



"OVER THE TOP"

AN AMERICAN SOLDIER WHO WENT

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MACHINE GUNNER, SERVING IN FRANCE

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CHAPTER I.

From Mufti to Khaki.

It was in an office in Jersey City. I was sitting at my desk talking to a lieutenant of the Jersey National Guard. On the wall was a big war map decorated with variously colored little flags showing the position of the opposing armies on the western front in France. In front of me on the desk lay a New York paper with big flaring headlines:

LUSITANIA SUNK! AMERICAN LIVES LOST!

The windows were open and a feeling of spring pervaded the air. Through the open windows came the strains of a hurdy-gurdy playing in the street—"I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier." "Lusitania Sunk! American Lives Lost!"—"I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier." To us these did not seem to jibe.

The lieutenant in silence opened one of the lower drawers of his desk and took from it an American flag which he solemnly draped over the war map on the wall. Then, turning to me with a grim face, said:

"How about it, sergeant? You had better get out the muster roll of the Mounted Scouts, as I think they will be needed in the course of a few days."

We busied ourselves till late in the evening writing out emergency telegrams for the men to report when the call should come from Washington. Then we went home.

I crossed over to New York, and as I went up Fulton street to take the subway to Brooklyn, the lights in the tall buildings of New York seemed to be burning brighter than usual, as if they, too, had read "Lusitania Sunk! American Lives Lost!" They seemed to be glowing with anger and righteous indignation, and their rays wagged the message, "Repay!"

Months passed, the telegrams lying handy, but covered with dust. Then, one momentous morning the lieutenant with a sigh of disgust removed the flag from the war map and returned



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to his desk. I immediately followed this action by throwing the telegrams into the wastebasket. Then we looked at each other in silence. He was squirming in his chair and I felt depressed and uneasy.

The telephone rang and I answered it. It was a business call for me, requesting my services for an out-of-town assignment. Business was not very good, so this was very welcome. After listening to the proposition I seemed to be swayed by a peculiarly strong force within me, and answered, "I am sorry that I cannot accept your offer, but I am leaving for England next week," and hung up the receiver. The lieutenant swung around in his chair, and stared at me in blank astonishment. A sinking sensation came over me, but I defiantly answered his look with, "Well, it's so. I'm going." And I went.

The trip across was uneventful. I landed at Tilbury, England, then got into a string of matchbox cars and proceeded to London, arriving there about 10 p. m. I took a room in a hotel near St. Pancras station for "five and six—five extra." The room was minus the fire, but the "extra" seemed to keep me warm. That night there was a Zeppelin raid, but I didn't see much of it, because the slit in the curtains was too small and I had no desire to make it larger. Next morning the telephone bell rang, and someone asked, "Are you there?" I was, hardly. Anyway, I learned that the Zeps had returned to their fatherland, so I went out into the street expecting to see scenes of awful devastation and a cow-

ering populace, but everything was normal. People were calmly proceeding to their work. Crossing the street, I accosted a Bobbie with:

"Can you direct me to the place of damage?"

He asked me, "What damage?"

In surprise, I answered, "Why, the damage caused by the Zeps."

With a wink he replied:

"There was no damage; we missed them again."

After several fruitless inquiries of the passersby, I decided to go on my own in search of ruined buildings and scenes of destruction. I boarded a bus which carried me through Tottenham Court road. Recruiting posters were everywhere. The one that impressed me most was a life-size picture of Lord Kitchener with his finger pointing directly at me, under the caption of "Your King and Country Need You." No matter which way I turned, the accusing finger followed me. I was an American, in mufti, and had a little American flag in the lapel of my coat. I had no king, and my country had seen fit not to need me, but still that pointing finger made me feel small and ill at ease. I got off the bus to try to dissipate this feeling by mixing with the throng of the sidewalks.

Presently I came to a recruiting office. Inside, sitting at a desk was a lonely Tommy Atkins. I decided to interview him in regard to joining the British army. I opened the door. He looked up and greeted me with "I s'y, myte, want to tyke on?"

I looked at him and answered, "Well, whatever that is, I'll take a chance at it."

Without the aid of an interpreter, I found out that Tommy wanted to know if I cared to join the British army. He asked me: "Did you ever hear of the Royal Fusiliers?" Well, in London, you know, Yanks are supposed to know everything, so I was not going to appear ignorant and answered, "Sure."

