a knife. It was cold. The walls and roof were supported with heavy square-cut timbers, while the entrance was strengthened with sandbags. Nails had been driven into these timbers. On each nail hung a miscellaneous assortment of equipment. The lighting arrangements were superb—one candle in a reflector made from an ammunition tin. My teeth were chattering from the cold, and the drip from the airshaft did not help matters much. While I was sitting bemoaning my fate and wishing for the fireside at home, the fellow next to me, who was writing a letter, looked up and innocently asked, "Say, Yank, how do you spell 'conflagration'?"

I looked at him in contempt and answered that I did not know.

From the darkness in one of the corners came a thin, piping voice singing one of the popular trench ditties entitled:

"Pack up your Troubles in your Old Kit Bag, and Smile, Smile, Smile."

Every now and then the singer would stop to cough, cough, cough, but it was a good illustration of Tommy's cheerfulness under such conditions.

A machine-gun officer entered the dugout and gave me a hard look. I sneaked past him, sliding and slipping, and reached my section of the front-line trench, where I was greeted by the sergeant, who asked me, "Where in —— 'ave you been?"

I made no answer, but sat on the muddy fire step, shivering with the cold and with the rain beating in my face. About half an hour later I teamed up with another fellow and went on guard with my head sticking over the top. At ten o'clock I was relieved and resumed my sitting position on the fire step. The rain suddenly stopped and we all breathed a sigh of relief. We prayed for the morning and the rum issue.

CHAPTER X.

"The Day's Work."

I was fast learning that there is a regular routine about the work of the trenches, although it is badly upset at times by the Germans.

The real work in the fire trench commences at sundown. Tommy is like a burglar, he works at night.

Just as it begins to get dark the word "stand to" is passed from traverse to traverse, and the men get busy. The first relief, consisting of two men to a traverse, mount the fire step, one man looking over the top, while the other sits at his feet, ready to carry messages or to inform the platoon officer of any report made by the sentry as to his observations in No Man's Land. The sentry is not allowed to relax his watch for a second. If he is questioned from the trench or asked his orders, he replies without turning around or taking his eyes from the expanse of dirt in front of him. The remainder of the occupants of his traverse either sit on the fire step, with bayonets fixed, ready for any emergency, or if lucky, and a dugout happens to be in the near vicinity of the traverse, and if the night is quiet, they are permitted to go to same and try and snatch a few winks of sleep. Little sleeping is done; generally the men sit around, smoking fags and seeing who can tell the biggest lie. Some of them, perhaps with their feet in water, would write home sympathizing with the "governor" because he was laid up with a cold, contracted by getting his feet wet on his way to work in Woolwich arsenal. If a man should manage to doze off, likely as not he would wake with a start as the clammy, cold feet of a rat passed over his face, or the next relief stepped on his stomach while stumbling on their way to relieve the sentries in the trench.

Just try to sleep with a belt full of ammunition around you, your rifle bolt biting into your ribs, intrenching tool handle sticking into the small of your back, with a tin hat for a pillow and feeling very damp and cold, with "cooties" boring for oil in your armpits, the air foul from the stench of grimy human bodies and smoke from a juicy pipe being whiffed into your nostrils, then you will not wonder why Tommy occasionally takes a turn in the trench for a rest.

While in a front-line trench orders forbid Tommy from removing his boots, puttees, clothing or equipment. The "cooties" take advantage of this order and mobilize their forces, and Tommy swears vengeance on them and mutters to himself, "Just wait until I hit rest billets and am able to get my own back."

Just before daylight the men "turn to" and tumble out of the dugouts, man the fire step until it gets light, or the welcome order "stand down" is given. Sometimes before "stand down" is ordered, the command "five rounds rapid" is passed along the trench. This means that each man must rest his rifle on the top and fire as rapidly as possible five shots aimed toward the German trenches, and then duck (with the emphasis on the "duck"). There is a great rivalry between the opposing forces to get their rapid fire all off first, because the early bird, in this instance, catches the worm—sort of gets the jump on the other fellow, catching him unawares.

Empey goes "over the top" for the first time and has a hand-to-hand fight with a giant Prussian. In the next installment he tells the story of this thrilling charge.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

NUISANCE ALL TOO COMMON

No Doubt the Majority of Our Readers Have Met at Some Time the "Big Money" Boy.

Step up a little closer, patrons, look 'em over good, then take your seats and set back for a listen. Y'know this windbag, the big money boy. Oh, yeh! Go ahead, you tickle us. This pipe dream is always putting across some "big deal" expecting a "clean up," "got a tip," etc., and all that fat chatter. His melody goes a buzz this way:

"Well, things look merry for me, I'll say. Got in on a deal this morning; if it goes through, means much 'Jack,' a 'gas roller' and easy picking for me to last some moons. Can't tell you what it's about just yet. Backed up by so and so of the so and so corporation, and he's sinking all his interest collection on it, so you see what a blazer it is or he wouldn't be in it. I'm to be one of the main squeezes, hold stock, and go on the road at $100 per Saturday, 25 per cent commish and traveling expenses," etc., etc.

