

In this issue ~ meet ~ JIMMIE HICKS, THE DOUGHBOY
By ARTHUR GUY EMPEY *A full length novel!*

Over the Top

FRONT LINE FIGHTING STORIES

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The Word Flashed to Beavertown



Then it spread to the ranches and across the valley to Land's End.

Jim-twin Allen had broken his promise! He had again strapped on his black guns to ride the crimson trail of vengeance.

His youthful face had grown gray; his eyes flickered with yellow light. He was again the "White Wolf" — a merciless killer—relentless in his purpose.

And before him fled five notorious gunmen, lashing their horses in frenzied fear, even though they knew that the end would come—that the White Wolf would trail them to cover.

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GOOD READING—*Continued*

pense which this book contains. Rest assured, however, that "The Miracle Marriage" is a love story very much out of the ordinary, very much worth the reading.



NICE GIRL, by Vivian Grey. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

In this book the reader is brought face to face with the reality of love problems that come into the lives of countless couples. The daughter of poor people, she had married a man who had all the good things of life at his disposal. And while at first he loved her passionately, she had to fight her way to a standing in a world which was strange and sometimes hostile to her. And then one day fear gripped her as she realized that in a subtle way she was losing her husband. "It was a fear of his calm acceptance of life without her" that caused Betty's heart to skip a beat or so.

How the "Little Cinderella of Greenwich Street" kept the love and the admiration, too, of her Prince is a theme which Miss Grey handles with exquisite skill. It is a love story and a fighting story as well, the story of a struggle against odds for recognition for Betty's own sweet sake. From the unusual first chapter, which starts with the dropping of a mysterious message from the skies, to the last thrilling chapter, "Nice Girl" keeps you as literally on your toes as was Betty in the climax of her career.



AV CAPRICE, by Beniah Poynter. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

"Under the trees of the parks that cut the avenue in twain, lovers were strolling arm in arm. Sitting at the terrace cafés were boys and girls, hands linked together, cheek pressed against cheek, coffee, aperitifs and wine forgotten in the more pungent, sweeter quaffs of love. There were life and laughter, song and music here. Love was in the warm summer breezes that whispered through the flower-laden branches of the horse-chestnut trees: it

peeped under the awnings shadowing the cafés."

And through this Paris of love's summer walked two, desperately in love themselves, yet thinking that they must part forever.

One was a young American art student, the other the beautiful Caprice, darling of the studios, who had made the greatest of sacrifices for her sensitive father.

From the idyllic surroundings of the French metropolis to the roar and thunder of New York the scene shifts. This side the water, Caprice, come to secure aid from her wealthy grandfather, is beset with the intrigues of a scheming lot of relatives and for a while the art student fades from the picture and it seems as though she were doomed to marry a man for whom she can have no love.

But don't look to us to tell you the ending of this altogether beautiful story of young love. The book is at your dealer's, and if you take our advice you will make it yours to-day.



HER OTHER HUSBAND, by Louisa Carter Lee. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

To be sure she had regarded it as a loan, the money she took from Gus Harmon, who had promised to marry her—some day. But the judge who listened to the indignant Harmon's charges saw it in a different light, and Connie found herself a prisoner on Welfare Island. There was something fine in the girl that brought her through this terrible ordeal and that called to the better nature of Eddie Costello, denizen of the underworld, who was waiting for her when she was released.

Eddie, however, just couldn't seem to go straight and Connie was won by the wistfulness of a poor inventor. Together these two started out to rebuild their lives, but there were obstacles in the way. How they fought and fell and rose again and how the spirit of the great-hearted girl finally came through is a story of love and adventure that will hold you breathless to the end.



ANOTHER GREAT EMPEY YARN!



In this unusual novel of behind-the-lines humor and front-line action, a man from Broadway puts on the greatest show of the war—"Black Jack" Pershing leading a charge!

Jimmie Hicks, The Doughboy

By Arthur Guy Empey

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCING BUCK AND "PEEWEE."

ON the level, Buck, I can't stand this confinement no longer."

The speaker was Private "Pee-wee" Benson, a fighting bantam, no bigger than a bit of shrapnel but, in his own mind, able to break the Hindenburg Line unassisted.

"Look at me," he went on, "stuck in
OT—1

a lousy replacement camp a million miles from the trenches where the boys are fighting for democracy. I tell you it's a crime, Buck, and I ain't gonna stand for it no longer. The place fer a fighting bear cat like me is right close to old Kaiser Bill himself. Them Krauts wouldn't have a chance with me on a machine gun. If they don't turn me loose mighty soon, I'm gonna write home to my congressman about it. Can

you feature it, a patriotic dough like me ketchin' German measles just when the outfit leaves for the front line? I'm gonna step out, and this very day, too."

"How you gonna step out?" questioned Private Buck Evers, almost twice as big as Peewee, but not quite sure whether he could break the said Hindenburg Line without assistance. "You sure gotta step high, wide, and handsome to get over that fence surroundin' the camp. You want one of them fresh sentries to autograph his name on the seat of yer pants? Them birds has orders to shoot, I tell you. I got a bigger kick comin' than you. I lands a cushy detail in regimental headquarters and then gets inflicted with chronical belly-ache—anyhow, that's what that lousy pill roller named it before sendin' me back here."

"Listen, Buck." Peewee lowered his voice and gazed cautiously about. "Me and you is been pals since this gare started. We ain't gonna stay here and starve to death, are we, Buck, and a war going on? We's too damn patriotic fer that. Ain't we, Buck? At least I am."

"No, we ain't gonna stay here," said Buck sarcastically. "We's gonna walk right outa the front gate. If the sentry stops us, we'll bust out laughin' and tell him he's only kiddin'. Know any more jokes?"

"I been lookin' around fer two days now and right in back of the morgue is a stretch of fence where there ain't no sentries a-tall. All we gotta do is wait until it's dark and then hop the fence in a jiffy. We'll get free, if we work fast."

"You sure hafta be fast to beat a bullet, I'll tell the cockeyed world. No, Peewee, I ain't runnin' no more risk in this war than I gotta run."

AW, listen to reason, won't you?" pleaded Peewee. "The eats here is awful and the beds a damn sight worse. Say, them women nurses of ours is

harder than any top cutter what ever hit the army. Red Cross angels, huh? Yeh, they're angels all right. The only thing missin' is forked tails to make 'em devils."

"Well," said Buck thoughtfully, "supposin' we do get out, what we gonna do? We'd be picked up by the first M. P. and sent back here. And then what? About six months in the mill makin' little ones outa big ones. Anyway, we ain't got a lousy franc between us."

"Cripes, Buck, you gotta take some chance in a war. Then, too, there's high doin's to-night in town. One of the orderlies said the division concert party is givin' a show at the Y. M. C. A. hut. Listen, Buck, they's gonna be all kinds of girls, too—blondes, brunettes and redheads. I ain't kiddin', most of 'em is headliners in vaudeville. You ain't gonna pass up a party like that, are you, Buck, especially when you're such a wow with women?"

"A lotta skirts, eh?" Buck began to show interest.

"I'll say there's a lotta skirts," replied Peewee enthusiastically. "Flocks of 'em and prettier than pictures, Buck. Most of 'em is outa the Follies—you know, them babies from Broadway. You'd sure make a hit with 'em, Buck."

"Most women falls fer me," said Buck modestly. "I got a way about me what sorta bowls 'em over. Did I ever tell you about the women that——"

"Yeh, I know all about 'em, Buck. You told it to me so often I can remember their names and the color of their hair and where they was born. Come on, whatta you say, shall we chance it to-night?"

"I guess I better not," returned Buck pensively. "I've growed a bit blawsay with frails."

"Yeh, but there's more than skirts to the show, Buck. There's a guy what I seen in vaudeville, a feller what impersonates people. Say, one minute he can look like Napoleon, and the next min-

ute like 'Buffalo Bill,' and the next minute he can look like anybody he wants to look like. A magician, too, and a sleight-of-hand feller. He's clever, Buck, a whole show in himself. His name is Hicks."

"Hicks? Did you say Hicks?" Buck was so interested that the match with which he was lighting his cigarette burned his fingers. "Hicks," he repeated slowly. "Hicks. I been lookin' a long time fer a guy named Hicks, and in vaudeville, too. What's his first name?"

"James Hicks, magician and impersonator. Why? Do you know him?"

"Do I know him? I'll say I know him! Why, the dirty bum owes me aunt three months' board. She keeps a actors' boardin' house in New York. One night this palooka blows in. Boy, how he can smear the salve! Say, he hands the aunt a line what would tie up a battleship. Take it from me, Pee-wee, the aunt ain't no fall sister fer nobody. She's hard. You gotta be hard handlin' actors, especially them N. V. A. guys. Well, this guy is so smooth he hangs the aunt up for three months' board, then pulls out and leaves a trunk. Whatta you suppose is in the trunk?"

"All his make-up and costumes, I bet."

"Yeh? Said trunk was full of thin atmosphere. He even took the tray with him. We ain't seen nor heard of him since. Pee-wee, if Jimmie Hicks, as he calls himself, is playin' at that concert party to-night, I'm gonna be there with bells on."

"Whatcha gonna do, Buck, beat him up?" asked Pee-wee anxiously. "We can't afford no fights because we'll be A. W. O. L., and if we get pinched, it'll go hard with us."

THAT guy won't never fight. He's yeller. I'll jest knock him off for twenty francs; then, after seein' the show, we'll slip over to the estaminet and fill ourselves up with red ink. I

ain't had a real drink since Napoleon was a corporal."

"You mean you're comin' back here after the show, Buck? Hell, that ain't no way to talk. Let's fill up a bit on coneyack and beat it to the front. A coupla smart guys like us oughta get by the M. P.'s. You know they don't stop nobody goin' toward the fightin', only them what's runnin' away from it."

"Look here, Jack Johnson," said Buck severely, "you get that nonsense outa your head. We ain't got no more chance makin' it to the front line than a wax cat has winnin' a marathon in hell. I'd like to rejoin our outfit as much as you, but I ain't riskin' five years in the jug for it, or perhaps leaned up against a wall and lead poisoned. None of that for me!"

"Have it your own way, Buck," replied Pee-wee resignedly. "But perhaps you'll change your mind after a few drinks. You always do."

"I reckon you done fergot about 'Black Jack' Pershin' inspectin' the hospitals to-morrow, huh? That's what we been cleanin' the camp up for."

"Sure, he's inspectin' the hospital, but that don't mean he's comin' over here in the lousy replacement camp."

"Is that so? I heard the C. O. say he was. And when Black Jack's on a inspection tour, it ain't no time fer two lousy buck privates to take things into their own hands."

"I guess you're right, Buck," admitted Pee-wee. "We'll see the shows, tank up a bit, then come back to our misery. I'll meet you behind the morgue at eight o'clock. So long."

IT was five minutes to eight by Pee-wee's wrist watch when he arrived at the morgue, but he found Buck there ahead of him, impatiently waiting.

"Gee, we're in luck," exclaimed Pee-wee. "Lookit them clouds over the moon. It's so dark you can hardly see your hand before your face. Now, if

we're careful and don't make no noise, we oughta get away with it."

Gingerly they approached the fence, senses on the qui vive for a probable prowling sentry. Climbing the obstruction proved even a more difficult task than they had anticipated, because on the top they encountered several strands of barbed wire. Buck safely negotiated the obstacle, but not Peewee. A loud, ripping sound, and he muttered angrily:

"I damn near tore the seat of my pants out. I'm in a helluva fine fix to go callin' on show girls."

"It'll be all right, if you don't turn around."

"Cripes, but you're funny," retorted Peewee. "Funny as a crutch."

"Halt! Who's there?" challenged a voice from the darkness.

The two doughboys stood as still as statues, tense with fear. Again the challenge rang out. However, the unseen sentry must have believed himself mistaken, for he did no further investigating.

Buck and Peewee stole quietly away from the fence toward the town. Reaching what he considered a safe spot, Peewee took stock of the damage to his trousers. It was serious. He was in despair, but Buck solved the problem by using three toothpicks in lieu of pins.

"If you don't set down," said Buck, "or hend over, them toothpicks oughta preserve your dignity."

Grumbling at his hard luck, Peewee strode hurriedly along with his pal. Eventually they reached the Y. M. C. A. hut, which was crowded with soldiers. By adroit maneuvering they managed to push themselves through the mob until they had gained the front row of benches. Here, by more adroit maneuvering, Buck found a seat. Peewee preferred to stand.

The show started. The first number was a sister team, who did a song and dance act. Neither could sing very well and the dancing was nothing to rave

about, but they were young and pretty, so what else mattered? Three times they had to take a bow.

"Oh, boy," whispered Buck to Peewee. "Ain't that blonde the cutie, though? Me for her. Did you see her making goo-goo eyes at me? She falls for me the minute she comes out. I'm gonna see her after the show if it's the last thing I ever do."

"I wasn't watchin' her much," replied Peewee, drawing in a deep sigh. "That red-headed partner of hers is a pip. No henna about her. Listen, Buck, when you see Jimmie Hicks, don't start layin' in to him about that board. If we handle him right, he might give us a slap-down to them two skirts. He can fix it for us if he wants to."

"I don't need nobody to fix it fer me where women is concerned," answered Buck loftily. "That blonde fell fer me like a panic on Wall Street."

There followed two other acts, a banjo player and a monologue artist. Then the sister team again made an appearance. Despite Buck's contention that the blonde had fallen for him, she did not even deign to look his way. Peewee received a smile from his redhead as did the other doughboys in the hut. Amid enthusiastic applause, the girls bowed themselves out.

"Gee, Buck," said Peewee excitedly, "did you see the redhead smile at me? I winked at her a coupla times and each time she nodded her head. What happened to your blonde, though? She musta swallowed a lump of ice and froze up. She didn't know you was here."

"Of course, she don't look at me," growled Buck. "Think she's gonna tip off the house that romance is between us? Not her. She's too wise a baby fer that."

"You might be right," replied Peewee skeptically. "Anyway, it won't hurt to play up to Jimmie Hicks. Make a friend of him and we'll take the girls out for a good time."

"How we gonna take 'em for a good time when we ain't got a sou between us? A guy like that N. V. A. bum is gotta be treated rough. I'll squeeze the twenty francs out of him, then we'll show the girls a real time."

THE master of ceremonies came to the footlights to announce the next number.

"Boys," he said impressively, "a great honor has been conferred upon us. An honor so unusual and unexpected that it has left me practically speechless. The commander in chief of the A. E. F., General John J. Pershing himself, is about to address you."

"Cripes, let's beat it," whispered Pee-wee. "If Black Jack sees us and then inspects the replacement camp to-morrow, he's surer'n hell gonna ask us what we was doin' here to-night."

"Be yourself," replied Buck. "Black Jack won't notice a coupla bums like us."

The master of ceremonies moved to the wings and bowed low. Out strode General Pershing. There was no mistaking that military carriage and stern face. It was the general himself. He walked to the footlights and swept the audience with a steely gaze. Finally his eye came to rest upon Buck. A slight start of recognition, and the general looked the harder at the nervous, squirming doughboy, then turned away.

"I knowed it," groaned Pee-wee. "What did I tell you? He's got you spotted. We can't go back, Buck, or he'll skin us alive."

General Pershing held up his hand and smiled. Every soldier in the house smiled back at him, except a certain one, and he was beyond smiling.

"Men," said the general, with dramatic gestures, "it gives me keen pleasure to stand before such a representative body of fighting men. As I gaze into your grim, set faces—faces of resolve—faces of courage—I wonder why the

war department sent me to France. You men need no commander in chief. Nothing can stop you. You are war dogs straining at the leash—straining to fly at the throats of the enemy, to roll them back into the Rhine."

The general paused and the hut shook with applause. Soldiers looked at one another and nodded. The general knew his onions.

"However," resumed Pershing, "there is one important thing you must not overlook; a thing so potential that victory cannot be achieved without it. Without it, no war can be won, no enemy can be defeated. Without it, the morale will crumble to nothing. I refer to the——" The general stopped dramatically. "I refer to the Sam Browne belt."

"Fer cripes sake," whispered Pee-wee, "wouldn't that sink you? Just like everybody says—he don't know nothing except a lousy Sam Browne belt."

"All generals is bugs," replied Buck, with decision. "If it ain't a Sam Browne belt, it's something else nutty."

FOR a space the general glared at his audience as though challenging them to dispute him. No objection was hurled his way. Bowing coldly, he disappeared into the wings. The amazed doughboys did not come out of their coma until the master of ceremonies stepped forward.

"Boys," he said, "it is no wonder that General Pershing is beloved by every man in the A. E. F. The immortal Washington said, 'In God we trust.' The indomitable Grant said, 'Let us have Peace.' And now the unconquerable Pershing says, 'Let us have the Sam Browne belt.' Once more is history in the making."

He stopped to note the effect of his words. The effect was there all right. If the Kaiser had suddenly appeared in their midst, attired in a ballet costume, it would not have been more stunning.

"Let's beat it out of here, Buck," implored Peewee. "The whole damn army is gone goofy."

"Men," went on the master of ceremonies, "it gives me great pleasure to introduce to you our own Jimmie Hicks, a Broadway star in his own right, who gallantly volunteered to risk the dangers of shot and shell in the S. O. S. to entertain you boys while you are fighting for your country. *Jimmie Hicks!*"

Out breezed Jimmie Hicks, Broadway and Forty-seventh Street stamped all over him. He was a typical wise guy, if ever there was a wise guy. Blowing a kiss to the master of ceremonies, he made a sweeping gesture to the grinning audience.

"Hello, army playmates," he said, in greeting. "How's the War? Everybody has heard of Jimmie Hicks, the doughboy. Well, here he is himself. Look me over, fellows, then take off your handcuffs and show your appreciation. To the ordinary actor, it would be pretty hard to follow a headliner like Black Jack Pershing, but I am no ordinary actor. I admit that I'm a wow." Laughter from the audience. "Now watch closely, and I'll make a poker deck perform without the help of a Sam Browne belt."

Producing a deck of cards, he performed a series of tricks which made the audience gasp. He pulled royal flushes and full houses from the air at will.

"Is it him?" asked Peewee eagerly. "Is he the guy who gypped your aunt?"

"It's the connivin' bum himself, Peewee. I'm tryin' to catch his eye, but he's afraid to look at me. He knows damn well what I'm here for."

With a flourish, Jimmie Hicks concluded his sleight-of-hand card tricks. The drop behind him rolled up, affording him the full stage. The usual paraphernalia of the stage magician were seen. He then gave a really clever ex-

hibition of magic. This finished, two .22-caliber rifles were handed to him by a soldier attendant. On a target for that purpose, he played "Home, Sweet Home." He then further demonstrated his skill with the rifle and pistol, which elicited wild applause from the doughs.

"And now," he said, "I need a volunteer. There is really nothing very dangerous to the trick, if I don't miss. I would use my regular assistant, but, unfortunately, in the last show I grew a bit careless. However, we buried him with full military honors."

Jimmie Hicks paused and ran an eye over the faces in front of him. No one volunteered. Finally he fixed his gaze upon Buck.

"How about you?" he asked. "Somehow or other your face looks very familiar. I wonder if you would oblige me by volunteering."

"You ain't gonna shoot at me, you big bum," replied Buck savagely. "I got something to say to you right after the show, and I don't mean maybe."

"Is that nice?" Jimmie Hicks grinned provokingly. "Think of your relatives, soldier boy. They could use Uncle Sam's ten-thousand-dollar funeral present—if I miss."

"You ain't so funny as you think you are," retorted Buck. "Eddie Foy is got you skinned a mile."

The soldiers, thinking that Buck was a plant in the audience, immensely enjoyed the tilt between the two. Finally a soldier volunteered. Jimmie Hicks neatly clipped the fire from a cigarette held in his mouth. This concluded the performance.

CHAPTER II.

THE MEETING.

BUCK and Peewee hurried back stage. They found Jimmie Hicks waiting for them. He grinningly offered a hand in greeting. The sister team was nowhere in sight.

"Come across, you lousy board jumper," said Buck, ignoring the hand. "There's three months' rent due my aunt and you ain't gonna soft soap me out of it, neither. Kick in with the dough or your nose will be hanging to your left ear."

"My nose was placed where it belongs," replied Jimmie Hicks pleasantly, "so don't try to move it. Listen, bo. I sent that money to your aunt long ago, so act natural. I'm a soldier like you fellows and volunteered to fight, not to entertain fighters. In France they got wise I was an actor and detailed me to this job. I'm fed up with it. On the level. Anyhow, this is my last show, and I'm going to join my outfit up the line. It's the 611th Infantry, A Company."

"The 611th!" exclaimed Pee-wee. "A Company! Why, that's the outfit me and Buck belongs to."

"Cut it out," growled Buck to Jimmie Hicks. "I ain't fallin' fer no hot air like that."

"No joshin', bo," said Jimmie Hicks. "Here, you can read my order for yourself." He showed Buck his order. "Now am I kidding?"

"A order is a order," grudgingly admitted Buck, "but that ain't payin' the dough you owe the aunt. You didn't send her nothin'. Not you. I tell you what I'll do, I'll accept twenty francs on payment and you can give me the rest later on. It oughta be easy for a guy what can handle a deck of cards that way to roll in jack."

"I haven't got a red cent. I'm flat. Anyhow, believe it or not, I paid that board bill."

"You done fergot about the blonde and redhead, Buck?" inquired Pee-wee anxiously.

"No, I ain't fergot about 'em, but them New York show girls ain't steppin' out with a coupla blokes what's stony broke. Them babies likes to eat and drink."

"Oh, ho!" ejaculated Jimmie Hicks, winking wisely. "So you fellows took a tumble for Mazie and Flora, huh? Great! Wanta meet 'em?"

"Do we?" came in chorus from the two.

"I'm the niftiest little fixer in the world," went on Jimmie Hicks. "I've contrived more marriages and caused more divorces than Don Juan himself. I'm the guy that founded Reno. But I'm afraid it's too late to meet Mazie and Flora. They've gone home by now."

"Cough up them twenty francs, or I'll bust every bone in your body," threatened Buck.

EASY, easy," whispered Pee-wee into Buck's ear. "You know we can't afford a mix-up. We'd be pinched and sent back to the replacement camp."

"Is that polite?" asked Jimmie Hicks, a grin spreading over his face. "Practically calling an actor and gentleman a liar. Where are your manners?"

"Pick a soft spot to fall on," retorted Buck, "because I'm gonna knock you for a loop, unless you produce them twenty francs."

"So you're one of those hard-boiled guys, huh?" The grin vanished from the other's face. "Well, Billy the Kid, I'm hard, too. I haven't got a cent and I'm not a bit afraid of you. I want to make friends and you try to ride me rough. How'd you like to jump in the lake? Honey gets farther with me than vinegar."

"Be reasonable, Buck," pleaded Pee-wee. "He ain't got any jack. And perhaps he did pay her. It's a cinch you can't squeeze blood out of a stone. Let's pull together. Perhaps Mazie and Flora ain't such awful gold diggers after all."

Buck stroked his chin in thought. He would gain nothing by hitting the actor, except perhaps a term at breaking rocks; and he was desirous, very desirous, of

meeting the blonde. There seemed no way but to compromise.

"All right," he said, "seeing we belongs to the same outfit, I'll be regular with you. Fix it so me and Peewee can meet Mazie and Flora and I'll call it quits—pro tem. But remember, this is only a short truce. I'm gonna get that jack if I hafta throw mud in your face to do it."

"You got me on the hip, I guess." A humorously crafty look stole into Jimmie Hicks' eyes. "Mazie and Flora are stopping at a house in town—boarding with a grouchy old Frog. Grandpa, as we call him, turns in early and don't like to be waked up after he's gone to sleep. Do you fellows want to risk his anger by waking him?"

"I'd swim the Atlantic to meet—Which one is the blonde?" said Buck.

"Mazie Palmer, and the redhead is Flora Fullerton. Both Mazie and Flora love romance. They thrive on it. You guys sing?"

"Yeh, I can sing," came quickly from Buck. "That's how I cop all my dames—with my melodious voice. They can't resist it."

"Sure must of changed a helluva lot then," put in Peewee.

"I got a great scheme," said Jimmie Hicks. "If you wake the Frog by knocking on the front door, you're liable to get a hide full of buck shot. Buck, you and Peewee can serenade Mazie and Flora. You know, stand under their window and sing a love song to them."

"I don't wanna get hit with no wash pitcher," protested Peewee. "Once Buck opens his mouth to sing, all the furniture in the room will shower down on us."

"That sounds great, Jimmie," said Buck eagerly. "But when I'm dry I can't sing a note. I gotta have a few drinks under my belt before I get real sentimental. Can't you cough up a couple of francs so we can wet our whistle at the estaminet first?"

"I might be able to fix it, I think. We'll hike over to the estaminet and try our luck."

THIS suggestion received a hearty approval and the three doughboys started off. They found the estaminet crowded with soldiers returning from the show. Jimmie Hicks elbowed his way to the counter.

"What will you have, gentlemen?" he asked of Peewee and Buck. "Champagne, coneyack, *vin blanc*, or *vin rouge*? Take your choice. I'm buying."

"You buyin'?" said Buck sourly. "I thought you didn't have no money."

"The hand is quicker than the eye, my boy. Live and learn. What is it going to be? Watch me closely and you'll receive an education in high finance."

They ordered cognac. The proprietor, a fat, perspiring Frenchman, filled their glasses and held out his hand for the money. Jimmie Hicks brazenly took a five-franc note from a pile of change in front of an artilleryman next to him and passed it to the Frenchman.

"Hey, what the hell are you doing?" cried the wagon soldier. "Gimme back that dough."

"Keep your shirt on, fellow," replied Jimmie Hicks coolly. "I'll return it in a minute. Here, Lafayette," he said to the proprietor. "take the drinks out of this and give me back the change, toots sweet."

The artilleryman was too confounded to do else but gaze open mouthed at the actor. The proprietor took the five-franc note and stuffed it into a pocket of his apron. He then handed the change back to Jimmie Hicks and left to wait on his other customers.

"Here." Jimmie Hicks gave a five-franc note to the artilleryman. "Here's your lousy money. Quit your squawkin'."

The artilleryman, jaw hanging

weakly, accepted the bank note. Buck and Pee-wee stared in astonishment at Jimmie.

"How did you do it?" demanded Pee-wee. "I seen you give the Frog a five-franc note, and now you give it back to the wagon soldier?"

"Didn't I say the hand was quicker than the eye? Stick around me and apree la gare you'll be able to make a killing in Wall Street."

Jimmie Hicks, downing his cognac, led the way to a table in a corner, Buck and Pee-wee following him like sheep.

"Cripes!" ejaculated Buck. "It's easy to understand how you done the aunt out of that board. It's the slickest stunt I ever seen pulled."

"You'll see a slicker one pulled to-night." Jimmie Hicks chuckled gleefully to himself. "I'm the chief stunt man of this A. E. F."

WITH each round of drinks, the pile of money in front of Jimmie Hicks grew larger, and if the Frenchman had investigated the pocket in his apron, he would have found that his pile was growing proportionately smaller.

The drinks came so fast that Buck and Pee-wee soon began to show signs of inebriation. Buck gave evidence of his condition by warbling a popular love ballad. His rendition firmly convinced Jimmie Hicks that John McCormack was a great singer.

At last Buck voiced his desire to call on Mazie and Flora. This Jimmie Hicks readily agreed to; in fact, a little too readily if the doughboys had stopped to ponder.

"Yes, it's time you troubadours serenaded your lady loves," he agreed. "Hurry, because it's getting late and Mazie and Flora might have turned in. They don't like to be disturbed from their slumbers. Buck, I suggest that you sing, 'Where Are You To-night, My Love?' Mazie dotes on that."

"I was figuring on singin' 'In the Gloaming,'" objected Buck, "or perhaps 'Come and Fly with Me.' You know, somethin' what suggests romance, adventure and love, and all that."

"Gees," groaned Pee-wee, "I can stand most anythin', Buck, but them two songs is the limit. I know of worse voices than yours, but I ain't never heard one."

"You're too damn tiny, Pee-wee, to appreciate soul music," snapped Buck. "Where does Mazie live, Jimmie?"

"Go south—down this street—until you come to a red-brick house, a two-story affair, on the right. That's where she lives."

"Nix on the comedy, you Broadway ham!" exploded Pee-wee. "That's brigade headquarters."

"No, it ain't, either," corrected Buck. "Brigade headquarters is across the street. That's where Brigadier General Smalley lives. 'Red Mike,' they call him. Cripes, if we ever woke him up this time of the night, he'd crucify us fer breakfast. Hey, you lousy sleight-of-hand artist, whatcha tryin' to put over on us?"

"I guess you fellows don't keep up with current events," laughed Jimmie Hicks. "Sure, Red Mike used to live there, but he moved to the north end of town about two weeks ago. Mazie and Flora board there now. I ought to know, seeing that I live there, too."

"How much you owe the Frog?" demanded Buck sourly.

"Whatta you mean—owe him? I've only been there a week."

"That's all I wanted to know. You're owin' just a week's board, then."

"Are you sure Red Mike's moved?" inquired Pee-wee. "You know what would happen to two buck privates wakin' up old Red Mike. You don't hate us that bad, do you?"

"Do I look like a fellow who would pull a dirty trick on two soldiers?" demanded Jimmie Hicks reprovingly.

"You don't have to go serenading. Mazie and Flora are nothing to me. You're the fellows in love with them, not me."

"All right, don't get sore," said Buck. "Go on with the story."

"Mazie and Flora sleep on the second floor. You fellows stand under their window and start singing. The old Frog is liable to get sore as hell and order you away, but he's only a big bluff. Don't pay any attention to him, or, perhaps, if he gets too fresh, tell him a few things."

"What'll we do when Mazie and Flora come down?" inquired Peewee.

"Well," advised Jimmie Hicks, "I'd suggest you bring them over here and throw a swell feed into them. I'll stand the gaff. By the time you arrive I'll own the place and have the Frenchman working for me. On your way now, and good luck."

"So long, Jimmie." Buck slipped an arm about the actor's shoulders in maudlin affection. "I'll never forget what you done for me to-night, Jimmie."

"I'll say you won't! Oh, another thing, fellows. The Frog speaks pretty good English and is liable to cuss you out. Throw it right back at him. Au revoir."

UNSTEADY under their load of cognac, Buck and Peewee left the estaminet. Outside, Peewee grew nervous. Just before reaching the red-brick house, he pushed Buck up against the front of a store.

"Buck," he said, "I got a hunch everythin' ain't so quiet along the western front. That lousy actor is too smooth. Listenin' to him is like drinkin' oil. How we know Red Mike is really moved?"

"I'm gonna serenade Mazie," grumbled Buck thickly, his usual caution drowned in the cognac he had drunk. "If you don't think enough of your red-

head to take a chance, then I'm goin' it alone."

Shrugging in resignation, Peewee capitulated and trudged along beside his pal. They found the brick house dark and silent. Apparently the girls had gone to bed, but this did not deter the doughboys in their resolve.

They stationed themselves under a window, and Buck started singing "In the Gloaming." It was enough to wake the dead. It did wake the tenant of the house. Up flew a window and a portly individual in a white nightshirt stuck out his head.

"What in hell's thundering blazes are you making that damn racket for?" he roared. "Are you in pain? This isn't the hospital."

"Go away and sell your papers," retorted Peewee. "You ain't bluffin' nobody, you big, pot-bellied baboon."

"What?" bellowed the man in the window, flushing angrily. "What's that you said? A big, pot-bellied baboon?"

"You ain't blind. You heard what I said. Shut up and go tell Miss Flora Fullerton her boy friend is waitin' for her. Shake your tail, frozen face."

"Yeh," rasped Buck, "what you interruptin' my singin' for? Ain't you got no bringin' up a-tall? I'll spit in your eye and blind you."

"Do you drunken rowdies realize who you are talking to?" thundered the man in the window.

"We realize all right," grinned Peewee. "And if you don't get out of that window, I'll bounce a rock off your bean, you lousy Frog."

"I'll stick you in the guardhouse for the rest of your natural lives, you nit-wits. I never listened to such insolence."

"Well, you're listenin' to it now," replied Peewee. "If you don't go tell them ladies we's here, we'll pull your lousy house down around your big ears."

There followed a stream of verbal explosives from the window that made

the fiercest bombardment of the Kaiser's artillery sound like a crooning lullaby, in comparison. The head above them suddenly disappeared.

"That's telling him where to get off at," exulted Peewee. "These Frogs has gotta be learned how to talk polite to American doughboys."

"Where did I leave off?" demanded Buck, clearing his throat. "That big stiff threw me off key."

"Cripes!" ejaculated Peewee. "You ain't goin' to start all over again, are you? No wonder the Frog went off his nut listenin' to your howlin'."

BUCK again cleared his throat, sucked in a deep breath and gave an imitation of an opera singer in the throes of torment. He finished the first verse of "In the Gloaming," but no blonde made her appearance. Then he plunged into the second verse. Tears began to trickle down his cheeks and his tones grew husky with emotion.

"Ain't it beautiful, Peewee? It plays on my G string like a tropical breeze in palm trees. Mazie oughta been down by now. Perhaps she didn't hear me. I reckon I better sing louder."

"No, Buck, please don't," beseeched Peewee: "Any louder, and the town'll think it's a gas-alarm siren. I got a sneakin' idea we ain't settin' so pretty. I'm gettin' nervous, Buck. Let's blow."

"You can't see beauty in nothin'," retorted Buck. "You're made of common clay. There ain't no poetry in your soul a-tall. I'm gonna start all over again."

Despite Peewee's vehement protests, Buck carried out his threat. A huckster selling strawberries would have died of envy, could he have heard him. Then it happened. From nowhere in particular an M. P. sergeant appeared, automatic covering them.

"You're pinched," he announced, "for disturbing the peace."

"Whatta you mean—disturbin' the

peace?" demanded Buck hotly. "You call singin' disturbin' the peace?"

"We ain't done nothin', sarge, honest," pleaded Peewee. "You ain't gonna arrest a cotpla blokes for just singin'?"

"If that's singing," replied the M. P. acidly, "then I'd hate like hell to hear a cat being skinned alive. You're pinched, I said."

"Like hell, we are!" defied Buck. "There ain't nothin' in army regulations what says singin' is a crime."

"Perhaps not," replied the sergeant, "but there's a helluva lot in those regulations making it a crime to wake up a general and then call him names."

"A general?" quavered Peewee, in sudden fright. "Whatta you mean—wake up a general? We didn't call no general names. We just talked back to a fresh Frog who tried to insult us."

"Yeh, sarge," put in Buck nervously. "You ain't gonna turn us in for tellin' a lousy Frog where he got off at, are you? I don't get that general stuff."

"Nix on the alibi," snapped the sergeant. "This is General Smalley's house, and you woke him up. Got him out of bed. Say, I wouldn't be in your boots for all the money in the world. If he don't have you shot at sunrise, he'll stick you on the rock pile for ninety-nine years. Ain't you got any sense, singing under Red Mike's window?"

"Red Mike! You mean that guy in the window was Red Mike?"

"Nobody else but," returned the sergeant. "General Smalley in person. He telephoned our detachment and ordered you arrested."

"Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord," groaned Peewee, his knees sagging. "I knowed that lousy ham actor was up to somethin'. We'll be shot surer'n hell."

"The dirty N. V. A. bum!" exploded Buck. "Pulling a scurvy trick like that on us, and him owin' the aunt three months' board. I can see through it all now. Just to get out of that board, he framed us for a firin' squad. Gees, sar-

gint, have a heart, won'tcha? We won't do it no more."

JUST then the door of the house opened and Red Mike, military blouse hurriedly drawn over his night-shirt, came into view. Buck and Pee-wee nearly fainted at sight of him.

"Sergeant," said the general to the M. P., "take these two ruffians to your detachment commander and direct that they be held in close confinement until other orders are received." He wheeled upon the two trembling soldiers. "I don't know whether to hang you or to shoot you," he said. "I'll take the rest of the night to think it over. However, rest assured that it will be one of the two. Take them away, sergeant."

"Please don't shoot us, general," begged Pee-wee. "We didn't know it was you."

"So help me, General Smalley," quavered Buck, "do you think I'd have the nerve to sing under a general's window, sir? No, sir, not me."

"So you call that singing, do you? Well, after all, I don't believe I will shoot you."

"Thank you, sir, thank you! That's mighty fine of you, sir."

"I'll hang you, instead. A voice like yours ought to have a rope wrapped around it. And you," he said to Pee-wee, "I'll teach you whether I'm a big, pot-bellied baboon. Away with them, sergeant."

The M. P. saluted and ordered Buck and Pee-wee to walk in front of him. They staggered along, their alcohol-steeped brains hardly able to comprehend what had befallen them. At length Pee-wee found his voice.

"Where you takin' us, sargint?" he piped. "Not to the shootin' grounds. I hope. We ain't prepared to die."

"I'm taking you to the billet of our detachment commander, like the general ordered. We've got a second looey temporarily in command, who is even

worse than Red Mike. What that bird knows about the army, you can write on an eyelid, but there ain't enough paper in the world to write what he thinks he knows. He's dumber than you are. Him and the army morale are bed companions."

"You mean we're going to stay in his billet until mornin'?" asked Buck, a ray of hope warming his breast. He nudged Pee-wee and whispered, "Don't give up, kid, mornin' ain't here yet. There might be a chance for us to get loose. I thought we was gonna be jammed in the mill."

"Yes, sir," said the sergeant, "that's where you're going to stay—in his billet. But don't think you can pull a jail break. Our looey is so damn efficient that he sleeps in the guardhouse. No kidding, fellers, he sleeps and eats right next to the prisoners' cage. You'll be safe enough."

"We're lost," groaned Buck, "and there ain't nobody to lead us from the land of the Philippines."

"I jest knowed your lousy singin'," accused Pee-wee, "would end in disaster for us. I told you not to get fresh with Jimmie Hicks."

"Quit your squawkin'!" growled Buck. "I'm in misery enough already."

CHAPTER III.

"BLACK JACK'S" VISIT.

THEY walked along in silence, feet dragging, chins hanging. Indeed was their plight hopeless. Pee-wee finally lifted his head and glanced forward. They were going to pass the estaminet. He grabbed Buck by the arm.

"Let's ask the sargint to take us in, Buck," he whispered. "Perhaps when Jimmie Hicks sees the trouble we're in he might relent a bit and say it was his fault."

"That dirty bum take the blame? Not him. He framed us on purpose—

just to get me out of the way. Three months' board is worth a damn sight more to him than the lives of two patriotic doughboys."

"Nevertheless, I'm gonna ask the sargint," persisted Peewee. "Some M. P.'s is got hearts."

"Yeh," retorted Buck, under his breath. "But they uses them hearts to pump blood with."

Peewee was not to be gainsaid.

"Will you do us a favor, sargint?"

"Sure," answered the sergeant readily. "What kind of flowers?"

"This whole thing is nothin' but a joke, sargint," went on Peewee. "Only a huge joke."

"Why don't you laugh then, if it's so funny?"

"I ain't foolin', sargint. There's a soldier in the estaminet named Hicks, who framed us. He told us the general moved to the other end of the town and that a couple of show girls lived in the red-brick house. That's why we was serenadin'. Stop in the estaminet and pinch him, sarge. We can make him come clean in front of the loocy."

"I can't be annoyed." The sergeant pretended to yawn. "Of course, it's quite an adventure to you fellows—being shot at sunrise; but to me it's only routine—part of the day's work. I don't get a thrill out of it. Tell your troubles to the loocy and don't bother me."

"Cripes, there he is!" Buck pointed to the estaminet door. "It's the lousy ham himself. I'll bet he's waitin' to give us the razzberry as we marches to our death."

"Is that him standing in the door?" inquired the sergeant. Both nodded eagerly. "Perhaps it won't harm to quiz him a bit. If he admits he pulled a joke on you, I'll take him along. If not, I have no authority to arrest him."