After listening for one half-hour to Tommy's tale of their exploits on the firing line, I decided to join. Tommy took me to the recruiting headquarters, where I met a typical English captain. He asked my nationality. I immediately pulled out my American passport and showed it to him. It was signed by Lansing. After looking at the passport, he informed me that he was sorry but could not enlist me, as it would be a breach of neutrality. I insisted that I was not neutral, because to me it seemed that a real American could not be neutral when big things were in progress, but the captain would not enlist me.

With disgust in my heart I went out in the street. I had gone about a block when a recruiting sergeant who had followed me out of the office tapped me on the shoulder with his swagger stick and said: "S'y, I can get you in the army. We have a 'leftenant' down at the other office who can do anything. He has just come out of the O. T. C. (Officers' Training Corps) and does not know what neutrality is." I decided to take a chance, and accepted his invitation for an introduction to the lieutenant. I entered the office and went up to him; opened up my passport and said:

"Before going further I wish to state that I am an American, not too proud to fight, and want to join your army."

He looked at me in a nonchalant manner, and answered, "That's all right; we take anything over here."

I looked at him kind of hard and replied, "So I notice," but it went over his head.

He got out an enlistment blank, and placing his finger on a blank line said, "Sign here."

I answered, "Not on your tintype."

"I beg your pardon?"

Then I explained to him that I would not sign it without first reading it. I read it over and signed for duration of war. Some of the recruits were lucky. They signed for seven years only!

Then he asked me my birthplace. I answered, "Ogden, Utah."

He said, "Oh, yes, just outside of New York?"

With a smile, I replied, "Well, it's up the state a little."

Then I was taken before the doctor and passed as physically fit, and was issued a uniform. When I reported back to the lieutenant, he suggested that, being an American, I go on recruiting service and try to shame some of the slackers into joining the army."

"All you have to do," he said, "is to go out on the street, and when you see a young fellow in mufti who looks physically fit, just stop him and give him this kind of a talk: 'Aren't you ashamed of yourself, a Britisher, physically fit, and in mufti when your king and country need you? Don't you know that your country is at war and that the place for every young Briton is on the firing line? Here I am, an American, in khaki, who came four thousand miles to fight for your king and country, and you, as yet, have not

enlisted. Why don't you join? Now is the time.'

"This argument ought to get many recruits, Empey, so go out and see what you can do."

He then gave me a small rosette of red, white and blue ribbon, with three little streamers hanging down. This was the recruiting insignia and was to be worn on the left side of the cap.

Armed with a swagger stick and my patriotic rosette, I went out into Tottenham Court road in quest of cannon fodder.

Two or three poorly dressed civilians passed me, and although they appeared physically fit, I said to myself, "They don't want to join the army; perhaps they have someone dependent on them for support," so I did not accost them.

Coming down the street I saw a young dandy, top hat and all, with a fashionably dressed girl walking beside him. I muttered, "You are my meat," and when he came abreast of me I stopped directly in his path and stopped him with my swagger stick, saying:

"You would look fine in khaki; why not change that top hat for a steel helmet? Aren't you ashamed of yourself, a husky young chap like you in mufti when men are needed in the trenches? Here I am, an American,

came four thousand miles from Ogden, Utah, just outside of New York, to fight for your king and country. Don't be a slacker, buck up and get into uniform; come over to the recruiting office and I'll have you enlisted."

He yawned and answered, "I don't care if you came forty thousand miles, no one asked you to," and he walked on. The girl gave me a sneering look; I was speechless.

I recruited for three weeks and nearly got one recruit.

This perhaps was not the greatest stunt in the world, but it got back at the officer who had told me, "Yes, we take anything over here." I had been spending a good lot of my recruiting time in the saloon bar of the Wheat Sheaf pub (there was a very attractive blonde barmaid, who helped kill time—I was not as serious in those days as I was a little later when I reached the front)—well, it was the sixth day and my recruiting report was blank. I was getting low in the pocket—barmaids haven't much use for anyone who cannot buy drinks—so I looked around for recruiting material. You know a man on recruiting service gets a "bob" or shilling for every recruit he entices into joining the army, the recruit is supposed to get this, but he would not be a recruit if he were wise to this fact, would he?

