Gunner Depew

By

Albert N. Depew

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Member of the Foreign Legion of France
Captain Gun Turret, French Battleship Cassard
Winner of the Croix de Guerre

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DEPEW GOES "OVER THE TOP" AND GETS HIS FIRST GERMAN IN BAYONET FIGHT.

Synopsis.—Albert N. Depew, author of the story, tells of his service in the United States navy, during which he attained the rank of chief petty officer, first-class gunner. The world war starts soon after he receives his honorable discharge from the navy, and he leaves for France with a determination to enlist. He joins the Foreign Legion and is assigned to the dreadnaught Cassard, where his marksmanship wins him high honors. Later he is transferred to the land forces and sent to the Flanders front. He gets his first experience in a front line trench at Dixmude. Legionaries vow vengeance when Germans hide behind Belgian women and children.

CHAPTER VI—Continued.

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The lieutenant came back with the stretcher bearers and he asked one of them, so the boy could not hear him, if the boy would live.

The stretcher bearer said: "I don't think so. One through his chest and right leg broken."

The boy had kept quiet for a while, but all of a sudden he yelled, "Give me a cigarette!" I handed him a cigarette butt that I had found in the dugout. We were all out of cigarettes.

So they lit it for him and he kept quiet. As soon as they could they got around the corner of the fire bay with him and through a communication trench to a field hospital. The lieutenant and I walked a little way with him and he began to thank us, and he told the lieutenant, "Old man, you have been a father and a mother to me."

And the lieutenant said to him: "You have done well, old boy. You have done more than your share."

When they started into the communication trench the boy began to scream again. And the lieutenant acted like a wild man. He took out his cigarette case, but there were no cigarettes in it, and then he swore and put it back again. But in a few minutes he had the case out again and was swearing worse than ever and talking to himself.

"The boy isn't dying like a gentleman," he said. "Why couldn't he keep quiet." I do not think he meant it. He was all nervous and excited and kept taking out his cigarette case and putting it back again.

The other officer had gone on to inspect the sentries when the boy rolled into the trench and a poilu came up to tell us that the officer had been hit. We walked back to where I had been and there was the officer. If I had been there I would have got it too, I guess. He was an awful mess. The veins were sticking out of his neck and one side of him was blown off. Also, his foot was wounded. That is what shrapnel does to you. As I crawled past him I happened to touch his foot and he cursed me all over the place. But when I tried to say I was sorry I could not, for then he apologized and died a moment later.

There was a silver cigarette case sticking out of the rags where his side had been blown away and the lieutenant crossed himself and reached in and took out the case. But when he pried open the case he found that it had been bent and cracked and all the cigarettes were soaked with blood. He swore worse than ever, then, and threw his own case away, putting the other officer's case in his pocket.

At this point our own artillery began shelling and we received the order to stand to with fixed bayonets. When we got the order to advance some of the men were already over the parapet and the whole bunch after them, and, believe me, I was as pale as a sheet, just scared to death. I think every man is when he goes over for the first time—every time for that matter. But I was glad we were going to get some action, because it is hard to sit around in a trench under fire and have nothing to do. I had all I could do to hold my rifle.

We ran across No Man's Land. I cannot remember much about it. But when we got to the German trench I fell on top of a young fellow and my bayonet went right through him. It was a crime to get him, at that. He was as delicate as a pencil.

When I got back to our trenches after my first charge I could not sleep for a long time afterward, for remembering what that fellow looked like and how my bayonet slipped into him and how he screamed when he fell. He had his legs and his neck twisted under him after he got it. I thought about it a lot and it got to be almost a habit that whenever I was going to sleep I would think about him and then all hope of sleeping was gone.

Our company took a German trench that time and along with another company four hundred prisoners. We had to retire because the men on our sides did not get through and we were being flanked. But we lost a lot of men doing it.

When we returned to our trenches our outfit was simply all in and we were lying around in the front line, like a bunch of old rags in a narrow alley. None of us showed any signs of life except a working party that was digging with picks and shovels at stage bodies that had been frozen into the mud of the trench.

I used to think all the Germans were big and fat and strong, and, of course, some of the grenadier regiments are, but lots of the Boches I saw were little and weak like this fellow I "got" in my first charge.

It was a good piece of work to take the prisoners and a novelty for me to look them in the face—the fellows I had been fighting. Because, when you look a Hun in the face, you can see the yellow streak. Even if you are their prisoner you can tell that the Huns are yellow.

Maybe you have heard pigs being butchered. It sounded like that when we got to them. When they attacked us they yelled to beat the band. I guess they thought they could scare us. But you cannot scare machine guns nor the foreign legion either. So when they could not scare us they were up against it and had to fight. I will admit, though, that the first time Fritz came over and began yelling I thought the whole German army was after me, at that, and Kaiser Bill playing the drum. And how they hate a bayonet! They would much rather sit in a ditch and pot you.

I admit I am not crazy about bayonet fighting myself, as a general proposition, but I will say that there have been times when I was serving a gun behind the front lines when I wished for a rifle and a bayonet in my hands and a chance at Fritz man to man.