At the estaminet door the sergeant halted his prisoners. Jimmie Hicks, casually smoking a cigarette, glanced at

Peewee and Buck as though he had never seen them before in his life, then sarcastically saluted the sergeant.

"Seems you've rounded up some desperate characters, sergeant?" he remarked, blowing smoke in the air. "Two pretty tough eggs you've got there—disreputable, and all that."

"None of your wise-cracking," snapped the sergeant. "Do you know these men?"

"How dare you insult me? Know them? Are you inferring that I would associate with two tramps like them? Behave yourself, sergeant."

"So you don't know them, eh? Well, take a good look at 'em, because from all indications you'll never see them again. They're going on a long, long journey."

YOU dirty double-crossing bum!" blurted Peewee to Jimmie Hicks. "You cold-blooded murderer! Don't believe him, sarge. He's the guy that framed us."

"Yeh," said Buck fiercely. "A army Judas what betrayed his friends for thirty pieces of silver, only he owes my aunt a damn sight more'n that. You gonna let him get away with that stuff, sargint? Why don'tcha arrest him?"

"Who is that creature, anyway?" demanded Jimmie Hicks, staring indignantly at Buck. "What right has he to insult a gentleman? Remove him, sergeant, and shoot him."

"They are both liable to be shot," returned the sergeant. "No kidding."

"Some day you'll suffer for this, you yellor canary bird," hissed Buck to Jimmie Hicks. "Please, sarge, let me hit him just once, please. Then I can die happy."

"Step out," ordered the sergeant to his prisoners. "Tried to put something over on me, didn't you? But you can't make a fool of an M. P."

"You said it," retorted Buck. "The Lord took care of that."

The sergeant ordered them along, a twinkle in his eye, and the death march was resumed.

"I'll see you on the other side of the Jordan," called Jimmie Hicks after them. "Wait for me at the water's edge, because I'll be a long time joining you. Good-by, brothers in arms."

Arriving at the guardhouse, the sergeant ushered them into the presence of his detachment commander. One glance at the stiff-backed second looey convinced Buck and Peewee that they could expect little mercy from him. The looey looked through them as if they were window panes, then turned inquiringly to the sergeant.

"What are the charges, Sergeant Miles?" he demanded importantly. "Get your heels together in the presence of an officer," he ordered the noncom. "You prisoners straighten up and come to attention. No wonder the morale is cracking."

"Sir," said the sergeant, coming to attention. "General Smalley directs that these men be kept in close confinement until further orders. They serenaded the general under his bedroom window. Sang a love song to him, sir, and when the general ordered them away, they grew very insolent."

"Good Lord! What next?" exclaimed the looey. "What chance have we of defeating the foe when common privates sing love songs under generals' bedroom windows? I can't imagine such a thing! And General Pershing here on an inspection tour! What have you men to say for yourselves?" He looked straight at Buck.

"I—I thought the general was a show girl, sir," stammered Buck.

"A show girl? Merciful heavens! You add insult to injury. Does General Smalley look like a show girl, you idiot?"

"It was a put-up job on us, sir," interposed Peewee. "A doughboy named Jimmie Hicks framed us. Told us that

a blonde and a redhead lived in the general's house."

"Confine them, sergeant," commanded the looey. "To my mind, something deep and sinister is behind all this. I shall conduct a personal investigation."

PEEWEE and Buck were placed in a small room by themselves, the windows of which were barred. The door slammed behind the M. P. sergeant and they were alone.

"Well, here we are, thanks to you," growled Peewee. "It's the end of our military career. Wine, women, and song has been the downfall of thousands before us, and most likely will ruin thousands followin' us."

"That's right, blame it on me!" exploded Buck. "You're the one what lured me on. I didn't want to leave the replacement camp. If I ever lay hands on that lousy Jimmie Hicks, he'll think a mountain fell on him."

"You better prepare your soul for death," replied Peewee solemnly. "It sure needs renovatin'. I wonder if them bullets hurts much?"

"Bullets, my necktie! They ain't gonna shoot us fer nothin' like this. We might click a long stretch in the jug, but we won't be snuffed out."

"Cut out that racket in there," ordered an M. P., peering through the bars of their door. "Ain't you got no heart, waking up blokes what's gonna die in the morning?"

"What blokes?" demanded Peewee. "What do you mean—die?"

"This is condemned row," replied the M. P., "and the prisoners are complaining at the noise you're making. Guys waiting to be executed are entitled to at least one night's sleep before taking the jump. Have a heart."

"You mean we're gonna be shot?" gasped Peewee. "We ain't been tried yet."

"Who preferred the charges?" asked the M. P., concealing a smile.

"Red Mike," faltered Buck. "You know, General Smalley."

"Red Mike!" ejaculated the M. P. "Your goose is cooked. He shoots 'em first and tries 'em after. Sorta holds an inquest over their dead bodies. Now, keep quiet and have some consideration for them dying with you." He walked away.

Pee wee and Buck sank dejectedly upon their cots, chins resting in hands. They were licked.

PERHAPS an hour had dragged by when, all of a sudden, they were awakened from their stupor by a commotion in the hall. An M. P. rapped on the door to attract their attention.

"They have come for us," groaned Buck, crossing to Pee wee and thrusting out his hand. "So long, pal. I don't hold nothin' against you, even if it was your fault."

"We gotta face death bravely, buddy," replied Pee wee. "My fault, you big bun? It was that lousy voice of yours what got us in this jam."

"On your toes!" excitedly commanded the M. P. at the door. "Black Jack Pershing is inspecting the guardhouse. He's pulled one of his surprise stunts on the looey, who is flying around as if the cat was after him. Stand by your bunks and look intelligent, if you can."

The M. P. passed on and Pee wee and Buck stationed themselves by their bunk as ordered. Footsteps sounded in the hall, and they caught a glimpse of the general walking by, the looey tagging after him. Straining their ears, they heard cell doors open and a jumbled indistinct conversation; doubtless Black Jack was questioning the prisoners.

Finally it came their turn. The door opened and the general strode in. Pee wee gulped as he cast a timid glance at Pershing's face. The general slyly winked at him. General? It was Jimmie Hicks, the doughboy! Buck let out a deep sigh as he recognized the actor,

and received a wink. The daring of the trick took their breaths.

"Lieutenant," snapped the general, "the condition of your guardhouse is deplorable. I have a damn good mind to try you for inefficiency." He turned to the prisoners, tendered them a hard, searching look and then wheeled upon the nervous looey. "If this isn't an outrage!" he exploded wrathfully. "What are these men confined for? Who confined them? They belong to the intelligence staff of my headquarters."

"I—I—— It wasn't my fault, general," stammered the flustered looey. "They are confined by order of General Smalley. In fact, sir, I protested at the confinement. I saw instantly, sir, that they were above the average intelligence. I presume the general will take up the matter immediately with General Smalley, sir?"

"You presume too damned much. I'll do the presuming for this A. E. F. You second lieutenants are not running the army, even though you think you are. Click your heels together, drat you, when you're talking to me."

The looey was about ready to pass out. He snapped to attention and stood as though he had been dipped in shellac. Sweat trickled down his face. The general addressed the prisoners.

"How have you men been treated since being confined?" he asked. "Have you any complaints to make?" He again winked at the doughboys.

"I got a helluva lot of complaints, Jimmie," said Pee wee, then caught himself. "I—I mean, General Pershin'. The looey was very rude and unkind, sir. Just take a look for yourself, general, not even clean sheets. In fact, no sheets a-tall. I ask you, is that the way to treat two guys from the intelligent staff?"

"If I was you, general," put in Buck, "I'd give him a taste of his own medicine, to learn him a lesson."

"Lieutenant," said Jimmie severely,

to the now quaking officer, "I have a good mind to take your commission from you. You wouldn't make a good lance corporal. However, I might overlook your fault if you will show some pep in what I want you to do."

"Thank—th—thank you, sir," stuttered the loocy. "I'll—I'll d-do all in my p-power to m-make amends, sir."

I INTEND to pay the next brigade a surprise visit," said Jimmie Hicks musingly. "Now, if I could secure a closed car in a hurry, I could accomplish it. I'd use mine, but then the cat would be out of the bag. Have you a car handy, lieutenant?"

"There is General Smalley's car, sir," replied the lieutenant. "I can send for that, sir."

"I wouldn't have General Smalley disturbed again for the world. I think too much of him. Is there any way of getting his car without anybody knowing it?"

"Why, yes, sir, I think I can arrange it, sir," said the loocy eagerly. "Does the general desire a chauffeur?"

"Chauffeur, hell! These two men have driven me ever since my arrival in France. What the devil do I want a chauffeur for? Snap out of your dope. Bring that car here in five minutes or I'll prefer those charges."

The lieutenant was so perturbed that he saluted with both hands and hastened from the room. Jimmie Hicks turned on the M. P. who stood near by, popped.

"Fade out, you putty-brained flat-foot," he said. "This isn't a lawn party."

The M. P. disappeared like an arrow from a bow. When he had gone, Jimmie Hicks looked cautiously around and lowered his voice.

"We're in a helluva jam," he whispered. "We gotta work fast. Still, I've been in worse pinches and always managed to come clear. Didn't you fellows

know better than to wake up Red Mike with your unearthly yelping and howling? I thought you could sing."

"Another crack like that, and I'll bust you in the beezzer," said Buck. "Ain't you ashamed, pullin' a dirty trick like that on two unsuspectin' doughboys?"

"It seems to me," groaned Peewee, "that we's jumped out a the fryin' pan into the fire."

"You fellows haven't any sense of humor at all," replied Jimmie Hicks, grinning. "It ain't often a soldier has the pleasure of waking up a general and then using his limousine for a joy ride. You said you wanted to go up the line. Here's your opportunity. You should feel proud to tour France with Black Jack Pershing."

"You're clever, all right," Buck made a wry face. "Too damn clever for our safety. What's gonna happen when Red Mike learns you turned us loose, that you was impersonatin' Black Jack? In the mornin' every M. P. in France will be gunnin' for us, you screwy palooka."

If isn't morning yet. Never anticipate trouble, my boy. All I care about is the present: the future will take care of itself. If it doesn't, Jimmie Hicks will take care of it. This is only a pastime with me, turning the A. E. F. upside down. You ain't seen the half of it yet."

"If it's any worse'n this," growled Peewee, "I'd just as soon lay me down for a long rest. You sure got a cast-iron nerve, Jimmie Hicks."

"Cast iron? It's drop-forged steel. Now for a dress rehearsal. Pay attention to your lines. Can you drive a car, Buck?"

"I used to taxi for a livin' in New York, and damn near starved."

"Fine. You're my chauffeur and Peewee can sit beside you. Snap into it, I hear somebody coming."

The loocy hurried into the room,

hanged his heels together, and executed a smart salute.

"Sir," he announced, "the general's car is waiting."

"Where the hell did you go for it, to Paris?" snapped Jimmie. "Gentlemen," he continued, to Buck and Peewee, "the sooner we leave, the better it'll be for all concerned."

In the guard room Jimmie Hicks stopped to shake a finger under the looney's nose.

"Brains," he said, "pay heed to my instructions, because if you hawl them up, I'll hang you on a weeping willow tree for the crows to peck at. Remember now, no one is to know of my visit here, not even General Smalley. If he gets nosey about the released prisoners, tell him they are still confined; and if he asks about his car, say that you know nothing of it. Understand?"

"Yes, sir. Yes, general, I shall carry out your orders to the letter, sir."

"I'm beginning to think you're not so bad after all," said Jimmie Hicks, slowly. "How would you like to be appointed captain and assigned to G. H. Q.?"

"Wonderful, sir! What can I do to attain such an honor?"

"Refuse to answer any and all questions. Maintain a dignified and military silence. Then, upon my return, if it is in my power, I'll make you a captain."

"General, wild horses won't make me open my lips. I thank the general."

"You had better save your thanks for later. I have a feeling they are being wasted now. Hop to it, you men."

CHAPTER IV.

MICHAEL J. BURKE.

OUTSIDE, the door of General Smalley's car was held open respectfully by a waiting M. P. To the accompaniment of much saluting and bowing, Jimmie Hicks entered and set-

tled himself comfortably on the rear seat. Buck took the wheel and Peewee climbed up beside him.

"I have changed my mind," said Jimmie Hicks, loud enough for the lieutenant to hear. "Drive toward Paris; I forgot my Sam Browne belt."

Buck shifted gears and the car rolled away, leaving behind a group of M. P.'s still at the salute. Following the instructions of Jimmie Hicks, Buck turned down a side street and soon gained the main highway. Here they mixed with the traffic going north. Keeping close to the left ditch, Buck stepped on the gas until the speedometer registered thirty miles an hour. He craved distance between him and Red Mike. Occasionally he had to blow the siren to clear a passage. Dismounted troops and wheeled traffic gave way magically.

They traveled in this manner for about five minutes, then Jimmie Hicks used the speaking tube.

"A little way down the road," he said to Buck, "you'll come to an old farmhouse. Turn off there and pull up in its rear."

This Buck easily accomplished. Jimmie Hicks got out and ordered the doughboys to do likewise.

"Better stretch your legs," he said, "because we're going to burn up France in a few minutes. Keep an eye peeled while I go in and get my buck private's uniform. It might come in handy."

"Just a minute," said Buck. "I crave a council of war. Things is been movin' too fast for me to keep up with 'em. Where do we go from here?"

"Them's my sentiments exactly," put in Peewee. "I'm goin' around so fast, I'm dizzy. Get rid of that Black Jack uniform and let's come down to earth. You can't keep up this burlesque, or we'll be shot full of holes."

"With me leading you!" Jimmie Hicks struck an heroic attitude. "You've got a chance, but without me, you are

only babes in the woods. Wait here until I come back."

He went into the dark house. Buck and Pee wee gazed at each other in consternation.

"I bet he's got a screw loose," said Pee wee.

"Screw loose? His whole damn engine is fallin' apart. With him paradin' around as Black Jack Pershin', we'll all get mud thrown in our face."

"What's to be done then? Shall we beat it back to the replacement camp and make a clean breast of it? This thing can't go on forever."

"I don't know," mused Buck. "We done enough now to get shot three times. After the first time, it don't make much difference, I expect. I reckon we've got to carry on with it. There ain't nothin' else to do. Cripes, every time that guy comes into my life, it signifies misfortune."

JIMMIE HICKS came out of the house, still attired in the uniform of the general. He carried a bundle of clothes under his arm. Buck barred his path.

"Look here, mister," he said, "me and Pee wee is been discussin' this thing. Get shed of them Pershin' togs and jump into your regular uniform. We crave to know what your plans are."

"Man proposes and the army disposes," replied Jimmie Hicks airily. "Plans? I have no plans. You've got to take things as they come. I've always had an ambition to die a general, and this is my golden opportunity. Into the car, menials, we're traveling north."

To the tune of much grumbling and protesting, the doughboys sullenly obeyed. Jimmie Hicks ordered Buck to take the highway again and to give her the gun. With siren screaming, the car tore north along the road, followed by imprecations from the startled traffic. About three kilos farther on, Buck brought the machine to a stop.

"On your way, bum," commanded Jimmie Hicks. "What's the matter with you?"

"There ain't nothin' the matter," retorted Buck sarcastically, "'cept the crossroads is jammed. A battery of field artillery is trying to run over a regiment of doughs. You ever hear such cussin'? Listen!"

It was unnecessary for the three soldiers to strain their ears to any great extent in order to hear the altercation in progress. In the bright moonlight, the skies long since having cleared, they saw a colonel of artillery standing in his stirrups and fiercely shaking his fist at a mounted infantry colonel, who glared back defiantly.

"Get your lousy mud crunchers out of the way," roared the artilleryman, "and let my guns pass! Damn it, don't you read your orders? They plainly state that the artillery has the right of way over all traffic."

"Don't you dare call my soldiers lousy mud crunchers," replied the infantryman. "Rein back those smoke wagons before we dump them into the ditch. A helluva nerve you've got, trying to cut through the middle of my regiment. To hell with you and your orders! Get those stove pipes back, I tell you, before I lose my temper."

"Dump my guns into the ditch, will you? Just you try it! It'll be the last dumping your crumpy gravel agitators ever did."

"Ain't that nice language for two colonels?" said Pee wee. "And them's the guys what's always shoutin' morale!"

"And we're stuck in the middle of it!" groaned Buck. "I can't budge a inch. A field piece is right in front of me."

"I haven't seen any colonels yet who could hold me up when I'm in a hurry," said Jimmie Hicks. "Give 'em the siren, Buck."

"You know any more jokes? Them

two babies is hard. I ain't achin' to drag myself into a polite debate like theirs."

ON the right of the road sounded a fierce honking of an automobile horn, and a closed car, two wheels in the ditch, plowed up to the warring officers and stopped. An officer opened the door and got out on the running board. The bright moonlight revealed the stars on his shoulder. He was a brigadier general.

"What the bloody hell is all this row about?" he demanded, in a voice that reminded one of a sick bull. "Why isn't the infantry moving ahead?"

"For the simple reason, general," replied the infantry colonel, in high elation, "that this battery cut through the middle of my regiment. Its colonel has used tactics and language very unbecoming to an officer and a gentleman."

"I know it, I'm not deaf," retorted the general angrily. "You on the horse there, who the hell do you think you are? General Pershing? Get those iron pea shooters out of the path of my infantry or I'll prefer charges against you. Jump to it, damn you!"

"Very well, sir," replied the artilleryman meekly, "but the artillery has the right of way over all traffic, sir."

"Do as I say," thundered the general. "Get them to hell out of the way."

"I guess it's about time for me to horn in," grinned Jimmie Hicks. "These birds need a lesson in military etiquette. I'll show them who's commanding this A. E. F."

"For cripes sake!" remonstrated Peewee desperately. "Ain't we in bad enough already, without you buttin' into more trouble?"

"I can't pass up a rich situation like this," said Jimmie Hicks. "I'll throw a scare into those bozos that'll make their teeth chatter."

"Oh, Lord," groaned Peewee. "This is what we get for teamin' up with a

bug-house, crazy palooka like you. Keep your mouth shut and behave yourself, you fool."

Jimmie Hicks smiled exasperatingly and opened the door of the car. He climbed up on the front fender so that he could be seen by the three officers.

"Do you gentlemen realize there is a war in progress?" he cried.

They turned in his direction. However, they must not have recognized his rank, because his interruption only added fuel to the flame.

"Out of the way, you tabby cats," yelled Jimmie Hicks, "and let my car through!"

"Who the hell are you talking to?" roared the brigadier general. "Do you know who I am? I am Brigadier General Hazen of the infantry. You staff officers are not running this war."

"And do you know who I am?"

"I don't give a damn who you are. Keep your mouth out of my business or I'll have you court-martialed."

"For your information and guidance, I am General John J. Pershing."

The infantry general gasped and nearly fell off of the running board. The artilleryman stiffened and saluted. The infantry colonel looked as though he had taken a dose of castor oil. There was an awed hush.

"I—I beg your pardon, sir," stammered the brigadier general. "I—I didn't recognize you, General Pershing."

"I can overlook your insolence," replied Jimmie Hicks, "but not the fact that you are out of uniform. Where in blazes is your Sam Browne belt?"

"I—I left it in the car, sir."

"Put it on, then. Wait a moment. First clear a path for my car, then take the names of those officers." Jimmie Hicks pointed to the two colonels. "Then, upon word from G. H. Q., have them court-martialed for moperly."

"Moperly, sir? I do not quite understand you."

"You'll understand clearly enough

when I try you upon the same charge. Now agitate yourself and clear a way for my car."

NEVER before did three officers work with such coordination and efficiency. The field battery backed up and the infantry regiment split in two. Mechanically the dazed Buck shifted gears and stepped on the gas. The car rolled onward.

"I'm licked," said Pee wee feebly. "Talk about brass monkeys having nerve, you've got them skinned to a frazzle, Jimmie."

"That ain't the half of it," put in Buck. "If we ain't skinned to a frazzle, it won't be his fault."

"What's the use of being an actor if you can't live your part?" laughed Jimmie Hicks. "I believe in realism. Now, my doughty adventurers, wipe your swords and again prepare for the fray. I've a hunch things will happen before the sun comes up."

"I suppose right now everythin' is at a standstill?" ejaculated Pee wee acidly. "I'm so rusty from inaction that my joints are squeakin'."

The car covered nearly ten kilos without further incident, thanks to the siren. A dull, booming roar far in front of them, which rumbled and echoed on the night air, bespoke an unusual activity up the line.

A stalled truck necessitated that the car pull into a ditch until the trouble was remedied. A motor cycle and side car, coming from the front, was also compelled to stop. Buck shot it a nervous glance. It was manned by an M. P., while in the side car sat another M. P. and a private of infantry, his wrists manacled. Buck nudged Pee wee.

"Some poor doughboy gone wrong," he whispered. "He sure must be in Dutch, on account of them iron bracelets."

"Find out the trouble," ordered

Jimmie Hicks, in a low voice through the speaking tube. "They don't put handcuffs on a soldier unless he's charged with a major crime."

"Better keep your nose out of it," advised Buck, "and let well enough alone."

Pee wee, however, was not of Buck's way of thinking. He gazed sympathetically at the prisoner, whose chin was touching his breast as though he were in the depths of despair.

"Gees," whispered Pee wee, "somehow or other, I feel sorry as hell for that poor guy." Pee wee leaned out of the car and spoke to one of the M. P.'s. "What's he up against, buddy?" he asked.

"Plenty," replied the M. P., a note of respect in his tone as he took in the car with a glance. "He was tried at division headquarters and we're taking him back to be shot." A shudder passed through the prisoner. "One of those hard-luck patients," went on the M. P. "He was on listening post and fell asleep. He claimed he was sick, but the court wouldn't listen. So it's lights out for him."

"How about it, buddy?" asked Pee wee. "Is that the straight dope?"

THE prisoner lifted his head and looked at the speaker. He was as Irish as Paddy's pig.

"Shure, and there's no use of lyin'," he replied. "It won't git me nothin' now. I must of et somethin' what disagreed with me, because when I went on listenin' post I growed so sleepy I couldn't keep my eyes open. I ain't blamin' the army, because a lot depended on me out there in the mud. The Krauts might of sneaked up and cut me platoon to pieces. I ain't thinkin' of meself so much, but I got a wife and kid back home, what'll die of shame and sorrow. I asked the court to give me another chance, but I guess that spiel's handed to 'em every day."

"Supposin' you get another chance?" inquired Buck huskily. "What then?"

"I'd try and show 'em I wasn't yeller, and that I kin be trusted. Shure, and never be it said that Michael J. Burke run from a lot of Dutchmen. But what's the use of all this talk, me bye? I'm doomed beyond help. Shure, and I kin taste them bullets right now."

Peewee and Buck brought their heads together, and Jimmie Hicks leaned forward to join in the conference, using the speaking tube.

"I'm willing to risk it, if Jimmie is," volunteered Peewee. "You know what I mean, fellers."

"There ain't no hope for the poor bloke," said Buck. "The best we can do is stall off his death for a short while. I'm votin' with Peewee. A good turn done to a feller like him might make Saint Peter sit up and take notice when we try to crash the gate."

"Yeh," demurred Peewee, "but do you think the M. P.'s will stand for it? They ain't as easy as a couple of colonels and a brigadier general."

"You leave that part to me," replied Jimmie Hicks. "There isn't a knot in this army that I can't untie. I'm not egotistical, or anything like that, either; but when Jimmie Hicks, the doughboy, puts his mind to something, that something is accomplished. Here goes."

Jimmie whispered to Peewee to alight and open the door for him. Peewee played his part perfectly, standing to attention and saluting as General Pershing got out. The two M. P.'s stared for a moment at Jimmie Hicks, then sprang from their motor cycle and clicked their heels together. The prisoner looked as though he were seeing a ghost.

"I have been listening, my good man," said Jimmie Hicks, "and I'm inclined to believe your story. If I give you another chance, will you perform your duty as a soldier should? Speak up."

"That I will sir," replied the prisoner eagerly. "Shure, and me life will belong to ye, general. But I can't lie to ye, sir. I was not only charged with bein' asleep on post, sir, but several of the witnesses insinuated—yes, sir, insinuated—that I had been drinkin' fer two days."

"Then you were drunk on post, eh?"

"No, sir, I was not. Never in me life have I been drunk, though I'm compelled to admit that I've lapped up plenty of alcohol. Drunkenness don't run in the Burke family, sir."

"Your truthfulness saves you," replied Jimmie. He turned to the M. P. "Take off those handcuffs," he ordered.

"But—but I beg the general's pardon, sir," stuttered the M. P. in charge. "We have strict orders to deliver the prisoner to the base, sir. I can't very well surrender him, sir, without a written order."

"You have the temerity to disobey a direct order from the commanding general, from General Pershing himself?" demanded Jimmie Hicks severely. "Do you wish to change places with the prisoner?"

"No—no, sir. But how am I to know that you are General Pershing?"

JIMMIE HICKS glared threateningly at the trembling M. P. The policeman lowered his gaze.

"Take this man's name and outfit," he ordered Peewee. "I will prefer charges against him in the morning. He'll soon find out whether or not I am General Pershing."

"Please, sir," begged the M. P., on the verge of collapse. "I was only trying to do my duty, sir." He got out a key and removed the handcuffs from Burke. "There, sir. See, sir. I've turned him loose. What do you wish done with him, sir?"

"Never mind the charges," said Jimmie Hicks to Peewee. "I don't want to be hard on the men under me and this

man was doing his duty, as he thought. Private Burke, get into my car. I'll return you to division headquarters and take the matter up with the division commander. And you," he said to the M. P., "keep on until you reach general headquarters. I need men like you on my personal staff. On your way now, and let nothing stop you."

Burke got into the car and sat back luxuriously on the soft cushions. Saluting, the two M. P.'s mounted the motor cycle and started the engine. Jimmie lost no time in joining Burke. The stalled truck started moving, and Pee wee and Buck sprang to their places. Neither had any desire to loiter longer than was necessary. Under Buck's guidance, the car cleared the truck, and again was the mad race in progress.

"Shure, and once I didn't believe in Santa Claus," said Burke happily. "I don't know how to thank the general."

"Forget it," replied Jimmie Hicks. "Already I've got too damn many thanks coming to me. What outfit do you belong to?"

"C Company, the 197th Infantry. I'm a first-class bomber and machine gunner, sir."

"Have you seen any action?"

"That I have, sir. About three months of it. You know, sir, a fight a day keeps the blues away."

"You seem mighty cheerful for a man who has just escaped the firing squad."

"Shure, and that's what makes me cheerful. Then, too, it ain't every buck private what kin ride with Black Jack Pershin—I mean General Pershin—and in a fine car like this. Shure, and have you got a cigarette, general? I ain't had a smoke all day."

"Say, aren't you pretty damn familiar? Is that the way you talk to the commander in chief of the A. E. F.?"

"I don't wanna be impolite, but nuts on the commander in chief of the A. E. F. Shure and you ain't foolin' nobody. If ye're General Pershin, I'm

Sir Douglas Haig, of the firm of Haig & Haig."

"What in the hell do you mean?" demanded Jimmie Hicks. "Do you insinuate that I'm not General Pershing?"

"Insinuate is too mild a word. Listen, me lad, me heart goes out in gratitude to ye and yer buddies. Ye pulled one of the cleverest and nerviest stunts of the whole war. Yer heart is big as a church. Still, I ain't as thick as them M. P.'s. I remember the time when ye played Paterson, New Jersey, Mr. Jimmie Hicks, impersonator and sleight-of-hand artist. I was the prop man."

"Stick it there, bo; you can't fool the Irish." Jimmie Hicks cordially shook hands with his passenger. "It's a great war, Mike."

"Unfortunately, I ain't seen no greater," returned the Irishman. "Now, if ye don't mind, Mr. Black Jack Pershin', I'd like the low-down on yer disguise and where ye're takin' me."

"Oh, we're just going adventuring," replied Jimmie Hicks casually. "You know, looking for trouble and, finding that trouble, searching for the best way out again. Mike, the four of us are in the same boat. We're traveling like hell but don't know where we're going. Any suggestions?"

"Shure, and I have. Just keep on in the same direction and fast. Anywhere is better'n this lousy place."

CHAPTER V.

NO MAN'S LAND.

ON the front seat, Pee wee and Buck were having a little confab of their own, the main topic of which was "Where are we goin' and what are we gonna do when we get there?" Neither could furnish a satisfactory answer. They both decided that other soldiers in France had been in worse fixes than theirs but had landed in a cemetery.

The traffic on the road was beginning to thin and Buck increased the speed of

the car accordingly. The guns up the line grew louder and louder and the red tint in the sky deeper. They were rapidly nearing the front. Presently a shell screamed over their heads and burst in a field near the road. Except for Mike, none of them had yet been under fire.

"Cripes, what was that?" burst in fright from Peewee. "It sounded like the Woolworth Buildin' fell over."

"It's that seventy-five mile gun bombardin' Paris," shuddered Buck, trying to keep the car to a straight course. "One of the shells fell short, I guess. You feel like you been hit?"

"I feel damn funny, Buck—wetlike. Perhaps a piece of iron did hit me."

Peewee nervously looked behind him. Mike was in the act of lighting a cigarette, the flare of the match illuminating the interior of the car.

"Put that out, you dumbell!" Peewee yelled. "That's what them Krauts is shootin' at. Ain't you got no sense?"

But Mike didn't hear him.

"As I was sayin'," Mike remarked to the shivering Jimmie Hicks, "them iron eggs ain't dangerous, unless they hits ye."

For once Jimmie Hicks was unable to reply. Buck, receiving no orders from his self-appointed leader, kept the car headed north along the almost deserted highway, and in his nervousness unconsciously pressed down harder on the accelerator. The speedometer showed 40 and hung around that mark.

In the light of the fading moon, at a crossroads, the doughboys on the front seat saw two M. P.'s waving emphatically for them to stop.

"I knowed it," said Buck. "Our ruse is discovered. Them M. P.'s is been ordered to stop us."

"Keep on goin'!" cried Peewee. "You know, like we don't see 'em."

Buck followed this sage advice and the car shot past the gesticulating military policemen and their yells soon died out in the distance.

THE car hit a hole in the road and jumped like a bucking broncho, spilling Mike and Jimmie Hicks on the floor. Peewee held on by his teeth, or at least that is the way he described it later. Buck clung to the twisting wheel like a sailor holding to a raft. Eventually the car came down, landing right side up on terra firma. By a superhuman effort, Buck straightened the front wheels just in time to escape a war-blasted poplar tree at the side of the road.

"What'd we do—jump the English Channel?" gasped Peewee. "I bet that was why the lousy M. P.'s was yellin'—that we'd reached the end of France."

"Shure, and if ye'd use more care in yer drivin'," sounded through the speaking tube, in the voice of Mike, "I'd enjoy me ride more. Ain't ye got no more respect fer the general's guest?"

"Wouldn't that jar you?" exploded Buck wrathfully. "After savin' the dirty Irish mick, he complains of me drivin'. Hold that lousy tube to me mouth, Peewee, so's I can tell him a few things."

Peewee did as requested.

"You bowlegged north-of-Ireland turkey," rasped Buck into the tube. "You lopsided son of an Irish ape. That's what I think of you."

"Don't leave out the rest of yer family," replied Mike, with a chuckle. "By the description, I recognizes yer old man. Be a nice shofer now, and quit bumpin' yer betters around."

Who-ee! Crumpp! A blinding sheet of flame, and the car windows were shattered by a shower of stones and other flying missiles. Buck let go of the wheel and grabbed Peewee for protection. It is said that Providence takes care of drunks and fools; therefore, the car continued on its course. A warning shriek from Peewee, and Buck awoke to the danger. Grasping the wheel in the nick of time, he saved the car from nose-diving into the ditch.

A second shell quickly followed the first and exploded several hundred yards in the rear. Buck slowed down and jammed on his brakes. Jumping to the ground, he jerked open the car door and thrust in his head.

"What in the seventh comin' of Columbus do you think I am?" he bawled. "Every gun in the German army is shootin' at us. I ain't stayin' on this lousy ship no longer."

"Shure, and that's no way fer a sea capt'in to act," reproved Mike, "desertin' of a ship 'cause the weather's rough. Shame on ye!"

"Keep your mouth out of this! Officially, you're dead. I ain't listenin' to no post mortem corpses. I'm talkin' to you, Mr. Black Jack Pershin'. You're supposed to be commandin' this army. Sit up, and let's hear from you."

"I resigned five minutes ago," replied Jimmie Hicks, grinning. "The war's getting to polite for me. Let's go back and tell General Smalley we were only fooling."

"Nix on the wise cracks! I'm serious as hell. We gonna stay on this road and be blowed to pieces?"

"No," replied Mike, with a grin. "Let's go over there in that field."

"Are you gonna drive this car, or am I gonna?" demanded Peewee heatedly, from the front seat. "If the Krauts can come that close when we're movin', what in hell will they do while we're standin' still? That last iron baby had my name and address written all over it. Shake your stumps, Buck."

"What can we do, Mike?" asked Jimmie Hicks, scratching his head.

The Irishman grinned.

"Two things, Mr. Black Jack. Go ahead or go back—before we're knocked sideways. If we go back, we'll all be shot, sure'n hell. If we go forward, we'll all be shot, sure'n hell. Take yer choice and don't be greedy."

"Cripes, but you're bright," rasped Buck. "Bright as the rest of the Irish."

It seemed that a runaway express train was rushing toward them.

"Down! Down! On yer bellies!" shouted Mike, in warning. "This one's got our telephone number."

Vrooomnn! The road rushed up and smacked Buck in the face. Peewee did an Annette Kellerman from the front seat, landing on all fours. Jimmie Hicks and Mike went into a clinch on the car floor. A mighty, searing flash, and the earth hit the moon to the tune of a terrific detonation. Fragments of H. E. slapped the ground all about them, one tearing a jagged hole through the top of the car and missing Mike by a hair's breadth. Slowly the partly stunned doughboys sat up and gazed stupidly about them, all except Mike, who was coolly lighting a cigarette.

"Me arm! Where's me arm? I lost me arm!" cried Buck, his wits not yet having returned.

"Shure, and it's hangin' to yer shoulder, me bye."

"Who hit me on the head?" demanded Peewee. "You guys better cut out your foolin', or I'll bust loose on you."

"This is what I call anticlimaxing a good show," said Jimmie Hicks, trying to smile, but failing. "It looks like we'll have to write a new third act. What's wrong, Mike?"

"Nothin' much, Mr. Pershin'. We's only livin' up to what the good book says, 'The way of the transgressor is hard.' We best be movin', 'cause I really do believe the Krauts is shellin' the road."

"And Ireland wants to be free!" ejaculated Buck, in extreme disgust, after having located his lost arm. "He really believes the road is bein' shelled!"

Jimmie Hicks sprang into action.

"Shake your heads, fellows. On the wheel, Buck, and head straight for Berlin. Give her the gas before we're knocked loose from our pants."

"Head her for Berlin yourself, you ham actor. I was happy and contented

until I met you. I don't drive another lick."

Another runaway train came bumping along through the air, took a short curve, jumped the track and, whizzing by the stalled automobile, tore up the station platform and ripped the baggage room asunder. Or that's the way it seemed to the doughboys. A blast of hot fire, and La Belle France took a ride on a merry-go-round. Then the earthquake. It was still raining debris when Buck clambered erect and staggered to the front seat.

"Shure, and the sea capt'in is changed his mind," laughed Mike. "He's takin' the bridge again."

"Hold tight, everybody," shouted Buck, thumbing his nose at the Irishman. "If I gotta die, it ain't gonna be here."

The car lurched forward and tore madly down the road. Buck bending over the wheel, face set and grim. The "Rocky Road to Dublin" was a smooth asphalt pavement in comparison. The road, pitted with shell holes from a recent bombardment, made the car look like a drunken acrobat in a tumbling act. The others yelled for Buck to stop, not excluding Mike; but Buck paid no attention to them. It was only by a string of miracles that they escaped destruction.

"Did ye ever see such a careless shofer?" puffed Mike, as a lurch of the car banged him against the side. "Ye should use better judgment in hirin' yer help, Mr. Black Jack."

"The damn fool's gone crazy!" cried Jimmie Hicks, in fright. "And after all I did for him! If that isn't ingratitude!"

FAR ahead of the car the road burst into flame. A shell had registered a direct hit on it. It didn't suit Buck at all. He was trying to run away from those things, not into them. Then a crossroads. Without a moment's hesi-

tation, he swerved the car on two wheels and followed the right-hand road. Though narrow, and crooked enough to break a snake's back, it was smoother than the one he had left. Where it led to, he did not care. Not just then. It was taking him from the shelling, which was quite sufficient. He could play futurities as well as could Jimmie Hicks.

"As I was sayin'," remarked Mike, "shofers shouldn't be accepted without references. It seems to me we're headed for Switzerland, where they makes holes in cheeses. I'm thinkin' we'll all be full of holes before long. Be gorry, what was that?"

On the night air, above the rumble of the guns and exploding shells, sounded a staccato noise, as though a wooden table were being beaten with bamboo sticks.

"What is it, Mike?" asked Jimmie Hicks nervously.

"Nothin' but typewriters. Hush a minute. I can't tell if they's ours or theirs. Kraut machine guns works slow, ye know."

There came another burst of machine-gun fire, this time not as far distant as the other, then a sharp cracking over their heads.

"By the saints!" cried Mike. "There aint no mistakin' them bumblebees. It's a Kraut gun. Listen! There goes one of ours. Shure, and we must be close to the jump-off. Tell that damn fool at the wheel to slow up, Mr. Pershin'. He's so impolite he won't listen to me."

"Slow down, Buck!" cried Jimmie Hicks. "Mike says we're close to the jump-off."

"Tell him to do me a favor, then, and jump off," retorted Buck, over his shoulder. "Nobody'll miss him. Just try and stop me. You coaxed me to drive, and I'm drivin'!"

Through the shattered windows on the left side of the car they saw several star shells curve high up over the dark horizon.

"Kraut lines," announced Mike, with decision. "And we're runnin' parallel with 'em. I got a sinkin' sensation we're in No Man's Land."

Buck continued his mad race along the road. However, he soon had to reduce his speed materially, due to the many bends.

"Halt!" rang out a voice. "Halt! You can't go past this point."

"Who says I can't?" shouted Buck, as he whizzed by the invisible sentry.

Behind them a rifle spat fire and the glass in the wind shield was broken. There followed the quick emptying of an automatic pistol. Instead of the fusillade's stopping Buck, it added to his hysteria of excitement. He fed the engine more gas.

SUDDENLY a sharp curve loomed in front of him. The brakes shrieked. There followed an acrid, burning smell, and the rear wheels, locking, skidded in the soft dirt. It seemed that Buck lifted the front wheels around to the left by sheer strength. The car tilted perilously, then abruptly righted. Buck had safely negotiated the turn.

Somewhere in their rear a Vickers gun cut loose at the speeding car. A corner of the top was ripped off by the flying steel jackets. The road turned again. Having nothing better to do, Buck followed it, but at slower speed. Everything around them soon became silent.

Along the road for a short space Buck rushed. Trees began to appear. It was evident that the road was leading them into a wood. Buck slowed down to about fifteen miles an hour. He was beginning to tire of his joy ride.

"I'm gonna stop in a few minutes and let somebody else take the wheel," he announced to Pee wee. "I ain't gonna do all the work for this lousy outfit."

"It's only because we's doomed to be shot that your crazy drivin' didn't kill

us," muttered Pee wee. "You gone hay-wire, or somethin'?"

"I say, Mr. Shofer," called Mike, "I wonder if ye'd oblige me be stoppin' at the first comfort station ye come to. Glory be! Ben Hur's chariot race wasn't nothin' but a baby parade alongside yer drivin'."

"Fer cripes sake, put on the brakes!" yelled Pee wee to Buck. "There's a tree stretched across the road. See it there! What was that? Somethin' movin'!"