Down at the end of the bar was a young fellow in mufti who was very patriotic—he had about four "Old Six" ales aboard. He asked me if he could join, showed me his left hand, two fingers were missing, but I said that did not matter as "we take anything over here." The left hand is the rifle hand as the piece is carried at the slope on the left shoulder. Nearly everything in England is "by the left," even general traffic keeps to the port side.

I took the applicant over to headquarters, where he was hurriedly examined. Recruiting surgeons were busy in those days and did not have much time for thorough physical examinations. My recruit was passed as "fit" by the doctor and turned over to a corporal to make note of his scars. I was mystified. Suddenly the corporal burst out with, "Blime me, two of his fingers are gone." Turning to me he said, "You certainly have your nerve with you, not 'alf you ain't, to bring this beggar in."

The doctor came over and exploded, "What do you mean by bringing in a man in this condition?"

Looking out of the corner of my eye I noticed that the officer who had recruited me had joined the group, and I could not help answering, "Well, sir, I was told that you took anything over here."

I think they called it "Yankee impudence," anyhow it ended my recruiting.

CHAPTER II.

Blighty to Rest Billets.

The next morning the captain sent for me and informed me: "Empey, as a recruiting sergeant you are a wash-out," and sent me to a training depot. After arriving at this place, I was hustled to the quartermaster stores and received an awful shock. The quartermaster sergeant spread a waterproof sheet on the ground and com-

menced throwing a miscellaneous assortment of straps, buckles and other paraphernalia into it. I thought he would never stop, but when the pile reached to my knees he paused long enough to say, "Next, No. 5217, Arris, B company," I gazed in bewilderment at the pile of junk in front of me, and then my eyes wandered around looking for the wagon which was to carry it to barracks. I was rudely brought to earth by the "quarter" exclaiming, "Ere, you, 'op it; tyke it aw'y; blind my eyes, 'e's looking for 'is batman to 'elp 'im carry it."

Struggling under the load, with frequent pauses for rest, I reached our barracks (large car barns), and my platoon leader came to the rescue. It was a marvel to me how quickly he assembled the equipment. After he had completed the task, he showed me how to adjust it on my person. Pretty soon I stood before him a proper Tommy Atkins in heavy marching order, feeling like an overloaded camel.

On my feet were heavy-soled boots, studded with hobnails, the toes and heels of which were re-enforced by steel half-moons. My legs were incased in woolen puttees, olive drab in color, with my trousers overlapping them at the top. Then a woolen khaki tunic, under which was a bluish gray woolen shirt, minus a collar; beneath this shirt a woolen belly band about six inches wide, held in place by tie strings of white tape. On my head was a heavy woolen trench cap, with huge earlaps buttoned over the top. Then the equipment: A canvas belt, with ammunition pockets, and two wide canvas straps like suspenders, called "D" straps, fastened to the belt in front, passing over each shoulder, crossing in the middle of my back, and attached by buckles to the rear of the belt. On the right side of the belt hung a water bottle, covered with felt; on the left side was my bayonet and scabbard, and trenching tool handle, this handle strapped to the bayonet scabbard. In the rear was my trenching tool, carried in a canvas case. This tool was a combination pick and spade. A canvas haversack was strapped to the left side of the belt, while on my back was the pack, also of canvas, held in place by two canvas straps over the shoulders; suspended on the bottom of the pack was my mess tin or canteen in a neat little canvas case. My waterproof sheet, looking like a jelly roll, was strapped on top of the pack, with a wooden stick for cleaning the breach of the rifle projecting from each end. On a lanyard around my waist hung a huge jack-knife with a can-opener attachment. The pack contained my overcoat, an extra pair of socks, change of underwear, hold all (containing knife, fork, spoon, comb, toothbrush, lather brush, shaving soap, and a razor made of tin, with "Made in England" stamped on the blade; when trying to shave with this it made you wish that you were at war with Patagonia, so that you could have a "hollow ground" stamped "Made in Germany"); then your housewife, button-cleaning outfit, consisting of a brass button stick, two stiff brushes, and a box of "Soldiers' Friend" paste; then a shoe brush and a box of dubbin, a writing pad, indelible pencil, envelopes, and pay book, and personal belongings, such as a small mirror, a decent razor and a sheaf of unnumbered letters, and fags. In your haversack you carry your iron rations, meaning a tin of bully beef, four biscuits and a can containing tea, sugar and Oxo cubes; a couple of pipes and a pack of shag, a tin of rifle oil, and a pull-through. Tommy generally carries the oil with his rations; it gives the cheese a sort of sardine taste.

