



"OVER THERE"

The Thrill and the Hell of the Trenches, Described by an American Boy.

Sergeant Alexander McClintock of Lexington, Ky., and the Canadian Army Has Greeting Tale That Every American Will Read. For He Tells the Facts—Unadorned. Wounded, a Distinguished Conduct Medal Man, He Was Invalided Home, but Is Going "Out There" Again to Fight For Uncle Sam and His Allies. An Inspiring, Interesting, Personal Narrative, Full of the Spirit and Atmosphere of the Trenches.

No. 1. In Training
By Sergeant Alexander McClintock, D. C. M., 87th Overseas Batt., Canadian Gren. Guards.
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FOREWORD.

Here is a literary product which is at once an admirable example of the force of simple realism in the description of things which are difficult of ordinary comprehension, and a handbook and guide for every prospective soldier of our armies.

Sergeant McClintock has not written stories about the war. He has written the war itself, reducing it, one might almost say, to words of one syllable, yet bringing to the reader's view, clearly and vividly, the various aspects of the great struggle, hidden to all except the man who is actually a part of it. His contribution to the history of the war must be classed as one which shines with a new light.

It is fascinating in its simplicity, yet thrilling in its convincing detail. It leads one, with ever-growing and compelling interest, from a casual conversation in a hotel in New York through scenes of strife and blood and thrilling conflict to the moment when the king and queen of England came to the bedside of a Kentucky youth in a London hospital to thank him in the name of their nation for his services in the cause which we have now come to recognize as that of world humanity.

Sergeant McClintock received the Distinguished Conduct medal for leaving England for home on leave. He is returning to accept a commission in the Canadian overseas forces. The story is told in McClintock's own unadorned way.

I DON'T lay claim to being much of a writer, and up till now I have never felt the call to write anything about my experiences with the Canadian troops in Belgium and France, because I have realized that a great many other men saw quite as much as I did and could beat me telling about it. Of course I believed that my experience was worth relating, and I thought that the matter published in the newspapers by professional writers sort of missed the essentials and lacked the spirit of the "ditches" in a good many ways in spite of its excellent literary style, but I didn't see any reason why it was up to me to make an effort as a war historian until now.

Now there is a reason, as I look at it. I believe I can show the two or three millions of my fellow countrymen who will be "out there" before this war is over what they are going to be up against and what they ought to prepare for personally and individually.

That is as far as I am going to go in the way of excuse, explanation or com-



"Boys, for God's sake don't call me Harry. Here comes the general!"

ment, call it what you will. The rest of my story is a simple relation of facts and occurrences in the order in which they came to my notice and happened to me. It may start off a little slowly and jerkily, just as we did, not knowing what was coming to us. I'd like to add that it got quite hot enough to suit me later several times. Therefore, as my effort is going to be to carry you right along with me in this account of my experiences, don't be

impatient if nothing very important seems to come off at first. I felt a little ennuil myself at the getway. But that was certainly one thing that didn't annoy me later.

In the latter part of October, 1915, I decided that the United States ought to be fighting along with England and France on account of the way Belgium had been treated, if for no other reason. As there seemed to be a considerable division of opinion on this point among the people at home, I came to the conclusion that any man who was free, white and twenty-one and felt as I did ought to go over and get into it single handed on the side where his convictions led him, if there wasn't some particular reason why he couldn't. Therefore I said goodby to my parents and friends in Lexington and started for France and joining the Foreign legion of the French army.

Decides to Go to Canada.

A couple of nights after I got to New York I fell into conversation in the Knickerbocker bar with a chap who was in the re-enforcement company of Princess Pat's regiment of the Canadian forces. After my talk with him I decided to go up to Canada and look things over. I arrived at the Windsor hotel, in Montreal, at 8 o'clock in the morning a couple of days later, and at 10 o'clock that morning I was sworn in as a private in the Canadian Grenadier guards, Eighty-seventh overseas battalion, Lieutenant Colonel F. S. Meighen commanding. They were just getting under way, making soldiers out of the troops I enlisted with, and discipline was quite lax.

They at once gave me a week's leave to come down to New York and settle up some personal affairs, and I overstayed it five days. All that my company commander said to me when I got back was that I seemed to have picked up Canadian habits very quickly. At a review one day in our training camp I heard a major say:

"Boys, for God's sake don't call me Harry or spit in the ranks. Here comes the general!"