Buck applied the brakes and the car came to a halt.

"We can't go no farther, Jimmie," said Pee wee in a low voice. "What you think we better do now? I seen a coupla guys movin' in front of us. Some doughboy outfit, I guess. You better duck them Pershin' things and slip into your uniform."

"I haven't any uniform to slip into. It fell out of the car when Buck took that last curve. Don't worry. I haven't forgotten my lines."

"Things don't look so good," observed Mike seriously. "I got a queer feelin' in the pit of me stomick that there's somethin' rotten in Denmark."

"You're the somethin' what's rotten," snapped Buck. "You've got a helluva lot to say—and you a skunk at a lawn party! What's on the program now, Mr. Actor?"

Dark, shadowy forms, grotesque and ghostlike in the dim light, seemed to float through the air toward the car. The doughboys cast uneasy glances about them. Everywhere they looked were the mysterious forms, growing larger and larger and more plentiful.

"Gee willikers," said Pee wee anxiously. "I believe we've run into a cemetery and the ghosts is walkin'." He shuddered.

"Be yourself," reassured Jimmie Hicks. "It's time for me to speak my lines." The forms drew nearer. "Hey, buddy," called Jimmie Hicks, to one of the apparitions, "what outfit? We're

looking for A Company, 611th Infantry."

"Hands oop!" commanded a harsh voice, with a decided German accent. "You mein prisoners are yet. One move und we shoot. Dere two machine guns iss pointed by you."

"Shure, and I reckon the milk's upset," said Mike. "Stick yer arms up, fellers. The Kraut might be tellin' the truth."

"Here's where we get crucified," groaned Buck, elevating his hands. "How do you like 'em fried, Mr. Jimmie Hicks, you omen of disaster?"

"If you ever spoke lines, speak up now, Jimmie," implored Peewee. "Show your stage stuff, pal."

"Listen, fellows," whispered Jimmie Hicks, "follow my cues. You are my orderlies. I'm General Pershing. If I don't give these Dutchmen the run-around, it isn't my fault. It's yours."

THE door of the car was jerked open and a powerful-looking *unteroffizier* covered them with a Luger. Other soldiers, bayonets advanced, quickly made Buck and Peewee prisoners.

"Come mit der car out," ordered the *unteroffizier*. "Who iss you yet—riding into der German lines?"

"German lines!" ejaculated Jimmie Hicks, in well-simulated surprise. "Damn that driver! He has betrayed me. I never did trust him."

"Ach, it iss der driver's fault?" replied the *unteroffizier*. "You der captain iss? Yah?"

"Captain, hell!" put in Mike, sensing that it was his cue. "How dare ye boloneys call an American general a captain?"

"Amerikaner general?" The *unteroffizier* flashed an electric torch in Jimmie Hicks' face, then staggered back in surprise. "Got in himmel! Mein eyes go blind yet? Der commanding general by der Amerikaner army? You iss him? Yah?"

"Yes, I am General John J. Pershing, you damn fool," replied Jimmie Hicks, "commander in chief of the American army. Although I may be a prisoner, I demand the respect due my rank. How dare you address me that way?"

The German noncommissioned officer sprang to attention and brought his hand to the salute.

"Please excuse, sir," he begged. "You I did not recognize at first, sir."

He said something in German to his men. A subdued cheer rose from them. A circle of glistening bayonets pressed closer around the car and prisoners, the German soldiers craning their necks for a look at the famous general.

"What is your name?" demanded Jimmie Hicks severely. "And what regiment? What are you and your men doing here?"

"Corporal Schmitz, sir, Jager Infanterie. More I cannot tell. You is mein prisoner, General Pershing. I will be made der officer yet und receive der Iron Cross."

"You will like hell!" snapped Jimmie Hicks. "You had nothing to do with my capture. It was my driver who betrayed me. He is the one who'll get the credit."

CHAPTER VI.

MIKE MAKES A PART PAYMENT.

THE *unteroffizier* spoke in German to a soldier standing beside him. Jimmie Hicks seized the opportunity to whisper to Mike.

"Do you get my drift? This baby is after glory, and isn't eager to share it with Buck. He's dumber than a rented clothes rack. Put your brain to work, Mike. Anything to delay his taking us back to the German lines. You can never tell what will happen. Get me?"

"Shure, and I understand," whispered Mike. "'Tis a clever thought. I'll slip one over his head like a nightcap. Dutch corporals is thicker'n ours, hiven help 'em."

The prisoners were conducted to a spot about fifty feet from the road and a strong guard was placed over them. Buck was kept apart from the others. It soon became apparent to the alert Mike that they had been captured by an isolated detachment, probably a machine-gun crew, although there were no machine guns in sight.

The *unteroffizier*, after issuing a list of instructions to his men, came over and sat down on a log where he could watch the American general, possibly picturing to himself the glory awaiting him in Berlin for the capture. Mike's eyes never left the German noncom.

The Irishman suddenly sprang to attention before Jimmie Hicks and tendered him an exaggerated salute.

"Listen, Jimmie," he said in low tones, "we're in the hands of Kraut machine gunners, I think. His nibs, on the log there, is figurin' whether he'll take us back. We mustn't let him do that, or we'll be stuck in a prison pen fer duration of the war. Will ye do me a favor, Jimmie?"

"Surest thing you know, Mike. What is it?"

"I've been clownin' a lot since ye guys saved me from the M. P.'s, but that's only me nature. I appreciate what ye done fer me. Shure, and ye risked yer own necks to save mine. I've served long enough in the trenches to recognize the preparations fer an attack when I see 'em. Our doughs is gonna jump off at daylight, or I'm a left-handed Swede. We passed through a coupla regiments of 'em layin' low near the road. And they ain't gonna jump off without a tin shower from the artillery and then a creepin' barrage."

"I don't quite get you, Mike. What are you driving at? What is the favor?"

"That Dutch corporal don't know how to spell brains. I'm gonna talk to him and pull his wisdom teeth, then I'll borrow his Luger and tickle him in the ribs with it. If he's goosey, the feel of the

front sight will make him sit there nice and obedient until I'm ready fer him to move. And I'll not be ready until that creepin' barrage cuts him and us off from the Heinie lines."

"Suppose your scheme fails?"

"Then it'll be jest too bad fer one Michael J. Burke, of Mayo County. However, that's me own business. I owe ye blokes a lot, and it'll be me first part payment."

"Nothing doing, Mike, we're all in this thing together, and the risk must be equally divided. The odds are a hundred to one against you."

"Nevertheless, I'm gamblin'. Sit tight, now."

MIKE saluted, wheeled about, and strode boldly over to the German noncom. He sat down beside him.

"Listen, Corporal Liverwurst," he said, "I've jest been talkin' with the general. He's sorer'n a mashed thumb at that lousy shofer what betrayed him. Then, too, he appreciates the courtesy ye's showed him and us. He says ye're a perfect gentleman, Mr. Boloney. Lend me yer ear—it'll be to yer benefit and glory. If that driver shoots off his mouth at German headquarters, I ask ye, what do ye get out of it? Not a damn thing. The traitor will grab off all the credit and glory. You'll be sent back to the trenches fer the *Amerikaner* doughboys to shoot at, and believe me, General Sauerkraut, they kin knock a fly off the moon with both eyes shut."

"Ach!" The German spat in disgust. "Always yet am I in der hard luck. Der *Amerikaner* general don't like the driver? *Nein?*"

"He shure hates his guts."

"Und you don't like him?"

"He's poison to me eyesight, Mr. von Hindenburg."

"Goodt! I vill shoot him und close his mouth. Yah?"

"Shure, and ye're thicker'n thick," said Mike hastily. "Ye'd gum the whole

works, that ye would. Ye know damn well a German corporal ain't loved by his men. They'd tell how ye shot him, and ye'd be in trouble, serious trouble, fer the killin' of a German spy. That's what he is, Max—nothin' but a lousy German spy."

"Vass iss it I should do then?" demanded the *unteroffizier* in perplexity. "I can't take him back, und I can't shoot him."

"Shure, and what's the matter with me shootin' him?"

"How you can shoot him mitout a pistol yet?"

"What's the matter with that pea shooter in yer belt there? Slip it to me easylike, me crown prince, so none of yer men kin see. It wouldn't look right fer ye to be an accomplice to the murder. I'll unbutton me blouse and hide the plaything under it. See how easy it is?"

"You t'ink I am der fool yet? Suppose you should vant to shoot me?"

"Be yerself, Corporal Boloney. I'm not that impolite, to mistreat me host in such a way. Gwan with ye! Perhaps ye're fergettin' I'm an Irishman."

"Dat iss why I should be afraid yet, because you iss der Irisher. In Hoboken I see der many dirty Irish tricks—like you *Amerikaners* calls it."

"Shure, and ye're quite right, Fritz, but them dirty tricks was pulled by men from the north of Ireland, not from the south. Supposin' I did shoot ye? Glory be, I wouldn't last a minute alterward. Yer men would use their pig stickers on me. Well, if ye ain't cravin' of glory and Iron Crosses, it ain't no skin offn my neck. Let the driver steal all the credit, and see if I care."

"Perhaps it should be for der best," mused the noncom, scratching his head. "Yah, I do it."

"Ye're a man of brains, Corporal Limburger."

"Vy you call me all dem names, limburger, boloney, und such. I ain't some-

t'ing to eat, yet. Mein name iss Schmitz."

"Shure, and I humbly apologize. The drinks is on me. Come, Mr. Boloney Schmitz, pass me yer pepper box before I changes me mind."

THE noncommissioned officer glanced furtively around him while the elated Mike unbuttoned his blouse. After another look the German drew his Luger from its holster and quickly passed it to the Irishman, who thrust it under his opened blouse.

"Shoot him dead," instructed Schmitz. "So dead he can't say noddin. *Ach!* Vass iss dat? Vat you do yet? For vy you should stick it in mein belly?"

Mike scowled ferociously.

"You see, it's this way, dill pickle. Shure, and an Irishman is like a woman, he often changes his mind. Killin' the driver wouldn't do me a damn bit of good. In fact, it would embarrass me greatly, seein' he's a friend of mine. Instead, I've decided to play a game of watchful waitin'. If ye move or open yer mouth, Von Turpitz, I'll inject a lead pill into yer kidneys. I ask ye, nice and politelike, do ye wish to live?"

The German, pale to the gills, and realizing his stupidity, gazed blankly at the grinning Irishman.

"Der Irish iss no goodt!" he blurted. "Sometimes dey can be trusted not. Vat should I do it to live?"

"Do just as I tell ye. One word from ye in German to your men, and somebody's gonna start diggin' a grave for a cold weinie. Stick a smile on yer ugly mug and ask General Pershin' to come here."

The frightened noncommissioned officer did as directed. Jimmy Hicks walked over to them, instantly taking in the situation.

"Sit down, general," invited Mike with a wink. "Me and Hassenpfeffer is gone into partnership. Peewee, I want ye."

Peewee came over, followed by the sentry guarding him.

"Schmitz," said Mike, "Mr. Peewee here understands German, but can't speak it, so watch yer step and don't stub yer toe by tryin' to double cross us. Order yer sentry to bring the driver here, then tell yer little Kaiser Williams to back up to a respectable distance and mind their own damn business. Remember, Mr. Peewee kin understand yer lingo."

CORPORAL SCHMITZ issued an order in German and his men, with wondering gazes at one another, moved back and commenced talking in whispers.

"What the hell's up now?" asked Buck in astonishment. "A pinochle game, or somethin'?"

"Shure, and I jest melded two yards of trumps," replied Mike with a broad grin. "After a short debate I convinced Mr. Boloney we wasn't visitin' Berlin—at least, not fer the present. I'm ticklin' his ribs with a Luger. Now, general, ye kin go to work on the prisoner."

"When you stopped our car," said Jimmie Hicks to the German, "you claimed that we were covered by two machine guns. Where are they located? Answer truthfully, or I'll tell Mike to pull the trigger."

"One is over d-dere by der b-bushes," stammered the German, as he pointed to a clump of brush. "Der udder vun ve do not haf yet."

"How far are we from the American lines? And why the machine gun?"

"Perhaps der t'ousand yards. Der *Amerikaners* cannot fool der army of der Fatherland."

"But a turkey from County Mayo kin," interrupted Mike. "Shure, and what do ye know about the Americans?"

"Pretty soon dey come over—vat you call it?—over der top, und der machine gun iss stop dem."

"Is this the only machine-gun squad out here?" asked Jimmie Hicks.

"Everyvere dere is squads yet und machine guns und bombers. Ve iss ready for der attack yet."

"Ye damn fool!" said Mike. "Don't ye know the *Amerikaner* smoke waggins will lay down a barrage first? What good is yer machine guns then?"

"Some vill be blowed up, und some vill be blowed up not. Der orders iss stay und stop dem."

Jimmie Hicks and his pals went into a whispered conference to decide upon a course of action. The knowledge that the Americans were to launch an attack did not tend to quiet their jumping nerves, for they realized that they would be caught in the barrage. However, there was nothing to do but await developments. True, they had the drop on the stupid German corporal, but there was no telling at what moment his men might take the matter into their own hands. The Americans could feel the eyes of the German soldiers boring into their backs.

"It's five minutes to three," announced Mike. "If our byes is comin' over at daylight, the waggin soldiers oughta be gittin' busy purty soon now."

"What'll we do when them guns opens up?" inquired Peewee nervously. "I ain't never been under fire before."

"When the fireworks commences," replied Mike, "flatten yerselves on the ground and trust to luck."

"How about the Heinie corporal?" asked Jimmie Hicks. "How can we watch him in the shelling?"

"I'll nurse him. Shure, and he needs a Irish governess. Ye blokes jest forget about me and attend to the savin' of yer own skins. It'll be me second payment on what I owes ye."

"I can't see it that way, Mike," protested Jimmie Hicks. "You've overpaid us already. You mustn't forget that I'm a principal in this show, too."

Buck, Peewee and Jimmie, their

nerves jumping, sat down beside Mike on the log. A soldier walked up to the corporal and spoke heatedly to him in German. Mike pressed the muzzle of the Luger into the corporal's side as a gentle reminder that he was still on the job.

THE noncom, believing that Peewee really understood German, and fearing instant death at the hands of the Irishman, ordered the soldier back. By the vehemence of his tones and the glint in his eyes, the American doughboys surmised that the corporal had told the soldier plenty. The private straightened and commenced stammering out what appeared to be an apology. The corporal austere waved him away.

Mike kept an eye on the minute hand of his watch. Slowly it moved toward the 12 on the dial. It was three o'clock, but nothing happened. The minute hand crept past the 12. It was now one minute after three.

A thundering roar from the American lines, and jagged flashes of red streaked across the horizon. Jimmie, Buck and Peewee crouched down, faces pale. Then a terrific whistling and screaming overhead, and hell was turned upside down. Shells burst all around them.

"On yer bellies!" shouted Mike. "Hug the dirt, and if ye know how to pray, ask the good saints to take care of ye."

The German soldiers needed no such admonition. They flopped to earth as though their feet had been knocked from under them. A moaning whine from the American lines announced the coming of a heavy one. It sounded as though it were headed directly for them. A monstrous rushing, and a section of the wood about a hundred yards away blossomed into crimson flame. Tree trunks and limbs hurtled to every point of the compass. The ground rocked.

Then a terrifying blast, almost in their midst. When the smoke cleared and the shower of earth settled, Jimmie

Hicks, his eardrums aching, raised up on his elbows for a glance around. On the rim of a yawning shell hole he saw the torn and mangled bodies of several Germans. Mike and the corporal were no longer on the log. Where were they? Jimmie searched the ground with hot eyes. A doughboy's tin hat rose slowly from the other side of the log. Under the helmet was the face of Mike, but his habitual grin had vanished.

LUGER still in hand, he ran to Jimmie and lay down beside him. The German soldiers were too busy protecting themselves from the shelling to pay any attention to the prisoners.

"Where is Corporal Schmitz, Mike?" asked Jimmie. "I can't see him anywhere. It's pretty light now, so he couldn't have gone far without us noticing him."

"When that big one busted, the concussion knocked me sprawlin'. It made me dizzy fer a minute. When I opens me eyes, the Dutchman is gone. We gotta be damn careful, 'cause he's up to some monkeyshines. He knows bloody well his men will report him, if they live through the bombardment. He's a stupid jackass. Shure, and I think he's learned a lesson, though. I'll bet he's hidin' somewhere, perhaps behind a tree, waitin' to pop us off."

"You better lay low then, Mike," advised Jimmie, "because you're the one he's after."

"No such thing; 'tis ye yerself he wants. 'Twould square matters fer him and put a feather in his hat if he bumped off General Pershin'. Ye and the others keep down flat, and I'll take a look around."

"Not unless I go with you, Mike. You're not shouldering the brunt alone."

"Now, me bye, don't git rambunctious. Ye blokes ain't never been under fire before, and would only be in me way. Jest let this Irish trench digger take charge of the party. I'm worryin'

about that hidden machine gun. Shure, and it oughta be silenced before our doughs comes over."

"But how, Mike? What can one man do against a gun crew? You had better let me help you."

"Perhaps ye're fergittin' the man in question is Irish. There's a bag of Dutch potato mashers near the log. I'll borrow a couple and pay a visit to that gun."

A vicious crack in the air, and Jimmie Hicks rolled over on his back, a hand clapped to his temple. The horrified Mike saw blood oozing from between his fingers.

"Ye dirty hyena!" he cried wrathfully. "Snipin' a good bloke like him from behind a tree. I'll git ye fer it!" Mike's hot anger suddenly gave way to anxiety for the wounded shoulder. "Speak to me, Jimmie," he begged. "Tell me ye ain't dead. Where did it hit ye?"

No answer came from Jimmie Hicks. Mike raced to a dead German several yards away, appropriated his first-aid packet, then ran back to Jimmie. Disregarding the fact that he was an easy target for whoever had fired the shot, Mike kneeled beside Jimmie and disengaged his hands from the wound. Wiping the flowing blood away with a piece of gauze, Mike discovered to his great joy that the wound was only superficial. A steel jacket had plowed a furrow in the flesh of the temple. Under Mike's ministrations, Jimmie's eyes opened, and he grinned feebly at the Irishman.

"Quit yer actin', John Drew!" exploded Mike in pretended anger. "Always tryin' to steal the show. I ask ye, is it nice to frighten a guy out of his sinses over a lousy little scratch like that?"

"What—what happened, Mike? Did a shell hit me?"

The Irishman snorted.

"Shell, me necktie! Shure, and it was a grasshopper kicked ye."

CHAPTER VII.

THE GUN PIT.

THE sound of a steel jacket almost split their eardrums. Mike's jaw sagged and he clapped a hand to his heart, swayed unsteadily on his feet for a moment, then fell to the ground. His legs straightened, and he clawed the earth. Jimmie Hicks watched him in horror.

"Mike! Oh, Mike!" Two tears started down Jimmie's cheeks. "My God! He's killed! Killed trying to help a bum like me. Mike! Mike!"

"Not so much noise, ye damn fool," came the welcome voice of the Irishman. "Ye ain't the only actor in this war."

Jimmie Hicks gasped his relief.

"Thank Heaven, you're not dead, Mike!"

"Dead? Since when has a Harp been licked by a Dutchman? Shure, and I ain't hit a-tall, a-tall. I jest pulled a dirty Irish trick. Corporal Boloney thinks he's done me in. It won't be long now before he pokes his pig snout into real trouble. When he steps from behind his tree, I'll write the name of Michael J. Burke across the front of his undershirt."

Jimmie Hicks sighed in relief. Lying on his side with his Luger in readiness, Mike watched through half-closed eyes for the German corporal, feeling certain that he was the guilty one. He had purposely fallen in such a manner that he could cover the trees behind him.

Cautiously the rim of a coal-scuttle helmet came into sight from behind a tree, then the face of the corporal. For a short space the German sized up the situation, then stepped boldly into view.

"There he is, Mike," whispered Jimmie excitedly. "Shoot him! Shoot him! Quick, let him have it."

"Shure, and Rome wasn't built in a day, me lad. Don't rush me. 'Tain't often I has the pleasure of pushin' over a Kraut like him. When he gits nearer

I'll write him a letter of interduction to the divil."

The German noncommissioned officer, seemingly assured that the Irishman was dead, increased his stride, and with a Mauser at the trail, advanced confidently.

"Now, watch me," whispered Mike. "I'll pink him on the second button."

A rifle cracked on their left, and the corporal swung around and pitched heavily to the ground, deader than a mackerel.

"Who in hell done that?" exploded Mike angrily. "Shure, and if that ain't a dirty trick, stealin' the candy from under me nose!"

He wheeled in the direction from which the shot had come. Pee wee, a Mauser in hand, ran up and dropped down beside him.

"So it was ye, was it?" demanded Mike. "Didn't I tell ye to lay low—that this was a private fight?"

"Cripes! I thought you was both dead. I seen that son of a gun bump Jimmie, so I crawled to a dead Kraut and borrowed his gun. Then I seen you, Mike, runnin' for that first-aid packet to help Jimmie. Then the Kraut bumps you off. I pulls down on Schnitz as soon as he looks around the tree, but the damn Mauser ain't loaded, so I hafta go back for ammo. I got him the second time, square in the gizzard."

"I've a mind to kick ye in the pants, ye little shrimp. What do ye mean, exposin' yerself that way? Ye might of been killed. Ain't ye got no brains a-tall?"

"What about yourself, you thick mick?" demanded Pee wee indignantly. "Is that all the thanks I get fer savin' your lousy life? Next time you can fight your own battles."

"Don't git peeved. Shure, and do ye want me to kiss ye fer swipin' me candy? Where is that shofer friend of yers? He's been too damn quiet. I bet he's up to some mischief."

MIKE'S question was answered in person by Buck. The doughboy laid a bag of German hand grenades on the ground, then sat down and wiped the sweat from his face.

"Phew!" he exclaimed in relief. "I thought you two guys was napoo fini."

"Don't be disappointed," grinned Mike. "The day ain't over yet. What's annoyin' ye?"

"Fellers," said Buck earnestly, "I been doin' a helluva lot of thinkin'."

"Is that why the sweat's runnin' down yer dirty face?" asked Mike.

"This ain't no laughin' matter, you Irish baboon—bein' shelled by your own guns. Me nerves got jumpin' so much I couldn't lay down quiet waitin' to be hit, so I starts thinkin', as I said. The Krauts is scared stiff. Lookit 'em on the ground there, diggin' fer China. They's got a machine gun hid in them woods. While we ain't doin' nothin', I thought it would be a good idea to bomb it out."

"I sure teamed up with a scrappy bunch," Mike slapped Buck on the shoulder. "Ye're there a mile, me fine shofer, and I take back what I said about ye. Ye're all braver than hungry lions, unless ye're so scared ye don't know what ye're doin'. I got a better plan, though."

"You would," Buck said. "Let's have it."

"Why put a perfectly good gun out of commission? What's wrong with capturin' it and layin' low? Then, when our doughs comes over, we kin pepper the other guns the Krauts has hid."

"That isn't a bad idea," put in Jimmie Hicks. "What do you say, fellows? If we pull a stunt like that, it might save our skins for us. It's a cinch they won't court-martial four guys after they have become heroes. They should forget all about me impersonating Black Jack and snatching Mike from the M. P.'s."

"It sounds good," said Pee wee.

"We've got to do somethin' to save our faces. Wreckin' General Smalley's car ain't a joke to be sneezed at. I bet every wire in France is hummin', to nab us on sight."

"All in favor say aye," suggested Mike. "I'm an expert bomber and machine gunner, even if I do admit it meself."

"You ain't the only machine gunner in this crowd," snapped Buck. "Me and Peewee went to machine-gun school. We ain't seen no actual fightin', but we sure can handle a Kraut gun. It was part of the course."

"I guess I'm just a washout," said Jimmie Hicks apologetically. "I don't know a damn thing about bombs or machine guns."

"Well, let's git busy," said Mike. "We can't be heroes, settin' on our fannies gabbin'."

THEY brought their heads together to discuss the details of the plan. The Amercian barrage, which had shifted to other spots, as barrages have a habit of doing, burst forth again in renewed fury. For ten minutes, which seemed like years to the prone doughboys, shells tore gaping holes in the ground or else exploded overhead, fragments of H. E. screaming and whistling all around them. They huddled closer together, arms protecting their heads, their faces white and drawn from the terrible ordeal they were undergoing.

The shelling traveled farther north. Mike sat up and stared about him. The scene of destruction was awe inspiring. Through clouds of acrid, swirling smoke, he caught glimpses of blackened, shattered stumps which a few minutes before had been full-grown trees. Here and there grotesque humps of field gray told a story of blood and death.

Rubbing his eyes to clear them of the biting, smarting smoke, he gazed at his companions. They were on the verge of shell shock, trembling and shuddering as

they gazed wildly at the devastation caused by the artillery. Although himself unmanned by the terrific strain, Mike realized that something must be done to save the situation, or else their nerves would give way entirely.

"Ye're a sweet-lookin' hero," he said to Buck, forcing a laugh. "Wipe the mud from yer clock and shake yer head. There's work to be done."

"I—I can't stand it," sobbed Peewee, rocking to and fro, his hands hiding his face. "This is awful. Oh, my God! I can't stand it!"

Mike leaned over, and with an arm, drew the diminutive soldier to him.

"Keep a stiff upper lip, kid," he soothed. "The danger is all over now. Our smoke waggins is raised their sights. We won't git no more of the shellin'. It sure was tough while it lasted."

"All—all right, Mike," replied Peewee, trying to hold back his sobs. "Cripes, but you're great. I'm beginnin' to feel better already. You won't leave me, will you, Mike? I ain't used to this sort of thing."

"Leave ye, me brave bye? Not me. I'll stick closer to ye than a lousy cootie." He squeezed Peewee's hand. "What do ye say, Black Jack?" This, with an encouraging pat on Jimmie's shoulder. "What do ye think of the war now?"

"I'm not able to—to—think quite yet, Mike," faltered Jimmie. "This is worse than doing five a day on the Pantages time. How—how do I look? Is my make-up spoiled?"

"A bit of rouge on yer cheeks would help some, Richard Mansfield. There's a speck of dust on yer Sam Browne belt. Outside of that, ye oughta git by."

BUCK raised his head, straightened his drooping shoulders, and stared hard at the Irishman. There was a suspicious quiver at the corners of his mouth and a telltale mistiness in his eyes.

"Mike," he jerked out, "there's some-
thin' about you what peps a guy up.
I'll—I'll go through hell for you, Mike.
I ain't gettin' sloppy, neither. I mean
it. I'm beginnin' to think there's some
good in an Irishman, after all."

"Ye are, are ye?" Mike's voice broke
a little. "In a coupla years, Buck, ye
oughta make a fine soldier, but ye'll
never make a good shofer. Now, let's
snap into it, fellers. Before them fire-
crackers started, we was discussin' a
plan to capture a machine gun. Is the
motion still before the house?"

"I'm a bit weak, Mike," said Jimmie
Hicks, "but the commanding general
can't afford to display timidity before
his men. It might crack the morale.
Let's go. You're the big shot."

"I'm afraid as hell," said Peewee, "but
I'll try and do my bit."

"I ain't gonna let you guys show me
up, if I can help it." Buck essayed a
sickly grin. "But I wouldn't weep no
tears if peace was suddenly declared.
What you want me to do, Mike?"

The Irishman took careful stock of
his surroundings. He decided there was
little to fear from the few surviving
Germans. Seemingly, the shelling had
given them all the war they wanted.
Mike counted six who appeared to be
alive, but who lay as though they had
lost interest in all that was transpiring.
He then closely scrutinized the shattered
wood. He could detect no movement.
The clump of bushes, behind which the
German corporal had said the machine
gun was concealed, was intact.

"Everythin' looks serene along the
Mississippi," observed Mike to the oth-
ers, "but sometimes looks is deceivin'.
Buck, ye and Peewee better stay here
to protect our rear. Me and Black Jack
will take a peep at the Kraut typewriter.
Ye two fellers watch them Krauts lay-
in' on the ground there, and don't let
'em git fresh. Peewee can use his
Mauser, and ye, Buck, fasten onto them
potato mashers. O. K.?"

"You're the boss, Mike," replied
Buck. "From now on, anythin' you say
goes."

"Fine! There's good chances of ye
becomin' a corporal yet. Black Jack,
hook on to that Mauser, while I git me
a coupla them iron billydoos. I'll go
first and ye follow about ten paces be-
hind me, ready to bump off any one
what gits nosey."

Mike led off, Luger in right hand, and
two potato mashers in left. Jimmie
Hicks trailed in his rear, rifle at the
ready, while Peewee and Buck kept
watch on the Germans.

Darting from tree to tree, Mike rap-
idly advanced upon the concealed gun.
Reaching a point about thirty feet from
it, he stooped down behind a blasted
stump to reconnoiter. Peering through
the drifting smoke, he saw no movement
in the bushes. He crawled closer. Still
no move. Picking up a splintered
branch, he hurled it into the leafy screen.
Not a sound or a sign of life. He threw
another stick. No result.

NOISELESSLY he eased along on
his stomach until within a few feet
of his objective. From this vantage
point he could see clearly. There was
nothing resembling a machine gun or a
German in the bushes. Signaling for
Jimmie Hicks to join him, he covered
the foliage with his Luger and moved
forward to the bushes' edge, where he
waited for the actor.

"Much ado about nothin'," he growled
to Jimmie. "That damn *unteroffizier*
was lyin'. There aint' no typewriter
here a-tall. I wonder if these is the
bushes he meant."

"They are the ones he pointed out
to me," said Jimmie Hicks, "but of
course, he might have been spoofing us."

"Shure, and I'll take a closer look.
Aha! Ye can't always fool a horsefly.
Lookit them leaves there, all wilted and
everythin'. If they was growin' out of
the ground, they wouldn't be in that con-

dition. I've a hunch they's coverin' up somethin'."

Mike took two steps forward, but on the third suddenly disappeared from view. He had stepped into a cleverly camouflaged machine-gun pit. However, he had no time to consider the matter, because his foot had landed on the stomach of a German. With cries of alarm, two more Germans rose up in the hole and closed upon the Irishman.

The one on the ground disentangled himself from the Irishman's legs, drew his Luger, and fired point-blank at Mike. The bullet shattered Mike's left shoulder and, tearing through flesh and bone, caught one of the Germans struggling with Mike in the Adam's apple. With a choking groan, the German wilted into the gun pit. Mike fell forward on his hands.

For a second or so Jimmie Hicks stood inactive, frozen with horror. Then he came to with a rush. Hardly knowing what he was doing, and running the risk of hitting Mike, he brought the Mauser to his shoulder, took quick aim, and fired. His bullet grazed Mike's cheek and made a dirty red blotch on the forehead of the other German, killing him instantly.

The German with the Luger took two pot shots at Jimmie, but missed. He then turned his pistol on Mike, who, left arm dangling helplessly, was struggling to gain a sitting posture. A warning shout from Jimmie and Mike lifted his Luger and fired. Two reports rang out simultaneously. The German dropped his Luger, stiffened erect to his full height, turned completely around, and toppled over, blood spouting from a severed jugular vein. Mike crumpled forward on his face, the German bullet having torn through his left side.

Hearing the shooting, Buck and Pee-wee ran to the rescue. They reached the gun pit just as Jimmie jumped down into it. Frantically tearing away the

leafy camouflage, they followed the actor. Jimmie lifted Mike's head and gazed into his face.

"Mike," he beseeched, "for Heaven's sake, say something to me."

THERE came no answer from the Irishman. Buck opened a first-aid packet taken from a dead German and tried to staunch the blood flowing from Mike's wound.

"Damn the war!" cried Pee-wee in a broken voice. "To hell with it all! If Mike's dead, I don't give a damn who wins it."

"Easy, Pee-wee, easy," censured Jimmie Hicks. "That's no way to talk. Mike would be ashamed of you if he could hear it. Most likely he has given his life for his country, and you say you don't care who wins the war."

"Oh, shut up, Jimmie," snapped Buck. "You know damn well the kid don't know what he's sayin'. Shut up, I tell you, or I'll go bugs. I can't stand much more of this."

"Look! Look!" cried Pee-wee joyously. "Mike moved his hand. He's alive, I tell you. He ain't dead. Do somethin' for him."

Jimmie Hicks poured water from a German canteen through the bluish-gray lips. Mike coughed slightly and opened his eyes. His lips moved. All three bent over to catch his words.

"If ye ain't got nothin' better'n water," he said faintly, trying to smile, "I guess I'd better quit playin' dead. Me side feels as if a tank rolled over it. Did we win?"

"Good old Mike." Buck coughed to hide his emotion. "They can't kill you, can they, old pal?"

"No, Buck, but they kin come purty near it. I ain't got no kick, though, 'cause I've bumped off a few Krauts meself. What's fair fer one is fair fer the other. Now, if ye'll prop me up agin' that wall over there, I'll show ye junipers what to do. Ye know, the war

ain't over jest because an Irishman is been manhandled a bit. Snap into it, me hearties, and wipe them long looks offn yer faces. It's time to cry when I invites ye to me funeral."

"What a man! What a man!" exclaimed Peewee. "You oughta been a general, Mike."

"Well, I come darn near it, when they gave me a general court-martial. Look alive, now, and clean up the gun pit. Are ye fergettin' ye're in the army?"

Tenderly the doughboys carried Mike to a spot in rear of the machine gun. They made him as comfortable as was possible under the circumstances by propping him up with two German packs. Jimmie Hicks then fashioned a compress for the wounds in his side and shoulder, which were bleeding freely.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ATTACK.

BUCK and Peewee had the gruesome task of lifting the dead Germans from the gun pit. This done, they examined the gun and found it to be in good order. Next they inspected the ammunition. There was a plentiful supply of it. They reported the result of their efforts to Mike.

"Shure, and we're settin' purty," replied the Irishman, his strength slowly returning, now that Jimmie Hicks had staunched the flow of blood. "Git the pistols from them Heinies ye chucked out of the hole, Buck, and all the ammunition they's got. And Jimmie, see if them three Mausers over there is in workin' order. And ye, ye little shrimp, when Buck is finished, go back with him to the log and bring up the rest of them potato mashers. If the Krauts comes to close quarters with us, we kin receive 'em as such guests should be received. Black Jack, take a squint over the top and let me know what ye see."

The doughboys hastened to obey the Irishman's instructions. Retrieving the

pistols from the dead Germans, Buck passed one to each of his pals and equally divided the ammunition. The Mausers were examined and found to be O. K. There was an open box of rifle ammunition near the gun. Buck and Peewee then left to get the bombs, and Jimmie returned to the Irishman's side.

"You've got to hand it to the Germans," said Jimmie. "They certainly know where to spot a machine gun. You wouldn't believe it, Mike, the ground we can cover with our fire; and we can see without being seen. What in the poor light we supposed to be a large wood, is nothing but a small cluster of trees. We're on a sort of a knoll. I can easily make out the American lines; zigzagging pencil marks, yellow in color, stretching east and west—the trenches, I suppose?"

"They might be the trenches, Jimmie, but our byes is far north of 'em. Kin ye see the road we came along in the car? That's where our troops is."

"Yes, very distinctly, about eight hundred yards away."

"Fine! Ye wanna be damn careful not to fire the gun in that direction. When them two scalawags gits back, I'll set 'em to spottin' the hidden German machine guns. When the music commences, don't think fer a minute I'm gonna set down here on me fanny where I can't see nothin'. Not Michael J. Burke, of County Mayo! If I can't mix in the scrap, I'm entitled to a ring-side seat. Arrange one of them Kraut packs on the parapet, so's I kin lean agin' it."

Buck and Peewee returned with the bombs and replaced them within ready reaching distance should the occasion require. They then instructed Jimmie how to use a potato masher.

Mike detailed Jimmie to sentry work, while Buck and Peewee made a painstaking observation of the terrain and noted any and all spots that might conceal

German guns. However, Mike was not satisfied, and, despite their protests, insisted that he be lifted to his feet. Supported by Buck and Peewee, he looked for himself. But the strain proved too much, even for his indomitable courage and remarkable stamina. Beads of cold sweat broke out on his forehead, and he had to sit down again.

"I must be gittin' old, or somethin'," he said wearily. "I ain't as strong as I used to be, but I'll take off me hat to ye would-be machine gunners. Shure, and ye've got sharp eyes. We'll hand them Heinies a surprise package when our byes comes over the top."

IT was now almost broad daylight, and if it had not been for the smoke from the bombardment, the visibility would have been unusually high. Buck leaned against the rear wall of the pit, and for a long space watched the barrage between him and the German lines. At length, his brow wrinkled in thought, he sat down beside Mike.

"About three hundred yards behind us," he stated, "there's quite a sharp rise in the ground. I caught glimpses of it through the shellin'. To my mind, it's a strong point for the Krauts. There's a thick wood on the crest, which runs way back. I mean it used to be a wood before our waggin soldiers started cuttin' it down."

"Shure, and what's the answer, Buck?"

"I feel sorta leery of it, Mike. A lotta Kraut typewriters could be dug in on the north side of the rise, safe from the shells. Then, when the doughs came over, they could give 'em hell."

"The American brigade commander is got it spotted all right, Buck. Don't ye worry. Followin' behind the creepin' barrage, the doughs will take it like Grant took Richmond."

"I hope so," mused Buck. "But if the doughs is turned back by the Krauts, they'll be caught in the hollow and cut

to pieces. Somethin' might go wrong and they'd find themselves in a trap. There's room enough in that hollow for three companies."

"We can't do nothin', Buck, but cross our fingers. If it happens, it happens. Would ye mind easin' that pack a bit, me bye, to relieve the pressure on me side? Thanks."

Except for a shell now and then which came a bit too close for comfort, the doughboys in the gun pit went unmolested by the bombardment. Apparently the American artillery was concentrating its efforts upon the rise referred to by Buck, because it was hammered without cessation.

The Kaiser's guns commenced to retaliate. A jagged line of fire ran along the American trenches and increased in intensity as the minutes dragged by. To the observers in the gun pit it seemed that their troops would be wiped out before they were able to advance. A steady wind was blowing from the American lines.

"It won't be long now," announced Mike. "I bet the Heinies is wise to the American zero hour. Our lines is lousy with spies. Ye see how they're shellin' in front of our trenches? They knows where our troops is. Any minute now ye kin expect a creepin' barrage. And may the good Lord let it fall to the north of us, because we could never live through it."

"Gas! Gas!" cried Peewee in sudden fright. "The doughs is sendin' over gas shells, and we ain't got no gas masks."

"Heaven help us now," groaned Jimmie Hicks. "Anything but to die from mustard gas."

"Ye might be right, Peewee," said Mike in worried tones. "The wind is suitable fer gas. Shure, it'll blow it into the faces of the Krauts. The good saints protect us! Fer, if it's gas, we're doomed. Hold me up, me byes, so I kin take a look."

Buck and Jimmie helped Mike to his feet, and all watched his face anxiously as he gazed at the bursting shells. A grin crept over the Irishman's wan face.

"Set me down ag'in," he said. "Shure, and it ain't gas a-tall. Our smoke waggins is layin' down a smoke screen. They knows their onions, all right. It's a cinch they's wise to the hidden machine guns. The Heinie gunners will have to fire blind now. Will ye look at that smoke? Thicker'n a Chinese wall and rollin' right toward us! I'll lay ye a diamond ring to a bent pin that in less'n a minute a creepin' barrage will drop outa the sky."

THE relief on the doughboys' faces at the knowledge that it was smoke instead of gas was pathetically comical. The heavy smoke clouds rolled over them. They choked and gasped for air. Then their eyes suddenly began to smart and to run water. The American artillerymen were mixing tear gas with the smoke.

While they were digging at their eyes, it seemed that the heavens suddenly split asunder, blinding flashes of fire darting like forked lightning in all directions. The creeping barrage had missed them by a few yards.

Poor Mike, handicapped by his shattered left arm, had to sit and suffer stoically from the tear gas. Each cough sent racking pains shooting through his injured side and shoulder.