Add to this a first-aid pouch and a long, ungainly rifle patterned after the Daniel Boone rifle, and you have an idea of a British soldier in Blighty.

Before leaving for France, this rifle is taken from him and he is issued with a Lee-Enfield short trench rifle and a ration bag.

In France he receives two gas helmets, a sheepskin coat, rubber mackintosh, steel helmet, two blankets, tear-shell goggles, a balnevia helmet, gloves and a tin of antirust grease which is excellent for greasing the boots. Add to this the weight of his rations, and can you blame Tommy for growling at a twenty-kilo route march?

Having served as sergeant major in the United States cavalry, I tried to tell the English drill sergeants their business, but it did not work. They immediately put me as batman in their mess. Many a greasy dish of stew was accidentally spilled over them.

I would sooner fight than be a waiter, so when the order came through from headquarters calling for a draft of 229 reinforcements for France, I volunteered.

Then we went before the "M. O. (medical officer) for another physical examination. This was very brief. He asked our names and numbers and said "Fit," and we went out to fight.

We were put into troop trains and sent to Southampton, where we were destined, and had our trench rifles issued to us. Then in columns of twos we went up the gangplank of a little steamer lying alongside the dock.

At the head of the gangplank there was an old sergeant, who directed that we line ourselves along both rails of the ship. Then he ordered us to take life belts from the racks overhead and set them on. I have crossed the ocean several times and knew I was not seasick, but when I buckled on that life belt I had a sensation of sickness.

After we got out into the stream all I could think of was that there were a million German submarines with a torpedo on each, across the warhead of which was inscribed my name and address.

After five hours we came alongside

plaf and disembarked. I had attained another one of my ambitions. I was "somewhere in France." We slept in the open that night on the side of the road. About six the next morning we were ordered to entrain. I looked around for the passenger coaches, but all I could see on the siding were cattle cars. We climbed into these. On the side of each car was a sign reading "Hommes 40, Chevenaux 8." When we got inside of the cars, we thought that perhaps the sign painter had reversed the order of things. After 48 hours in these trucks we detrained at Rouen. At this place we went through an intensive training for ten days.

The training consisted of the rudiments of trench warfare. Trenches had been dug, with barbed wire entanglements, bombing saps, dugouts, observation posts and machine gun emplacements. We were given a smattering of trench cooking, sanitation, bomb throwing, reconnoitering, listening posts, constructing and repairing barbed wire, "carrying in" parties,



The Author's Identification Disk.

methods used in attack and defense, wiring parties, mass formation, and the procedure for poison-gas attacks.

On the tenth day we again met our friends "Hommes 40, Chevenaux 8." Thirty-six hours more of misery, and we arrived at the town of F—

After unloading our rations and equipment, we lined up on the road in columns of fours waiting for the order to march.

A dull rumbling could be heard. The sun was shining. I turned to the man on my left and asked, "What's the noise, Bill?" He did not know, but his face was of a pea-green color. Jim, on my right, also did not know, but suggested that I "awsk" the sergeant.

Coming towards us was an old grizzled sergeant, properly fed up with the war, so I "awsked" him.

"Think it's going to rain, sergeant?" He looked at me in contempt, and grunted, "Ow's it a-goin' ter rain with the bloomin' sun a-shinin'?" I looked guilty.

"Them's the guns up the line, me lad, and you'll get enough of 'em before you gets back to Blighty."

My knees seemed to wobble, and I squeaked out a weak "Oh!"

Then we started our march up to the line in ten-kilo treks. After the first day's march we arrived at our rest billets. In France they call them rest billets, because while in them Tommy works seven days a week and on the eighth day of the week he is given twenty-four hours "on his own."

Our billet was a spacious affair, a large barn on the left side of the road, which had one hundred entrances, ninety-nine for shells, rats, wind and rain, and the hundredth one for Tommy. I was tired out, and using my shrapnel-proof helmet (shrapnel proof until a piece of shrapnel hits it), or tin hat, for a pillow, lay down in the straw, and was soon fast asleep. I must have slept about two hours, when I awoke with a prickling sensation all over me. As I thought, the straw had worked through my uniform. I woke up the fellow lying on my left, who had been up the line before, and asked him:

"Does the straw bother you, mate? It's worked through my uniform and I can't sleep."