We found out eventually that there was a reason for the slackness of discipline. The trouble was that men would enlist to get \$1.10 a day without working for it and would desert as soon as any one made it unpleasant for them. Our officers knew what they were about. Conditions changed instantly we went on shipboard. Discipline tightened up on us like a tie rope on a coil.

We trained in a sort of casual, easy way in Canada from Nov. 4 to the following April. We had a good deal of trouble keeping our battalion up to strength, and I was sent out several times with other "noncoms" on a recruiting detail. While we were in the training camp at St. John's I made the acquaintance of a young Canadian who became my "pal." He was Campbell McFarland, nephew of George McFarland, the actor who is so well known on the American musical stage. He was a sergeant. When I first knew him he was one of the most delightful and amusing young fellows you could imagine.

The war changed him entirely. He became extremely quiet and seemed to be borne down with the sense of the terrible things which he saw. He never lost the good fellowship which was inherent in him and was always ready to do anything to oblige me, but he formed the habit of sitting, alone and silent, for hours at a time, just thinking. It seemed as if he had a premonition about himself, though he never showed fear and never spoke of the dangers we were going into, as the other fellows did. He was killed in the Somme action in which I was wounded.

I also had been made a sergeant on account of the fact that I had been at school in the Virginia Military Institute—that is, I was an acting sergeant. It was explained to me that my appointment would have to be confirmed in England and then reconfirmed after three months' service in France. Under the regulations of the Canadian forces a noncommissioned officer, after final confirmation in his grade, can be reduced to the ranks only by a general court martial, though he can escape a court martial, when confronted with charges, by reverting to the ranks at his own request.

Forty-two hundred of us sailed for England on the Empress of Britain, sister ship to the Empress of Ireland, which was sunk in the St. Lawrence river. The steamer was, of course, very crowded and uncomfortable, and the eight day trip across was most unpleasant. We had to eat until we were sick of the sight of it. A sergeant reported one morning, "Eight men and twenty-two breakfasts absent." There were two other troop ships in our convoy, the Baltic and the

Metagama. A British cruiser escorted us until we were 400 miles off the coast of Ireland. Then each ship picked up a destroyer which had come out to meet her. At that time a notice was posted in the purser's office informing us that we were in the war zone and that the ship would not stop for anything, even for a man overboard. That day a soldier fell off the Metagama with \$700 in his pocket, and the ship never even hesitated. They left him where he had no chance in the world to spend his money.

"Make a Break!"

Through my training in the V. M. I. I was able to read semaphore signals, and I caught the message from the destroyer which escorted us. It read:

"Each ship for herself now. Make a break!"

We beat the other steamers of our convoy eight hours in getting to the dock in Liverpool, and, according to what seemed to be the regular system of our operations at that time, we were the last to disembark.

The majority of our fellows had never been in England before, and they looked on our travels at that time as a fine lark. Everybody cheered and laughed when they dusted off one of those little toy trains and brought it up to take us away in it. After we were aboard of it we proceeded at the dizzy rate of about four miles an hour, and our regular company humorist—no company complete without one—suggested that they were afraid, if they went any faster, they might run off the island before they could stop.

We were taken to Bramshot camp, in Hampshire, twelve miles from the Aldershot school of command. The next day we were given "king's leave"—eight days, with free transportation anywhere in the British Isles. It is the invariable custom to give this sort of leave to all colonial troops immediately upon their arrival in England. However, in our case Ireland was barred. Just at that time Ireland was no place for a newly arrived Canadian looking for sport.

After that they really began to make soldiers of us. We thought our training in Canada had amounted to something. We found out that we might as well have been playing croquet.



After That They Really Began to Make Soldiers of Us.

We learned more the first week of our actual training in England than we did from November to April in Canada. I make this statement without fear that any officer or man of the Canadian forces alive today will disagree with me, and I submit it for the thoughtful consideration of the gentlemen who believe that our own armies can be prepared for service here at home.

In this war every man has got to be a specialist. He's got to know one thing better than anybody else except those who have had intensive instruction in the same branch. And, besides that, he's got to have effective general knowledge of all the specialties in which his fellow soldiers have been particularly trained. I can illustrate this. Immediately upon our return from first leave in England we were divided into sections for training in eight specialties. They were: Bombing, sniping, scouting, machine gun fighting, signaling, trench mortar operation, bayonet fighting and stretcher bearing.