When it seemed that all must succumb from lack of air, the smoke commenced to thin. To the right and left sounded a hammering of German machine guns. Nor were the American machine gunners idle. They laid down an overhead barrage that split the air with its vicious cracking, the streams of steel jackets passing not more than five or six feet over the gun pit. The racket was deafening.

Eyes red and pouring water, Peewee and Buck sprang to the machine gun.

Despite their suffering, they cheered till their throats were hoarse. The spectacle being enacted was enough to make any American cheer. On came irregular lines of doughboys, rifles held across their bodies, bayonets glistening in the shell bursts. Here and there a doughboy sprawled his full length upon the ground, rifle flying from grasp. Some tried to get up and carry on, but the majority lay still in death.

As the creeping barrage moved forward, the noise lessened; but even so, the men in the gun pit had to shout to be heard. Mike seized Jimmie Hicks by the leg to attract his attention, his weakened voice unable to carry to him. Jimmie stooped down.

"Fer Heaven's sake, Black Jack," said Mike, "help me up to me seat on the wall. It's agony fer me to stay down here and not see the circus."

"No, Mike," protested Jimmie. "Listen to that hellish racket. The bullets are thicker than a swarm of bees. They are kicking up the dirt all around the pit. One almost hit me a moment ago. No, Mike, it won't be safe for you."

"Damn ye, do as I say!" snarled Mike. "Up with me. If ye don't help me, I'll git up there meself, and that'll open me wounds ag'in."

Solemnly shaking his head, Jimmie touched Buck on the shoulder and asked his help. When Mike had been placed to his liking, a grin spread over his chalky face.

"Now ye kin all kiss me left ankle," he said. "Go on, attend to the war, and don't stand there gapin' at me, like monkeys with the flu. Hooray! Here comes our byes. Shure, and ain't they glorious? I bet every mother's son of 'em is Irish."

PEEWEE turned and beckoned wildly for Buck. Buck sprang to the gun in response.

"Over there on our left," shouted Peewee. "See its flash?" He pointed to

a darting tongue of flame in a clump of bushes about one hundred yards distant. "I can see the gunners, too, Buck."

"All right," cried Buck. "Out of the way while I swing her around."

Peewee jumped aside and fed the belt while Buck tried to take aim. His hands shook and his nerves jumped to such an extent that accurate aiming was impossible. He commenced firing. The burst tore up the ground thirty yards from the pit. Desperately he depressed the breech and fired again. This time he went high of his mark, knocking splinters from a shattered tree beyond the German gun.

As yet the German gunners were not aware that they were being fired at from their own lines. Buck nervously lowered his elevation, then happened to glance behind him and saw Mike sitting on the emplacement wall. In his excitement he had forgotten all about the Irishman.

"Get him down out of that!" he yelled. "Quick, you damn fool actor, before that gun over there spots him. He'll be chewed to bits."

Peewee hurried to the aid of Jimmie; and, disregarding Mike's wrathful entreaties to be let alone, they lowered him to safety. Buck fired once more, but fell short. The Germans spotted the unexpected menace and brought their gun to bear upon the gun pit. The hot lead came so close that it showered the doughboys with stones and dirt.

"Down, ye horse's necktie!" cried Mike to Buck; "or they'll make a sprinklin' can out of ye."

"Then you'll have somethin' to water my grave with," retorted Buck. "If they can shoot at me, I can shoot at them, the lousy Dutchmen."

Aware that he was flirting with almost sure death, Buck again took aim. His hands had ceased to tremble, and his nerves were steady as the rock of Gibraltar. His buck fever had passed. His gun commenced pounding. He had

found the range. For a few seconds he held the gun immovable, then began to traverse back and forth on his target. He stopped firing. Peewee, wide-eyed, gazed at him in awed admiration.

"I got 'em," announced Buck. "Five of 'em, and tipped the gun over. It was awful." He shuddered. "I made hamburger steaks of 'em."

He swayed. He would have fallen if Peewee hadn't caught him in time. Clammy sweat showed on his face.

"Are you hit, Buck? Did they get you?" Peewee's face was almost as white as Buck's. "Jimmie," he cried, "Buck is knocked off!"

"Don't worry, he'll come out of it all right, me lad," said Mike. "He's only passed out temporarily. I felt the same way when I got me first Kraut. Shure, and it ain't a pleasant sinsation to see men go down before yer fire."

Buck sighed heavily and wet his lips with his tongue. With the assistance of Peewee he straightened up.

"I must of et somethin'," he said.

"Shure, and ye would remind me that I'm starvin' to death," grinned Mike.

THE first wave of the American infantry was now about five hundred yards from the gun pit. The advance was necessarily slow, due to the soft ground. Buck and Peewee could hear German guns hammering away to the right and left of them. The doughboys were suffering heavy losses. No matter how closely Buck and Peewee watched, they were unable to detect a betraying flash, the German guns were so cleverly camouflaged. Jimmie Hicks, his eyes shaded with a hand, also searched the surrounding terrain.

"Where can those guns be?" he cried in desperation. "I can hear them plainly enough, but can't see them. I've been watching what looks like a thin stream of steam shooting up from the ground in the hopes that it was a gun, but I guess it's only smoke."

"Steam! Steam!" shouted Buck eagerly. "Show it to me. Where is it?"

"Right over there by that dead tree with the forked limb. There's a clump of bushes about twenty feet or more due south from the tree."

"I see it, Buck!" cried Peewee excitedly. "It's their steam tube. The gun is in them bushes. There she goes! They're firin' through wet sandbags to disguise their flash."

"I've got 'em," replied Buck, his squeamishness having vanished. "Six hunderd yards, I should say. What do you think, Peewee?"

"Nearer five hunderd, Buck. Get dirt first, then find the range."

Buck swung his gun on the German typewriter, set his sight, and ran an eye along the barrel. He pressed the thumb piece and got dirt about sixty yards from his target. However, his windage was off quite a bit to the left. He remedied the error and fired again. This time he came much closer. Another correction, and his fire tore into the bushes. The German fire abruptly ceased. Buck held his gun on the bushes until the belt ran out, to make sure of the job.

The first wave of doughboys reached the edge of the destroyed trees. A platoon sergeant spotted the flash from Buck's gun.

"Go get him, 'Swede,'" he ordered a six-foot corporal lumbering along beside him. "You and your bombers snuff him out. Pay no attention to that *kam-erad* stuff. Give 'em the works. They ain't goin' to cut us to mince meat and then surrender when it's our turn."

"You said it, sarge," replied the grim-faced corporal. "I lost me buddy back there a bit."

LED by the corporal, four doughboys each with a Mills bomb in hand, ran toward the camouflaged gun pit. Due to the leafy screen, there was no way of recognizing that the machine gunners were Americans.

Those in the gun pit were so interested watching the result of Buck's fire on the German gun that they did not see the American squad charging at them. When the doughboys were almost within bombing distance, Jimmie Hick sighted them.

"Here come our boys!" he cried excitedly. "Hell bent fer election! Go to it, you bear cats!" he shouted.

Peewee swung about, then froze with horror. Noting the expression on his pal's face, Buck sprang up from his gun and peered through the leaves.

"Cripes!" he gasped. "They're gonna bomb us out."

"Hey! Hey!" cried Peewee at the top of his voice. "We're Americans! We're Americans! Stop! For Heaven's sake, stop!"

Buck added his voice to that of Peewee, but against the strong wind their efforts were fruitless. Though long in the telling, it all took but a few seconds. Jimmie Hicks, not comprehending the danger, watched his pals in astonishment. Desperately Peewee and Buck tried to make themselves seen, but to no avail. The doughboy corporal pulled the pin from his bomb with his teeth, and with a swinging overhead throw, sent it speeding on its way.

"Hug the ground!" cried Peewee as the bomb left the corporal's hand. "On your face! Down!"

Instinctively Jimmie Hicks obeyed. Peewee had already dropped. Buck dived forward and pushed Mike over. The two German packs fell across the Irishman. Buck then flattened himself out.

A blinding sheet of flame, a dynamite report, and they were showered with dirt and twigs. The corporal had overthrown his mark. *Brammpp!* Another bomb exploded in the leafy camouflage close to the pit, but the iron fragments flew harmlessly over. A rending blast and a part of the sandbagged wall caved in, almost covering Jimmie Hicks. The

actor was so frightened that he lay still. A fourth bomb hit the machine gun, bounced off, and exploded in the air. When the smoke cleared, the stillness of death hovered over the emplacement.

CHAPTER IX.

FROM THE SIDE LINES.

THE bushes were torn apart, and the big corporal looked down into the pit. At his heels were the other doughboys.

"That's throwin' mud in their faces," said the corporal. "I'll learn 'em to come out in the open and fight. Four of 'em, and deader than Nero."

"Cripes!" ejaculated a doughboy in dismay. "Swede, lookit them uniforms. If they ain't olive drab, I'm cockeyed. And one of 'em is an officer, too."

"My God!" said another of the doughboys, nervously wetting his lips. "We've killed our own men."

"Nothing of the kind," snapped the corporal. "What the hell would Americans be doing here, shooting at their own troops? I may be a Swede, but I'm not as dumb as that."

"They are Americans," insisted the doughboy stubbornly.

"If so, it's just too damn bad," replied the corporal, still not believing the evidence of his own eyes. "Come on, the rest of you, we can't stop here all day. Williams, you stay here, and if they are Americans, see what you can do for 'em."

With the Swede in the lead, the bombers disappeared. Williams, a husky but not very intelligent-looking private, stood on the wall of the emplacement and pushed his tin hat back, tugging on an ear.

"They's all deader'n hell," he mused to himself uneasily. "I reckon I better ketch up with that damn Swede. I ain't no undertaker."

Jimmie's foot moved. Williams, his fears forgotten, sprang into action. He

jumped down and pulled the sandbags from the actor's body. Gasping for breath, Jimmie sat up and stared at his rescuer. Williams gave one look at Jimmie and his eyes popped. He jumped up and stood at attention.

"For the love of Mike!" he blurted. "General Pershing, or I'm seeing things. But how in hell did he get up here in the fighting? Impossible!"

Convinced that he had made a mistake, Williams grinned sheepishly and knelt down again by Jimmie. The actor was too dazed to do anything but stare back at the private.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Williams at length. "If you ain't General Pershing, who are you? Perhaps I've gone screwy, sir. You sure look a hell-uva lot like him, and that uniform and those stars."

Slowly Jimmie recovered his senses. His first thought was of his companions.

"Never mind me," he said. "Yes, I'm General Pershing, if that's any satisfaction to you. See what you can do for those poor fellows you murdered."

Williams couldn't swallow the dose. In his mind there was no room for a picture of the commander in chief of the A. E. F. being found in advance of the doughboys during an attack. Shaking his head, he went to Peewee and turned him over on his back. Jimmie Hicks already was caring for Buck.

PEEWEE was unconscious, but still breathed. A jagged hole was torn in his left leg by a bomb fragment. Buck, also unconscious, had received a shattered knee. Williams looked over at Jimmie.

"Sir," he said, "I think I can bring this poor fellow to, if you won't report me for having coneyack in me canteen. I didn't bring it along for myself, sir. Honest, I didn't. I was thinking of the wounded blokes."

"By all means, give him a drink. Then pass me your canteen and I'll give

Buck, here, a shot of it. He's my pal, you see."

"Your pal, huh? Oho! The general has a buck private for a pal, huh? Well, I'll be damned!" Williams burst out laughing. "I know who you are now. You're Jimmie Hicks, the actor. Say, all of France is scouring for you and your pals. It's the laugh of the A. E. F.—how you impersonated General Pershing. Cripes, what a wow! But I wouldn't want to be in your shoes. We heard about it just before we went over the top."

"Give that wounded man a drink, and shut up!" snapped Jimmie. "Yes, I am Jimmie Hicks, the actor. Get busy, will you?"

Grinning, Williams forced some brandy between the closed teeth of Pee-wee and then passed the canteen to Jimmie, who went to work on Buck. Pee-wee coughed and opened his eyes, but was too weak to speak. Williams placed a German pack under him and did what he could for the wound in his leg.

The cognac brought more encouraging results from Buck.

"How is Mike?" he asked feebly. "I just love that Irishman."

"Mike!" gasped Jimmie in remorse. "Cripes, I forgot poor Mike!"

Taking the canteen, he went over to the Irishman, who was lying on his uninjured side, the two German packs covering his head and shoulders. Jimmie quickly removed the packs and anxiously gazed into the upturned face.

"Shure, and it's about time ye took them lousy things offn me head," said Mike in a voice surprisingly strong. "What the hell happened? Shure, and Buck made a nose dive for me. Hit me like a batterin' ram. I must 'a' passed out, because I kin remember nothin' since. I been tryin' to git me breath. I bet that pack's full of limburger cheese, the way it smelt."

Jimmie quickly related what had hap-

pened, But Mike's attention was focused on the canteen in his hand. He kept sniffing suspiciously.

"Is that booze I smell?" he demanded. "Bring that canteen nearer, or am I havin' a dream?"

"You're not dreaming, Mike. It's really coneyack, but listen——"

"Coneyack? Give me a swig and then go on with yer story."

Mike took three swigs before he would listen to Jimmie. When he learned that Pee-wee and Buck had been wounded, the twinkle in his eyes gave place to deep concern.

"Why in hell didn't ye say so before, instcad of temptin' me with lousy booze? Glory be, me two buddies wounded, and here I am as helpless as a painter minus a brush!"

"Hey, there, Mr. Pershin'!" called Williams to Jimmie. "I've been figurin' this thing out. If these wounded guys is left in this hole, they're liable never to be found. I gotta join my outfit. We'll lift 'em up on the ground where the stretcher bearers can see them when they come along. It's safe enough, because there won't be much firin' back here now."

"Perhaps it would be best," replied Jimmie. "I'll keep an eye open for the medical men."

JIMMIE and the doughboy arranged the German packs in the leaves and then lifted Mike, Pee-wee and Buck out of the pit. It was tough on the injured men. But under the circumstances it seemed the best thing to do. When the job was finished, Williams wiped sweat from his forehead with a finger and grinned sheepishly.

"Well, fellers," he said, "I gotta be goin'. Cripes, I'm sorry as hell we mussed you up that way, but honest, we thought you was Krauts. In this war you gotta bomb 'em out first and ask questions later. It's much safer. You ain't sore at me, are you?"

"Don't mention it," said Buck sarcastically, a plentiful supply of cognac having pepped him up considerably. "I wouldn't think of bein' sore at a little mistake like that."

"In fact," said Peewee bitingly, "it really was our fault. We shouldn't have captured the gun."

"By the way, Williams," said Jimmie Hicks, "please don't say anything about meeting up with me. You know, Black Jack Pershing. I am the only unwounded one in the bunch, so they might pick on me."

Williams agreed readily.

"My mouth is sealed. You don't think I'm goin' to broadcast it around that we bombed out good guys like you, do you? So long, and I hope they treat you good in hospital."

"Ye ain't got any more coneyack, have ye?" asked Mike. "A canteen full is only a drop between four fellers like us. Next time don't be so careless with yer bombs. Good-by."

Williams flicked a hand to them and took up a dog trot to rejoin his outfit. About a stone's throw from them, Williams turned and waved an arm in farewell. With arm upraised, he pitched to the ground, threshed a moment with his legs, then stiffened out. With a cry of horror, Jimmie ran to him, the others watching him anxiously. Slowly he returned.

"Shot through the head," he announced solemnly. "Killed instantly. This war is sickening. Nothing but blood—blood—death—and suffering. I—I think I'm going crazy."

"Steady yerself, me bye," said Mike. "Jest don't think of it. Ye gotta keep yer chin up, Jimmie, 'cause ye're the only one we kin depend upon now. Chin up, me bye, and shoulders back." Jimmie smiled bravely, and up came his chin. "That's the way! Show 'em ye're a damn good actor, Jimmie, and a damn sight better soldier."

"Who could help being a soldier when

they're around you, Mike? You make me feel ashamed of myself."

"Which is a damn good sign. Just stay ashamed of yerself, and we won't have nothin' to complain about."

THE rise, which had previously caused Buck's misgivings, was in plain view of them. It seemed deserted. Owing to the nature of the ground and the clusters of trees, the wave of American doughboys had parted in the middle and was circling around into the hollow at the base of the hill. There seemed to be some indecision on the part of the officers in command, because for several minutes there was no advance.

"They better keep away from the hill," said Buck, "or they'll catch hell. I wonder why they don't go around it?"

"It sure looks queer," agreed Mike. "Perhaps they's waitin' fer the other waves to come up."

"If there are Germans on the rise," said Jimmie, "why the devil don't they fire? It seems to me that the doughboys are at the mercy of German machine guns."

"The Krauts is too cagy for that," replied Buck. "They ain't lookin' to bag a half company; they's after a whole battalion. If there's one gun on that hill, I bet there's forty, and all dug in, too."

"We'll soon find out," said Peewee, pointing toward the American line. "Here comes the second wave now, and another one right behind it. Cripes, I didn't know there was so many soldiers in the army. Look at 'em—herds upon herds."

What Peewee mistook for the second wave was in reality the support. Reaching a certain point in the advance, the doughboys split in the middle as had those before them, flanking the trees on the right and on the left.

"I see what's the matter now," said Jimmie Hicks, standing up to watch. "There's a stretch of marshy land out

there, a regular bog. I saw a soldier sink almost up to his waist. He had to be pulled out."

"Shure, and that explains the whole thing," came from Mike. "I thought that maneuver was damn funny."

The doughboys in the hollow were rapidly reënforced by the troops coming around the sides of the bog, until they were nearly three companies strong. They quickly deployed into skirmish line. Several whistle blasts rang out and a move was made toward the rise, over a ground pock-marked with shell holes.

It was an inspiring sight, and Jimmie Hicks cheered until he was hoarse. The wounded men, propped up as they were by the German packs, also were able to see; but the effort of cheering meant too much suffering for them. Still, their eyes glowed with patriotic fervor.

A German machine gun started hammering on the left of the rise. Apparently this was a signal for the others. And in less time than it takes to write it, a withering blast of death was being spewed from countless jumping muzzles. The doughboys went down like wheat before a scythe. Into mangled, bloody heaps they tumbled. Whole squads melted to the earth.

Uttering a loud groan, Jimmie Hicks covered his eyes with his hand to shut out the awful sight. Buck cursed and muttered to himself. Peewee sat transfixed, horror written across his face, his eyes staring and jaw dropping. Mike, his uninjured hand clenched tightly, attempted to get up, but fell back with a moan.

"The saints save 'em," he murmured over and over again. "The poor byes, the poor byes."

"It's murder, bloody murder," sighed Buck. "Damn our guns, anyway! What the hell good are they?"

"Give the waggin soldiers their due," remonstrated Mike. "There ain't a gun made what could plant a shell on the

north side of that rise. The Krauts was dug in, and when the creepin' barrage passed, they came out of their rabbit holes and set up their typewriters along the crest. Shure, and it was a Heinie trap, and the doughs walked right into it. May the Lord have mercy on their poor souls." Mike reverently made the sign of the cross. "I'm thinkin' there'll be many mothers in black on both sides after this day's work."

Although their first line was completely wiped out, the doughboys behind charged into the very teeth of the guns. Up, up, up they went, many paying with their lives, until they had almost reached the crest. Here they tried to bomb the guns.

FLESH and bone could not withstand that rain of hot steel and lead. Casualties mounted so fast that, except for isolated groups spotted along the hillside which valiantly or foolishly stood their ground, the second line was erased like a pencil mark from paper.

Sudden panic seemed to grip the Americans. The gallant charge changed to a rout, soldiers racing madly down the incline for cover. Into shell holes they dived, headlong, trying to make themselves as small as possible. Piercing whistle blasts were heard above the hell, and the American officers, themselves thinning fast under the merciless fire, tried to rally their men.

"Somethin' gone wrong with the orders," muttered Mike to himself. "There's a big mistake somewhere, a bloomer what's costin' hunderds of lives."

The panic was short lived. It is not the nature of American doughboys to run for long. Trained to take advantage of cover and not to sacrifice themselves uselessly, they quickly stiffened their morale once they had gained the shell holes. Nor did those in the hollow act as targets for the German machine guns for any length of time. The

shell holes absorbed them like a blotter absorbs ink. Rifles commenced to crack from the holes, and more than one German gunner suffered under the expert marksmanship.

From the center of the doughboys' position, three smoke rockets shot high into the air.

"Them's signals to the artillery," said Mike. "Come on, ye waggin soldiers, and show yer stuff. The infantry is callin' upon ye, me byes. Fer hiven's sake, come through."

"But how can they, Mike?" cried Buck. "They can't shell that hill without hittin' the doughs. Have they gone crazy?"

"Our guns will blow 'em to hell," groaned Pee wee. "The officer what ordered them rockets is haywire."

"Fellers," said Mike solemnly, "ye're witnessin' one of the bravest deeds of the war. The officer in command might be haywire, but he's makin' a desperate gamble. There ain't no retreatin' from that hollow and there ain't no advancin'. If they stays in them holes, it's only a matter of time before they'll all be killed. They can't retire, or they'll be chopped into steak. What else is left, I ask ye? The artillery. Look! There goes another rocket, and it's bustin' into stars."

"Thank heaven the damn fool is changed his mind!" cried Pee wee. "I hope the guns get the signal in time."

"No, he ain't changed his mind, me lad. Not him! I don't know what that rocket means, but I kin pretty nearly guess. Its message, translated into plain English, is 'Git the Krauts and never mind us.' Shure, and don't it make yer blood tingle to know ye belong to an army like that?"

"If I could only do something, Mike." Jimmie Hicks wrung his hands in despair. "I can't stand being a spectator, looking on in safety while men are so nobly dying for their country. All my life I've been nothing but a lousy actor, playing parts, doing brave deeds on the

stage, behind the footlights, in costume, paint on my face. And I had the nerve to call myself Jimmie Hicks, the doughboy. Doughboy? I'm a disgrace to the name. Isn't there something I can do?"

"There's nothin' left fer any of us to do, Jimmie, except to sit on the side lines and pray; and if we comes down to cases, I hardly think the good Lord would listen to anythin' from us. We ain't exactly lived as angels, ye know."

A moaning sigh in the distance behind them, and all anxiously looked to Mike for an explanation.

"It's one of our heavies," he announced gravely. "Watch that damn hill."

A mighty rushing of air over the shattered treetops, and a heavy buried its nose in the hill and exploded. A blast of fire, a thundering roar, and an immense geyser of dirt and smoke shot skyward, spread out, broke, then fell. Small stones pattered on the leaves near the wounded men, even at that distance.

CHAPTER X.

"GENERAL PERSHING" LEADS.

THE bombardment which followed is almost indescribable. The rise resembled a powder plant on fire. The noise was deafening. In one of the mighty bursts of smoke and flame a German machine gun was seen to hurtle high into the air and fall at least forty feet away.

The doughboys who had taken shelter in the holes near the crest were lost sight of by the watchers, but their fate was easy to guess. Nothing could live in that hellish holocaust.

Five or six of the smaller calibered shells fell short and took their toll of American lives. Then a sudden silence, a silence that hurt. As though it had been but one gun, the shelling stopped. The strong wind blew the smoke over the crest of the hill and to the north.

A series of whistle blasts, and the

ground became alive with doughboys. Up the hill they charged.

"If they kin reach the top before the Krauts recovers from the shock," cried Mike, "the day is won."

"Recover from the shock!" cried Jimmie Hicks. "Why, there isn't a German left alive. Nothing in the world could weather that storm of steel and powder."

"I pray ye're speakin' the truth, Jimmie, but I have me doubts. True, damage on this side of the hill was awful, but we can't see what happened on the other side."

During the short respite from the German machine-gun fire, a fresh company of doughboys seemed to come from nowhere to reenforce those in the hollow. Nearer and nearer to the crest drew the charging men. Not a gun was fired from the hill.

"They're licked! They're licked!" cried Peewee joyously. "Our waggin soldiers is blowed 'em to bits."

"I don't think so," said Mike. "It takes time fer 'em before the artillery kin butt in to save 'em."

"You mean that they must keep on charging, even if the machine guns open up?" demanded Jimmie Hicks.

"That's exactly what I mean, Jimmie. If they only had some one like Joan of Arc to lead 'em, or Grant, or Sheridan, or George Washington himself! Them doughs is mad enough to take the Hindenburg Line itself."

"Some one to lead them?" repeated Jimmie Hicks, a great light coming into his eyes. "A general to lead them! Supposing General Pershing should appear in their midst, would they follow him, Mike?"

"Aye, and that they would. They'd think a miracle was performed. Hey, what the hell? What's the matter with ye? What are ye gonna do?"

"I'm going to put on one of the greatest acts of my career, Mike. Look at me! A bum like me playing General

Pershing! Some one to lead them, eh? I wouldn't make a button on General Pershing's undershirt, but this uniform out there might do some good."

JIMMIE HICKS turned and raced for Red Mike's car, which was still standing on the road close to the trees. The fallen tree which had barred its progress had long since been splintered by a shell burst. The car itself was very much the worse from the bombardment. Hardly a vestige of the body remained, but the front seat and steering gear appeared to be intact.

About twenty paces beyond the splintered tree the road turned north and led straight to the doughboys in the hollow. There it turned west, circled the rise and was lost to view. Jimmie reached the car and climbed into the front seat, his wounded comrades gesticulating for him to come back.

A blast of machine-gun fire from the rise caused those near the gun pit to shift their gaze to the attack. Seemingly, the intense bombardment had had little effect upon the Germans, because their fire was as fierce as before. Valiantly the doughty doughboys rushed into the spewing death. As before, it was asking too much of human endurance. They again broke and made for the shell holes.

"Shure, and they're lost," said Mike huskily. "Nothin' kin save 'em now. One by one the Krauts will clean out them shell holes. 'Tis no wonder Jimmie got shell shocked. I'm on the brink of it meself."

"Look at Jimmie, will ya?" came from Peewee. "He's got the car started. Did you ever see such a wreck? How can it hold together? Cripes, the damn fool is turned down the road. He's goin' down there into that mess."

"He's mad, insane, crazy," put in Buck. "He's gone screwy, I tell you, and we're helpless to stop him."

"Crazy, did ye say? I'm beginnin' to

think he's not as crazy as he looks. Jimmie Hicks, the actor, has become Jimmie Hicks, the doughboy. I tell ye. If he pulls off what he has in mind, he'll make Joan of Arc look like a girl goin' to school. Glory be, the damn fool might git away with it after all."

"Get away with what, Mike?" demanded Peewee excitedly. "What in hell are you talkin' about?"

"Nothin' much, he gorra, except that John J. Pershin' himself is now takin' command. Ye've read of heroes, me byes, but now ye're seein' one with yer own eyes."

Down the rough, narrow road tore the car, lurching crazily, Jimmie Hicks clinging to the wheel. A long wailing of the siren was heard high above the noise of the machine-gun fire. The racing car hit a shell hole, skidded off the road on two wheels, missed a heavy tree trunk by inches, swerved again, almost keeled over, then regained the road. Again and again Jimmie sounded the siren.

"And ye thought ye was a driver, Buck," groaned Mike. "Shure, and ye kin learn drivin' from him. Bless him, the lousy actor. He ain't got no sense a-tall."

"Look at the doughboys!" shouted Peewee. "They must hear the siren. See, some of 'em are standin' up and wavin' their arms. They don't know what to make of it. There, he's reached that first bunch. See, there's an officer yellin' somethin' at the car. Does Jimmie stop? I'll say he don't."

"Cripes!" cried Buck. "The Krauts is tryin' to get him. You see those bursts kick up dirt not ten feet from him. There, the officer got it. See him fall!"

BUT the car, still unharmed by the machine-gun fire, tore along on its way. No doubt the Germans were as much in the air as the doughboys as to what it all meant. However, they were taking no chances. The Allies had

sprung a stunning surprise on them by the use of tanks. There was no telling what this new infernal device might be, disguised as a wrecked car. Accordingly, several of their guns concentrated upon the mysterious equipage. Dust spurted up all about the moving vehicle.

"That got him!" cried Peewee, in anguish. "Look, a machine gun is tearin' the back seat to splinters, and there goes what was left of the top. Jimmie must be dead."

"Dead, hell! You damn fool!" Tears were streaming down Buck's grimy face. "Do you think a dead man could keep on drivin'? The car ain't stoppin', is it? What do you suppose is steerin' it? Wireless?"

"No, he ain't dead, but the poor lad can't last much longer, with all them bullets pourin' into his hand wagon. Even a charmed life couldn't escape that hail of death. Come on, ye Jimmie!" Mike yelled, even though the effort opened the wound in his side and blood began to trickle. "Beat 'em to it, Black Jack."

"Win your race and I'll forget the three months' board you owe me aunt!" yelled Buck, with no attempt at humor. "Go it, you lousy ham actor!"

"It's all over," escaped from Peewee. "That burst got him—sure."

The fire from one of the German machine guns registered a direct hit on a front wheel. The front suddenly dropped and the car turned turtle, the three wheels still spinning. A dark form was seen to shoot over the dashboard before the spill and land away from the road. Exclamations of horror rose from the wounded men.

"Poor Jimmie," sighed Peewee. "He sure died noble."

"Quit yer croakin'," snapped Mike, wiping his eyes with his good hand. "Who in hell says he's kilt? There ain't nothin' in this war what kin kill Jimmie Hicks, the doughboy. The actor might of died, but not the doughboy part of

him. There, by the saints, what did I tell ye? He's gittin' up. He's on his feet! Glory be, he ain't even hurt."

"Now, what's he gonna do?" burst from Buck. "Well, I'll be damned! Look at him climbin' up on the wrecked car, and in all that machine-gun fire. He's nuts, I tell you. He's crazy."

"Shure, and he's crazy like a fox. He wants all the doughs to see him, to recognize him as Black Jack Pershin'. That's part of his scheme. They *have* recognized him. Lookit them wave their arms and cheer."

Jimmie Hicks jumped from the overturned car, landed on his feet, hesitated a moment, then was seen to point dramatically to the rise. He circled his arm rapidly over his head as a captain would rally his company after a bayonet charge. Then, like an arrow from a bow, he darted forward. His course led straight up to the center of the German hill. Shell hole upon shell hole he leaped, the men he passed cheering and gesturing. Whistles began to blow.

That which followed made the blood race in the veins of his three pals. The doughboys were not going to be outdone by their army commander. If Black Jack Pershing could charge that hill, they could charge it, too! There weren't enough Krauts between them and Berlin to stop them. The astounding drama must have had its psychological effect upon the Germans, for their machine-gun fire was spotty and irregular.

EXCEPT for an occasional glimpse here and there among the charging doughboys, Jimmie Hicks' form was lost to the sight of the watchers by the gun pit.

"Did you ever see anythin' like it in your life?" Buck, holding to a drooping limb and disregarding his wounded knee, drew himself up on one leg to see the better. "Look at those bear-cats go! Try and stop 'em, you lousy Dutchmen! Just try and stop 'em!"

"They're droppin' like flies." A shudder passed through Peewee. "But the devil himself couldn't push them back now."

"And me settin' here on me fanny like a old woman with the mumps," groaned Mike. "I'm gittin' paid back fer me sins. Grand doin's like that goin' on, and Michael J. Burke wearin' out the seat of his pants on the ground? Step on it, ye lousy trench diggers! Knock 'em fer a goal! Show the Kaiser's pets what fightin' is!"

The side of the hill was fast becoming a charnel house. Being fired at point-blank and raked by enfilading fire on each flank, the charge, it seemed, again must crumble. Killed and wounded soldiers, where the incline was particularly steep, rolled and slid down the slope for several feet. The doughboys coming from behind jumped over the bodies of their unfortunate comrades and, with bayonets at the charge, grimly carried on. The Germans must have thought them devils incarnate as they doggedly battled up the hill.

"They can't make it! They can't make it!" Buck, in an agony of suffering, swayed dizzily as he held himself erect with the aid of the supporting limb. "A hunderd feet to go, and they're stoppin'! That bunch of bombers on the left is turned tail. See! They're runnin' back! Look at 'em jump into that shell hole. *Ahhh!* A machine gun has caught 'em in the nose. Three—four—six—knocked over like tenpins."

"And they're breakin' on the right of the line," cried Peewee. "There goes the center. I thought so; they've all turned. No! No! Hooray! The stampede is stopped. They've flopped on their bellies, but their heads is pointin' to the Krauts. Who is that, standin' up there all by himself and not budgin' a inch? Who is it, Mike? Somethin's in me eyes and I can't see clear."

That something in Peewee's eyes was nothing else but tears.

"Who the hell do ye think it is?" replied Mike, his voice choked with emotion. "It's Jimmie. It's our own pal, Jimmie Hicks—Jimmie Hicks, the doughboy. The good saints shure is pertectin' him. How kin he live in that storm? Good old Jimmie! Shure, and ye're stoppin' the show. Ye're a wow, Jimmie, ye're a wow!"

"Cripes! Do you see what I see? He's movin' forward, chargin' the crest all by himself. Hooray! Hooray!"

In his excitement Buck loosed his grasp on the limb and tumbled into a heap. Face drawn with pain, he struggled to a sitting posture, sweat beading his face and lips quivering.

"The doughs is gettin' up." Peewee sent his tin hat sailing into space. "They's followin' Jimmie! The charge is on. Lookit them Yanks, will ya? Up! Up! Into the jaws of death! They've reached the crest! Over they go! They're bombin' the Heinies! Lookit them iron pills bust! The Kraut fire is slowin' down. It's stoppin'. They ain't a gun firin' on the left. They've won! They've won!"

A long-drawn, rasping sigh, and Peewee crumpled over on his side. The strain had proved too much for him. Buck began whimpering. Mike tried to cheer, but his vocal chords were not equal to the task. His lips trembled pitifully and he lowered his head to hide his weakness from the others.

SOON, from the top of the hill, came straggling columns of German prisoners, their hands raised high. Without escorts, they floundered down the incline, unmolested by the doughboys through whom they passed. It was all part of the game to the Americans, even though they had suffered heavy losses. It was not in their category to visit their wrath upon those who had surrendered.

Without delay the advance was resumed, leaving behind a terrain dotted with dead and wounded. Such is war.

Completely exhausted, Jimmie's pals were bereft of speech. Buck was unconscious. Mike was breathing heavily, his eyes closed. Peewee, the strongest of the three, stared unseeingly at the recent scene of battle.

How long they lay that way is still a blank to them.

Mike felt his head tenderly lifted and something hard thrust between his lips. Instinctively, he sucked in a breath. What was that delicious taste on his tongue? Cognac, to be sure! After all, life was worth living. A man-sized gulp, another, and he opened his eyes.

A grinning stretcher bearer was bending over him. The Irishman looked around. Peewee and Buck were receiving similar treatment. Close by, a litter rested on the ground, and on that litter, propped up by a stretcher bearer, was no less a personage than Jimmie Hicks, the doughboy. His general's blouse was stiff with dried blood and his face was streaked with grime. But a broad grin almost split his face from ear to ear.

"How did you like the show, Mike?" he asked. "Did my act get over?"

"Ye knocked 'em outa their seats, Jimmie. Ye was great, me bye." Mike started to blubber. "Shure, and—shure, and I could kiss ye—dirt, blood, and all—ye crazy palooka."

"Quit that cryin', you lousy Harp," blurted Buck. "You've got me feelin' the same way."

Buck's face twisted comically and he began sobbing.

"You—you lousy nursery soldiers! What in hell are you cryin' for?" Peewee's face screwed into a knot and he joined in the chorus of weeping. "You're—you're makin' a baby outa me, too."

"A helluva fine audience you fellers are," said Jimmie Hicks, himself wiping his eyes. "I put on a comedy act and

it brings forth a flood of tears. I guess I'll give up acting and stick to soldiering. I'm a flop as a comedian."

"Bend to it, you stretcher bearers," ordered a captain, standing near. "Get these men back to a first-aid post, where their wounds can be dressed. The army doesn't want to lose them."

"Beggin' yer pardon, sir," quavered Mike, still dabbing at his eyes, "do ye mean we're under arrest, sir? If so, I have a bit of a confession to make. It wasn't the fault of these byes, sir. I connived the whole scheme. I slipped a fast one over on 'em, sir. If there's any arrestin' to be done, shure, and I'll plead guilty."

"Under arrest?" The captain leaned back his head and laughed heartily. "So that's why you think we don't want to lose you, eh? Don't worry! I have an idea that General Pershing will be glad to decorate the man who doubled for him. And you men, too."

"Then I am to be forgiven, sir?" Jimmie Hicks asked. "And my pals here?"

"Forgiven? General headquarters has a sense of humor. If not, the morale would have melted long ago."

THE wounded men were placed on litters and carried to the rear. At a first-aid station their wounds were dressed and they were shoved into an ambulance. With the dull roar of the battle still booming in the north, the ambulance wended its way southward.

"Jimmie," said Buck, "I'm beginnin' to believe you really did pay that three

months' board. George Washington couldn't tell a lie, and you've got Georgie skinned a mile."

"Thanks, Buck, for those kind words. They mean more to me than all the medals in the army."

"I wonder if you'll do me a favor, Jimmie?" asked Buck. "I sure would like to get a slap-down to Mazie, if you can fix it for me. If she ever hears me sing 'In the Gloamin',' she'll fall like a ton of bricks. Listen, and I'll show you how it goes."

"Cut that out!" protested Peewee. "That's how all this lousy trouble started—in the gloamin'! You can't sing."

"The start of a story don't mean a damn thing," put in Mike. "It's the endin' what counts. Thanks to Jimmie, Mrs. Michael J. Burke and Master Michael J. Burke, Jr., of Harlem, is gonna be mighty proud when they read the papers. Do ye remember, Jimmie, when ye opened in Paterson?"

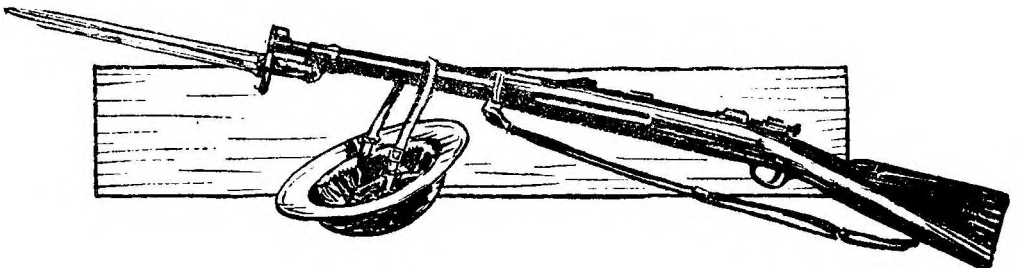
"Can I ever forget it?" sighed Jimmie.

"Shure, and it's took me a helluva long time to muster the courage, Jimmie, but I gotta tell ye that ye and yer act was lousy."

"As an actor, Mike, I'll have to call you a liar. But as a soldier, I surely do agree with you."

"Whether you blokes like it or not," said Buck, "you're gonna listen to 'In the Gloamin'.'"

