GUNNER DEPEW

By

ALBERT N. DEPEW

Ex-Gunner and Chief Petty Officer, U. S. Navy
Member of the Foreign Legion of France
Captain Gun Turret, French Battleship Cassard
Winner of the Croix de Guerre

FOREWORD.

"Gunner Depew" is not a work of fiction, but it is more thrilling than any fiction you ever read. It is the true story of the experiences of an American boy who had a fighting career that is unique in the annals of the great war. It is a story crowded with fighting and adventure — big with human courage and endurance. It is the first war narrative that tells the true story of conditions in the German prison camps. It is a story that every American should and will read to the end.

CHAPTER I.

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In the American Navy.

My father was a seaman, so, naturally, all my life I heard a great deal about ships and the sea. Even when I was a little boy, in Walston, Pa., I thought about them a whole lot and wanted to be a sailor—especially a sailor in the U. S. navy.

You might say I was brought up on the water.

When I was twelve years old I went to sea as cabin boy on the whaler Therifus, out of Boston. She was an old square-rigged sailing ship, built more for work than for speed. We were out four months on my first cruise, and got knocked around a lot, especially in a storm on the Newfoundland Banks, where we lost our instruments, and had a hard time navigating the ship. Whaling crews work on shares and during the two years I was on the Therifus my shares amounted to fourteen hundred dollars.

Then I shipped as first-class helmsman on the British tramp Southerndown, a twin-screw steamer out of Liverpool. Many people are surprised that a fourteen-year-old boy should be helmsman on an ocean-going craft, but all over the world you will see young lads doing their trick at the wheel. I was on the Southerndown two years and in that time visited most of the important ports of Europe. There is nothing like a tramp steamer if you want to see the world. The Southerndown is the vessel that, in the fall of 1917, sighted a German U-boat rigged up like a sailing ship.

Although I liked visiting the foreign ports, I got tired of the Southerndown after a while and at the end of a voyage which landed me in New York I decided to get into the United States navy. After laying around for a week or two I enlisted and was assigned to duty as a second-class fireman.

People have said they thought I was pretty small to be a fireman; they have the idea that firemen must be big men. Well, I am 5 feet 7½ inches in height, and when I was sixteen I was just as tall as I am now and weighed 168 pounds. I was a whole lot huskier then, too, for that was before my introduction to kultur in German prison camps, and life there is not exactly fattening—not exactly. I do not know why it is, but if you will notice the navy firemen—the lads with the red stripes around their left shoulders—you will find that almost all of them are small men. But they are a husky lot.

Now, in the navy, they always haze a newcomer until he shows that he can take care of himself, and I got mine very soon after I went into Uncle Sam's service. I was washing my clothes in a bucket on the forecastle deck, and every garby (sailor) who came along would give me or the bucket a kick, and spill one or the both of us. Each time I would move to some other place, but I always seemed to be in somebody's way. Finally I saw a marine coming. I was nowhere near him, but he hauled out of his course to come up to me and gave the bucket a boot that sent it twenty feet away, at the same time handing me a clout on the ear that just about knocked me down. Now, I did not exactly know what a marine was, and this fellow had so many stripes on his sleeves that I thought he must be some sort of officer, so I just stood by. There was a gold stripe (commissioned officer) on the bridge and I knew that if anything was wrong he would cut in, so I kept looking up at him, but he stayed where he was, looking on, and never saying a word. And all the time the marine kept slamming me about and telling me to get the hell out of there.

Finally I said to myself, "I'll get this guy if it's the brig for a month." So I planted him one in the kidneys and another in the mouth, and he went clean up against the rail. But he came back at me strong, and we were at it for some time.

But when it was over the gold stripe came down from the bridge and shook hands with me!

After this they did not haze me much. This was the beginning of a certain reputation that I had in the navy for fist-work. Later on I had a reputation for swimming, too. That first day they began calling me "Chink," though I don't know why, and it has been my nickname in the navy ever since.

It is a curious thing, and I never could understand it, but garbies and marines never mix. The marines are good men and great fighters, aboard and ashore, but we garbies never have a word for them, nor they for us. On shore leave abroad we pal up with foreign garbies, even, but hardly ever with a marine. Of course they are with us strong in case we have a scrap with a liberty party off some foreign ship—they cannot keep out of a fight any more than we can—but after it is over they are on their way at once and we on ours.

There are lots of things like that in the navy that you cannot figure out the reason for, and I think it is because sailors change their ways so little. They do a great many things in the navy because the navy always has done them.

I kept strictly on the job as a fireman, but I wanted to get into the gun turrets. It was slow work for a long time. I had to serve as second-class fireman for four mouths, first-class for eight months and in the engine room as water-tender for a year.

Then, after serving on the U. S. S. Des Moines as a gun-loader, I was transferred to the Iowa and finally worked up to a gun-pointer. After a time I got my C. P. O. rating—chief petty officer, first-class gunner.