I was selected for special training in bombing, probably because I was supposed, as an American and a baseball player, to be expert in throwing. With the other men picked for training in the same specialty, I was sent to Aldershot, and there for three weeks, twelve hours a day, I threw bombs, studied bombs, read about bombs, took bombs to pieces to see what made them tick and put them together again and did practically everything else that you could do with a bomb, except eat it.

Then I was ordered back along with the other men who had gained this intimate acquaintance with the entire bomb family, and we were put to work teaching the entire battalion all that we had learned. When we were not teaching we were under instruction ourselves by the men who had taken special training in other branches. Also at certain periods of the day we had physical training and rifle practice. Up to the time of our arrival in England intensive training had been merely a fine phrase with us. During our stay there it was a definite and overpowering fact. Day and night we trained, and day and night it rained. At 9 o'clock we would fall into our bunkers in huts which held from a half to a whole platoon—from thirty to six-

ty men—and drop into exhausted sleep, only to turn out at 5 a. m. to give a sudden and exact imitation of what we would do to the Germans if they sneaked up on us before breakfast in six inches of mud. Toward the last, when we thought we had been driven to the limit, they told us that we were to have a period of real intensive training to harden us for actual fighting. They sent us four imperial drill sergeants from the British grenadier guards, the senior foot regiment of the British army and the one with which we were affiliated.

It would be quite unavailing for me to attempt to describe these drill sergeants. The British drill sergeant is an institution which can be understood only through personal and close contact and is about as cordial as loose electricity. If he thinks a major general is wrong he'll tell him so on the spot in the most emphatic way, but without ever violating a single sacred tradition of the service. The sergeants who took us in charge to put on the real polish to our training had all seen from twenty to twenty-five years of service. They had all been through the battles of Mons and the Marne, and they had all been wounded. They were perfect examples of a type. One of them ordered all of our commissioned officers, from the colonel down, to turn out for rifle drill one day and put them through the manual of arms while the soldiers of the battalion stood around looking on.

"Gentlemen," said he very politely in the midst of the drill, "when I see you handle your rifles I feel like falling on my knees and thanking God that we've got a navy."

A Call for Volunteers.

On June 2, after the third battle of Ypres, while McFarland and I were sitting wearily on our bunks during a strange hour in the afternoon when nobody had thought of anything for us to do, a soldier came in with a message from headquarters which put a sudden stop to the discussion we were having about the possibility of getting leave to go up to London. The message was that the First, Second and Third divisions of the Canadians had lost 40 per cent of their men in the third fight at Ypres and that 300 volunteers were wanted from each of our battalions to fill up the gaps.

"Forty per cent," said McFarland, getting up quickly. "My God, think of it! Well, I'm off to tell 'em I'll go."

I told him I was with him, and we started for headquarters, expecting to be received with applause and pointed out as heroic examples. We couldn't even get up to give in our names. The whole battalion had gone up ahead of us. They heard about it first. That was the spirit of the Canadians. It was about this time that a story went round concerning an English colonel who had been called upon to furnish volunteers from his outfit to replace casualties. He backed his regiment up against a barrack wall and said:

"Now, all who don't want to volunteer step three paces to the rear."

In our battalion sergeants and even officers offered to go as privates. McFarland and I were not accepted; our volunteers went at once, and we were re-enforced up to strength by drafts from the Fifth Canadian division, which was then forming in England.

In July, when we were being kept on the rifle ranges most of the time, all leave was stopped, and we were ordered to hold ourselves in readiness to go overseas. In the latter part of the month we started. We sailed from Southampton to Havre on a big transport, escorted all the way by destroyers. As we landed we got our first sight of the harvest of war. A big hospital on the quay was filled with wounded men. We had twenty-four hours in what they called a "rest camp." We slept on cobbles in shacks which were so utterly uncomfortable that it would be an insult to a Kentucky thoroughbred to call them stables. Then we were on the way to the Belgian town of Poperinghe, which is 150 miles from Havre and was at that time the rail head of the Ypres salient. We made the trip in box cars which were marked in French, "Eight horses or forty men," and we had to draw straws to decide who should lie down.

In the Front Trenches.