Listen! This rummy has more wind than a deck of cyclones. He imagines more money in an hour than the mint turns out in a month. Call his bluff and tell him to go settle his laundry bill with the Chinaman. Remember: They are not putting signs up in the back windows, "President Wanted."—Washington Herald.

The Born Orator.

It is narrated that Colonel Breckenridge, meeting Major Buffo'd on the streets of Lexington, asked:

"What is the meaning, suh, of the conco'se befo' the co'thouse?"

To which the majah replied:

"General Buckneh, suh, is making a speech. General Buckneh, suh, is a bo'n oratah."

"What do you mean by a bo'n oratah?"

"If you, or I, suh, were asked how much two and two make, we would reply: 'Foh.' When this is asked a bo'n oratah he replies: 'When in the co'se of human events it becomes necessa'y to take an integeh of the second denomination and add it, suh, to an integeh of the same denomination, the result, suh, and I have the science of mathematics to back me in my judgment, the result, suh, and I say it without feah of successful contradiction, suh, the result is foh.' That's a bo'n oratah."—Rehobath Sunday Herald.

Her Work.

Congresswoman Jeannette Rankin said in a Y. W. C. A. address:

"Charles Schwab married on $7 a week, and Chauncey Depew on $9. I have no sympathy with the girl who makes a devoted young man wait till he can support her as luxuriously as her old father does.

"My sympathy all goes out to the young man who said joyously, as soon as he was accepted:

"'Then, darling, we'll get married at once. Of course, at first, we shan't be able to keep a servant.'

"'Oh, Jack, hadn't we better wait, then?' she protested. 'What would the neighbors say if they saw me doing my own work?'

"Jack looked puzzled.

"'Why, sweetheart,' he said, 'whose work do you want to do?'"

Muscular Activity and Heat.

Owls and other birds which are active at night show a rise of temperature during the hours of darkness and a fall during the day. This is a result of the well-known fact that muscular activity means an increased production of heat.

FOR BETTER ROADS

SPEED GOOD ROADS BUILDING

Federal Supervision of Nation's Highways Is Being Urged—Military Value Is Shown.

A few days ago a big government motortruck stuck hard and fast in a rut on the road between Washington and Baltimore. A commercial truck tried to get around it from one direction and another government truck from the other direction. Both of these also stuck. Soon this over-traveled road, for a mile each way, was jammed with squawking cars and trucks. All traffic was stalled for the better part of a day, with the result that war work was delayed, suburbanites were late to dinner and thirsty Washingtonians were unable to reach the Maryland oasis.

This incident is no special discredit to the Maryland road builders. The Washington-Baltimore road was not built for the amount and kind of traffic it is now bearing. The same is true of many other highways in all parts of the country. More and more motortrucks are taking over what used to be "short haul" railroad freight. And the short haul that is accomplished by motortruck has gradually lengthened from ten or fifteen miles until now much freight is carried 200 miles in trucks.

Such facts are the basis of a drive being made on congress for legislation to empower the federal government to unify roads of the country into a comprehensive system and to spend the money necessary to make the roads adequate to meet the new requirements. The federal government, it is claimed by proponents of the plan, must do the work, because a central authority is absolutely necessary to the perfection of a national system of roads.

The federal government should spend the money, they say, because their military value makes the roads a great national asset. This military value of good roads is already shown by the dependence which the government is placing upon them for the moving of troops and supplies. In Europe it has been even more convincingly demonstrated. It has been said that good roads saved France and the lack of them defeated Russia. It is

Sand and Gravel Piled on Subgrade Ready for Use on Experimental Concrete Road, Chevy Chase, Md.

certainly true that the French had the best roads in the world when the war broke out and that the men and supplies which checked the first German rush went forward largely by motor. It is also true that a breakdown of all transportation facilities prevented Russia from effectually mobilizing her tremendous resources.

There is now a federal office of good roads, operating under the federal road act, whereby the government appropriates funds for roads, provided the states in which the roads are to be built will appropriate a similar amount. This gives the government the power to recommend the improvement or building of certain roads and to disapprove the improvement or building of others. It may exercise a sort of advisory and mildly compulsory power toward the establishment of a unified national system of roads. But this power, it is argued, is by no means sufficient in an emergency like the present. What is needed is the power to form a definite plan for a system of national highways, and the funds to carry that plan into execution as rapidly as possible.