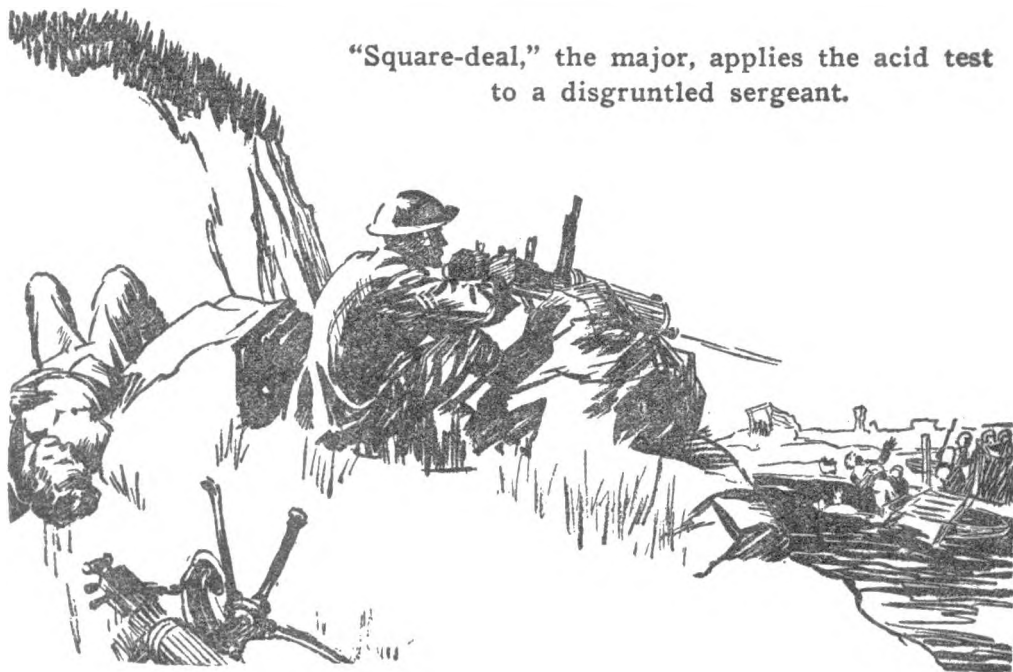
"Then I'll get out and walk," growled Peewee. "'cause there's only one thing worse than this war, and that's your singin'."



When The Line Broke

By Captain John B. Bellinger, Jr.

"Square-deal," the major, applies the acid test to a disgruntled sergeant.



JUST behind the trench a shell crashed and Sergeant Jack Lowry shivered, pressing closer against the damp wall of the dugout. That shell had come within a hair's breadth of being a direct hit; the next one would probably register a bull's-eye.

By an effort of will Lowry wrenched his thoughts from the barrage that growled unceasingly above. What was the matter with the major? Over the upturned collar of his muddy slicker, the cold unemotional face of the battalion commander revealed no evidence of perturbation. But the dogged persistence with which he churned the crank of his field telephone was ominous.

"R3!" he called. "R3!" There were pauses as he listened for a response and repeated his code summons for the regimental P. C. Then coolly, efficiently, as

Major Carns always did everything, he replaced the receiver on its hook.

"Sergeant Lowry," he said, "the Boche are about to attack. Their fire has cut our telephone line, which is unfortunate, for we must have reinforcements at the earliest possible moment. I'll try to reach the regimental P. C. by runners, but meanwhile—I have a job for you."

Spreading a map upon the floor, the major pointed to a spot marked by a penciled cross.

"Lieutenant Curston's platoon," he explained, "is holding that hill. Directly opposite to them, the Vesle River is narrowest, and there the Boche will try to cross by means of pontoons. They must be stopped. Tell the lieutenant that he must stop them—if it takes his last man to do it. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

Jack Lowry saluted stiffly, whirled upon his heel and climbed the sandbag steps of the dugout until he reached the shell-wracked ground above. He wondered if the major had read the bitterness in his eyes.

The barrage had temporarily shifted to another part of the sector, affording a welcome relief from the shell-splinter hail he had expected to face. But as he hurried along Lowry almost wished that the shells would start to snarl once more. They might serve to distract his mind from the gnawing, vindictive thoughts that were growing increasingly difficult to crush.

Would he ever forget that day, only three weeks ago, when his class at officers' training camp had been lined up to receive notification of their appointments as commissioned officers? When Major Carns, then commandant of the school, had read the list of names, that of Jack Lowry had been among the missing.

TO Lowry, this blow had been demoralizing, the more so because it found him utterly unprepared. The major, known as "Square-deal" Carns, had personally selected Lowry to act as first sergeant for a company of a hundred candidates. These were noncoms from every branch of the service; men of all ages, from youngsters to grizzled veterans, many of whom had splendid records.

It was generally understood that the man who acted as top-kick was recognized by the authorities as specially qualified to lead men. He would be certain to receive a commission.

And then the blow had fallen. For what reason? So far as Lowry knew, no fault had been found with the way he handled his company. Square-deal had not praised him—he never praised any one—but several of the other instructors had taken it upon themselves to

commend him. Sergeant Lowry was a natural leader of men, they said.

Searching his memory madly to discover a possible explanation for his rejection, he finally saw a glimmer of light. To be sure it was a very faint glimmer, but the longer he thought of it, the more certain he became that his guess was correct.

An incident had occurred one morning at reveille, just a few days before the class was to graduate. In rebuking one of the chronic "lates," Lowry made a humorous reference to possible punishment by Square-deal. A titter had traveled down the ranks, an expression of merriment suddenly suppressed, and Lowry became aware that the major had approached unobserved and was standing at the flank of the company. Square-deal had made no comment, then or later. Lowry himself forgot the incident—until his class was graduated.

Having failed to receive a commission, Lowry would in the ordinary course of events have been ordered to rejoin his regiment as he left it, a sergeant. But the great Marne drive was in full swing; replacements were badly needed at the front. Square-deal was sent to join a regiment in action, and when he left, Lowry went with him as a member of the major's noncommissioned staff and—as Lowry discovered from headquarters—at the major's own request.

"Cripes!" groaned Lowry, for perhaps the hundredth time. "Square-deal isn't human; he's a devil! Because of a single wise crack I made about him, he's going to see to it personally that I eat dirt from now on. Never a let-up will I get, not a single minute——"

He stopped just in time. His absorption in his own affairs had so occupied him that he had paid but scant attention to his immediate surroundings. Another step would have plunged him headlong into a rain-filled 240-millimeter-shell crater.

He stepped back, glancing around. A few hundred yards away was the hill which he identified as the one held by Lieutenant Curston's platoon. But what was this? His eyes widened at the extraordinary sight that spread before them.

Men were streaming down the hillside toward him—soldiers wearing the olive drab of Uncle Sam. These men were in a hurry; some were walking rapidly, others were on the dead run. They were tossing aside packs, gas masks—anything that impeded rapid progress. Glancing beyond them, Lowry saw geysers of earth spouting along the brow of the hill. Heavy explosions crashed incessantly.

"What in hell is coming off here?" he shouted at the first man who passed him. "Are the Boche staging a counter attack?"

"If you wanta know, buddy," the hurrying doughboy flung over his shoulder, "go forward an' find out. I got another date, myself."

LOWRY attempted to question some of the others as they passed, but had no better success. One or two of the men grunted half intelligible replies, others merely shook their heads. It was quite evident that the morale of the entire detachment was badly shaken.

Puzzled by this turn of events and uncertain as to what he should do under the circumstances, Lowry hesitated. Then he caught sight of two men who walked at some distance behind the others. Recognizing one as Lieutenant Curston, Lowry hastened toward them.

"I was correct, wasn't I?" the lieutenant was demanding insistently of his companion. "You'll testify to that, sergeant? There was nothing else to be done under the circumstances."

The sergeant, whom Lowry remembered as a man by the name of Keene, was speaking soothingly to his excited platoon commander.

"Yes, sir," he agreed, with emphasis, "the lieutenant was certainly right. A few minutes more of that barrage would have wiped out the whole platoon."

The sergeant's voice was suave, so much so that Lowry cursed under his breath.

"Lousy bootlicker," he grunted, "he can wind that shave-tail around his little finger any time he feels like it. I wonder what in hell he's up to now." Then raising his voice, he said: "Lieutenant, I have orders from the battalion commander."

Engrossed in their conversation, the lieutenant and his sergeant had paid no attention to the other man's approach. Hearing himself addressed, the officer stopped suddenly. He favored Lowry with an angry look.

"Well, sergeant," he demanded testily, "what is it? Speak up now, for I'm in a hurry to report at Major Carns' P. C."

Under its mud-caked stubble of beard, Lowry's face flushed resentfully. Only a few short weeks before Lieutenant Curston had been a student at officers' training camp, a member, in fact, of the very same company which Lowry had ruled as top-kick. Curston's erratic disposition had not won him many friends. But he was known as a master of theory. His brilliant solution of tactical problems had won him a commission.

During their sojourn at training camp, Curston had plainly shown his jealousy of Lowry's apparent success. Now that positions were reversed, the lieutenant took pains to "rub it in" at every opportunity. As he spoke now, his stare was contemptuous.

Lowry steeled himself to calmness. He had no respect for the officer, no faith in his ability. But he was only a sergeant; Curston was now a lieutenant. Lowry delivered his message briefly.

"What!" exclaimed Curston. "Hold that hill! Don't make me laugh. The

Boche just raked it with such a barrage that not even an ant could stay there and live. I ordered a retreat."

So this was the type of man that Square-deal deemed fit to be an officer! This was the kind that the major had selected to lead American troops to victory! A faint grin twitched the corners of Lowry's mouth.

"Major's orders," he responded simply.

Curston saw the smile; and his dignity rose in arms.

"What in hell do you mean," he shouted, "by laughing at me like that? You're only a sergeant, and a damn poor one at that. I'm an officer, see?"

LOWRY was tired. Ever since the drive started, he had pushed himself unsparingly. Lack of proper food and loss of much-needed sleep had sapped his self-control. As he listened to Curston's insulting words he felt a sudden rush of blood to the head.

"Luck gave you a Sam Browne belt!" he exploded angrily. "But officer or not, you'd better be careful what you say to me. Another crack like the last one, and I'll knock you clean through No Man's Land."

Lieutenant Curston gasped. For a full minute he gazed at Lowry, as though wondering whether or not the latter had lost his mind. Then his wrath reached the boiling point.

"You——" he howled, leveling a trembling finger at Jack. "You—you—you're under arrest for insubordination in face of the enemy. Follow me! I'm going to turn you in at headquarters."

When Lowry left the major's dug-out, he had taken but scant interest in his mission. His mind had been filled with bitter thoughts of Square-deal. But now, as he listened to the pompous, childish lieutenant, and noticed the grin on Sergeant Keene's fat, heavy-lipped face, his anger took a different form.

So he was due for a court-martial,

eh! He was to be tried because he had told a yellow dog what he thought of him. Well, Square-deal, Curston and Keene, too—the whole damn crowd of them—could go to hell. He would show them where they all fell short.

"Lieutenant," he said coldly, "the major ordered your platoon to hold that hill. If you won't do it, I will!"

Lieutenant Curston stared.

"Why—what do you mean?" he stammered. "You're not going up on that hill alone, are you? No human being could live there, and—and—besides, you're under arrest."

Lowry's reminder of orders had plainly confused the lieutenant's thoughts. The former, observing this, pressed his advantage.

"You'd look fine," he growled, "hiking me back to headquarters and reporting that you'd not only failed to obey orders, but also prevented me from trying to do so."

This shot struck home. Curston, biting his lower lip nervously, stood silent for a moment as though trying to frame a reply. Then he turned to Sergeant Keene for support.

"What can I do?"

Sergeant Keene lifted his eyebrows suggestively.

"Lieutenant, I think this guy has a touch of shell shock. We'd better take him back to the dressing station and turn him over to the medical officer."

Curston's face brightened, but only for a moment.

"No," he decided regretfully, "I'm sort of shaky about having ordered a retreat anyway. They'd certainly listen to what this man had to say, and—— Why in hell did you advise me to retreat, Keene? You should have advised me to stick."

The lieutenant was plainly unnerved. A shell, bursting fifty yards away, did not prove an aid to his peace of mind.

"Say," he decided suddenly, "I don't care what the hell you do, Lowry. I'm

going to get out of here. Come on, Keene."

But the sergeant hesitated.

"Better come with us, Lowry," he advised. "This place is getting hotter every minute. Besides, how could you hold that hill alone when you got nothing but a .45 to do it with? Use your head, guy."

JACK LOWRY shook his head stubbornly.

"The machine guns are still there," he said. "I noticed that your men were not carrying anything that would interfere with speed. I can worry the Boche a good deal with them."

Another shell burst near the group, this time somewhat closer than before.

"Come on, Keene!" Lieutenant Curston shouted impatiently. "We can't waste time with a crazy man. Let's get going."

Off he started alone.

"Well, sir," replied Keene, "if that guy is so set on going forward, maybe I'd better go with him. Two heads are better than one."

Surprised at Keene's sudden change of front, Lowry flashed him a quick look. Did the man really believe he was dealing with a case of shell shock? Keene's face was a stolid mask.

Meanwhile, Lieutenant Curston was striding rapidly toward the rear. It was doubtful if he had heard Keene's decision, but it was quite evident that his principal object at the time was to depart promptly from what he considered an extremely dangerous position. Casting a look of disgust at the officer's retreating back, Lowry swung abruptly back to Keene.

"If you think I'm cuckoo," he said shortly, "you've got another guess coming. I'm pulling this stunt for reasons of my own, see? And I want no nosey birds trying to interfere."

Keene grinned, displaying a set of very white teeth.

"I was handing that looney a line of bunk about shell shock," he admitted. "Being in his platoon, I had to sort of smooth him along. But all the time I was feeling just like you did. That position has got to be held."

Keene's explanation sounded plausible, and ordinarily Lowry would have been only too glad to welcome a trustworthy companion in his venture. But something about the stout sergeant did not ring true. Why should he be so eager to go forward, especially after advising Curston to give up the position? Lowry hesitated. Would the man really prove of assistance, or was he—still believing that Lowry had taken leave of his senses—waiting for an opportunity to overpower him and drag him to the rear?

Time was precious; the Boche might even now be bridging the river. As he listened, Lowry was sure that he heard approaching machine-gun fire. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Come along," he invited. "I'll need all the help I can get."

"You must be awful fond of Major Carns," Keene suggested, as they began to climb the hill which Lieutenant Curston's platoon had so hurriedly vacated a short time ago.

"Of—who?" Lowry gasped. "Why—what in hell gave you that idea?"

"Because," answered Keene, "you seem dead set on getting bumped off just to please the major."

To please Square-deal! Well! Lowry did not like Keene. He had no reason to believe that the latter felt particularly friendly to him, and therefore was not inclined to discuss affairs of a personal nature. But to be considered an admirer of the officer who—

"Cripes!" Lowry growled. "Far be it from me to want a boot lick with that bird. I'm going forward because I'd like to show the world I'm a damn sight better man than he gives me credit for, see?"

"Oh," said Keene. "So that's the idea, is it?"

THEY were approaching the brow of the hill now. A shrill scream presaged the arrival of a whizz-bang. Both men flung themselves upon their faces as the shell, bursting just short of the hill, heaved a shower of earth and pebbles around them.

"We'd better hug the ground pretty close from now on," Lowry suggested. "The Boche will have us under direct observation. Where are your machine guns located?"

Keene hesitated.

"Seems to me they was over that way," he finally said, waving vaguely toward the right. "But—— Say, buddy, you'd better think this proposition over a little more. Of course, I'm game if you are, but the other side of this hill is just plain hell. We won't have a Chinaman's chance, and if we get bumped off, the major will get all the credit for having tried to hold the position. Chances are that you won't even get a coffin."

Lowry was adamant.

"Maybe," he conceded. "But just the same, I've made up my mind; I'm going forward. If you want to go back, it's up to you."

As Keene did not reply at once, Lowry glanced questioningly at him. The fat sergeant was gazing furtively over the surrounding territory, as though looking for some one, or perhaps to assure himself that he and his companion were alone. Catching Lowry's puzzled expression, he gave a start.

"I was hoping," he explained, "that there might be some reinforcements coming up. There ain't any, but just to show I'm not a quitter, I'll go with you."

Keene's words lacked the ring of sincerity; they gave the impression of being too carefully measured. Lowry's

vague feeling of distrust began to grow. He was positive now that Keene had not accompanied him with the idea of protecting a shell-shocked man. The big sergeant's whole attitude showed that he realized Lowry was perfectly normal.

Then why had Keene volunteered his assistance? Particularly when he had done nothing but attempt to discourage his companion from the moment that they had started to climb the hill. To this question Lowry found no answer. But his increasing distrust caused him to keep a sharp eye on the other man's movements. As he began to crawl forward he noticed that his companion showed a tendency to lag.

"Snap into it!" Lowry exclaimed impatiently. "If you're coming with me, you're not going to be a rear guard."

Keene muttered a reply that was unintelligible. But his movements became quicker. Keeping abreast of each other, the two men reached the hill crest. Below them the ground sloped gently to the river, some six or seven hundred yards eastward.

"Cripes!" Lowry cried. "Look at that, Keene. The Boche are certainly not wasting any time."

HIS statement needed no elaboration, for that part of the river directly opposite presented a scene of feverish activity. Moving like an industrious tribe of ants, a long stream of gray-coated men were carrying boards along a pontoon bridge, already stretching halfway across the stream. Others were busy lashing the various parts together.

"Where are those machine guns?" Lowry demanded sharply. "I thought you said they were right here."

Looking around quickly at Keene, he noticed that the fat sergeant was fumbling at his revolver holster. Simultaneously Keene caught his glance and moved his hand as though to straighten his blouse. His expression became furtive.

"Oh—er—well," he stammered, "things were moving so fast when that barrage caught us—I guess I sort of got mixed up."

"Maybe," thought Lowry. "But why the gun all of a sudden?"

Then he said aloud: "What are those things over on the left there?"

"They're what we're looking for, I guess," Keene mumbled reluctantly. "We'd better ease over that way."

Lowry answered nothing, but as the pair started crawling in the new direction, he slipped his .45 from its holster.

Moving slowly, hardly daring to breathe, they finally reached the two guns which had formerly supported Lieutenant Curston's platoon. One of the weapons lay upon its side, crippled by shell fire; the other stood upright with a half-used belt of cartridges still in position.

"Well," exclaimed Lowry in satisfaction, "this is not so bad! With two of us to work this, we——"

Crash! Without warning of any kind, something exploded beside him. His forehead felt as though seared by a red-hot dagger. Instinctively he jerked his head to one side, and as he did so, another bullet whistled by him.

His senses already on edge from suspicion, Lowry knew at once what had happened. Quick as lightning, he whirled his own revolver, pressing the trigger. There was a deafening report. Keene dropped his gun; his free hand clutched at his breast.

"You skunk!" Lowry grated, keeping his revolver leveled at the prostrate form. "Not even to give a fellow a fighting chance!"

Keene began to cough, a red froth rising to his lips.

"Sorry," he mumbled, "but—but—I had to do it. Heaven—give you better luck?"

"What the devil do you mean?" Lowry demanded. A dull stain appeared on the breast of Keene's blouse,

growing steadily larger. It was evident that all danger from him had passed. "What do you mean?" Lowry repeated as he leaned closer to the dying man. "Why should you want to kill me?"

Keene's face contracted spasmodically. He spat out a mouthful of blood in disgust.

"My—my duty," he whispered weakly. "I belong to the Kaiser's secret service, you see."

Keene shuddered, then relaxed. As Lowry moved closer to inspect him he realized that the fat sergeant would never move again.

"No wonder I didn't trust that guy!" Lowry exclaimed. "But he was playing the game the best he knew how, I suppose. And he must have known, too, that his chances of living to win an Iron Cross were pretty slim."

FOR a long moment Lowry gazed at the motionless form beside him. Then he raised his head to look toward that steadily approaching pontoon bridge on the river.

"Keene," he muttered, "I guess it's up to me to prove to your buddies that men are made of the same stuff, wherever they come from. Germany may have them, but I'll say the good old U. S. A. won't be left behind."

Using hands, elbows and knees, Lowry wormed his way over stones and mud until he reached the machine gun, which still stood like a stubborn but impotent sentinel in position. He stared grimly through the sights; his finger caressed the trigger.

Rat-tat-tat! rat-tat-tat!

Down on that partially completed bridge a gray-clad figure collapsed over the edge. Another flung his arms toward the sky. A group of three or four suddenly became a squirming heap. Several of the men who were carrying boards dropped their burdens, diving into the river as they did so. The re-

mainder, officers and men, raced pell-mell for the shore.

"That ought to hold them for a while," Lowry muttered. But he knew that the battle had only just begun; and in a very short time he was proved correct.

The machine gun which he operated had been mounted in the crevice of a large rock, and this offered fair protection to the gunner. But as the fury of the German retaliation swept around his position, he wished that the rock had been many times its size.

An ominous whistle sounded overhead, increasing rapidly in volume. And as the Boche machine gunners perfected their range, leaden hail began to patter hungrily, relentlessly, against the stone behind which Lowry lay. A new voice added its menace to the chorus; the angry shriek of 77s. One of them burst just in front, the explosion almost shattering his eardrums. Stone fragments fell in a shower around him.

Lowry crouched closer against his shelter, waiting for that murderous barrage to lighten. But the enemy were evidently in no mood for play; bullets continued to clip the top of his little fortress; new earth geysers sprayed the air with monotonous regularity. Would they never shift their fire?

Raising his head slightly, he peered through the crevice of the rock. As he did so he discovered the reason for the continued intensity of the German fire. The engineers were once more at work upon the bridge, and it was evidently the intention of the Boche commanders to screen this work with such a terrific barrage that all interference would be paralyzed.

Lowry glanced at the motionless figure of the German spy.

"Maybe it's just as well you're here, buddy," he grunted. "If I didn't keep remembering that I had to match American guts against yours, I might be tempted to skip."

ONCE more he glanced along the sight of his machine gun. He pressed his finger against the trigger, and just then his heart seemed to stop beating. The gun had jammed!

Heedless of flying bullets, he inspected his weapon to find that an empty shell had caught in the chamber. Feverishly he went to work, but the shell was so tightly jammed that considerable exertion was necessary before it could be dislodged. When Lowry sighted along the barrel once more, the pontoon bridge was on the verge of completion.

Rat-tat-tat! As his weapon spoke, Lowry saw another German fall. *Rat-tat-tat*— Suddenly and very definitely he realized that again he was squeezing a useless trigger. The gun had turned obstinately silent.

It was with a hopeless feeling that Lowry began another inspection of the gun. Around him the rain of bullets and H. E. shells continued, while down on the river the Boche engineers were lashing their last pontoons into place. It would be only a matter of minutes before the enemy infantry began to cross on a counter attack, which might mean disaster for the American troops.

"Lowry! Sergeant Lowry!"

Was he dreaming, or had his tortured eardrums played him some uncanny trick? Lowry turned his head in a dazed survey of his immediate surroundings.

Topping the crest of the hill behind him, a figure in olive drab was crawling toward him. Hardly daring to trust his senses, he closed his eyes for a second, then opened them once more. Yes, the newcomer was Square-deal himself, advancing across open ground under a torrent of screaming steel.

"I'll be damned!" Lowry exclaimed. Then, raising his voice to a shout: "Get back there, major! They'll bump you off!"

Lowry rose to his knees, accompanying his verbal warning by frantic ges-

tures. Square-deal raised his hand in acknowledgment. But to Lowry's utter amazement, he continued to advance.

"Well," Lowry growled, "of all the fools I ever saw——"

He broke off abruptly, for the major's body gave a convulsive jerk, after which it lay still.

"Cripes, they've got him!"

But, no, Square-deal lifted an arm as though to drag himself forward again. The effort produced but little result: his legs seemed incapable of motion: he was out.

"Cripes!" Lowry muttered. "If anybody ever played me a dirty trick, that bird is the one. I'll have to hand it to him, though, he certainly has guts. Even if I am a fool to help him, I can't let the poor fish die out there alone."

Abandoning the comparative security of his rock, Lowry squirmed along the bullet-scorched ground until he reached the major. The latter gazed at him through eyes that were bloodshot from pain and fatigue.

"It's nothing," he insisted. "A fragment of shell put my hip out of action. Get back under cover. I'll be all right here."

"The hell you will!" Lowry protested. "I can't leave you out in this kind of a thunderstorm. Let's go."

It was tedious, nerve-racking work. Lowry expected that at any moment a shell would send both men into oblivion. But strangely the barrage seemed to lighten; the bursts came with less frequency. At last he hauled the officer behind the big rock.

"Gosh," he muttered wearily, as he drew a hand across his perspiring brow. "I don't see how we made it." He grinned mirthlessly. "Sorry, major, but I'm afraid we've only jumped from the frying pan into the fire. This damn gun has jammed and when the Boche once start across——"

"Look," interrupted Square-deal, pointing to the river below; and Lowry,

gazing in the direction indicated, felt a sudden thrill.

THE bridge had been completed. It was now covered by a mass of advancing troops and a considerable portion had already landed on the American side. But a certain very familiar type of geyser was beginning to spout suggestively in the vicinity of the adventurous Heinies. Some of these upheavals were spraying the river generously, others were belching from the earth. And the number of geysers was increasing rapidly.

"Our artillery," explained the major as Lowry glanced at him questioningly. "Communication with the regimental P. C. was established shortly after you left. When *Lieutenant*"—he emphasized the title sarcastically—"Curston reported his retreat, I acted at once. After sending him back under arrest, I came forward myself, for I was afraid that you might be in trouble."

As he listened, Lowry became positive that his ears were playing him tricks. Major Carns, risking his life to save a man he had practically branded as worthless! Impossible! Why—He ducked as a .77 screeched over his head. There would be time enough later to puzzle over such matters.

"The Boche are still crossing, major," he remarked. "Our barrage is a bit late."

For the first time since he had known the major, Lowry surprised a grin on his superior officer's face.

"I don't think so. Suppose you look behind you," suggested Square-deal.

Following this advice, Jack was treated to one of the most welcome sights of his life. With bayonets glittering in the sunlight, a great wave of American doughboys swept over the hill crest. As they rushed down the slope with all the power of an unleashed sea, he saw a second wave hurling itself in support; then a third.

Square-deal was still smiling.

"Lowry," he said, "I can guess what you've been thinking about me. Maybe I seem pretty hard boiled. That's because my motto is always 'Duty first.' I'm sorry if I hurt you, but I never let personal likes or dislikes interfere with what I consider the right course."

Jack Lowry crouched silently beside his commanding officer. He felt tired, cruelly tired and discouraged. Perhaps he did lack something. Maybe he was not the type to be a leader of men. At any rate, he realized now that Square-deal was not the "devil" he had labeled him. The major had proved his mettle. Square-deal was speaking again:

"When your classmates at training camp were appointed second lieutenants, you suspected I had caused your rejection. For two reasons I deliberately let you continue to think so. First, because I had no authority to recommend any of my students for a commission higher

than a second lieutenancy, and consequently I was not certain that my actual suggestion would be approved. Second, because I wanted to test your moral courage when you thought that you had been rejected."

Higher rank! Moral courage! What was the man talking about? Possibly he had a touch of shell shock.

"That's all right, sir," Lowry said dully. "No matter how hard it hit me, I'm sure you played square."

"My recommendation in your case," Square-deal continued, "was so unusual that it required lengthy consideration by G. H. Q. Therefore your name did not appear in the routine list of promotions."

"Why—— What do you mean?" Lowry stammered at last. "Am I——"

"Your telegraphic appointment reached me just as I left my P. C. to come here. Congratulations, *Captain* Lowry!"



Find The Woman

By Bill Morgan



Continuing the adventures of the "Wound Stripe Quartet"—who tangle this time with Heinie spies.

THE amusement center at Tours was a large wooden building with a regular stage and real chairs for the audience. It was the finest theater in any American rest camp in France. It even had dressing rooms down below the stage for the different acts of the show. In one of these rooms sat four soldiers. Each of them had a narrow gold stripe on the right sleeve of his blouse which showed that each had been wounded. They were known as the "Wound Stripe Quartet." And how these four soldiers could sing!

"Monk" Sutton sang bass, and from his big, hairy chest his voice boomed full and deep. Monk could fight as

well as he could sing. He had proved that at Soissons. He had tried to stop a German grenade and, as a result, couldn't go back to his outfit.

"Solly" Cain's experience in vaudeville before the War stood him in good stead now. He had lost a leg at Cantigny, but it didn't seem to bother him very much. He could dance almost as well with his good leg and his crutch as he had before the accident.

"Scoop" Wells, ex-newspaper reporter, wasn't able to use his left yet, because of the German bullet which had smashed his shoulder. He was the leader of the quartet and had a monologue as a specialty number which he did as an encore.

The last of the four was "Pretty Boy" Butler, who sang tenor and did female impersonations. But don't let that fool you! The gang in his outfit was still talking about the way he had fought during the crossing of the Ourcq River.

"Dis is a great life," said Monk, smearing grease paint on his battered features. "Next to bein' up at th' front chasin' Heinies, dis is th' job for me."

"As we were all too shot up to do any more fighting," said Scoop, "I guess we are doing our bit the best way we can. All the men in the audience to-night are from a combat division. They've been at the front for a month and are tired and half sick and disgusted with living. It's up to us to give them a good show, to cheer them up. They're a tough, hard-boiled outfit and it's going to take a lot of singing to do it."

"Say," said Solly, "we ain't the only act on this bill. Did you see that Rooshin woman that's got the dressing room two doors down the hall? She's gonna sing, and if she can warble as good as she looks, she'll sure knock 'em cold."

I WAS outside when she came through," said Pretty Boy. "She acts like a princess or something. Did you get that big fur coat? And a whiff of the perfume she's wearing? Wow! I've got a lot of nerve trying to do a female impersonation when there's a real woman like that on the same bill."

"That's all right, Pretty Boy," said Scoop. "You're good yourself. When you put on that nurse's uniform and sing about the moonlight you always get a big hand."

The door of the dressing room swung open and a tall, lean, white-haired officer came in. He was Colonel Hatfield, the man who had found the quartet at the hospital and got them

their new job. The four soldiers sprang to attention.

"At ease, boys," said the colonel. "How are things shaping up for the show to-night?"

"Great!" answered Scoop. "We've got a couple of new numbers we're going to use for the first time. We rehearsed them on the train coming down and they seemed to go very well."

"That's good," said the colonel. "I know the quartet will make good. But that isn't what I came to see you about. Frankly, I want your help in a very delicate matter. I know I can trust you men and you're in a position to do me a real favor."

"Listen, colonel," said Solly, "you don't have to ask. You tell us and we do it. Ain't you a friend of ours? Sure, you are. You done us a lot of favors already. We're glad to get a chance to do one for you."

"All right," said the officer. "I thought you would take it that way. Now listen carefully to what I'm going to tell you. There's a Russian woman on the same bill with you to-night. I'm very interested in her."

"Oi!" interrupted Solly. "She goes by the door to-night. She smells so beautiful!"

"Yes, that's the one," said the colonel. "Her name is Countess Alexanderoff. She's supposed to be married to an American major. No one seems to know very much about her. She appeared in Tours suddenly and offered to sing for the soldiers. They say she has a good voice."

"We know who you mean," said Scoop. "We saw her come in to-night, but nobody had a chance to speak to her."

"Of course, it was a patriotic thing to offer her services," said the colonel. "But she may be doing it as a blind. Her American husband is supposed to be a railway transportation officer. And the Germans seem to know a lot about

the transportation of troops in France. We suspect that there is a leak somewhere and we're naturally suspicious of the countess."

"A spy!" said Solly. "When I seen her I thought there was monkey business. Such a swell coat she was wearing. It must cost two thousand dollars."

"We don't know a thing about her," said the colonel. "Her papers are in perfect order. She seems to be a cultivated and charming woman. Now what I'm driving at is this: You four men are back stage. You have a chance to talk to her. You might even be able to get into her dressing room while she's singing. Find out everything you can. Ask her about this husband of hers. See if there are any papers lying around. You may discover nothing. You may be able to get to the truth of this thing."

"I see what you mean," said Scoop. "Being part of the show ourselves, we'll have more opportunity to meet her than any one else. We'll do the best we can. If we're able to find out anything, we'd report to you."

"That's the idea," said Colonel Hatfield. "I'll meet you here after the performance and we'll talk it over. In the meantime, try to get information about her."

AFTER the colonel had gone, Scoop and his three companions talked over the mission which they had accepted.

"The first thing we'll have to do is find out when this woman is going to sing," said Scoop. "Pretty Boy, you slip upstairs and ask that sergeant who's running this show how the acts are arranged. You can pretend that you want to find out about our own stunt, and at the same time get the dope on this Russian *femme*."

"If you're thinkin' of searching her dressing room while she's gone you're

out of luck," said Solly. "She's got her maid with her, a funny-lookin' little old woman who looks like a witch."

"Dey ain't nothin' to dis," said Monk. "I'll just bust up to her and start talkin'. I used to get along swell wid th' gals. Yuh gimme a chance to talk to dis one and I'll find out everything yuh want to know."

"Oi!" cried Solly. "With that face you would scare her away. Lemme talk to her. I ain't so bad with the girls myself."

"With that maid hanging around it's a cinch we can't search the countess' room," said Scoop. "I guess one of us will have to try and get acquainted."

Pretty Boy came back with a list of the acts in the order in which they were going to appear. Right after the Wound Stripe Quartet was listed the Countess Alexanderoff, which meant that she followed the four boys on the stage.

"We'll work it like this," said Scoop. "While the countess is on the stage, one of us will call the maid out of the dressing room on some excuse or other. The minute she leaves I'll go in and search the place. As far as I can see, it's our only chance."

"How 'bout me?" said Monk. "Ain't yuh gonna let me try?"

"Sure," said Scoop, winking at the rest. "Go ahead, Monk. Go down and introduce yourself to her. These Russian woman are funny. The countess might fall for a big ape like you."

"You ain't kiddin' me," said Monk. "Yuh guys might get a surprise. Stick around till I come back."

He went down the hallway and knocked on the countess' door. It opened and he disappeared inside. After about two minutes the door opened again and Monk came hurriedly out. His face was a bright beefsteak red and he looked like a little boy who had just been spanked for stealing jam.

"Well, what luck did you have?"

asked Scoop. "Did the countess invite you to dinner or something?"

"Hell, no," said Monk. "I got throwed out on my ear. Dat woman is a heller. When I busted into her room, she asked me what I wanted. I told her I just come in to chew th' rag. She looked me up and down and her eyes was cold as ice. Den she said dat when she wanted any visitors she'd ask 'em herself and for me to get to hell out of dere, fast. I done it, too, what I mean. I wouldn't want to have no gal like dat sore at me. She's the kind dat would just as soon stick a knife into yuh as not."

PRETTY BOY BUTLER had on his nurse's uniform. He was smoking a cigar and adjusting the blond wig which he wore for his impersonation.

"Let me call on the countess," he said. "I can say I want to borrow some hairpins. If I can fool the old girl into thinking I'm a nurse, she might loosen up with some news."

"Fair enough," said Scoop. "But you don't want to forget yourself and start chewing tobacco. If you're going to act like a lady, you've got to be refined. Don't cuss so much and don't spit on the floor."

"Leave it to me," said Pretty Boy. "I'll fool her. She'll think I'm a dumb little nurse that's wandered into her room to borrow something."

Pretty Boy tripped down the hallway to the countess' room and was admitted. Monk, Scoop and Solly waited breathlessly for him to come out again. It wasn't long. Pretty Boy bounced into the hallway and came stamping back in a very unladylike manner.

"She gave me one look and knew I was a fake," he said. "She didn't let me get away with it for a minute. She and that maid of hers started jabberin' together in French and what they said was enough to blister the paint on the walls. I got part of it which was

enough for me. She's smart, that woman, and we're not putting anything over on her."

"Well, there's only one thing left," said Scoop. "We'll have to try and get that maid out of the room for a few minutes, so I can slip in and search it. I got an idea that isn't going to be easy to do. But at least we can have a try. Colonel Hatfield has certainly been decent to us. If there's any way we can help him, we want to do it."

One of the stage hands stuck his head in the door and announced that the Wound Stripe Quartet was next on the program. They'd better hurry, he said, or they wouldn't be in time for their turn.

SCOOP led the way upstairs. The quartet assembled in the wings, ready to march on singing as the curtain went up. Just before the orchestra struck the opening bars of the first number, Scoop happened to look around and saw the countess standing behind him in the shadow. The sight of her gave him a shock. She was a tall, slender woman with raven-black hair and a startlingly white face slashed with carmine lips. She had glittering, black, icy eyes. To Scoop she was exactly what a Russian spy should look like. He shivered at the idea of stealing into her room and attempting to search it. Suppose she caught him, what would happen then?

"What's th' matter wid yuh?" said Monk. "Don't yuh hear dat music? It's time for us to do our stuff."

The quartet moved out into the glare of the footlights. The sound of their own voices was drowned by the roar of three thousand men, all shouting and stamping at the same time. For the moment Scoop forgot about the countess. He knew that the quartet was facing a real test. They had to quiet that audience, make them listen. They had to sing the kind of songs those

soldiers out in front wanted. He spoke to his three partners under his breath.

"All right, gang, give 'em 'Hinky Dinky.' If we can get them to singing with us, they'll quiet down. Ready? Let's go!" Scoop signaled the orchestra leader the tune they wanted. The man nodded and swung into the music of the most popular song in the A. E. F.

"Mademoiselle from Armentiers, parlez-vous, Mademoiselle from Armentiers, parlez-vous."

"Yow!" went the audience in a great cheer of welcome. Here was a song they all knew.

"Sing!" yelled Scoop. "Sing, guys, sing!"

They sang, Fifteen verses one right after the other. They would have gone on singing all night if Scoop hadn't stopped them. He had them under control now. He quieted them down while Monk sang his bass solo. Then the quartet gave two more numbers in rapid succession, followed by Scoop's monologue about the dumb sentry and a general at the front. The audience howled with delight.

Solly's dance, as usual, was appreciated. He had become expert in the use of his crutch and could hop and skip around the stage with remarkable agility. The finale of the act was Pretty Boy's impersonation of the nurse. He worked hard at his song and ended down at the footlights in the full glare of a spotlight thrown from the balcony above. A dead quiet settled over the amusement hall which meant ten times more than if the men in the audience had applauded. The quartet took six bows and could have gone back on the stage and given the whole program over again and been welcomed.

SCOOP had other plans. He wanted to have as much time in the countess' dressing room as possible. And he knew that he would have to hurry.

As he started down the stairway to the rooms below, the countess herself appeared out of the darkness and stopped him.

"You have performed so wonderful," she said. "Me, I'm afraid before those men. Like a great animal they are out there. They cheer with one voice and applaud all together enough to knock down the building. Do you think they will like me to sing for them?"

Scoop knew how the countess felt. He had been terrified himself when he had first stepped out to face that crowd. But he didn't want her backing out now. He had to say something that would encourage her to go on with the show.

"The audience is friendly now," he said. "They'll love your singing. You must not disappoint them."

"Yes," said the woman. "I have promised. I must go ahead with my songs." She threw off the coat she was wearing and appeared, a dazzlingly beautiful woman in a low-cut evening gown. Scoop heard the shout of welcome the audience gave her when she stepped out on the stage. He did not wait for the beginning of her song, but hurried downstairs to find his three friends. They were waiting for him in the dressing room and he told them briefly what he wanted them to do.

"Solly, it's up to you to get that maid out of the way. Tell her she's wanted outside; tell her her grandmother's sick. Tell her anything, but get her out of that room and keep her out for ten minutes. Can I count on you to do that?"

"Sure," said Solly. "I'll manage. You can trust me."

"All right," said Scoop. "Now, Pretty Boy, I want you to stand at the bottom of the stairs and warn me when the countess comes down. When you see her, whistle, so I'll have time to get out of the room. Monk, you stick around the stage door. If you see any-

thing suspicious, whistle the same as Pretty Boy. Have you got that?"

"Sure," said Monk. "I getcha. Dere won't nobody get funny around me or I'll bust 'em in the jaw."

"We've got no time to lose," said Scoop. "Let's hurry. Go ahead, Solly, and get that maid out of the way."

Solly went to the door of the countess' room and knocked. When the maid opened it, he said something to her which seemed to have a surprising effect. The woman ran out into the hallway, looked all around, then raced up the stairs to the stage with Solly following her.