It was in this charge that our chaplain was put out of commission. As we were lined up, waiting to climb on to the fire step and then over the parapet, this chaplain came down the line speaking to each man as he went. He would not say much, but just a few words, and then make the sign of the cross. He was in a black cassock.

He was just one man from me as we got the word and stood up on the fire step. He was not armed with as much as a pin, but he jumped up on the step and stuck his head over the parapet and got it square, landing right beside me. I thought he was killed, but when we got back we found he was only wounded. The men who saw it were over the parapet before the order was given and then the whole bunch after them, because they, too, thought he was killed and figured he never would know how they came out about their vows. All the men in the company were glad when they found he was only wounded.

While half of us were on the firing step throughout the day or night the other half would be in the dugouts or sitting around in the bottom of the trench, playing little games, or mending clothes or sleeping or cooking or doing a thousand and one things. The men were always in good humor at such times and it seemed to me even more so when the enemy fire was heavy.

Stuck His Head Over the Parapet and Got It Square.

If a man was slightly wounded down would come the rifles to order arms, and some poilu was sure to shout, "Right this way. One franc." It was a standing joke and they always did it. The poilu who did it most was a Swiss and he was always playing a joke on somebody or imitating some one of us or making faces.

We were all sorry when this Swiss "went west," as the Limeys say, and we tried to keep up his jokes and say the same things and so forth. But they did not go very well after he was dead. He got his in the same charge in which the chaplain was wounded. He was one of the bunch that charged before the order was given, when the chaplain got it, and was running pretty near me until we got to the Boche wire. I had to stop to get through, though must of it was cut up by artillery fire, but he must have jumped it, for when I looked up he was twenty or thirty paces ahead of me. We got to the Germans about that time and I was pretty busy for a while. But soon I saw him again. He was pulling his bayonet out of a Boche when another made a jab at him and stuck him in the arm. Then the Boche made a swing at him with his rifle, but the Swiss dropped on one knee and dodged it. He kept defending himself with his rifle, but there was another German on him by this time and he could not get up. The corporal of our squad came up just about that time, but he was too late, because one of the Boches got to the Swiss with his bayonet. He did not have time to withdraw it before our corporal stuck him. The other German made a pass at the corporal, but he was too late. The corporal beat him to it and felled him with a terrific blow from his rifle butt. The Huns were pretty thick around there just as another fellow and myself came up. A Boche swung his rifle at the corporal and when he dodged it the Boche almost got me. The swing took him off his feet and then the corporal did as pretty a bit of work as I ever saw. He jumped for the Boche, who had fallen, landed on his face with both feet and gave it to the next one with his bayonet all at the same time. He was the quickest man I ever saw.

There were a couple of well-known savate men in the next company and I saw one of them get under Fritz's guard with his foot and, believe me, there was some force in that kick. He must have driven the German's chin clear through the back of his neck.

We thought it was pretty tough luck to lose both the chaplain and the village wit in the same charge, along with half of our officers, and then have to give up the trench. Every man in the bunch was sore as a boil when we got back.

CHAPTER VII.

Stopping the Huns at Dixmude.

I was standing in a communication trench that connected one of our front-line trenches with a crater caused by the explosion of a mine. All around me men of the third line were coming up, climbing around, digging, hammering, shifting planks, moving sandbags up and down, bringing up new timbers, reels of barbed wire, ladders, cases of ammunition, machine guns, trench mortars—all the things that make an army look like a general store on legs.

The noise of the guns was just deafening. Our own shells passed not far above our heads, so close were the enemy trenches, and the explosions were so near and so violent that when you rested your rifle butt on something solid, like a rock, you could feel it shake and hum every time a shell landed.

Our first line was just on the outskirts of the town, in trenches that had been won and lost by both sides many times. Our second line was in the streets and the third line was almost at the south end of the town.

The Huns were hard at it, shelling the battered remains of Dixmude, and to the right stretcher bearers were working in lines so close that they looked like two parades passing each other. But the bearers from the company near me had not returned from the emergency dressing station and the wounded were piling up, waiting for them.

A company of the 2me Legion Etrangere had just come up to take their stations in the crater, under the parapet of sandbags. A shell landed among them just before they entered the crater and sent almost a whole squad west, besides wounding several others.

Almost before they occupied the crater the wires were laid and reached back to us, and the order came for us to remain where we were until further orders.

Then we got the complete orders. We were to make no noise but were all to be ready in ten minutes. We put on goggles and respirators. In ten minutes the bombers were to leave the trenches. Three mines were to explode and then we were to take and hold a certain portion of the enemy trenches not far off. We were all ready to start up the ladders when they moved Nig's section over to ours and he sneaked up to me and whispered behind his hand, "Be a sport, Doc; make it fifty-fifty and gimme a chance."

I did not have any idea what he meant and he had to get back to his squad. Then the bombers came up to the ladders, masked and with loaded sacks on their left arms. "One minute now," said the officers, getting on their own ladders and drawing their revolvers—though most of the officers of the Legion charged with rifle and bayonet like their men.