The various navies differ in many ways, but most of the differences would not be noticed by any one but a sailor. Every sailor has a great deal of respect for the Swedes and Norwegians and Danes; they are born sailors and are very daring, but, of course, their navies are small. The Germans were always known as clean

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sailors; that is, as in our navy and the British, their vessels were shipshape all the time, and were run as sweet as a clock.

There is no use comparing the various navies as to which is best; some are better at one thing and some at another. The British navy, of course, is the largest, and nobody will deny that at most things they are topnotch—least of all themselves; they admit it. But there is one place where the navy of the United States has it all over every other navy on the seven seas, and that is gunnery. The American navy has the best gunners in the world. And do not let anybody tell you different.

CHAPTER II.

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The War Breaks.

After serving four years and three months in the U. S. navy, I received an honorable discharge on April 14, 1914. I held the rank of chief petty officer, first-class gunner. It is not uncommon for garbies to lie around a while between enlistments—they like a vacation as much as anyone—and it was my intention to loaf for a few months before joining the navy again.

After the war started, of course, I had heard more or less about the German atrocities in Belgium, and while I was greatly interested, I was doubtful at first as to the truth of the reports, for I knew how news gets changed in passing from mouth to mouth, and I never was much of a hand to believe things until I saw them, anyway. Another thing that caused me to be interested in the war was the fact that my mother was born in Alsace. Her maiden name, Dierveux, is well known in Alsace. I had often visited my grandmother in St. Nazaire, France, and knew the country. So with France at war, it was not strange that I should be even more interested than many other garbies.

As I have said, I did not take much stock in the first reports of the Hun's exhibition of kultur, because Fritz is known as a clean sailor, and I figured that no real sailor would ever get mixed up in such dirty work as they said there was in Belgium. I figured the soldiers were like the sailors. But I found out I was wrong about both.

One thing that opened my eyes a bit was the trouble my mother had in getting out of Hanover, where she was when the war started, and back to France. She always wore a little American flag and this both saved and endangered her. Without it, the Germans would have interned her as a Frenchwoman, and with it, she was sneered at and insulted time and again before she finally managed to get over the border. She died about two months after she reached St. Nazaire.

Moreover, I heard the fate of my older brother, who had made his home in France with my grandmother. He had gone to the front at the outbreak of the war with the infantry from St. Nazaire and had been killed two or three weeks afterwards. This made it a sort of personal matter.

But what put the finishing touches to me were the stories a wounded Canadian lieutenant told me some months later in New York. He had been there and he knew. You could not help believing him; you can always tell it when a man has been there and knows.

There was not much racket around New York, so I made up my mind all of a sudden to go over and get some for myself. Believe me, I got enough racket before I was through. Most of the really important things I have done have happened like that: I did them on the jump, you might say. Many other Americans wanted a look, too; there were five thousand Americans in the Canadian army at one time they say.

I would not claim that I went over there to save democracy, or anything like that. I never did like Germans, and I never met a Frenchman who was not kind to me, and what I heard about the way the Huns treated the Belgians made me sick. I used to get out of bed to go to an all-night picture show, I thought about it so much. But there was not much excitement about New York, and I figured the U. S. would not get into it for a while, anyway, so I just wanted to go over and see what it was like. That is why lots of us went, I think.

There were five of us who went to Boston to ship for the other side: Sam Murray, Ed Brown, Tim Flynn, Mitchell and myself. Murray was an ex-garby—two hitches (enlistments), gun-pointer rating, and about thirty-five years old. Brown was a Pennsylvania man about twenty-six years old, who had served two enlistments in the U. S. army and had quit with the rank of sergeant. Flynn and Mitchell were both ex-navy men. Mitchell was a noted boxer. Of the five of us, I am the only one who went in, got through and came out. Flynn and Mitchell did not go in; Murray and Brown never came back.

The five of us shipped on the steamship Virginian of the American-Hawaiian line, under American flag and registry, but chartered by the French government. I signed on as water-tender—an engine room job—but the others were on deck—that is, seamen.

We left Boston for St. Nazaire with a cargo of ammunition, bully beef, etc., and made the first trip without anything of interest happening.

As we were tying to the dock at St. Nazaire, I saw a German prisoner sitting on a pile of lumber. I thought probably he would be hungry, so I went down into the oilers' mess and got two slices of bread with a thick piece of beefsteak between them and handed it to Fritz. He would not take it. At first I thought he was afraid to, but by using several languages and signs he managed to make me understand that he was not hungry—had too much to eat, in fact.

I used to think of this fellow occasionally when I was in a German prison camp, and a piece of moldy bread the size of a safety-match box was the generous portion of food they forced on me, with true German hospitality, once every forty-eight hours. I would not exactly have refused a beefsteak sandwich, I am afraid. But then I was not a heaven-born German. I was only a common American garby. He was full of kultur and grub; I was not full of anything.