As soon as they were gone, Scoop, feeling like a burglar, slipped into the empty dressing room. The place was exactly the same as all the others back stage. There was a small square mirror surrounded by lights. The countess had brought a suit case with her, the contents of which were scattered about the room. In the bottom Scoop saw a bundle of letters. They were written in French so he could make nothing out of them. Not daring to take them, he thrust them back where they belonged. Next he began a thorough search of the room itself. So engrossed did he become that he did not hear the door open softly behind him. He was bending over the dressing table, pawing through the toilet articles there, when a voice behind him brought him suddenly upright.

"Who the devil are you? What are you doing in this room?"

SCOOP wheeled around and found himself facing Major Zumalt. Scoop knew the major of old. He was the railway transportation officer who had tried to have Scoop and his three friends assigned to clerical jobs in the S. O. S. The major had been very nasty about it.

"Speak up!" said the officer. "What are you doing in this room?"

Scoop wondered what the major was doing there himself. "Our quartet is singing here to-night," he said. "I guess I've wandered into the wrong dressing room."

"The hell you have," said Major Zumalt. "It didn't look like it when I first came in. You were looking through the things on the dressing table as if you were trying to steal something. What were you after—money, jewelry? We'll soon get this straightened out. I'll have an M. P. here in ten minutes. You'll do the rest of your singing on a rock pile."

"I wouldn't be in a hurry about the M. P.'s," said Scoop. "I happen to be in this room for a very good reason. I was ordered to come here."

"What do you mean," snapped the major. "Who ordered you?"

Instead of answering, Scoop asked a question himself. "While we are on the subject," he said, "I would like to know what you are doing here?"

The major's face became livid. "Of all the damned impertinence," he spluttered, "this is the worst!"

"That's all right," said Scoop. "But only the people who are part of the show are allowed back here. If you want to call the M. P.'s, go ahead. There's one right outside the stage door. Of course you'll have to explain to him what you are doing here."

Major Zumalt quieted down. "There's no use for us to stir up trouble," he said. "It happens that I have a perfect right to be here, but it would be hard to explain. I am married to the Countess Alexanderoff."

"Married!" said Scoop. "Then you're the major they were talking about."

"I suppose you're from the intelligence department," said Zumalt bitterly. "We've had trouble of this sort before. Everybody seems to think my wife is a spy. They make life miserable for her. They're always rummag-

ing through her baggage and examining her papers and sending people to annoy her. I see it now. You're an agent, too. That's what you're doing in this room."

"Not exactly an agent, sir," said Scoop. "I'm just helping out."

"Now listen here," said Major Zumalt. "My wife is absolutely innocent. I'm positive of that. I'd give almost anything if I could establish that fact. They would leave her alone. She is very patriotic, she wants to help in every way she can. But she is constantly under suspicion. I'd give anything I have if we could clear this up for once and all."

IN spite of his dislike for the major, Scoop believed that what he had said was true. He could understand the officer's position. He felt sorry for the man.

"I'll report what you have said," he replied. "Of course, the authorities will have to be convinced of the truth."

"Yes, I know," said the major. "But I'm getting damn sick of the whole business."

A loud, clear whistle sounded from the hallway. It was Pretty Boy's warning. The countess' act was over and she was coming back to her room.

"I'll have a talk with the colonel," Scoop promised. "Your wife is coming. I'll get out of here before she arrives." He slipped through the doorway and out into the hall. At the foot of the stairway he met the countess. She was glowing with excitement and pleasure.

"They have applaud' my singing," she said. "They like me. It was so wonderful. I should like to sing for American soldiers in all the camps."

"I know how you feel," said Scoop. "When those boys clap they mean it. It gives you a real satisfaction to know that they appreciate what you are doing for them."

"Yes, yes," said the countess. "Now

I must hurry, my husband is coming to see me. I must tell of my success."

Solly and Monk had heard Pretty Boy's whistle. They knew what it meant, so they hurried to the dressing room to find Scoop and to hear whether the plan had been successful or not. Colonel Hatfield was also there when Scoop came in.

"Well," said the colonel, "what did you discover?"

"Not much," said Scoop. "except that the countess' husband is Major Zumalt and that they were married a short while ago in Paris. The major knows that his wife is suspected of being a spy. He swears she's innocent but of course can prove nothing."

"There's a leak somewhere," said Colonel Hatfield. "The enemy is getting information about the railway transportation office. We've got to find out where it's coming from."

"Say," said Solly suddenly, "I got a idea. How about this maid that's with the countess? So funny she acts, when I was talking with her."

"What's that?" said Scoop. "What do you mean?"

"Well, I tell you," said Solly. "When I went to get her out of the way I told her that a friend is waiting to see her outside. She don't speak no English and my French ain't so good, but she got the idea without no trouble. So excited she gets. She runs upstairs and goes out the side way into the audience like she was expecting somebody to meet her. She ain't come back yet either, 'cause I been watching."

"It's worth investigating anyway," said Colonel Hatfield. "One of you men slip up there, have a look around and see what you can find. If you learn anything interesting, let me know and we'll come up."

"C'mon, Monk," said Solly. "You and me'll go together. We'll have a look at this joint and see what's going on."

MONK and Solly had been gone about five minutes when there was a loud, clattering noise on the stairs, the sound of something banging and bumping. Scoop opened the door and looked out. There was Solly Cain, the crutch going one way, the good leg the other. In his excitement he was trying to run and having a hard time of it.

"What is it, Solly?" cried Scoop. "What's happened?"

"Monk found her," panted Solly. "She's out behind the amusement hall talking to a French soldier. Only he ain't no Frog, he's a Kraut. Monk heard 'em speakin' German together. C'mon quick, we'll catch 'em before they have a chance to get away."

Scoop, Pretty Boy and Colonel Hatfield almost knocked each other down in their eagerness to get through the door. They stumbled out into the hall and made for the stairs on the run. Solly Cain did an awkward about-face and went stumping and bumping along behind them. When they came out on the stage they saw that all the scenery had been cleared away and that the curtain was up, disclosing row upon row of empty chairs. Scoop remembered that there was a side door just off the orchestra pit and led the way in that direction. When he got outside he turned abruptly to the right and raced along the wall of the amusement hall.

Suddenly he saw Monk and the maid and her soldier friend. Monk was engaged in a battle royal. He had tried to grab the woman and had been promptly attacked by the man. Both of them were on top of him now clawing and scratching and kicking. Monk was down and fighting for his life. He had his arms crossed over his head to protect his eyes from the claws of the woman. The man in the French uniform was enthusiastically engaged in trying to kick in Monk's ribs.

Scoop arrived and threw his arms

about the woman. He was kicked in the shin, scratched on the left cheek and bitten on the right arm. The woman was a tigress. There was no holding her. Colonel Hatfield came up, a .45 automatic in his hand. But what good was a pistol now? He couldn't shoot it for fear of hitting Monk or Scoop, and so mixed up were the four figures on the ground that he couldn't use it as a club.

Now that Monk no longer had to fight off the woman he was able to give his full attention to the man. This he did immediately. Back came a hamlike fist. The soldier cried out as he saw it coming and tried to kick Monk in the stomach. He was half a second too late. Monk's fist landed solidly on his jaw. Down he went in a crumpled heap to lie very still.

"Try and kick me, will yuh?" said Monk. "I guess dat'll hold yuh. If yuh'd stood up and fought like a man, I wouldn't 'a' socked yuh so hard."

Pretty Boy grabbed the woman's arms and pinned them at her sides. Scoop tried to catch her feet and was kicked in the jaw for his pains. At last he caught her and he and Pretty Boy held her fast.

"I never ran into such a wild cat," said Scoop. "I thought she was going to scratch my eyes out. What'll we do with them, colonel?"

"Carry them to the dressing room. We'll search them there. Maybe we can find something. But from the way they have fought, it's easy to guess that something was wrong."

MONK picked up the Frenchman. Scoop and Pretty Boy carried the woman. They took them down to the dressing room and placed them both side by side on the floor.

"Scoop, you go and get the major and Countess Alexanderoff," said Colonel Hatfield. "They ought to be here to help us question these people."

Major Zumalt and his wife were still in the theater. They came willingly when Scoop told them what had happened. When the three of them got to the dressing room they found that the man had regained consciousness and was talking volubly—in German. The woman sat sullenly against the wall. Colonel Hatfield asked a question now and then and the man answered it.

When the countess saw her maid, her face became chalk white. "Jeanette!" she cried. "What are you doing here?"

Jeanette shrugged her shoulders and said nothing.

Colonel Hatfield turned to the countess. "How long has this woman been in your service?" he asked. "What do you know about her?"

"She has been with me for three years," the countess replied. "She said she was Swiss. Beyond that I know nothing."

"Dat wasn't no Swiss she was talkin' wid dis bird when I found 'em," said Monk. "If you ask me, I'd say both of 'em was Jerries."

"Search the man," said the colonel. "We'll soon find out."

Monk and Scoop seized the man and went through his pockets very thoroughly. Scoop had been a reader of detective stories. He made the man take off his shoes. In the left one he discovered a tiny wad of tissue paper. Colonel Hatfield unfolded it and spread it out on the dressing table. It was a miniature map of the railway systems of France, complete to the smallest branch line. In one corner was listed the rolling stock in service by the allied armies; so many locomotives, so many passenger cars, etc. In the opposite corner there was a memorandum to the effect that the United States was sending huge engines to France, locomotives capable of pulling more than a hundred cars.

Colonel Hatfield called Major Zumalt. "Look at this map," he said,

"and tell me if you've ever seen anything like it before."

The major bent over the little drawing and studied it carefully. "It is a composite map of every railway in the country," he said. "I have one like it which I carry with me for reference."

"Would your wife have a chance to see that map?" asked the colonel.

"Yes," admitted the major. "What are you driving at?"

"Just a minute," said Colonel Hatfield. "Would your wife's maid have a chance to see the map?"

"Why, yes, she would," said Major Zumalt. "In fact a strange thing happened last week. I brought the map home and had it in my room. It disappeared. I was afraid I had lost it or it had been stolen. I hunted everywhere, but couldn't find it. The next morning it turned up in exactly the place I had left it."

"That explains a great deal," said the colonel. "While you were looking for the map, your wife's maid and her partner were copying it. Not wishing to arouse suspicion against themselves, they carefully replaced it where they found it. To me the case is complete in every way."

THE colonel looked at the maid, Jeanette, and seemed to be weighing something in his mind.

"If you would confess," he said, "I would see that you stand trial before an American court-martial. As you won't tell me anything, I'll have to turn you over to the French." Colonel Hatfield spoke in English, but Jeanette seemed to understand every word.

A twinge of pain passed over the woman's face. "No, no!" she cried. "Do not give us to the French. They are merciless. They would shoot us to-morrow."

"They probably would," said Colonel Hatfield. "They have little patience

with spies. You can hardly blame them, after all the trouble they've had."

"I confess," cried Jeanette. "I tell everything."

"All right," said the colonel. "If you do, I'll see that you get a fair trial."

Between sobs the woman told her story. The man in the French uniform was her brother. They had come from Alsace and were in the employ of the Germans. The countess and Major Zumalt were innocent. What information the spies had been able to pick up had been by eavesdropping and by copying papers and maps which the major brought home. Most of the things they had sent to the Germans had been worthless.

Colonel Hatfield called an M. P. and gave the two spies into his charge. "Well, that's done," he said. "I'm mighty glad it's over."

"Colonel," said Major Zumalt, "I can't thank you enough. You have established my wife's innocence and lifted a load from both our shoulders. Now we can live in peace without being watched everywhere we go."

"Don't thank me," said the colonel. "Thank these four boys who did the real work. They are the ones who cleared up the mystery."

Major Zumalt looked at the quartet with embarrassment. He hadn't been friendly with these men and he knew it. He cleared his throat gruffly before he spoke.

"I'm sorry for what happened at the hospital," he said. "If there's any way I can make up for it, let me know. I'm going to see that you travel first class on every railroad in France from now on. You won't have any trouble from railway transportation officers, I assure you of that."

"T'anks," said Monk. "We're always glad to help out."

The Countess Alexanderoff smilingly shook hands with each of the four men. "Maybe we meet again," she said. "If they permit, I am going to continue to sing for the soldiers."

After the major and his wife had left, Colonel Hatfield told the quartet that he had a surprise for them.

"You men have done good work," he said. "As a reward, I'm going to send you up to Chaumont and arrange for you to give a special performance before the general."

"Dat's great," said Monk. "I always did want to go to G. H. Q. When I see Black Jack I'm gonna ask him for a pass."

NEXT MONTH

Further adventures of the Wound Stripe Quartet

G. H. Q.

By Bill Morgan

An ace of a yarn—watch for it!

A Drink on the Colonel

By Edward Arthur Dolph



Sergeants Casey and Murphy of the "Owld Fiftieth" Field Artillery put over a "fast one" in a Frog estaminet.

WHAT was left of the first and second battalions of the 440th Infantry was busily engaged consolidating and strengthening the position they had won that morning in the face of terrific resistance. Three hundred yards to the rear, two red-faced field artillery sergeants who, because of their regiment's shortage of officers, had been sent up on liaison duty for the attack, slowly descended the steps of a captured German dugout and knocked at the heavy wooden door. Inside the dugout Colonel Burns, the 440th's rather youthful commanding officer, leaned hastily over an upended box that stood half facing the wall, then straightened up and strode swiftly over

to the rude board table that served as a desk.

"Come in!" he called peevishly.

The two sergeants entered and saluted.

"Sorr," said the larger of the pair, "Sergeants Casey and Murphy of the Fiftieth Field Artillery report to the colonel as ordered."

"And it's about time!" snapped the colonel. "If there's one thing in which artillery can be on time, I'd like to know what it is!" Whereupon he began to hold forth on the utter worthlessness of all artillery in general and the Fiftieth Regiment in particular.

The truth was that the colonel had tied up the attack most inexcusably that

morning by personal interference with his battalion commanders and was seeking a "goat" on whom to saddle the blame. Not only had he lost contact with outfits on his right and left, but he had lost over a third of his command in casualties by advancing through machine-gun-infested woods without proper reconnoissance and by failing to call for artillery support until it was too late to avoid coming partly under his own shell fire. Nevertheless, he was trying to convince himself that the artillery was to blame for all his troubles. Certainly that was the excuse which he meant to make at the interview with the division commander which he knew was inevitable.

"A hell of a lot of good your artillery was to us!" he rasped. "They fired that barrage so fast that it was over before the regiment could get under way. And when we called for some H. E. on those machine-gun nests they waited until we'd taken them and then dropped a shower of scrap iron on the backs of our necks! Butchered by our own artillery! That's what my men were! By Heaven, I'd like to get that outfit of yours up here and show 'em just for once what real war is like."

"But, sorr," loyally protested the larger of the two sergeants, on whose breast was the ribbon of the Medal of Honor and on whose head was a bolo cut that kept it company, "they did but fire that barrage according to schedule. An'—beggin' the colonel's pardon, sorr—if ye had but taken my suggestion, I could have had a little H. E. on thim nests sooner, instead o' waitin' until aftther the rigimint had started to advance again."

"What!" shouted the overwrought colonel, incensed at the opposition to his alibi. "Do you mean to tell *me* how to conduct an attack, Sergeant Casey?"

He bored the sergeant through with a venomous stare. "Why, damn it!"

he snorted, "I've half a mind to try you for disrespect! Imagine telling *me* how to conduct an attack! I've a good mind to send you back to your outfit under arrest."

He stepped closer and shoved his face up close to Casey's.

"Listen, sergeant!" he hissed ominously. "I've heard about you. You get away with murder because you and Colonel Lane have served twenty years together in the Fiftieth Field Artillery. I've heard how you and Sergeant Murphy here got drunk and took the pants off an M. P. in Brest. And I've heard about you stealing the French general's horse and changing its hoof markings. And I know about your impertinence to junior officers. But—don't try anything like that with me!"

THE colonel stood staring at Casey for a minute. Then, with a final snarl, he turned and began striding back and forth across the dugout, muttering angrily to himself.

Casey's face turned a deeper red, and the veins stood out on his forehead like whipcords, as he thought of the "Owd Fiftieth" Field Artillery being blamed for Colonel Burns' own lack of judgment and inexperience in leading troops in battle. Years of facing irate officers, however, had taught him when he might and might not speak with impunity. All he could do was swallow his anger and glare impotently about the room. Suddenly his gaze fell upon an empty box a couple of feet to his left near the wall. An open side was turned partly toward the wall and partly toward him. He started slightly, then jerked his gaze back to the colonel, who was just turning about. The veins on Casey's forehead faded and a slight smile played momentarily about his lips. Then, as the colonel swung fully around, his face became as masklike as it was at many a pay-day poker table.

"I've a good mind," said Colonel

Burns slowly, "to keep you here under arrest and prefer charges against you."

Casey's jaw dropped, and his raincoat slid off his arm and plopped down beside the box.

A smile of grim satisfaction flickered over the colonel's face, as he observed Casey's discomfiture.

"But," he continued, "you two have been worse than useless to me, so I'll even matters with your colonel by sending you back to him."

He turned to the rude board table, pulled out a notebook and began to write.

"This pass," he said, "will get you by any division M. P.s looking for stragglers."

Casey's gaze flickered to the box on his left, then back to the bowed head of the colonel. Slowly he bent over, fumbled behind the box for an instant and picked up the raincoat. He draped the coat carefully over his left arm and hand just as Captain Lee, the regimental adjutant, entered.

"Sorry, sir," said the adjutant, saluting, "but here's a message from the division commander. He wants you to report to him immediately. There'll be a car at the crossroads near K-32-d."

The colonel's face paled, then flushed darkly. He burst into a string of curses, then checked himself as he remembered the two sergeants.

"All right, captain," he managed to say, "but if the general thinks he can hang me for what the artillery tied up, he's badly mistaken. I'll fight him to the last ditch!"

He turned to the two sergeants.

"Come on!" he snapped out. "I'm going to see that you men get back to your regiment without delay."

He picked up his trench coat and strode out of the dugout, followed by Casey and his inseparable buddy, Sergeant Murphy.

The crossroads near K-32-d lay two and a half kilometers behind the posi-

tion the 440th held, but every step of the way Colonel Burns raved about the "damned artillery."

When they arrived at the crossroads a staff car was waiting.

"After the rotten liaison work you two did," said the colonel, "you don't deserve to ride. But we'll probably need some one to push us out of the mud and shell holes, so you can climb in for the kilometer or so I'm going your way."

A DOZEN times along that kilometer of pockmarked, shell-torn road the two sergeants were ordered out to push and tug at the bemired vehicle, while its wheels spun helplessly in the mud and the colonel sat swearing in the back seat. It was dark when they finally reached the branch road that led to the artillery positions a kilometer farther to the rear. Here the tired and disgusted sergeants did their final bit of pushing and tugging on the mud-encrusted car, for the crossroads had been heavily shelled and the area was badly torn up. When at last the car was on solid ground the colonel leaned out and called to Casey.

"Here, sergeant," he snapped, tossing out a pair of raincoats. "Here are your coats. You two turn off here and proceed directly to your regiment, do you understand? And you can give your C. O. my opinion of his artillery along with my compliments!"

Casey picked up a coat from the ground and saluted. With a grinding of gears the car slithered off through the mud.

"May ye roast in hell, ye baboon-faced mud cruncher!" growled the big Irishman, shaking his fist after the disappearing car. Then he turned and hurried off into a near-by field, followed by the wondering and protesting Murphy. When they had gone about a hundred yards Casey slackened his pace and raised his hand.

"Battberry, halt!" he sang out.

"For Heaven's sake!" growled Murphy. "What's the idea of the foot race, anyway? And what are you chasing off here in this field for? Anybody would think the devil himself was after you."

Casey's mood was surprisingly amiable.

"Sure, an' that he is, sweetheart," he said, seating himself carefully upon the ground. "At least the chaplain has been thryin' to convince me o' the sad fact for some time. An' just to make sure that I have good company whin I meet him, I'm goin' to lead ye astray by offerin' ye a bit o' stimulant, though Heaven knows ye don't deserve it!"

From his pocket he drew a half-empty bottle of schnapps. Murphy stared pop-eyed at the bottle.

"For the love of Pete!" he gasped. "Where did you get that bottle?"

Casey snorted in disgust.

"By the great gun of Athlone!" he exploded. "Wit' your lack of intilligence an' perception, 'tis a wonder they've not made ye a member o' the gineral staff long ago. To be perfectly honest wit' ye, sergeant, I stole it from that lop-eared imitation o' milithary greatness while he was cussin' us out back there in the dugout, an' if ye'd not been as dumb as he is, ye'd of seen me do it! Now, if your sinse o' honor is painin' ye, I'll dhrink it all meself!"

"Give me that bottle," said Murphy, grinning and dropping down beside Casey. "I can't testify against you until I prove to myself it's liquor!"

"To Colonel Burns," said Murphy. "May the general skin him alive for the way he tied up that attack." After four or five healthy swallows he smacked his lips and passed the bottle to Casey.

"To the same," said Casey. "An' may the owld Fiftieth drop a salvo down the seat o' his pants."

There followed a long, agonized wait

on the part of Sergeant Murphy, punctuated only by the rhythmic *glug, glug* of Casey's swallowing.

The bottle was finally passed back to Murphy, who, after holding it near his ear and shaking it dubiously, proceeded in time-honored fashion.

When the pair at last rose rather unsteadily and continued on their way the empty bottle lay on the ground between them, mute testimony to a half hour well spent and an omen of trouble ahead.

INSTEAD of reporting back to their regiment as Colonel Burns had ordered, the two sergeants now headed for a battered little village that lay about a kilometer behind their regimental area. Only two buildings still stood in the little village—the battered stone church and Papa Dupre's little wine shop. All else was a crumbling pile of gray stone and dust. Firm of purpose, if unsteady of gait, Murphy, who had temporarily taken the lead, skillfully avoided an occasional figure that loomed out of the night and led Casey to the back door of the estaminet. They entered a little, dimly lighted back room furnished with two chairs and a table.

"Well, Mike," said Murphy, not a little proud of himself, "how's this suit you?"

"Sure," said Casey, tossing his coat on the table, "an' 'tis the first intilligint thing I've seen ye do this night. Wit' a little Three Star Hennessey the aaven-in' might yet prove interestin'."

As the coat slid across the table, something gleamed dully from its wrinkled folds. Murphy squinted at the coat in surprise, then leaned over and examined the source of the gleam. On the shoulders of the coat were a pair of silver eagles.

"Great day!" he cried excitedly. "You've got Colonel Burns' trench coat!"

Dumfounded, Casey stared at the

coat for a minute. Then a broad grin spread slowly over his face.

"Sure," he said, "an' I'm thinkin' the owld sayin' is right. Heaven cares for fools, dhrunkards, and childern, sure enough! Here I am wit'out a franc in me britches, an' yet there is provided the means for a pleasant aavenin'." He picked the trench coat up and slipped it on, while Murphy looked on aghast.

"There!" said Casey. "Show me the Frog that'll question me financial ratin' too early in the aavenin' now!"

"But, Mike," protested Murphy, "you'll be tried for impersonatin' an officer."

Casey groaned in disgust. "Ye nit-wit!" he hiccuped. "How the divil can I impersonate an imitation? Do ye, like a good lad, stop your worryin' an' order a couple bottles o' Three Star at once."

Sergeant Murphy was about to comply when Papa Dupre himself appeared on the scene. For an instant he was so startled at the sight of the supposed American officer that he could not speak. Then his face flushed with pleasure at the unexpected honor and the thought of the profit he could make by overcharging the colonel.

"*Ah, bon soir, mon colonel!*" he began, beaming.

"Bung soir," said Casey, bowing.

"*Fraiment,*" said Papa, "zis ees a grand *honneur* to serve ze officer *Americain*. What ees it zat ze colonel weesh?"

"Coneyac," said Murphy, holding up two fingers. "*Deux* bottles."

"Toot sweet!" said Casey.

"*Mais oui!*" said the delighted Papa, hurrying off to fill the order.

THE thirsty pair had drunk about half of the first bottle and were in a rosy condition when the door leading to the front room suddenly swung open and Papa burst in upon them, shaking with fright and wringing his hands

while he poured forth a torrent of incomprehensible French.

Casey paused, a freshly filled glass halfway to his lips.

"For the love o' Heaven!" he said disgustedly. "What the hell's the matther wit' ye? Have ye got the St. Vitus dance?"

Just then there came the sound of pounding at the back door, and a harsh voice loudly demanded admittance.

"Oh, ze M. P.s," cried Papa. "Oh, ze *bon* colonel! He weel save me, ees it not?"

But Sergeant Casey was intent on saving something else. He reached for the unopened bottle of cognac just as the hammering at the door was renewed.

"Mike," gasped Murphy, "what the divil will we do?"

"Shut up, ye ass," hissed Casey, "and put this in your pocket."

Shoving the unopened bottle toward Murphy, Casey grasped the half-empty one just as the door crashed open and a smartly uniformed second lieutenant of military police rushed into the room. The looney started to speak, then stopped, dumfounded at the sight of the huge, red-faced colonel clutching a half-empty bottle of cognac.

Twenty years of service and as many trials for pay-day spree had made Casey an expert in meeting situations such as this. With great dignity he rose to his feet and glared his stern disapproval of the open-mouthed shave-tail before him. Under that withering look the lieutenant seemed to shrink down into his boots.

"I—I beg the colonel's pardon, sir," he stammered. "I was——"

"An' who the divil cares if ye was?" snapped Casey. "'Tis a fine situation, indade, whin an officer an' gentleman fresh from the front can't have a bit o' stimulant afther three days in the threnches an' no sleep, wit'out ye snoopin' M. Pays disthurbin' his com-

fort! Are ye not content wit' all the women but ye must have all the liquor, too?"

"No, sir! I mean, yes, sir!" stammered the lieutenant.

"'Tis as I thought!" snorted Casey. "Ye're incapable o' normal mental functionin' or else ye wouldn't qualify for the gum-shoe brigade. Now get to hell out o' me sight, before I lose me dignity an' timper at one an' the same time! An' no blabbin', do ye understand, about a colonel havin' a friendly nip wit' a noncom that's saved his life this night!"

"Yes, sir!" said the embarrassed lieutenant as he saluted and backed hastily out of the door.

HARDLY had the young officer disappeared when Casey pushed the open-mouthed Murphy aside and cautiously opened the door that led to the front room, where a snarling M. P. sergeant was busily rounding up three or four soldiers who sat around one of the little, marble-topped tables. As Casey watched through the barely opened door, the lieutenant whom he had reprimanded hastily entered the front door of the building and engaged the M. P. sergeant in an excited whispered consultation. After a few seconds' conversation, punctuated by furtive, curious looks toward the back-room door, the pair hurriedly left the estaminet.

Surprised silence reigned for a minute among the soldiers who had fully expected to be taken away in arrest. Then, "I'll be damned!" exploded a big buck private.

Casey opened the door and stepped out into the room, followed by Murphy and the grateful and fawning Papa Dupre, who had been hiding behind him like a frightened rabbit. A chorus of gasps issued from the amazed soldiers in the front room.

Casey enjoyed the situation to the

limit. He looked about at the quaking soldiers for a full minute. Then a benign smile spread over his face and he turned slowly to Papa Dupre.

"Mon sewer," he said with great dignity, "the poor *soldats* have need of a bit o' nerve tonic. Do ye, like a good bartender, fill up their glasses. *Encore coneyac!*"

He waved his hand magnanimously toward the soldiers' glasses, and Papa understood. Gratefully he filled each glass to the brim.

"Now, me lads," said Casey grandiloquently, "don't be bashful. Sure, an' we'll all have a dhrink on the 'Owld Man.' Down wit' it! It's on me!"

He raised the half-empty bottle which he still clutched in his hand, and the hypnotized soldiers followed suit.

"Oh, *non, non, non, non!*" said Papa Dupre, suddenly remembering the American expression "on me" and realizing what Casey was doing. "Zis time she ees on me!"

Casey turned a stern eye on Papa. Then an amused smile spread slowly over his face.

"Sure, Papa, ye owld billy goat," he said, gently pulling the Frenchman's little goatee, "an' if ye only knew it, they're *all* on ye!"

After ordering another bottle to be brought out to the soldiers, Casey and Murphy retired to the back room to polish off the rest of their first bottle. In a few minutes Casey reached the point where he could not be restrained from bursting into song. He rose unsteadily to his feet, raised his brimming glass and launched into that grand old song which is the favorite of all "jackass" artillerymen.

"I'd rather be a red-leg wit' a mule an' moun-
tain gun
Than knight of old wit' spurs of gold,
A Roman, Greek, or Hun——"

Suddenly there was a commotion in the front room. There was the sound

of scraping and overturning chairs, but Casey sang on, unheeding:

"So fill your glasses, fellows,
An' dhrink this toast wit' me—
Here's a how, an' a how, an' a how, how, how
To a mountain battere-e-e!
Here's a how——"

FROM the front room came sharp cries of surprise, punctuated by sharper words of command. Murphy leaped to the door, opened it a crack and looked out.

"Mike!" he cried in sudden consternation. "It's that M. P. looey, with Major Flint, the division provost marshal!" He hastily braced a chair against the door.

Casey stared at his companion for a minute, while the importance of the news slowly penetrated his alcoholic fog. Then——

"To hell wit' him!" said he, shoving the second bottle of cognac into his blouse pocket. "I'm a red-leg from the owld Fiftieth, an' no New York cop turned major o' M. Pays is goin' to spoil me aavenin's pleasure. Come wit' me, an' we'll have one on the colonel."

Blowing out the feeble oil lamp, he started for the back door. As he did so, Murphy suddenly grabbed him by the shoulders and stripped the trench coat from him.

"Let go o' me, ye nitwit!" growled Casey.

"Leave that damned coat here," said Murphy. "If you let Major Flint catch you with that on, your name'll be mud."

Casey was inclined to argue, but some one had already begun pounding on the door to the front room, so together the pair dashed out the back door. A foot outside they collided with a burly M. P., but one of Casey's hamlike fists promptly rocked that unfortunate soldier to sleep.

"Take his feet!" snapped Casey, leaning over and lifting the M. P. by the shoulders. Murphy promptly obeyed.

"Over here!" said Casey impatiently, indicating what was left of a battered wall a few yards across the rubble-strewn alley.

A minute later, as they lay stretched behind the wall, the two sergeants heard the sound of splintering wood and saw a match flicker in the room they had so hastily deserted. Then the oil lamp flared dimly, and through the open back door they could make out the shadowy forms of Papa Dupre and the two officers. The major looked searchingly around the room, then leaned over with an exclamation of surprise and picked up the trench coat from the floor. For a second or two he studied the coat as he held it near the lamp.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he suddenly burst out. "It's a long road that has no turning, sure enough! See this name inside the collar, lieutenant? Colonel Burns, 440th Infantry! The bird that raised hell with me for picking up a bunch of his lousy drunks! The high hat that turned me in to the division commander for disrespect because I made his car wait while I gave the right of way to an ammunition train. Oh, boy! This is good! Won't I burn him up for this! When I get through reporting this to the general, Colonel Burns will be headed for a court-martial and Blois so fast that a Jerry .77 shell couldn't overtake him!"

BEHIND the wall, Casey nudged Murphy in the ribs and chuckled with fiendish glee. Inside the little back room, Papa Dupre took a hand in the conversation.

"But, yes, *mon commandant*," said he tearfully, "an' ze colonel, he has not pay ze beel! *Toutes les soldats* drink ze cognac an' champagne wiz heem, an' he does not pay me. What ees it zat I shall do, *mon commandant*?"

"Do?" snapped the major. "You ought to lose your shirt, you old robber, for the way you profiteer on these sol-

diers. But make out your bill, Papa—make out your bill! *This* time you'll get your money, or I'll know the reason why!" He rubbed his hands together gloatingly.

"How much, Papa?" he demanded. "*Combien? Cent francs*, eh? One hundred francs? Is that enough?"

"*Mais non! Mais non!*" cried Papa Dupre, seeing his opportunity. "For ze champagne, ze cognac for *beaucoup soldats*, it ees not enough! *Cent cinquante* One hoondred feefty!"

"All right! All right!" said the major, turning to go. "One hundred

fifty it is! And you'll get it, too, or my name's not Flint!"

Followed by the lieutenant, he went back into the front room, gathered up his prisoners and left.

Behind the battered wall across the alley Casey rolled slowly over on his back and sat up. From his lower right-hand blouse pocket he lovingly drew forth the second bottle of cognac and removed the cork.

"Sergeant Murphy," said he, "as I was suggestin' before this sleepin' beauty interfered wit' me plans, we'll now have a little drink on the colonel."

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CHAPTER I.

AN EARFUL OF WINE.

MILITARY snobs of Huot's sort were rare among French officers, but in the course of six years in the Foreign Legion, Knoles had encountered a few of them, both in Africa and in France since the outbreak of the War. He had met Huot the preceding day and he nodded, now, as the staff captain strode into the Papillon d'Or.

Why they called the little third-rate estaminet "The Golden Moth" was a mystery, for it swarmed with nothing more picturesque than flies. Yet it was

the best in Brissay, and Huot, like other officers of the Allied troops concentrating there for the drive in the La Champagne sector, patronized it. To the American's nod as he entered, the captain returned only a cold stare. He brushed past Knoles, flung himself down at the next table and beckoned to Derstines, an infantry officer.

"Name of a dog!" growled Huot, as Derstines joined him. "I have just finished at the staff office. And do you know who is to be given the position of honor in the attack to-morrow?"

"Why—why"—said Derstines excitedly—"I had hoped I—my company know, I thought——"

He and Huot were cousins. He thought that Huot had arranged for his company to be the spear point of the coming drive, but he did not put his thought in words, for the little room was crowded with officers at noon mess. Derstines was a glory grabber; Huot, a politician. They had long ago agreed to further each other's official interests whenever possible.

"Your company was to have position. It was arranged," Huot went on bitterly. "But of what use is one's effort? It is this Legion company—those cattle are to be shoved ahead of every one else."

"The Legion!" Derstines was incredulous. "But aren't you close to the major general? I thought you and Gontier were friends."

Huot shrugged drearily. "We are. We are. That can't be questioned. The plan of operations was completed. It was full of my suggestions. Yet now, everything is wrong. A wire has just come through from high official sources."

"Eh?" Derstines leaned forward intently. "Who——"

"Gontier is superseded. His operations plan is discarded," Huot interrupted impatiently. "The telegram orders a different distribution of all infantry units. These filthy Legionnaires go up first. Your regiment follows them."

"Those jailbirds," sneered Derstines, his face whitening. "It's an insult—following swine like that into battle." He was furious. "Who countermanded Gontier's plan? He's head of the army corps in this area, isn't he?"

"The wire," said Huot wryly, "was signed by a marshal of France."

"Ah—ah——"

DERSTINES' indignation seemed to shrivel up. Beside a marshal of France, Major General Gontier's rank dwindled in significance. And the three

short, gold bars on his own sleeve, which proclaimed him a captain in a line regiment, were less than nothing. Rank as high as Huot had mentioned made a profound impression on him, almost stupefied him. He was silent.

Huot, however, was not. All his petty scheming and influence with his chief of staff, Gontier, had been discounted. It was not possible for him to criticize the marshal who had sent the wire, but there was an immediate outlet for his disgust in the direction of the Legion company that had marched into Brissay yesterday. He resented their arrival in the sector and broke into an ugly, cursing tirade against them.

"Spawn like that! They haven't the courage of lice," he wound up, choking slightly. "Rats, criminal scum, the sweepings of foreign gutters——"

The fact that Knoles, a lieutenant of the Legion and at present commanding the company at Brissay, due to casualties among its other officers, was seated at the next table, served to put no check on Huot's tongue. The American, a yard from Huot's elbow, could not help but hear.

Personal snubs from officers of Huot's type meant nothing to Knoles. But running down the Legion and the men of his company was another matter. Those men, since the Legion's arrival in France, had fought well. At Arras two months ago when the British and French lines gave way, it had been the Legion that was flung into the breach. Up there, where the German advance had been halted, the fields were studded thick with the white crosses carrying the Mohammedan crescent and star that marks Legionnaire graves. Afterward there had been a ceremony in Paris. Legion flags were decorated. The Legion had been given full standing with French regiments of the line.

Huot's remarks were too much for Knoles. Slowly he poured his glass full of wine, picked it up, turned in his chair

and regarded the captain stonily. If Huot was conscious of the American's gaze he did not betray it. He was tall and powerfully built. Everything about him flared—his wide shoulders, his black mustache, his immense ears. He was seated so that the side of his face was presented to Knoles. One of his ears protruded at Knoles like a funnel.

It was an admirable target, and Knoles quite deliberately tossed the glass of wine into that ear.

ACROSS the table, Derstines let out a squawk, as some of the liquid that drenched the captain also splattered on his tunic. Huot sat dead still in his chair for a split second, then twisted, swift as an animal, and looked into Knoles' eyes. Suddenly he blurted an oath and hurled himself from the chair straight at the American.

Knoles came halfway to his feet in a crouch, and his fist whipped out even as he moved. It crashed against Huot's cheek and opened up his face to the bone. The Frenchman's body seemed to pause between the tables, then it appeared to leap backward and smash into the one from which he had risen.

This table collapsed, as Huot went down, and Derstines, still seated at it, went over backward in his chair. Instantly the room was in an uproar and men were crowding forward.

But Huot did not get up to continue the fight. He was unconscious. And Knoles, observing that his opponent was out, sat down again and said nothing. Apparently Derstines had no desire to take up the captain's battle. He applied his energies to bringing Huot around.

There were several English and Canadian officers in the room, but after they had pressed forward and observed the damage the captain had suffered, they discreetly withdrew and resumed their meal. It was not their province to do anything where officers in French uniforms were involved. As for the

five or six other Frenchmen at the inn, they were all sublieutenants; their rank was no greater than Knoles' and they made no move to arrest him.

So it remained for Huot to revive under Derstines' ministrations. The staff captain sat up, shook his head, blinked his scowling eyes. His whole face pained him terrifically. Then he beheld Knoles seated imperturbably in the same chair where he had last seen him.

"Species of a goat!" he roared. "You—you are still there, eh?"

"As you observe, *mon capitaine*," Knoles acknowledged.

"You are under arrest," Huot brayed.

Knoles came smartly to his feet, to attention, and saluted.

"I have held myself in arrest ever since the captain was on the floor," he said shortly.

Huot glared at him, half suspecting Knoles of contempt, but the American's expression was absolutely wooden. The captain turned and snapped an order to a couple of the young lieutenants.

"You—and you," he grunted, jabbing a finger at them, "take Lieutenant Knoles over to the staff office. He's maintained in arrest. I shall be over there at once."

BLOOD and wine had made messy blotches all over Huot's uniform. He spent some minutes arranging his appearance before he withdrew from the inn with Derstines. The two headed up the single street of the village toward the town hall which had been taken over as the staff headquarters.

"Well," grunted Huot grimly, when he was sure they were out of earshot of every one, "you see it worked, my cousin. But sacred devil!" and he felt tenderly of his face. "I am a better judge of a man's character than of his physical make-up."

Derstines' mouth popped open, and he stared at the captain, amazement

growing in his dark eyes. He was tall and slim beside Huot, with a smooth, olive-hued face. Derstines knew profoundly the *règlement*—that body of rules by which everything is done in the French army, from taking an objective to taking a bath. He was savage with his men and rather proud of the fact that they feared him. It gave him pleasure to drill the whole company till it sweated blood, and he did so whenever there was the least infraction of the *règlement*.

"*Tiens!* You mean you purposely engaged in a brawl with that American animal," he breathed.

"But certainly. It occurred to me the instant I saw him. Only I didn't think he'd hit so hard and quick."

"But—but—what was to be gained?"

Huot scowled at the other's stupidity. "Everything, Raoul," he said. "Regard. The American is the only officer of that Legion company; he is now discredited. He has assaulted a superior officer. He will be sent to the rear for a court-martial."

"And he's apt to say that you made statements seditious to the army," Derstines pointed out.

"Let him. I'll deny them. We shall testify he struck me because I declined to speak to him when I entered the inn. Others saw the incident. It will appear he made an unprovoked attack."