In a sleepy voice he answered, "That ain't straw, them's cooties."

From that time on my friends the "cooties" were constantly with me.

"Cooties," or body lice, are the bane of Tommy's existence.

The aristocracy of the trenches very seldom call them "cooties," they speak of them as fleas.

To an American flea means a small insect armed with a bayonet, who is wont to jab it into you and then hop-skip and jump to the next place to be attacked. There is an advantage in having fleas on you instead of "cooties" in that in one of his extended jumps said flea is liable to land on the fellow next to you; he has the typical energy and push of the American, while the "cootie" has the bulldog tenacity of the Englishman; he holds on and consolidates or digs in until his meal is finished.

There is no way to get rid of them permanently. No matter how often you bathe, and that is not very often, or how many times you change your underwear, your friends the "cooties" are always in evidence. The billets are infested with them, especially so if there is straw on the floor.

did not matter. On one side of the disk was inscribed your rank, name, number and battalion, while on the other was stamped your religion.

C. of E., meaning Church of England; R. C., Roman Catholic; W., Wesleyan; P., Presbyterian; but if you happened to be an atheist they left it blank, and just handed you a pick and shovel. On my disk was stamped C. of E. This is how I got it: The lieutenant who enlisted me asked my religion. I was not sure of the religion of the British army, so I answered, "Oh, any old thing," and he promptly put down C. of E.

Now, just imagine my hard luck. Out of five religions I was unlucky enough to pick the only one where church parade was compulsory!

The next morning was Sunday. I was sitting in the billet writing home to my sister telling her of my wonderful exploits while under fire—all recruits do this. The sergeant major put his head in the door of the billet and shouted: "C. of E. outside for church parade!"

I kept on writing. Turning to me, in a loud voice, he asked, "Empey, aren't you C. of E.?"

I answered, "Yep."

In an angry tone, he commanded, "Don't you 'yep' me. Say, 'Yes, sergeant major.'"

"I did so. Somewhat mollified, he ordered, 'Outside for church parade.'"

I looked up and answered, "I am not going to church this morning."

He said, "Oh, yes, you are!"

I answered, "Oh, no, I'm not!"—But I went.

We lined up outside with rifles and bayonets, 120 rounds of ammunition, wearing our tin hats, and the march to church began. After marching about five kilos, we turned off the road into an open field. At one end of this field the chaplain was standing in a flubber. We formed a semicircle around him. Overhead there was a black speck circling round and round in the sky. This was a German Fokker. The chaplain had a book in his left hand—left eye on the book—right eye on the airplane. We Tommies were lucky, we had no books, so had both eyes on the airplane.

After church parade we were marched back to our billets, and played football all afternoon.

(To be continued)

HIGHWAY WORK MUST BE PUSHED AS A WAR MEASURE

Every move to lessen the amount of highway work in this country is a move against our ability to win the war.

Indeed, every effort of this kind, whether done by the National Government or by others, would be as unwise as has been the policy of the Government for many years in railroad matters, which has now brought about the collapse of the railway systems of the country and their utter inability to handle the nation's traffic. Railroad transportation has largely broken down. It cannot for years to come be developed sufficiently to meet our actual needs during the war. It becomes imperative, therefore, that motor-truck transportation of freight and automobiles for passenger work must be developed on a very large scale. There is no other way possible to help to supplement the railroad situation so quickly available as this.

It is true that water transportation must be developed by barges and steamers in the interior and by sailing vessels and barges and every other available boat along the coast. But highway transportation by motor trucks and automobiles is vital to the nation's existence. This statement, as strong as it may seem, is nevertheless true. If transportation completely breaks down, we cannot win the war, and transportation is in a desperately bad way and is steadily growing worse, for even if the railroads could catch up with the present congestion, they are overworking their engines, their cars and their roadbeds, and thus exhausting their physical condition.

Highway building becomes more and more important to national life in this time of war, and every movement made by the Government to cut out the handling of highway materials cannot be classed otherwise than shortsighted and dangerous. We must build more highways of the most substantial character, and we must keep up to the highest measure of efficiency existing highways, and not a day is to be lost in doing this work, for every day lost will count against us.

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