There was a large prison camp at St. Nazaire, and at one time or another I saw all of it. Before the war it had been used as a barracks by the French army and consisted of well-made, comfortable two-story stone buildings, floored with concrete, with auxiliary barracks of logs. The German prisoners occupied the stone buildings, while the French guards were quartered in the log houses. Inside, the houses were divided into long rooms with whitewashed walls. There was a gymnasium for the prisoners, a canteen where they might buy most of the things you could buy anywhere else in the country, and a studio for the painters among the prisoners. Officers were separated from privates—which was a good thing for the privates—and were kept in houses surrounded by stockades. Officers and privates received the same treatment, however, and all were given exactly the same rations and equipment as the regular French army before it went to the front. Their food consisted of bread, soup, and vino, as wine is called almost everywhere in the world. In the morning they received half a loaf of Vienna bread and coffee. At noon they each had a large dixie of thick soup, and at three in the afternoon more bread and a bottle of vino. The soup was more like a stew—very thick with meat and vegetables. At one of the officers' barracks there was a cook who had been chef in the largest hotel in Paris before the war.

All the prisoners were well clothed. Once a week, socks, underwear, soap, towels and blankets were issued to them, and every week the barracks and equipment were fumigated. They were given the best of medical attention.

Besides all this, they were allowed to work at their trades, if they had any. All the carpenters, cobblers, tailors and painters were kept busy, and some of them picked up more change there than they ever did in Germany, they told me. The musicians formed bands and played almost every night at restaurants and theaters in the town. Those who had no trade were allowed to work on the roads, parks, docks and at residences about the town.

Talk about dear old jail! You could not have driven the average prisoner away from there with a 14-inch gun. I used to think about them in Brandenburg, when our boys were rushing the sentries in the hope of being bayonetted out of their misery.

While our cargo was being unloaded I spent most of my time with my grandmother. I had heard still more about the cruelty of the Huns, and made up my mind to get into the service. Murray and Brown had already enlisted in the Foreign Legion, Brown being assigned to the infantry and Murray to the French man-of-war Cassard. But when I spoke of my intention, my grandmother cried so much that I promised her I would not enlist—that time, anyway—and made the return voyage in the Virginian. We were no sooner loaded in Boston than back to St. Nazaire we went.

Gunner Depew, on board the French dreadnaught Cassard, gives the Poilus a sample of the marksmanship for which the American gunners are famous. Then he leaves his ship and goes into the trenches. Don't miss the next installment.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Something to "Greet" About.

Persons casting about for something to worry about may take pleasure in recalling from "The Little Minister" the manner in which self-styled simple folk in Scotland regard the northern lights—"the devil's rainbow," Waster Lunny called it. "I saw it sax times in July month," he said, "and it made me shut my een. You was out admiring it, dominie, but I can never forget that it was seen in the year '12 just afore the great storm. I was only a laddie then, but I mind how that awful wind stripped a' the standing corn in the glen in less time than we've been here at the water's edge. It was called the deil's bosom. My father's hinmost words to me was, 'It's time eneuch to greet, laddie, when you see the aurora borealis.'" Waster Lunny was "greeting" o'er the drought then, but twelve hours later the Quharity was out of its banks, washing out the corn and with a year's store of wool on its crest was dashing out to sea.

Moon by "Earthlight."

When the crescent of the new moon appears in the west the phenomenon called "the old moon in the young one's arms" is often observed. Partly embraced by the horns of the crescent is seen the whole round orb of the moon. The cause of this appearance is that the "earthlight" upon that part of the moon not reached by the sunshine is sufficiently brilliant to render it faintly visible to our eyes.

Harnesses Sun's Rays.

An experimenter in the Royal College of Science in Toronto claims that he has found a way to harness the sun's heat to industrial tasks of almost any nature. For instance, by his experiments with mirror combinations he has focused reflected rays so as to melt a bar of lead at a temperature below freezing to a depth of one and a half inches in 43 seconds.

Intended No Harm.

Lucy was playing up on the lawn with her little puppy when the dog next door came up wagging his tail in a most friendly way. The little pup stuck his tail between his legs and started for the house. Lucy caught him, saying: "Don't be afraid, pup; he won't hurt you; he just come over to introduce hisself."

Necessity.

A national exhibition was recently held in Berlin to popularize the use of paper clothing.

The Piano at the Front.

Lieut. Reginald B. Jones, formerly organist at the Commercial Street Baptist church, Newport (Mont.), writing from France, says:

"The padre came along on Sunday evening, and our battalion had an open-air service while the shells were whistling over and the German planes hovering. We salved an old piano from a ruined cottage. It had seven notes missing and three holes from shells in it, but we mended the wires with telephone wire and string. I played it for the service, the fitter having 'tuned' it. In spite of the great discords we had fine, hearty singing."

A man's crookedness often gets him into financial straits.

An Afflicted Rooster.

The whooping cough has been quite prevalent in North Indianapolis recently, and Bobbie Jones, the five-year-old son of E. R. Jones, 615 West Twenty-ninth street, had overheard his parents discussing the subject.

Incidentally the next-door neighbors have a small flock of chickens.

One morning Bobbie was playing in the back yard when their neighbor's rooster began to crow loud and lustily. Rushing into the house in a great state of excitement, Bobbie exclaimed: "Mamma, has that rooster got the whooping cough?"—Indianapolis News.

The man who marries a widow usually finds out that he is the successor to her ideal husband.