We got into Poperinghe at 7 a. m., and the scouts had led us into the front trenches at 2 the next morning. Our position was to the left of St. Eloi and was known as "the island," because it had no support on either flank. On the left were the Yser canal and the bluff which forms its bank. On the right were 300 yards of battered down trenches, which had been rebuilt twice and blown in again each time by the German guns. For some reason, which I never quite understood, the Germans were able to drop what seemed a tolerably large proportion of the output of the Krupp works on this particular spot whenever they wanted to. Our high command had concluded that it was untenable, and so we, on one side of it, and the British, on the other, had to just keep it scouted and protect our separate flanks. Another name they had for that position was the "bird cage." That was because the first fellows who moved into it made themselves nice and comfy and put up wire nettings to prevent any one from tossing bombs in on them. Thus, when the Germans stirred up the spot with an accurate shower of "whiz bangs" and "coal boxes," the same being thirteen pounders and six inch shells, that wire netting presented a spectacle of utter inadequacy which hasn't been equaled in this war.

They called the position which we were assigned to defend "the graveyard of Canada." That was because of the fearful losses of the Canadians here in the second battle of Ypres, from April 21 to June 1, 1915, when the first gas attack in the world's his-

tory was launched by the Germans, and, although the French on the left and the British on the right fell back, the Canadians stayed where they were put.

Right here I can mention something which will give you an idea why descriptions of this war don't describe it. During the first gas attack the Canadians, choking to death and falling over each other in a fight against a new and unheard of terror in warfare, found a way—the Lord only knows who first discovered it and how he happened to do it—to stay through a gas cloud and come out alive. It isn't pretty to think of, and it's like many other things in this war which you can't even tell of in print, because the simple description would violate the nice ethics about reading matter for the public eye which have grown up in long years of peace and traditional decency. But this thing which you can't describe meant just the difference between life and death to many of the Canadians that first day of the gas.



As Dawn Broke We Made Out a Big Painted Sign Above the German Front Trench.

Official orders now tell every soldier what he is to do with his handkerchief or a piece of his shirt if he is caught in a gas attack without his mask.

The nearest I can come in print to telling you what the soldier is ordered to do in this emergency is to remind you that ammonia fumes oppose chlorine gas as a neutralizing agent and that certain emanations of the body throw off ammonia fumes.

Now that I've told you how we got from the Knickerbocker bar and other places to a situation which was just 150 yards from the entrenched front of the German army in Belgium I might as well add a couple of details about things which straightway put fear of God in our hearts. At daybreak one of our Fourthenth platoon men, standing on the firing step, pushed back his trench helmet and remarked that he thought it was about time for coffee. He didn't get any. A German sharpshooter, firing the first time that day, got him under the rim of his helmet, and his career with the Canadian forces was over right there. And then, as the dawn broke, we made out a big painted sign raised above the German front trench. It read:

WELCOME, EIGHTY-SEVENTH CANADIANS

We were a new battalion. We had been less than seventy-two hours on the continent of Europe, and the Germans were not supposed to know anything that was going on behind our lines!

We learned afterward that concealed telephones in the houses of the Belgian burgomasters of the villages of Dinkelsbuech and Renninghelst, near our position, gave communication with the German headquarters opposite us. One of the duties of a detail of our men soon after that was to stand these two burgomasters up against a wall and shoot them.

In concluding this first article I want to say frankly that any man who claims he is not afraid when for the first time he goes into that hell of fire on the western front is a liar, and I'll tell him so to his face. Later we became impervious, but that first day I prayed, and I would have bent down and prayed only my knees shook so.

The five remaining articles in this remarkable series will appear one each week. They are as follows:

No. 2—The Bomb Raid.

The great preparations and rehearsing for this attack. Volunteers for the job taken behind the line where the German trenches are exactly reproduced. The days of preparation. Hereafter unwritten detail of modern trench raids. This article concludes with the men going out to their job.

No. 3—"Over the Top and Give 'Em Hell."

The English Tommy's battle cry as he breaks from his trench. The bomb raid and what happened. Of sixty that started forty-six failed to return because the Germans had prepared and mined the trench. Graphic description of Sergeant McClintock's terrible experience.

No. 4—Shifted to the Somme.

Sergeant McClintock takes part in the greatest of all battles and tells of the hell of it. The front in Belgium was really a rest sector in comparison with it," he says. The extensive preparations of the allies for open warfare afterward abandoned because of the failure of expected developments.

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