Then—Boom! Slam! Bang!—and the mines went off.

"Allez!" and then the parapet was filled with bayonets and men scrambling and crawling and falling and getting up again. The smoke drifted back on us, and then our own machine guns began ahead of us.

Up toward the front the bombers were fishing in their bags and throwing, just like boys after a rat along the docks. The black smoke from the "Jack Johnsons" rolled over us and probably there was gas, too, but you could not tell.

The front lines had taken their trenches and gone on and you could see them, when you stood on a parapet, running about like hounds through the enemy communication trenches, bombing out dugouts, disarming prisoners—very scary-looking in their masks and goggles. The wounded were coming back slowly. Then we got busy with our work in the dugouts and communication trenches and fire bays, with bayonets and bombs, digging the Boches out and sending them "west." And every once in a while a Fritz on one side would step out and yell "Kamerad," while, like as not, on the other side, his pal would pot you with a revolver when you started to pick him up, thinking he was wounded.

Then we stood aside at the entrance to a dugout and some Boches came out in single file, shouting "Kamerad" for all they were worth. One of them had his mask and face blown off; yet he was trying to talk, with the tears rolling down over the raw flesh. He died five minutes later.

The Bombers Were Fishing in Their Bag and Throwing.

One night, while I was lying back in the trench trying not to think of anything and go to sleep the bombs began to get pretty thick around there, and when I could not stand it any longer I rushed out into the bay of the fire trench and right up against the parapet, where it was safer.

Hundreds of star shells were being sent up by both sides and the field and the trenches were as bright as day. All up and down the trenches our men were dodging about, keeping out of the way of the bombs that were being thrown in our faces. It did not seem as if there was any place where it was possible to get cover. Most of the time I was picking dirt out of my eyes that explosions had driven into them.

If you went into a dugout the men already in there would shout, "Don't stick in a bunch—spread out!" While you were in a dugout you kept expecting to be buried alive and when you went outside you thought the Boches were aiming at you direct—and there was no place at all where you felt safe.

But the fire bay looked better than the other places to me. I had not been there more than a few minutes when a big one dropped in and that bay was just one mess. Out of the 24 men in the bay only eight escaped.

When the stretcher bearers got there they did not have much to do in the way of rescue—it was more pallbearer's work.

A stretcher bearer was picking up one of the boys, when a grenade landed alongside of him and you could not find a fragment of either of them. That made two that landed within twelve feet of me; yet I was not even scratched.

When I got so that I could move I went over to where the captain was standing, looking through a periscope over the parapet. I was very nervous and excited and was afraid to speak to him, but somehow I thought I ought to ask for orders. But I could not say a word. Finally a shell whizzed over our heads—just missed us, it seemed like, and I broke out: "What did you see? What's all of the news?" and so on. I guess I chattered like a monkey.

Then he yelled: "You're the gunner officer. You're just in time—I've located their mortar batteries."

Depew has an exciting experience in a Zeppelin raid, as told in next installment.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Get Wise.

Vanderhoof Herald—If you feel that the whole world is against you, get in line; the world may be right about it.—Boston Transcript.

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Athlete and Soldier.

General Sir Henry Rawlinson, the commander of the British Fourth army, which has recently been rendering such conspicuous service, was one of the late Lord Kitchener's closest and most intimate friends.

I once heard Sir Henry relate a story concerning a major who, sent to inspect an outlying fort, found the commander intoxicated. He immediately locked him up; but the bibulous one managed to escape, and, making his way to the nearest telegraph office, dispatched the following message to no less a personage than the colonial secretary: "Man here named —— questions my sobriety. Wire to avert bloodshed."—London Tit-Bits.

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"You say you were going forty miles an hour when the accident happened?"

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"Don't you call that reckless driving?"

"No, sir. If I had been going forty-five miles an hour I should have been a mile away before the man got to the corner where he was hit."

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A Missouri Case

Mrs. Kate Chenea, practical nurse, 28 S. Olive St., Mexico, Mo., says: "My kidneys were disordered and my bladder was inflamed. My head ached and I had dizzy spells. I had dropsy and a sunken and weak feeling. I got up lame and my back ached like a tired muscle. The doctors pronounced it kidney trouble. I took medicine for quite awhile. I tried Doan's Kidney Pills. I got some more from the drug store and got rary relief and I kept taking Doan's Kidney Pills. It was not long before the swelling and other symptoms of kidney trouble disappeared."

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Interesting to New Zealanders.

Did New Zealand editors, when in London, find time to visit the site of old Newgate prison? They should, for there the idea of colonizing New Zealand had its birth. It was while serving a sentence for absconding with an heiress that Edward Gibbon Wakefield thought out a scheme of colonization, which he afterward set forth in a book. The result was the formation of a society for colonizing South Australia and New Zealand, and to the latter islands Wakefield himself emigrated and took an active part in their development.—Indianapolis Star.

These Girls.

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