"All right; that eliminates him," Derstines agreed. "There are his men, however——"

"They'll never fight to-morrow. You must help me see to that. This is an emergency; they are without commissioned officers; you will be placed in command of them immediately." Huot spoke swiftly, confidently. "I shall effect your transfer as soon as we are at the office."

"Bah! I don't want to command those cutthroats."

"Look here. You will take them over this afternoon," snapped Huot. "They

reached Brissay late yesterday. I happen to know they marched one hundred and fifteen kilometers within the last two days. They are supposed to rest before they move up to the front to-night. You know what to do to them. And you'll have the afternoon to work in. You comprehend?"

A slow grin spread across Derstines' mouth. He understood now what Huot was driving at.

"But isn't Gontier likely to suspect something? Do I turn in a report?"

"No. You will make no report of them. Leave Gontier to me. We'll permit him to draw his own conclusions about them. He'll see they're unfit to go into action and they'll be held back here in disgrace."

Derstines complimented Huot on his cleverness. "I'll do my part."

"Good!" said Huot. "To-night you'll go back to your company. Your regiment will open the drive to-morrow. Be careful up there. Let your men be the heroes and stop the bullets. Don't you go and get potted."

"That's unnecessary advice. You won't catch me getting shot."

"You'll be a major next month, then," Huot predicted. "As for me, Gontier has recommended it, and shortly I am going to the war college. *Eh, bien!* Our futures are quite assured, my old one."

CHAPTER II.

DERSTINES DRILLS THE LEGION.

HUOT'S first move when they reached the staff office was to make out the order for Derstines' transfer to the Legion company as a replacement officer. Next, he turned his attention to Knoles, had the American locked up in an unused room of the building and a guard placed before the door. Then he went to seek Major General Gontier to give him a colorful account of matters.

Knoles was not much concerned about himself. The worst that would likely

happen to him would be the loss of his commission. Prison, even a short sentence, was improbable, for France needed men too badly. His only worry was the disposition of his company. Under the wrong officer, those men would go to pieces. They had to have some one who understood them, in whom they had faith.

The American, rangy, big boned and without an ounce of fat on his frame, was entirely of the Legion. He had entered it a soldier of the second class, served his five-year enlistment, and ended up a sergeant. Knoles had been awaiting his discharge when the war broke with Germany. He promptly re-enlisted for its duration and within a month had been sent to France to train for his commission at St. Maixent, the officers' school for men from the ranks.

Had he chosen to wear them, the American could have adorned his tunic with the ribbons of two colonial decorations. At the end of his first African campaign a French general had pinned the Order of the Star of Benim on his chest. Two years later that same general had decorated him with the Order of the Black Swan. At Arras he had won the war cross with three palms, and his name had appeared in the orders of the day.

Knoles never wore his ribbons. They do not mean much in the Legion. There were men in his company who had won a half dozen different medals and had not had them on since the day they had been conferred. He was wondering about his men now encamped a half mile west of Brissay. What sort of an officer would be detailed to replace him?

He took a turn or two about the room, decided to see if he could get any information from the guard outside, and knocked on the door. The soldier stationed there by Huot unlocked it hesitantly.

"Attend," he said quietly to the man in French. "I desire a small favor."

"But—but—*mon lieutenant*—"

The *poilu* was afraid and he was uncertain. Even under arrest, Knoles was still an officer. But he had had orders from Huot to permit the lieutenant neither to leave the room nor communicate with any one.

"I wish," said Knoles steadily, "that you walk down this hall to the staff office and find out from an orderly what officer is commanding the Legion company that arrived yesterday. Relock the door. I merely want information, not an opportunity to run away."

"Ah——" grunted the *poilu*, "I—I cannot——"

The American drew two five-franc notes from his pocket.

"You go up to the front to-night. Then you would enjoy a bottle of wine. And orderlies also have a taste for wine. One of these is for the orderly."

The man accepted the money with a faint grin. Why shouldn't he do this small service for the lieutenant? Huot, he had observed, had left the building some time ago and had not returned.

"*Bon*," he nodded, and privately concluded that the orderly should never see one of the notes.

He relocked the door, but was back in five minutes tapping on it softly.

"Well?" said Knoles when it opened.

"Captain Derstines is commanding the Legion company."

"By whose order?"

"Pending the signature of the major general, by order of Captain Huot. That's what the orderly says."

"Thanks," said Knoles, smiling. "You're a good soldier, *mon enfant*."

AS soon as he was pacing the room again behind the closed door, the smile gave way to a frown. He was suspicious. Something about the whole business began to smell. Derstines had been the officer Huot had called over to his table at the inn. Knoles remembered scraps of their conversation.

Derstines had expected his outfit to be the advance company in the coming drive, to have what is known in French tactics as the "position of honor." Huot's arrangements had slipped up.

"And now," muttered Knoles, "he's going to take the Legionnaires into action and get them butchered. That's it. Those two birds hung me up on the hooks beautifully."

The indifference he had felt at first about himself left him at once. He wanted to be free to hit back at the pair. He had to do something, get out of confinement some way for the sake of his men. Yet what? And how could he do it? The one window of the room happened to be barred. For what purpose, Knoles hadn't the least idea. Apparently to make him more completely a prisoner. The door was locked and guarded. He began to realize his helplessness.

He was positive he had been neatly framed, caught with his eyes closed. And he was sure Huot had planned it. Derstines was simply to benefit by it. And the Legionnaires commanded by Derstines would pay the price. Knoles thought he had followed Huot's scheming through to its conclusion, but he had not gone far enough. There in the room he could not know with what a fine and devilish skill Derstines was accomplishing the demoralization of No. 2 Company of the Legion.

Derstines had lost no time. A quarter of an hour after leaving the staff headquarters he had found the company sprawled out and resting under shelter tents set up west of the village.

There could be no doubt that these men were tired. Some of them, indeed, had sore feet from the seventy-mile march up to Brissay. That was all the better, Derstines decided, as he called the sergeant major to him.

"Turn them out," he ordered curtly. "I wish to inspect them, perhaps put them through a few maneuvers."

"The orders were for the men to rest, sir," the sergeant major ventured. "Lieutenant Knoles——"

"Assemble the company," roared Derstines. "Lieutenant Knoles is not in command here. I am the officer."

Bewildered, the sergeant major saluted and turned away. He found a bugler and had him sound assembly. The men came tumbling out, perplexed and grumbling. Many of them had been asleep. Rapidly the sergeants formed them up and dressed an impeccable line.

Every nationality of Europe and Asia Minor except Germans were to be found in the company. German Legionnaires had remained in Africa when the two regiments of the Legion sailed for France.

Even though tired, the men put snap and precision into the formation they were standing. The Legion knows how to do that as no other military organization in the world. As soldiers they are as mechanically perfect as it is possible for a body of men to become. Derstines eyed them, however, with critical disapproval.

"Yes, they need a little drilling," he growled to the sergeant major. "They should be smartened up. Dismiss them, sergeant. Have them reform with full packs."

Within five minutes the company was aligned, standing stiffly at attention once more. Only this time each man had a pack and equipment weighing nearly one hundred pounds on his back.

Derstines took the company over and got down to business.

"Present—arms!" he bawled. The Legionnaires came up to the present with a rattle and with machinelike precision. "Order—arms!"

FOR the best part of an hour they went through the manual. Derstines contented himself with roaring order after order. He never paused to have

the sergeants correct a man or a movement. That would give aching arms a chance to rest, and Derstines wanted them to have no rest.

Finally he formed the company into a column and marched it off a mile from its encampment to put it through close-order drill. He noted with growing satisfaction that already the men were becoming sullen. They marched badly; this was partly due to their condition and partly to their resentment.

Followed an hour of drilling in close order without an instant's rest. Toward the end of it the men were openly sluggish in the execution of Derstines' commands. Here and there in the ranks were audible grumbles. The sergeants rushed about behind the company shouting silence.

"What's the matter with them?" demanded Derstines when he found himself beside the sergeant major. He put a note of disgust in his question. "Haven't they had any decent training?"

The sergeant major, a grim-faced veteran who had done fifteen years in the Legion, said nothing. Derstines regarded him angrily.

"I asked," he repeated icily, "what was the matter with them?"

The noncom shrugged. "I could not say, *mon capitaine*." The sergeant major's face was absolutely expressionless.

"Bah!" rapped Derstines. "You sergeants are as bad as the men. We'll give them some work in extended order."

It went on for another two hours. The company did bayonet rushes till it was out of breath, staggering on its legs. But Derstines saved his prize trick for the last. He knew the Legionnaires would have to stand an inspection before moving up to the front that evening. All their equipment and clothes were supposed to be clean. He marched them over into a broad field of mud, then had them extend by platoons.

"*Aux genoux!*" he bellowed, giving the order for the kneeling position of fire.

About half of the men went down. The rest remained on their feet.

Derstines affected tremendous rage, and it was not altogether acting. He hated these Legionnaires. Their direct refusal to obey an order had been just what he was hoping for.

The sergeants were confused and apprehensive. Their disgust with Derstines was as great as that of the men, yet it was their inescapable duty to support his authority. They rushed at the men who were standing.

"Down, cattle! Kneel!" they yelled.

When the company was finally on its knees in the mire and the farce was complete, Derstines, somewhat red of face, ordered them up. A column of march was formed, and he led them back toward their tents.

Inspection was due in less than an hour, and they were supposed to move up to the front. They were tired, hungry, and in a rebellious frame of mind. He was especially satisfied with their appearance.

The pants of every member of the company were smeared with soft mud.

CHAPTER III.

HUOT'S SCHEME WORKS.

BRISSAY, set in the hills between the Aisne Canal and the Suippes River, was no different from a hundred other French provincial villages, except that it had thus far escaped shelling and was still occupied by its original inhabitants, although the second year of the War was under way. It was well within the war zone, no more than twenty-five kilometers behind the front which stretched southward from the Aisne to the Marne. Doubtless for this reason, Major General Gontier had chosen it for a concentration point.

Gontier was a thin, slightly stoop-

shouldered, blue-eyed man. Physically, he did not look like a soldier, and mentally, he lacked the aggressiveness of the military mind. He had been with the ordnance and there he fitted well, for he had a capacity for organizing and handling war material. The pressing need for higher officers had caused him to be transferred to the infantry, where he was lost.

The wire that had come through from G. H. Q. over the signature of a marshal had made him worried and nervous. To all appearances some one higher up did not think he had his work perfectly in hand. He would show them.

Until well into the afternoon he was extremely busy. It was nearly four o'clock before Huot was able to reach him and recount how he had been attacked for no reason at all by a Legion officer.

"The American lieutenant is confined under guard," he concluded. "I had no other recourse."

"No; of course not," said Gontier. The incident only increased his irritation. "Those Legion troops are always trouble makers. I don't see why that company was sent up here."

"Some one must have been under the impression that they'd be needed," remarked Huot indirectly.

"Needed? Well, they're really in the way," Gontier complained. "We have more men than is necessary for this offensive."

Under Gontier there were three French regiments which were to carry the brunt of the attack next day. They were to be followed up to the front and supported by a crack Canadian regiment and a regiment of Scotch troops.

Knoles' company was a consolidation of the other companies of his regiment. It contained the men who had survived the fighting at Arras, and it had been ordered to Brissay to participate in the drive while the rest of the regiment was being recruited up to full strength. Gon-

tier knew nothing of the Legion's reputation as a fighting band and cared less.

He glanced at the watch on his wrist and sighed.

"The inspection. We must get out there at once. Inform Colonel Ricard and the other officers."

Huot saluted, hesitated briefly. "This Legion company—I assigned Captain Derstines to its command. He has a name for discipline and may be able to handle them. The order of transfer is made out. Perhaps this evening you will find time to sign it."

"Yes, I'll sign it to-night." The transfer order should have been issued by himself, but he was thankful for Huot's zeal in the matter. He had enough to bother about. "We must be going."

ACCOMPANIED by four other officers of his staff besides Huot, he left the building, entered his automobile, and was rapidly driven up the road west of the village. At the spot from which the inspection was to start, all six climbed out and walked up the road, with Gontier a trifle in advance.

Fifty yards ahead, Gontier encountered No. 2 Company of the Legion. It was drawn up in advance of all the other troops, which were strung out for more than a half mile down the road.

Derstines had given the men only the time to take down their shelter tents. Then he had marched them over to the highway to be inspected.

"*Dieu de Dieu!*" Gontier growled. "What's that on their uniforms?"

None of his staff followers made answer, so the major general approached the company for a closer scrutiny. He took in the mud-stained aspect of the Legionnaires, caught a whiff of sweat-soaked garments and retreated as inconspicuously as he could. He was wondering if the men had ever been clean at any time in their lives.

Passing rapidly down the line, he paused with his staff at the other end

of the company. He swept an unfriendly eye back over the Legionnaires. They seemed to stare back at him defiantly, sullenly.

"They don't look very effective," muttered Gontier doubtfully. "Ah—and look how they stand there. All humped over that way. Haven't they any energy?"

"Their morale doesn't look very high," murmured Huot at Gontier's elbow.

Colonel Ricard on the other side of Gontier said nothing. It was obvious that he did not have a high opinion of the tired, slovenly company.

Suddenly Gontier was very angry. "Those men stand there more like sheep than soldiers. They can't be sent up to the front. No; it's impossible. They'd have a bad effect on the other troops." He came to a decision. "They're a disgrace. They'll stay right here in Brissay."

"Yet it was ordered——" Colonel Ricard began.

"I shall hold them back here," said Gontier crisply. "My own eyes tell me they aren't fit to go into battle."

He turned to Huot. "Go over and find out from their officer how they happen to be in that condition. Tell him the company is in disgrace and is not going up to fight. You can tell me what he had to say after dinner to-night. Then we'll take measures. We must get on with the inspection now."

"But," said Huot softly, "I'm sure it isn't Captain Derstines' fault. I know his record. In justice—ah—I think he would rather go back to his own men than remain behind."

"Yes. Yes. Naturally." Gontier nodded, recalling that Derstines was not the regular officer of the Legion company. "No use to waste the captain on them. Have him turn them over to their noncommissioned officers and then report back to his regiment."

With a salute, Huot walked over to join Derstines. The rest of the staff

moved off, and the inspection went forward.

AFTER Huot and Derstines had talked for a space, the latter addressed the company. He spoke with brevity and contempt, informed them that they were in disgrace and not considered fit to fight for France. He wound up by turning them over to the sergeant major and hastened away to his regiment while Huot hurried up the line to find the staff.

The sergeant major immediately gave the order, "*sac au terre*," and the men tossed off their packs and slumped down at the roadside in their tracks. They were sitting there a half hour later when the inspection ended and Gontier with his staff was whisked back to the village in the automobile.

Presently somewhere up in Brissay a French regimental band blared. A few hundred yards to the right of the spot where the Legionnaires sprawled, a series of orders was shouted. The two French regiments formed into a column of march and swung up the road in a long line of horizon blue, past the men of the Legion, and into the village.

The Canadians who followed them had no band. Last came the Scotch regiment in kilts, marching superbly with a rhythmic rise and fall of bared knees. The Scotch regiment was played out of Brissay with a wild skirl of bagpipes.

The approaching drive was to be launched along a thirty-mile front. Simultaneously, as these units were leaving Brissay, other battalions were moving up to the front at Courtisols, fifteen miles to the south, and Mont Laurent, an equal distance to the north.

Gontier's forces were supposed to support not only the middle of the offensive but to strike deepest within the enemy territory. From the Allied front-line trenches at Souain, they were to penetrate four miles, according to the

map that had been marked off at headquarters. The consolidation of the ground they gained was to be left to supporting Canadian and Scotch troops.

Apparently, as the four regiments swept past and marched through Brissay to the spirited music, they produced no effect on No. 2 Company of the Legion. The men sat sodden and disgruntled on their packs, watching the departure with little interest. Finally the sergeant major called them to attention and took them back to the site of their former encampment to put up their shelter tents again.

As soon as this work was in progress, he left it and the company in charge of the sergeants and set off for Brissay, upon which darkness had now descended. In town, he went directly to the staff office and made inquiry concerning Knoles. He learned the lieutenant was under arrest and asked permission to speak to him. The request was declined.

THE sergeant major, however, was not to be deterred so easily. He withdrew from the outer room of the staff quarters and pretended to lose his way on the second floor of the building, moving up and down the corridors till he spotted a door before which a guard was stationed.

Leaving the building then, he looked it over from the outside, found the exterior location of Knoles' prison chamber, studied the barred window, and whistling softly between his teeth, then strolled up the street to the estaminet where Huot and Knoles had fought. There he procured paper and laboriously wrote out a short account of what had happened to the company that afternoon.

Upon his return to the vicinity of the staff headquarters, he provided himself with a stone the size of an egg. Around this he carefully wrapped the scrap of paper containing his message and tied

it with a piece of twine. From the middle of the village street on which the building fronted, he heaved it at the window.

The instant sharp clatter of broken glass told him it had not struck one of the bars but had gone through the window and fallen into the room. With a chuckle, the sergeant major disappeared around the corner of the headquarters building and departed in the direction of the Legion encampment.

Inside the room, Knoles had just time to recover the stone and take the message from around it before the guard got the door unlocked and thrust in his head.

"What's the noise?" the poilu inquired, and at that instant perceived the broken window. He looked at Knoles suspiciously.

"Some one threw a stone through the window," said Knoles casually. "Probably some drunken villager."

He held out the stone as evidence of the truth of his statement. The guard took it and examined it, then went over and tested the bars across the window. Knoles was unconcerned. The message was safely stuffed in his pocket.

When the guard withdrew, he read the sergeant major's note swiftly, for he knew the fellow would report the broken window at once. The information on the scrap of paper made him hot all over.

"Damn them!" he grated. "They weren't satisfied to leave me to hold the bag. They've made goats of No. 2 Company."

Rapidly he tore up the message and tossed the fragments out the broken window. Footsteps sounded outside the door in the corridor. A second later, it opened to admit the guard and Captain Huot.

Huot took no notice of Knoles, but crossed the room and inspected the window. The bars were intact and that was all that mattered to him.

"You will stay in this room to-night, lieutenant," he declared. "I don't imagine you'll suffer from the draft. To-morrow you're going to be sent to Paris for court-martial."

"If that's the case," said Knoles shortly, "I'd like permission to see Major General Gontier right now."

"Too bad," Huot shook his head. "The major general's busy this evening and won't see any one. And to-morrow I doubt if he'll have time before you depart."

The staff captain glanced at Knoles through narrowed eyes, shifted his gaze to the wrecked window for a thoughtful second and was gone. Knoles heard the guard lock the door again. Within the next ten minutes a second guard was stationed on the ground below the broken window.

Huot, it was evident, had no great faith in Legionnaires.

CHAPTER IV.

RETREAT!

ZERO hour for the Allied offensive was set for five thirty next morning. An hour before it rolled around, the artillery opened up far behind the lines and raked the German trenches with an intense hurricane fire.

At five twenty-six the artillery momentarily suspended, made corrections for curtain fire, and broke loose once more. The drive began just before dawn, with Derstines' company leading the rest of its regiment over the parapet.

The advance was made in two thin waves, one some fifty yards behind the other. Derstines and his men were deployed in a mile-long line. The fronts of the other nine companies took up as many more miles. Behind them was the second French regiment drawn out in another wave.

Back of the screen of artillery fire, the first wave went forward slowly. It met neither bullets nor obstacles. Even

the wire it encountered was badly strung and impeded its progress to no noticeable extent. Derstines' company, slightly in advance, paused on the brink of the Boche front-line trenches, waiting the instant for the curtain fire to hop on.

The faces of the poilus were tense and strained. They were waiting to leap into these trenches with the bayonet. Yet they had come across No Man's Land without being fired on, and that very circumstance made them nervous. They had expected the chatter of machine guns, the crash of rifle fire. The very absence of it made them apprehensive.

But as the screen fire jumped the trenches and moved on, the reason for the lack of opposition they had encountered became apparent. The trenches were empty, deserted. There was not a Boche to be found in them.

This same condition was true when they reached the second and then the third-line trenches. The attack had penetrated more than half a mile into enemy territory and had not engaged the enemy. To all appearances the Germans had withdrawn from this entire area overnight.

In front of the advancing men now lay a long, shallow valley. And it was there in that valley that they walked into the trap the Germans had laid. The first wave got half across it before men began to drop. Still no firing came from up ahead of them. There was only a peculiar smell, as of green corn, in the air.

The valley was flooded with gas, but it was gas more lethal than the chlorine the Canadians had encountered at Ypres. This stuff was swift and deadly. It was the forerunner of the dreaded Blue Cross gas—the most poisonous chemical weapon at Germany's command just then.

Many of the men succeeded in getting into their masks. But their masks were

not designed to protect them against this newer and more powerful chemical. To make matters worse, from the crest of the other side of the valley, a score of Hotchkiss machine guns began to clamor. Somewhere far beyond, the Boche artillery went into action and laid down a heavy barrage in the rear of the advancing French waves.

Gas shells began to fall into the valley, adding to the havoc already wrought. The low ground was untenable. Yet the men could not go forward across the gassed area and in the face of murderous machine-gun fire. Nor could they fall back with any degree of assurance, for behind them was the pounding barrage of the German artillery.

THE Allied offensive was hung up along a front of a dozen miles in the center. And shortly, when the Germans pressed home a counterattack with six battalions of fresh troops, it became a rout and then took on the aspect of a grave disaster.

Enemy troops poured across the gas-shrouded valley equipped with masks made to withstand their own chemicals. The remnants of the two French regiments were driven back, and the Boche fell unexpectedly upon the supporting regiments of Scotch and Canadian troops. Bloody fighting ensued for an hour in the trenches the Germans had purposely evacuated earlier that morning.

Both the Canadians and the Scotch hung on desperately, but there were no reserves that could be sent up to their relief, and the number of Germans driving in on them became overwhelming. They were forced to fall back, those of them who survived, to the Allied trenches north and south of Souain from which the drive had started.

Here, bolstered by the forces holding those trenches, they fought for another

half hour. But it was useless. The Germans came on in an appalling weight of numbers. It became necessary to abandon even these positions. At first an orderly retirement was attempted. Then the pressure of the Boche attack became so great that the Allied retreat was wholly disordered.

A mile behind the trenches the shattered regiments were joined by four French and English artillery companies, who increased the turmoil and general confusion in their effort to save themselves and haul back their guns.

ABOUT the time the retreat was in full swing toward Brissay, a huge, gray Fiat came roaring over the road and into the village from the west. It slid to a stop in front of the French staff headquarters with a squeal of brakes.

A small, silken pennant fluttering over the hood of the high-powered machine announced that it was the official car of a high officer. The man who got out of it was tall and spare, well past middle age. His face was ruddy but gaunt; his thin mouth was shadowed by an iron-gray mustache, and he had piercing steel-colored eyes. On the sleeve of his coat gleamed the seven stars of a field marshal of France.

He dropped an abrupt order to his chauffeur, entered the building, strode up a flight of stairs and into the staff office.

Marshal Georges Jean-Etienne d'Alo stamped into the staff office at exactly eleven minutes after eight and took over the conduct of operations from the highly distracted and helpless Gontier.

He arrived upon a scene of excitement and confusion in the office, for the news that the drive had collapsed in the middle had been telephoned back to Gontier and his staff nearly three quarters of an hour ago. It had been relayed to the French G. H. Q. and from there passed on to D'Alo, who was to

the south in another sector. The marshal had reached Brissay from Epernay, forty miles away, in less than as many minutes.

His presence brought silence and something like order in the staff office. He issued no commands, but asked several sharp questions. The latest telephone communications from the front were to the effect that the Allied middle was in full retirement, that the infantry units had fallen back seven kilometers, that the artillery had abandoned its positions but was making every effort to save its guns.

THE marshal inquired about the amount of war material and supplies that had been massed in Brissay. Gontier grew embarrassed. With his talent for ordnance he had assembled twice as much as he needed for the troops in this area. He explained that in view of the anticipated success of the offensive, he had collected the material there to lessen the problem of transport.

D'Alo was uninterested in Gontier's foresight. What arrangements had the major general made just now to evacuate all these supplies in case the German counterdrive rolled back on Brissay?

Gontier had made none. Surely the Boche wouldn't knife into Allied territory a distance of twenty kilometers.

"The Boche," remarked D'Alo dryly, "will be in the vicinity of Brissay within two hours."

He knew much of war psychology, for he had spent his life fighting wars. And he understood the psychology of frantic retreat, its effect on advancing enemy troops. Victory is tonic. It inspires men to exceed themselves. Twenty kilometers were no margin of safety in view of what was happening up at the front.

It would take at least three hours to get the vast supplies Gontier had stored in Brissay out of the village. France could not afford to let all this material

fall into German hands. The marshal's gaunt jaw set.

"There is an encampment off the road west of this village. I passed it coming in. What troops are those?" he demanded.

"A company of Legionnaires," Gontier informed him nervously.

"What are they doing out there?"

More explanations that were scarcely to the credit of the Legion followed. This company was in too disgraceful a condition to go up to the front.

"Where are its officers?" D'Alo persisted.

He learned that Lieutenant Knoles, the only officer of the company, was in arrest and then he said something that caused the dozen other officers in the staff office to look at each other aghast.

"I will see this Legionnaire lieutenant. Have him brought in here."

It was incredible. The marshal, in the midst of a critical situation, wished to speak to a mere *sous-lieutenant* and one in arrest at that.

KNOLES was brought in. He had been informed that the marshal wished to interview him. He came to within four paces of D'Alo, halted, saluted and held himself rigidly at attention.

D'Alo surveyed him without a flicker of expression on his stern face.

"You are in arrest. Why?" he queried.

"Due to a difference of opinion, *Monsieur le Maréchal*," said Knoles stolidly.

"That's evasive," snapped D'Alo. "I want causes."

"An officer criticized Legionnaires as not gentlemen. He also criticized their courage. It seemed to me he spoke too loudly and his opinions were not well informed, at least on the latter point." Knoles paused.

"Proceed," the marshal ordered.

"The Legion doesn't boast that it's a school turning out gentlemen," said the

American calmly. "But its bravery is a matter of record. My resentment of the officer's remarks was not personal. I was at Arras, *Monsieur le Maréchal*. I saw the men die like flies and without a whimper, but they did not break. It's the boast of the Legion that it doesn't turn its back to the enemy."

"I have heard that said of the Legion," nodded D'Alo, the ghost of a smile hovering on his grim mouth. "You will have opportunity to make that boast the truth, *mon enfant*. The Boche will be in Brissay shortly if you don't. We need an extra hour to evacuate the village. You will see that we have it."

D'Alo rose from the chair in which he was seated. His action was very deliberate, yet the tension in the room seemed to increase every time he spoke or moved.

"Take command of your company. I will see to it that you are provided with additional machine guns at once. Move it out five kilometers east of Brissay. Dig in out there. Check this enemy advance for an hour. You may be relieved in that time and you may not. Nothing can be promised. Reserves are on the way."

His voice was sharp, rapid. "You understand what you are to accomplish? You understand my orders?"

"Fully," said Knoles, saluting. "And I desire to thank the marshal for his confidence in the Legion."

"Dismiss," rapped D'Alo.

The instant the American was out of the room, Gontier spoke up in no little agitation.

"But—but—the man was facing court-martial. Does the marshal appreciate he was to be sent back——"

"Zut! This is not a time for military jurisprudence," said D'Alo coldly. "I appreciate that he could be useful. Where he's going it will be dangerous, but I believe he is used to danger. You should keep your mind more in the present, Gontier."

"But his offense——" stammered Gontier.

D'Alo transfixed the major general with his steel-colored eyes.

"It is unlikely that the lieutenant will be coming back," he observed ironically, "and you can't court-martial a dead man."

CHAPTER V.

TO STOP THE BOCHE ONE HOUR——

OUT at the Legion encampment west of the village men dozed beneath the shelter tents indifferently. Others sat and sulked like animals. A few had managed somehow to get drunk. They did not care that an officer for whom they had no respect had told them they were a disgrace to the French army. So was the officer, in their opinion. But inactivity had an acute effect on them. A dozen miles away a battle was raging. They could hear the artillery rumble. It was strange that there was fighting and they were not in it.

Suddenly a bugle screamed.

Assembly! Over at the edge of the encampment they could see the bugler. Therefore, it was not a mistake. A stir ran through the tents. Some one spread the news with a joyful curse that the lieutenant had come back. They were going out to fight. The bugle flung out its brassy, challenging notes again. Men piled forth from under the tents.

"Without packs," the sergeants barked. "Form a line."

Knoles had issued those instructions. The company was to encumber itself with nothing but its rifles, extra ammunition, intrenching tools and *bidons*—the big half-gallon canteens. Probably there would be nothing left of the company, he told himself, so why should the men waste their strength on their hundred-pound packs? They would never use them again.

The American looked his company over carefully. The men had cleaned up

their uniforms. They had had a night's sleep. They looked fit. Knoles made them a speech—a brief one and the only kind the Legionnaires perfectly understand.

"Well, *mes amis*," he growled at them, "we are going to do a little fighting."

The men grinned and that was all.

A crackling order from Knoles, they swung into a column, and he marched them into Brissay. Here they were halted long enough to have eight more machine guns and ammunition added to the two the company already possessed. He distributed the weight of the extra guns and ammunition drums through the company.

There was no band playing as they left Brissay, but the company went out to music. It furnished its own. The men were roaring "The March of the Legion" as the little village dropped behind.

Three miles beyond Brissay the country was broken by many low hills. The road itself, leading from the village, lay between two hills at this point. Command of this highway was vital to the Germans if their advance was to continue. There was no other route over which transports could travel within a score of miles.

The Legion company reached its destination in the shadow of those hills. As Knoles and the noncoms set about directing intrenchment and machine-gun positions, the first of the walking wounded came straggling by on the road. They stared at the Legionnaires and went on, presently to be followed by other backwash from the debacle that had occurred up on the front.

A motor cycle sped by and was followed by three others careening along with motors wide open and popping. Messages were going back to headquarters. The appearance of the motor cycles meant that the telephone wires were no longer open. Liaison was be-

ing maintained with the staff headquarters by written dispatch now.

Larger numbers of wounded men, hobbling and limping as fast as their injuries permitted, came down the road. A half dozen *fourgons*, big, clumsy baggage and supply carts, were right on their heels. Behind these were a whole fleet of ambulances, one of which blew a tire, ran off the road and turned over in a field a few hundred yards from the point where the Legion company had halted.

KNOLES paid scant attention to this shattered procession, but calmly went about outlining to the sergeants what he wanted done. It was impossible for them to block off the road because of the Allied traffic filtering back from the battle.

Any defenses, either barricade or intrenchment, that they should build across the road would have to be left to the last. Yet Knoles was determined to fortify the road as strongly as possible when the time arrived. The Boche would concentrate their heaviest efforts on the highway as soon as they discovered there was some formidable opposition here.

The company was up to full strength, and of the hundred and twenty men, Knoles kept forty under his direct command to defend the road. The remainder he divided into two sections, each of forty men, and placed the sergeant major in charge of one and the senior sergeant over the other.

With the distribution of the machine guns it was revealed that there were eleven. In some fashion the company had come by an extra one and it was not the least unwelcome. Knoles' section retained five of these and the other sections were allotted three apiece. Knoles' mouth was grim as he divided up the weapons. His men had practically the machine-gun equipment of a battalion.

"We'll be needing it, too, *mon lieutenant*," growled the old sergeant major.

"No doubt," the American agreed quietly. "How many automatic rifles have we?"

"Nine," said the sergeant major, "but the stock of one is broken. It is useless."

"Discard it. You will take three of the rifles. And Sergeant Chabot." Knoles addressed the stocky senior sergeant, "your section will equip with three more. I will retain the other two. Move out your sections."

Knoles' plans were thorough. He was preparing for a desperate defense of the road and the adjoining country. He did not intend to let the enemy slide around him.

The two sections under the noncoms were to deploy a kilometer to the right and left of the highway. Machine guns were to be implaced at equal intervals along their fronts with a gun on each extreme flank. Between the machine guns would be stationed men with automatic rifles.

"Dig your guns in deep out there." were his final orders. "Remember, we're supposed to hold up the Boche here for an hour. Hang on then at all costs. We haven't enough men to hold the road from both front and rear."

"Don't worry," chuckled the sergeant major. "The Boche won't turn your flank till we're all dead, *mon lieutenant*."

The statement implied or conveyed no heroics. It was simple. It was matter-of-fact. And Knoles knew that it was so. The Legionnaires would fight till they dropped.

As soon as the two sections departed, the American was everywhere at once. He took a detail of a half dozen men with a machine gun and ammunition and climbed the hill overlooking the road on the right. Up there his men fell to work instantly with their intrenching tools.

Knoles left them under a corporal, went down on the road and took a

similar detail up on top of the hill to the left to prepare another machine-gun nest. This hill to the left of the highway was higher than the other. From it he had a view of the road up ahead for more than a mile.

It was alive with a terrible confusion of traffic. Huge canvas-curtained camions lumbered along it. In their wake were more ambulances and a number of other trucks. Some of the camions had French .75s mounted on trailers. Behind these were a long file of horse-drawn gun caissons. Dust, turmoil, noise, all blended in a mad disorder—the welter of retreat.

Groups of men, wounded and unwounded, were fleeing down the road. Most of these had flung away packs and rifles. They were in a hurry and their haste indicated clearly that German advance patrols could not be a great distance behind them.

Uncasing his glasses, Knoles studied the road for another half mile until it curved out of sight into a wood and some hills. Nothing seemed to be coming along behind the muddle of traffic now in view. This was the artillery with such of its guns as it had been able to bring in. Knoles came to a decision. When they got past, the road would be closed.

These preparations had taken time. Something like an hour and a half had elapsed since the company had left its encampment on the other side of Brissay, marched the four miles out here, and set about the defense of the highway. He could consider the retreating traffic no longer.

The American put up his glasses and descended the hill. At its base, as he slid and stumbled off the steep lower slope, he almost collided with a figure sitting slumped in the ditch beside the road. The man was a French infantry lieutenant, a very young officer Knoles recalled having met the day before.

"Lieutenant Jonval," said the thin, young officer, getting limply to his feet.

His face was exceedingly pale and he appeared exhausted, due to loss of blood. A large, drying red stain showed on one leg of his breeches just above his knee.

"In the leg, eh?" nodded Knoles. "Hit bad?"

"I don't know," Jonval responded. "But I'm too weak to go on. I didn't have it attended at the field-dressing stations."

"Just a minute then and I'll give you some first aid," Knoles promised.

He procured a kit and swiftly put a dressing on the wound. The bullet had torn into the muscles of the lower thigh, but the injury was not as bad as it appeared.

"How soon will the Boche be along?" Knoles asked Jonval as he worked.

"Any time now," predicted the Frenchman. "I don't think I can get on to Brissay. With your permission I shall stay here and fight with you. Death isn't so undesirable if it's the right sort of death," he murmured gloomily.

"Stay by all means" Knoles said.

JONVAL seemed to be suffering more from shock than his wound. It was plain that he had been badly shaken up by something. He puzzled the American, for he appeared more depressed than afraid.

He told Knoles of the gas trap in which the French regiments had been caught.

"Ah, terrible things happened up there—terrible!" cried Jonval. "You don't know."

"War's never a pleasant affair," Knoles grunted, a trifle out of patience. He rather fancied he had had a great deal more experience of fighting in all its phases than Jonval. In fact, what Jonval needed, before he would be a useful officer, was seasoning.

"But I didn't know such things occurred," Jonval protested vaguely.

"What things?"

"Did you know Captain Derstines?" the other countered disconnectedly, as if he had not heard Knoles' question.

"I merely met him—and I didn't like him," the American acknowledged bluntly.

"He's dead. I was a little behind him when we came to the Boche front-line trenches. I saw him slip into a dugout," Jonval muttered. "Why he went into the dugout, I don't see. We weren't supposed to mop up; that was for the Scotch—the Canadians. Besides, the trenches were vacant. The Boche were laying for us farther back."

Knoles had his own idea as to why Derstines had sneaked into the dugout, but he remained silent.

"Four of his men saw him go in there and followed him," Jonval continued. "They came out a minute later, but the captain did not appear. I was curious, so I took a look in the dugout." Jonval's lips twisted, and a nervous shudder passed over his body. "What do you imagine I found down there?"

"I dare say the captain with the back of his head blown in," Knoles observed curtly.

"No! No!" Jonval denied, wetting his lips with his tongue. "He wasn't shot. There was a bayonet sticking a foot through him. And it was a French bayonet. His own men, monsieur—"

Knoles nodded gravely. "That happens. But it only happens to unsuccessful officers. Derstines' men lacked faith in him. Was he a special friend of yours?"

"No. We went to the same military school, that's all. His death—it was so—so ignoble."

"Quite," the American agreed. "Yet there's no use brooding about it. We have plenty of work to do."

The last of the traffic was rumbling by them now, and Knoles' mind was at

once directed back to the problem of defenses for the road. He dropped his conversational tone and addressed the French officer as company commander.

"Lieutenant Jonval, take a small detail of men twenty-five yards up the road and construct a dummy barricade. Four feet high—not bullet proof."

The sharp, impersonal order had its effect on the dazed officer. He pulled himself together, saluted, and limped off to execute it.

KNOLES, with the rest of the Legionnaires, went to work on the main barricade, availing themselves of all the loose material in the neighborhood. A mound, shoulder high and thick enough to stop bullets, was thrown up. Loose earth, tree trunks, boulders went into it. Behind it the trio of machine guns were implaced, and their muzzles masked.

The barricade stretched across the road, down into the ditches alongside and ended against the hills to right and left. A rod or more back of it, the American had men dig a trench across the road and bank it on both lips. It would be the last position from which they would fight if the barricade were forced, or it would serve if defense were necessary for the rear.

A quarter of an hour later, Lieutenant Jonval brought his detail in behind the main barricade and reported the dummy barricade completed.

"Boche patrols are in sight," he announced laconically.

"Whereabouts are they?" Knoles inquired.

"Two, a mile or more up the road, and one out on either flank. All quite large. There's a body of troops coming on behind them, but I can't say in what force. You doubtless wish to observe them through the glasses."

"Yes." Knoles swiftly uncased his binoculars. "Come forward with me and we'll take a look."

CHAPTER VI.

FIGHTING MEN IN ACTION.

THROUGH the glasses the two officers easily made out the strength of the advance patrols. They were large—forty or fifty men—and the two on the road were only an eighth of a mile apart. They were advancing at a rapid pace.

Ranging far out on either side of the road, Knoles discerned other patrols. He brought his glasses back to the highway. Behind the patrols on the road, he picked up the first of the main advance force of the enemy, four or five companies in columns, marching with the swift, stiff German step.

The American handed the glasses to Jonval.

"It's my opinion those patrols will mistake us for a handful of wounded who couldn't get back and who decided to barricade here and put up a bit of resistance," he said. "I propose to let them think so. We'll take care of them with rifle fire and without disclosing our machine guns. That way we'll surprise the force behind them, for they'll come on when we hold off the patrols."

"*Bon,*" grunted Jonval with the glasses to his eyes. He seemed to have recovered his poise and was eager for the fighting to begin.

"Stay here," said Knoles. "I'll send a runner up on top these hills and have those guns remain silent up there."

Less than ten minutes later, the two German patrols merged and halted briefly a quarter of a mile from the barricade. They spread out and came forward at a rapid pace, expecting to meet only a ragged and short-lived resistance.

The dozen Legionnaires posted on top of the two hills opened fire. Knoles had sent orders for them to snipe away at will. They had excellent positions for this individual firing, and here and there men began to fall among the approaching enemy.

Yet the sniping fire did not halt their advance. Perhaps it served to confirm their notion that the opposition was weak and the road could be easily opened.

Knoles waited till they were within two hundred yards before he gave the order for salvo fire to the thirty men behind the barricade. Flame spurted from the rifles laid across the breastwork, and there was a rippling crash.

Volley followed volley at two-second intervals. The Legionnaires emptied their rifles. The patrols crumbled, lost cohesion, went to pieces. They had been depleted by two thirds of their number, and the survivors, unable to find cover, turned and ran, scattering as widely as possible.

"At will!"

Knoles changed his firing orders, as his men reloaded, and they began to pick off the fleeing survivors. Watching through his glasses, the American noted that less than a dozen foes got back to the several companies that had been following them on the road.

The long gray column of German troops had halted and had been waiting for the patrols to clear the highway. Away on the flanks, Knoles also noted that the sound of firing had caused the outflung patrols to halt.

What gave him peculiar satisfaction, however, was the fact that neither the sergeant major nor Chabot, the senior sergeant, had done any firing. They were doubtless well concealed and their presence unsuspected.

THERE was a movement among the troops a half mile ahead in the road. They were coming forward. Knoles gave the glasses to Jonval.

"What do you make of them?"

"About five companies," said Jonval, "and they're younger men. They must be shock troops—part of the battalions thrown against us up at the front. They're opening out now."

"Preparing to storm us," Knoles commented. "Natural mistake since they don't know about our machine guns."

He could see without the binoculars that two companies were moving off the highway and would come forward over the rough ground on either side of it. Still, because the road was the assault point and lay between two hills, the Germans could not spread out much. They would be a beautifully compact target for both machine guns and automatic rifles.

If his men could stop this first onset, Knoles felt confident that he would win at least thirty minutes of the precious hour the marshal sought. More German troops would come up, but they would be inclined to cautious tactics when they found that a number of companies had failed to carry the road.

He watched the oncoming gray ranks calmly, held up the fire until they were nearly abreast of the overturned ambulance; then:

"Three hundred—enemy in front—swinging traverse!"

Knoles' voice, ordering range and method of fire for the machine-gun crews, was loud and unhurried. It betrayed no more agitation than if he were commanding maneuvers on parade ground.

"Steady!"

Two seconds ticked off. Drab uniformed ranks topped off with coal-scuttle helmets were aligned now with the overturned ambulance. The American's upraised arm swept suddenly forward and down.

Instantly the three machine guns behind the barrier opened with a deadly stutter. On top the hills overlooking the road, the gun crews evidently had been waiting for activities to commence below, for they picked up the fire at once. Their guns went into action with long, rapid, tearing bursts.

The effect upon the attacking Boche infantry was magical, merciless. Under

the leaden streams from five guns, the advance seemed to halt, stunned in mid-stride. Knoles, observing the fire, was reminded of high-pressure hydraulic streams playing against the face of a hill.

The whole fronts of the three leading companies appeared to cave in. Rank behind rank, men were melted down, blown away. Caught in the annihilating hail, they were abruptly destroyed, hosed and sprayed into oblivion, a wild, startled reflex of surprise frozen on their faces.

But the attack held up under that first blast of death and pressed on. For a hundred yards there was support from the two rear companies, then the guns on the hilltops swept these companies in the middle and sickled them with death.

While Knoles regulated and observed the shattering machine-gun fire, Jonval was directing the salvo fire of the score of Legionnaires using their rifles. This was concentrated on the troops in the road, for here the three companies had become fatally confused and massed. The auto-rifles were held in reserve in case the machine guns jammed or suspended, due to overheated barrels.

BEHIND the barricade the first casualties occurred among the men Jonval was handling. Two were killed outright, three more wounded. Over on the right end of the breastwork one of the machine guns went out of action temporarily. A chance bullet crashed through the skull of the No. 1 man firing the piece and he collapsed onto the gun.

His body was swiftly hauled aside. One of the two Legionnaires loading and passing the ammunition drums took his place. Jonval, having seen the death of the gunner, immediately sent a man across the road as a replacement.

Far out to the left and right of the action on the road, the two patrols

that had halted till the heavy German advance force moved forward to storm Knoles' position, had decided that it was up to them to cut through the hills and take the defenders of the road from the rear.

They went ahead with more caution than the Boche units on the road, deploying to semiskirmish lines. But they were not cautious enough, and their numbers were far too few. Almost simultaneously on both flanks, concealed machine guns began to chatter. They were wiped out nearly to a man.

On the road the German dead were sown in heaps to within fifty yards of the dummy barricade, but there the attack washed back and disintegrated.

Knoles called Jonval to his side.

"Check the casualties," he said briefly. "Send a runner up on the hills to learn how they came out up there. Then attend the wounded. Have the worst ones carried into the trench behind us. The rest will have their wounds dressed and remain at their posts."

Jonval got busy, and the American studied the situation up the road through his glasses. The remnants of the attacking companies had drawn off and were reforming to one side of the highway. But more troops were appearing. A seemingly endless column of gray was pouring forward from the hills into which the road dipped and disappeared in the distance. The newly arriving units halted when they reached their beaten comrades.

They remained in marching columns on the highway for a few minutes, then suddenly their officers turned them off the road into the fields. The reason for this was presently divulged to Knoles when an armored automobile came shooting down the road. It skidded to a stop, and several high German officers got out. Some of these went into a conference with the field officers of the troops; others got out binoculars and studied the barricade long and earnestly.

The American glanced at his watch. The repulse of the patrols and the first attack had taken between fifteen and twenty minutes. Ten minutes more had elapsed while the Boche were withdrawing and reforming and being joined by new forces. The German officers would waste a few more minutes before they decided a plan of assault.

"Have to hold them up at least a quarter of an hour," he concluded. But the increasing numbers of the enemy made him wonder whether it could be accomplished.

Nor was Jonval's report reassuring.

"Four dead, five wounded down here, three of them seriously. There's a dead and wounded man on each hill. That leaves us thirty able to fight," the lieutenant pointed out.

Knoles frowned. "There's four fresh battalions in front of us, some of 'em shock units and some from a *Landwehr* division, as nearly as I can make out. If they had artillery they could flatten us in no time. Fortunately they haven't and they don't know our strength. They merely know now that we've extensive protection on both flanks."

"Look!" exclaimed Jonval suddenly. "A wave assault. They want this road and they're coming after it properly, my friend."

"They may get it," grunted Knoles grimly, "but not before fifteen minutes."

IT did not require the glasses to verify Jonval's statement. A German battalion was debouching on either side of the highway, moving far out toward the flanks. Directly ahead, another battalion was going into a wave formation and behind it the *Landwehr* troops, older men not used for shock attack, were being held as a mobile reserve.

Five minutes, and the Boche formations were completed. Whistles shrieked. The gray tide rolled forward.

It was preceded by a thin surf of skirmishers. Then came one wave after

another, a hundred yards apart on a mile-long front.

They came on at a walk. Minute followed minute. The skirmishers were within five hundred yards—the range Knoles had ordered. The machine guns of the Legion began to crackle all along the line of defense.

From the Boche came a heavy return fire. Bullets droned like swarms of insects, and Legionnaires dropped, despite their protection and cover. Up and down the line death found them.

The sergeant major was killed at a machine gun far to the right, and his body pushed aside. Over on the left flank, a bearded Legionnaire operating one of the automatic rifles sat down, and his twisted features suddenly took on the hue of clay.

He was observed by the next nearest Legionnaire a dozen yards away. This man tossed his Lebel rifle to the ground and crawled to his wounded comrade.

"You're going west, gorilla face," he grunted. "Let me have that automatic. I will show the cows some shooting."

The wounded man grinned, passed over the auto-rifle, laid down on his side and died.

ON top of one of the hills overshadowing the road, Alborg, a corporal, sat behind his machine gun, a cigarette stub between his teeth. The Dane's huge body jerked, as the gun pounded away. With each jerk some of his life's blood ebbed out. The breast of his tunic was a crimson smear. Vasilli, a swarthy little Sicilian, had propped himself up and was loading. He had a stomach wound.

They were all that was left of a crew of six. Both men, badly hit, were dying. They knew it, yet they hung on. It was a point of honor to keep the gun in action.

Across on the other hill there was only silence. The gun up there had ceased firing. Its crew had been obliterated.

In the road behind the barrier, a dozen Legionnaires were down. One machine gun and an automatic rifle were stilled. The others continued to gibber their language of death.

A score of Boche skirmishers had reached the dummy barricade and converted it into bullet-proof shelter momentarily with their own dead. Fifty yards behind them the second German wave merged with the survivors of the first.

The knot of skirmishers now surged over the dummy and came at the main breastwork.

Jonval was dead. Knoles, wounded three times but still on his feet, was commanding the handful of Legionnaires alone. Grouped about him they heard his foghorn voice above the clamor of the guns.

"Baionette au canon!"

There was a rattle of steel, as bayonets came out and were locked on.

The skirmishers struck the barricade, swarmed half over it. Legionnaires met them, hurled them back on the points of their bayonets, stopped them.

But the gray wave behind the skirmishers flooded the road, and Knoles knew it was the end. He caught up an auto-rifle from a Legionnaire who toppled at his side. He emptied the remainder of the magazine.

A half dozen Prussians swarmed at him with driving bayonets, and he clubbed the rifle. In front of him a grenade landed and burst with a red flash, a roaring explosion.

Knoles went down half buried under the débris of the barricade.

CHAPTER VII.

REWARDS.

WITH the evacuation of Brissay, the Allies fell back to the Aisne Canal. But four days later another offensive, strategically conducted by Marshal d'Alo, resulted in more than the re-

covery of the territory the Boche had occupied by their thrust. The Allied front lines were pushed five miles beyond Souain to Hurlus.

The city hall in Brissay, which the Germans somehow failed to burn, once again became staff headquarters.

Marshal d'Alo was seated at Gontier's desk in the staff office poring over a sheaf of reports made out by the major general. Gontier and the rest of his staff were down at the inn at luncheon.

The marshal scowled, chewed the end of his mustache. The major general, he found, ran to words, was full of long-winded explanations. He decided that Gontier would be returned to ordnance and supply. Obviously he was not the sort of man to head a field staff.

At that moment Captain Huot entered the office. He was seeking Gontier, and was no little surprised to see the marshal. Huot saluted and started to withdraw.

"Come in, captain," D'Alo invited. "Be seated, if you aren't busy. It has reached me that you expect to prefer charges against Lieutenant Knoles."

Huot nodded.

"I've learned that part of the Legion company, including the American lieutenant, got back," he said. "They're somewhere in a rest area, but I have been unable to locate them."

It was true. Marshal d'Alo had made no promises, but he had rushed two Senegalese battalions in motor lorries out to Knoles' relief as soon as the black reserves had reached Brissay. The colonials had swung into the fighting in that last moment when Knoles fell. They had brought in the Legion survivors.

"Perhaps you didn't look for those Legionnaires in the right place," the marshal suggested. "They're in the hospital at St. Hilaire. Nine of the company survived, but two have since died.

Lieutenant Knoles has serious wounds, but he will get well."

"In that event I shall go to the hospital and place him in arrest again," stated Huot doggedly, getting to his feet.

"Sit down," grunted D'Alo. "I am going over to the hospital this afternoon and you can accompany me if you care to. But there will be no arrest—no court-martial. All charges will be dropped by my order. The lieutenant held up that Boche advance for an hour. It would be insane to reward work like that with court-martial."

"But he only obeyed orders," the captain mumbled.

"He's a brave man, that American. I know him," snapped the marshal. "Twice in Morocco as a general I had the pleasure of conferring decorations on him. I am to decorate him again—him and those six others. They are to have the Military Medal."

"I—I didn't know he had any decorations," said Huot irreverently. "He wears no ribbons."

"Neither do you, captain."

Huot's face reddened. "I am sorry, *Monsieur le Maréchal*. I have no decorations."

D'ALO glanced at a document on his desk.

"I notice Gontier has put your name down for the war college."

"Yes," admitted Huot modestly, "he feels that my forte is tactics. My record at St. Cyr——"

"Decorations aren't won in the war college. They are won in the lines, is it not?" D'Alo interrupted dryly.

"Yes, but——" Huot, the politician, was in a panic. "The major general's recommendation——"

"Means nothing. Gontier is going to a division of the army where his judgment is sounder. I perceive you've been

quite diligent in certain directions here in the office of staff, Huot."

The marshal picked out a form from among the other papers. It was the order transferring Derstines to the Legion company. On it was Huot's name, but unfortunately Gontier had forgotten to sign it.

"This order was between Gontier and a regimental commander. Does the major general do that often—permit other members of his staff to sign his orders?"

"It was an oversight, an emergency," Huot blustered hastily.

"*Alors*." The marshal had dealt with politicians before. He read them unerringly. "You shall have your chance, captain. It will be a regiment of the line."

Huot stammered, made unintelligible noises.

But the marshal had heard enough. Already his mind was elsewhere. He was thinking of the ceremony that was to take place that afternoon at the hospital. It ran in his memory that Knoles did not like ceremonies. And he was to confer on the lieutenant the Military Medal. With the medal would go the accolade—the kiss on both cheeks. D'Alo was dubious. What would Knoles do when he received the embrace?

"Perhaps if the marshal would consent to examine my record——" Huot broke in.

"Dismiss!" growled D'Alo. "Get out of here!"

Alone in the room, he shrugged. He could not omit the accolade that afternoon. It was a part of the ceremony. Yet when he bestowed it upon the lieutenant——

"Well, I must go through with it," the marshal muttered. "But that American—ah! It is even possible that he will fall out of bed."



Viper of the Sand

By Bengt Atlee



The Arab air force—himself—and Nasir, the carpenter, invade a Turkish town to find El Amr, the Yankee, and trouble.

AND then, el Aurums, as I am a man," declared Yusef ibn Gasim, sheik of the Weled Ali tribe, with a characteristic gesture of his snakelike hand, "they descended out of the hills—the Turks! Abdulla el Amr had gone by himself to view the village from the hill, and they found him first. Only by the mercy of Allah had we time to mount our camels and ride off before they swept down toward us. I return with these words through the miracle of our speed—the speed of the offspring of my old she-camel, Tair, who is now dead. Is it not truth, Aziz?"

He turned to the squat, greasy man at his side, who, in turn, wheezed that Yusef spoke as a man whose heart was open to the skies.

Now Abdulla el Amr was the Arab name of Dan Weatherby, the American,

who had lived among the Weled Ali for many months. Before the War Weatherby had excavated at Carchemish with the American School, and had stayed on, unable to tear himself away from the place of treasure until the United States entered the conflict. Faced then with the certainty of internment in a Turkish prison camp, he had, in the dress and manner of an Arab, made his way out into the Syrian desert in an attempt to reach Egypt or Lawrence. On the second day out, his camel died. There, face to face with death, a raiding party of the Weled Ali found him and took him as a guest to their tribe, but knew him only as Abdulla el Amr. They were allies of the Turks then, and the tale of how he brought them by wile and stratagem into Lawrence's fold at Azrak a month before is

too long to tell here; suffice it to say that Yusef ibn Gasim had played no willing part in the matter. In fact, Yusef had been brought to the change of allegiance in spite of himself. Finding the fates against him, however, the Weled Ali sheik had yielded with apparent grace to the inevitable and had ridden many times with the American on scouting expeditions for el Auruns. It was from one of these he was now returned with news of the other man's capture.

El Auruns—by which name Colonel T. E. Lawrence, leader of the Arab force, camped at Azrak, was known in the desert—said with a shrug:

"A man cannot escape his fate. Return to your tents, O Weled Ali, and Allah will requite you according as you have done this day."

Yusef rose to his feet and, followed by the greasy Aziz, departed.

Old Auda abu Tayi, the fighting sheik of the Howeitat, growled in his beard again as he had growled more than once during Yusef's recital: "*Wellah*, they are women! Had he not a hundred men with him? Were the Turks stronger than two hundred? *Yah!*"

Lawrence smiled at the old warrior.

"We cannot all be Howeitat," he said gently.

As the old man's face softened under the praise, the little leader of the Arab revolt rose and left the tent. Nor did he seem to mark Yusef ibn Gasim and his tool, Aziz, who had halted a short distance away and had their heads together earnestly. Passing down the line of tents, he entered one on the floor of which lay sleeping a big young man in the uniform of the Royal Air Force. He put his bare toe against the sleeper's ribs.

LIEUTENANT BURKE, the one and only airman with the Arab force, sat up, rubbing his eyes. Dropping beside him in the true Arab squat, Law-

rence told what had happened to the American.

"I'm afraid it will go hard with him when he's taken before Djemal Pasha, the Turkish commander at Damascus. Could you do anything at Deraa? He's probably there now."

The big Irishman grinned, knowing well what the question meant. Three times now he had been in Deraa in Arab guise and knew the Turkish stronghold pretty thoroughly. Rising, he said:

"I'll do what I can. I can save some time by flying. That ravine I was telling you about north of the pass over the hills is a safe hiding place for the Sopwith. I left her there last week for a couple of hours while I reconnoitered over the top of the divide. It's a deserted neighborhood at the best."

"May the world be a smooth carpet under your feet."

"It won't!" Burke laughed grimly. "It never is!" Suddenly he turned toward the doorway of the tent and cried: "Who's there?"

The flap parted. Yusef ibn Gasim stepped inside.

"I crave indulgence, O el Auruns," he said in his suave, cold way, addressing Lawrence who had remained squatting on the floor, "but this man followed you to beg a favor."

"Speak!"

"I will lead the Weled Ali back toward Deraa and make search there for Abdulla el Amr. He is a man of strata-gem as I know, and has perhaps escaped the accursed Turk. It will make friendly the way of his return—and safe if he comes in haste. I ask this thing for the honor of my tribe."

Lawrence's steel-blue eyes hung for a moment on the other's face, as if trying to read the depths of those crafty, slanting eyes. And then he said: "Go in Allah's face!"

As the flap fell to behind the Arab's back, Burke growled: "I don't trust that bird—and never did!"

"It takes all kinds to make a world!" Lawrence smiled as he rose to his feet.

"Some of whom I keep my eyes on!"

"Then woe betide Yusef ibn Gasim if he goes wrong!" Lawrence's laugh trailed behind him as his small, white-clad figure disappeared through the tent door.

GATHERING up his helmet and flying coat, Burke made his way down the slope to the single hangar beyond the castle. To the little red-haired cockney mechanic he said:

"How's the old bus this afternoon, Higgs?"

"Sweet as a 'ound's tooth, sir! I got her tuned up so she fair sings!"

"Trot her out—I'm going flying. Slip a couple of cans of bully beef and some biscuits into the pockets. See that the water bottle is filled."

"Very good, sir!"

With the help of his three Arab assistants, Higgs trundled the old two-seater Sopwith, the best a niggardly air force would allow the Arab army, out of its hangar.

A little Arab came strutting up—a comic, bow-legged creature—a mite of whimsy with a wide-split, grinning mouth that showed the fangs of two teeth only, and whose right eye was covered with a black patch. This was Nasir, the carpenter of Deraa, who had flown from that place for a reason and was now the self-constituted personal bodyguard of Burke.

"We fly then, el Bourque!"

"I fly!" Burke grunted, lighting a cigarette.

"*We'llah*, are we not one? By the tail of the Prophet's shirt I am the shadow of my master!"

"You'll probably get your belly full of being my shadow if you come with me to-day!" Burke laughed grimly.

"Those are sweet words to a belly forever empty of adventure in this place of desolation!" Nasir waved a con-

temptuous hand at the lava hills of the surrounding Sirhan desert.

"Come on, then!"

From the folds of his dirty *abba* the little man drew something which he proceeded to pull on over his bald head—having first removed his *kefieh*. Burke broke into a laugh. Nasir had been carpentering with the hide of a dead camel and had manufactured a grotesque copy of the airman's flying helmet which now sat rakishly over the one good eye that glowed with pride in the accomplishment.

A few minutes later the Sopwith was winging westward toward Deraa. A half hour. The Turkish town and the long gleaming lines of the Mecca Railway loomed far ahead out of the mirage. Burke put the plane's nose down toward the hills that lay east of the track, and presently the mouth of the narrow, high-walled ravine he sought loomed directly ahead, the white sand gleaming on its smooth floor. Letting the Sopwith settle lower and lower, he put her into the gap. She bumped the earth, glided along a hundred yards, and came to a stop close to the face of the precipice that made the blind end of the tiny valley. With the assistance of Nasir, Burke got her tail around so that she faced toward the exit, and then from the front cockpit drew a bundle of clothes—the garb of an Arab sheik—into which he changed. Nasir, not without regret, suffered himself to change his headgear again.

Finally, Burke said: "We march again!" and returning to the valley's mouth, they started off up the rocky hills.

The shadows lengthened. Before they reached the summit the sun was gone below the distant transjordan hills. Deraa lay at their feet, shrouded in twilight. Though he had been in the Turkish town so often, the sight of it had not yet lost its power to give the airman the thrill of excitement that is

born out of a sense of danger. You went blithely enough, but you knew as you traveled that if you were caught you were a spy and would be stood up before a firing squad summarily. And it set your pulses hammering!

NIGHT had definitely fallen by the time they reached the railway embankment a half mile south of the station. Creeping to the top they peered over warily. A few figures moved below the red and green lights on the station platform, but the wide interval of baked earth between the embankment and the town was deserted, save for heaped-up stores of war material. Crossing the tracks, they tacked to and fro between these stacks, but once clear of them, the pair walked boldly toward the mouth of the nearest street, Nasir with *kefeh* drawn over his face, since he had no desire for recognition on the part of his late fellow townsmen.

They were pressing along between the high stone walls when a long line of camels, laden with war stores, came scuttering toward them.

"Out of the way! Make way there, dogs!"

One of the Turkish drivers laid his stick across Nasir's back, and Burke had to drag him forcibly into the shelter of the nearest wall and jam a hand across his mouth to prevent the little man bawling out the Turk's pedigree in the usual obscenities.

The caravan passed. They proceeded on their way, Nasir grumbling that a man's knife could have no better use than slitting the gullet of a misbegotten Turk. To the right—to the left—and then down a narrow, high-walled street. They stopped finally before a doorway where Burke rapped sharply three times. After a moment the gate creaked open a few inches and two furtive eyes appeared in the slit.

"I seek Ali Bender, your master!" Burke grunted under his breath.

The gate swung wider, and the eyes disappeared within.

"This way, O sheik!" a voice said in the darkness.

THEY followed the servant across the paved courtyard, along a passage, onto a porch. A door swung open. In a wide, airy room a grave Arab sat on the cushioned floor smoking his *narghile*. At the sight of his two visitors he leaped to his feet with an exclamation of surprise.

"In the name of Allah!" he cried. "You come again, el Bourque!" And then he sighed deeply, yet with all the fatalism of the East. "Alas, for my peace of mind, there is always suspense when you are here, effendi."

Nasir cackled, showing his fangs of teeth.

"Your heart still beats like a woman's, O my uncle!"

Ali Bender sighed again, but suddenly recollecting his duty to his guests, clapped his hands. A servant appeared. "Bring food!" he commanded.

"*Aice!*" added the little carpenter. "Bring the best of food! Fowl—melon—and sweet sherbet! I am large in stomach as well as resource!"

The servant disappeared. The three men seated themselves on the cushions. Ali Bender resumed his pipe and smoked grave-faced, though not without a shadow of apprehension.

Without preamble, Burke began:

"We come for news of one, Abdulla el Amr, who was taken outside Deraa this morning by the Turkish cavalry. Have you word of him?"

The merchant started out of his smoke-encircled reverie.

"*Wellah,*" he replied, "it was rumored in the market this morning that a captive had been brought in. I do not know this Abdulla el Amr. What tribe is he?"

Burke chuckled. "The Beni American—and very dear to the heart of el

Auruns." His face sobered. "It is necessary, Ali Bender, that you go into the town to-night and get me news of him. The dawn must not return before I march to his rescue."

The merchant shook his head sorrowfully.

"Alas, my uncle," he said, "that every time you return to my house, el Bourque, I must put my neck in jeopardy!"

"Yah!" jeered the little carpenter. "You have but one neck! Use it for a good cause and I will lay flowers on your grave, O my uncle!"

Shuddering, the other man rose to his feet.

"I will go since I must!" he groaned. "Allah sends this trouble knowing my infirmity! I will return here at midnight!"

He disappeared. Presently the servant returned and laid food before the two guests. As his hand darted toward the platter, Nasir cackled gleefully:

"*Wellah*, this is better than desert carrion! A man can grow plump and comfortable here!"

IT was more than midnight before the merchant returned, but he had gained his information. In an Arab city there is nothing hidden, nothing secret—if you search in the right place for it. Ali Bender had searched in the right place.

"The man is here, el Bourque," he said, seating himself gravely, and—now that his mission was completed—with relief, "in the house of Moustapha Bey, the *kaimakan*. The word is that he will be taken at once to Djemal Pasha at Damascus."

Nasir looked triumphantly at the airman.

"*Wellah*, el Bourque, it is the mercy of Allah that you have me with you on this business! The house of Moustapha is an open book to me! I have driven a thousand nails into that house!"

"It is true, el Bourque," added the

merchant. "Nasir was one of the builders."

"Come then, O my uncle!" the little man said to Burke, leaping nimbly to his feet. "Let us go! *Aice billah*, I shall lead you!"

They left the house as they had come—stealthily. Nasir led the way, using devious dark unfrequented lanes, sinister in their quietude. Presently, at the end of a long passageway where their farther progress was barred by a high wall, he hissed:

"This is the place!"

And then, like nothing so much as a monkey, he sprang into the air, caught the top of the wall with his fingers, and was up crouching on its spiked summit. A moment later his hoarse whisper descended:

"Come! The way is clear!"

Burke clambered up. They dropped into a garden—fig and olive trees growing amid a profusion of bushes—and proceeded cautiously through it. Again Burke felt his pulses rising. The big house loomed ahead, shrouded in darkness. Beyond, Deraa lay silent under the midnight stars, except for the gentle wind that stirred the languid tree-tops.

They came to a flat-roofed porch that jutted out from the back of the house. One story high. A stone cistern gave footing halfway up. Leaping to the top of this, the little carpenter drew himself to the roof. Burke followed. On the far side a door stood open to let the night breeze play through the day-heated interior of the main body of the house. Short of this door Nasir halted and hissed:

"There are but two parts where he can be. I will go and search. Stay in the shadow here until I return."

HE disappeared noiselessly through the doorway into the dark interior. But Burke did not stay. Here was too serious a matter to leave to the cocky little

Deraan, whose supreme confidence in himself made him at times a bit too reckless. Furthermore, time was beginning to press. Burke crept in through the doorway, waited there a moment or two, and then began to move slowly along the shrouded hall. A dozen paces. Suddenly, he stopped.

Voices—below!

His wary foot presently found only air where the floor should have been. He let it down gingerly—a step. Those voices—only a faint guttural rumbling—drew him down—down. His heart was pounding in the darkness. He was getting nearer the bottom—but was he alone there in the darkness? A feeling of eyes watching—waiting—expanded that sense of dread that grows in dark places. Perhaps he should have stayed where he was and left the house to Nasir, who knew it.

He hesitated irresolutely at the foot of the stairs. It was his own fear—the shame it caused him—that forced him along against the wall. The soft pile of a velvet curtain brushed his hand. Cautiously he pulled it aside, revealing a passage, lighted at the far end. The voices were coming quite clearly now. Slipping inside the curtain, Burke edged along the passage—inch by inch—every nerve taut. Reaching the far end he pressed himself behind another curtain that half closed the portal. He held it ever so gently to one side. The interior of a room was revealed.

Suddenly, his eyes widened, his whole body stiffened with the shock of surprise. On the floor of the dimly lit room sat three men—a large, corpulent town Arab who must undoubtedly be Moustapha Bey—and facing him across a low carved table upon which sat a bowl of almonds, Yusef ibn Gasim, sheik of the Weled Ali, and his tool, the greasy Aziz! Burke's jaw clamped itself grimly together. This was the way in which the Weled Ali retrieved their honor! Suddenly, Burke knew in his bones that

Yusef ibn Gasim had told a lying tale at Azrak that morning.

Moustapha Bey was speaking with ponderous suavity.

"You are a man of resource and stratagem, O Yusef! And the reward will be a fitting one for the two seizures."

Burke's forehead wrinkled. Two seizures? One would be Abdulla el Amr—but the other?

The Weled Ali sheik was saying coldly: "What is a fitting reward? Name the price, O Bey!"

"*Yes*, let it be something a man's mind can take hold of—and no empty promise!" added the greasy Aziz, his greedy little eyes glittering.

"The price is for Djemal to name," said the *kaimakam*, with a shrug. "We are in his hands. Return in two nights and the gold shall await you. I am sending the man to Damascus to-night on the train that leaves within an hour, and Djemal will not delay his decision."

A train leaving within an hour! There was no time to lose. Even if Burke and Nasir got the American away from this house, they could have little start before the escape would be discovered. It was the luck of the devil.

Burke began to edge along the passageway. In his haste one of his feet scraped the stone floor noisily. A sharp exclamation sounded behind him as he darted for the hall. Reaching it, he turned to peer back through a slit in the velvet. His heart stood still. Moustapha Bey was framed in the lighted doorway, staring along the passage. Would he come farther to investigate? For one breathless moment it looked that way, and then the heavy figure swung back into the other room.

WIPING the cold sweat from his forehead, Burke hurried in the direction of the foot of the stairs. He had just put a wary foot on the bottom one, when something came flying

down then toward him. Caught in the chest by the impact of that flying body he was bowled over on his back like a ninepin. Something flashed in the air above him—steel; As the thing hissed, he shot his hand out, by a miracle caught the bony wrist in his grasp, and bore his assailant back.

Suddenly, he became aware of two things—that there was a commotion in the room at the end of the passage, and that the thing in his grip was the one-eyed carpenter.

"It is el Bourque, fool!" he growled, leaping to his feet. "Come, they are after us!"

"*Inshallah!*" Nasir hissed angrily, as they pressed up the stairs. "I told you to stay on the roof! It is the mercy of Allah that I did not slit your throat!"

At the top Burke growled: "Where is el Amr?"

"He is not here! I have searched everywhere. I was going to the room below——"

"He's not there! I've been. Come on!"

Three figures had burst into the hall below.

Burke and the little carpenter shot along the hall and out on to the porch roof. They were dropping from its edge into the garden when a shout rose from the roof door. Reaching the ground they dashed into the shadow of the trees. Suddenly, from under the very feet of Nasir, who was ahead, a towering figure rose with a guttural grunt. It was silenced by the little carpenter's knife which laid the fellow's neck open from ear to ear. Burke shuddered as they passed on, realizing how close he had come to a similar fate in that dark hall within.

Five minutes later they were on their way back to Ali Bender's, hurrying along under the shadow of a high wall that lined the narrow, foul lane. Suddenly through the night came a faint, distant rumble. Burke stopped in

his tracks and listened. A railway train was coming from Ma'an in the south. The train on which Weatherby would be sent to Damascus! In that moment he realized, unless through some miracle they could rescue the American before he stepped onto the train, his doom was sealed.

"Come!" he growled brusquely at Nasir. "We're going to the station!"

"But, *wellah*, el Bourque, I shall be recognized!" gasped the little man. "Some one will cry out: 'Here is Nasir, my neighbor!' and what then?"

"In that case I'll go alone!" Burke grunted and turned on his heel.

BUT Nasir was still with him when, two minutes later, the open space of ground, with the station at the far side, lay before them.

"For," declared the little man indignantly, "where el Bourque goes, there also goes the captain of his bodyguard! Who knows but there may only be soldiers at the station who will not know me? And if I see a friend I will tell him not to cry my name unless it be the last name he cry!"

The long train, minus a headlight—for even at night the Turks were wary of aerial bombs—could be heard roaring toward Deraa, a mile or so away. They hurried across the wide yard and found the station platform deserted, save for a squad of sick soldiers who were evidently being sent to a hospital—and four figures under a dim oil lamp at the far end of the way. Followed by the little carpenter, Burke made his way boldly toward the latter, one of whom, a red-bearded man in Arab costume, towered over the rest.

"By my very Allah!" he exclaimed, planting himself fairly in front of the prisoner, "it is the man! Behold"—he turned to Nasir—"they take the dog to Damascus!"

"*Aiee*, the infidel pig!" Nasir spat to show that he could also act a part.

"Who are you?" growled the Turkish officer—a pompous, mustached gentleman, looking somewhat seedy and irritable at this time of morning—who, with two soldiers made up the prisoner's escort.

"Ask the dog who I am!" Burke cried, pointing a contemptuous finger at Weatherby. "And if he remains dumb I will tell you that I am a sheik of the Weled Ali! Can a man not come to gloat over the creature whom his tribe has put into the hands of Djemal Pasha—on whom be peace?"

There came a glimmer into the prisoner's gray eyes—an awareness which told Burke that he understood, and then the train came roaring into the station. There were shouts and yells in true Arab fashion from the trainmen; a great scuttering and milling to and fro on the platform—a Turkish officer using his cane to hurry the sick soldiers aboard.

Weatherby was being bundled into a compartment when suddenly, out of the corner of his eye, Burke saw two figures swing around the corner of the station two hundred feet away. His heart dropped into his sandals. Yusef and the greasy Aziz were coming for a last look at their victim.

The Turkish officer was following the prisoner and guards into the compartment. Burke growled a warning in Nasir's ear and stooping, crawled quickly under the car. The train started to move as he reached the other side and he had to drag the little carpenter clear by main force to save him from the advancing wheels. Cheated of his original plan, there seemed but one chance left. Grabbing at the handle of an approaching compartment door, he swung himself up to the long running board. Nasir bobbed up beside him.

"By my very Allah!" gasped the little man, "we had but a thread of luck to cling to that time! What then, do we ride to Damascus?" His little eyes gleamed hopefully.

"Not if I can help it! Come along—and have that knife of yours handy for use!"

THE train was gathering speed. They crawled along the running board of the swaying car, which was of the continental type with separate noncommunicating compartments running the full width, and came to the door of the one into which the prisoner had been bundled. Crouched below the window, Burke hissed in Nasir's ear:

"Are you ready?"

"*Aice billah!*" answered the little man, his eyes gleaming.

Burke turned the handle cautiously and suddenly swung the door open. At the same moment the train gave a lurch that almost threw him off the running board, and only Nasir's bony hand around his arm saved him from losing his hold. The accident spoiled the element of surprise in their plan, and the Turks were on their feet by the time the airman plunged into the compartment. His fist caught the chin of the nearest Turkish soldier who had sprung toward him and sent the fellow down. A Turkish oath was bellowed from the farther side of the car where the officer stood, and an instant later the darkness was lit by the searing flame of a revolver shot. Burke plunged toward the spot from which it had come. Another—wild like the first—crashed through the window.

And then for several moments there was a wild mêlée in that confined space. The butt of a rifle caught Burke under the chin and almost stunned him. Some one—it might have been Weatherby—went plunging, head down, toward the spot from which the revolver had barked, and there was a crash of splintering glass—a groan. A monkeylike figure leaped up on one of the seats and shot past flashing a knife blade. Something went plunging to the floor, spouting a sticky liquid all over the place.

And then Burke heard the little carpenter crying:

"Steady, el Weatherby, while I cut these ropes!"

Some one struck a match—the American. The Turkish officer, his head hanging out the broken window, lay limp at the far end of the compartment. A Turkish soldier reclined on the floor with a wide-open throat. The other had slithered to his knees and lay across one of the seats as if praying.

Nasir chuckled, as the match flared out.

"*Wellah*, it is victory!"

"A mighty nice bit of work, Burke!" exclaimed Weatherby.

"I had given up hoping for miracles when you hove in sight! Pretty nervy stuff! Where do we step next?"

"Off the side!" Burke replied, rubbing at the lump on the side of his chin. "Fortunately these trains can't travel fast. Engines are all out of kilter. Let's make it now—she seems to be taking a bit of a grade."

"You're the captain!" chuckled the American.

They moved toward the door.

SAVE for a few bruises, the descent from the train proved uneventful and the three men started back on foot toward the hills east of Deraa. There was some need of haste, for already the sky was getting gray in the east.

"I made the mistake again of believing that the leopard could change his spots," said the American, as they hurried along. "Some day I'll learn not to be too trusting." He chuckled again. "There was no doubt that Yusef ibn Gasim had arranged with the Turkish cavalry to be on hand yesterday morning. It was he who asked me to go to the top of the hill at dawn to reconnoiter. 'You have the glasses that bring the distance close,' the old fox said, though he can see as well with his bare eyes as I can through a telescope. Any-

way, when I reached the top of the hill, there the Turks were waiting for me; and when I turned, Yusef and his brave fellows were flying east."

"He's our viper in the sand all right," Burke agreed. "I discovered him with his greasy tool, Aziz, at the house of Moustapha Bey last night when I went there searching for you. He was after his reward."

"So that's his game, eh? Playing the ponies both ways!"

"Some day," cackled the one-eyed carpenter, puffing his chest out, "I will do myself the pleasure of slitting the dog's gullet!"

They pressed on. Dawn sent a crimson flame up into the east, and it was day. Finally, they reached the head of the little gorge in which the Sopwith lay hidden. They were skirting one of its precipitous sides when suddenly Nasir, who was nearest the edge, let out a startled exclamation.

"Look!" he cried, pointing a quivering forefinger below.

In a semicircle about the Sopwith squatted a hundred dark-clad figures—Arabs.

Dropping to their stomachs, the three men wormed their way to the edge of the ravine.

"*Weled Ali!*" grunted Weatherby. "There's Yusef himself!" Then he growled: "The devil is waiting there in ambush for you, Burke! He's going to sell you and your airplane to Djemal, too!"

Suddenly Burke remembered what he had heard in Moustapha Bey's house a few hours before. Two seizures! Yusef must have been listening outside his tent the afternoon before when he told Lawrence where he would leave the airplane. By gad, that was probably why the Weled Ali sheik had come in to tell Lawrence that he was going toward Deraa again for the honor of his tribe! He had come searching for the Sopwith—and had found it!

"It's an ambush for sure," said the American. "Look at the way he has hidden his camels over there!"

BEHIND a bend in the precipitous walls a hundred yards nearer its mouth the Weled Ali animals lay closely couched.

"Damn the luck!" Burke ground through his teeth. "Azrak thirty miles away, and not a water bottle between the three of us! We daren't try it on foot! Suicide! Have to stay here until nightfall anyway! Damn that misbegotten——"

Weatherby interrupted him.

"There are only two men guarding the camels, Burke. Supposing Nasir and I work our way around the head of the ravine and get above them. We might be able to drop down on top of the animals and stampede 'em. That would draw the devils away from your plane. There might be time for you to drop down and get your precious mount away before they catch on to the stratagem. It's worth a trial."

"Looks pretty hopeless!" Burke grunted dismally. "But it's apparently our only chance. I don't want to lose that bus. Not that she's such a wonder, but the trouble is every time I lose a plane they send me up a worse one from Sinai. I take it you'd get away with the camels and I'd pick you up somewhere out in the Sirhan?"

"That would depend on our luck!" chuckled the red-bearded American, as they crawled back from the edge. "Come along, Nasir," he said. "You and I drive camels to-day!"

But the little carpenter held back.

"I am the captain of el Bourque's bodyguard," he declared in no uncertain way. "I go where he goes!"

The two white men laughed. Burke said: "You go with Weatherby—I'll be there in spirit! March!"

Presently, back at the edge of the cliff on his stomach again, he watched

the other two thread a tortuous way around the rocky head of the ravine. The thing looked hopeless—utterly hopeless—for now he could see the half dozen Arabs who lurked around the mouth of the gorge, waiting there doubtless to fall on him if he had gone that way. But they were enough to head the camels off, even if Weatherby did succeed in stampeding them. He scanned the figures below and noticed for the first time that Aziz was not there. Suddenly it came to him that the greasy one might have stayed behind in Deraa—to guide the Turks out here. And in that case the Turks might not be long in coming! A pretty mess, indeed!

The American and his little companion had reached the other side, and were now almost immediately above the couched camels. It was evident that they could not be seen by the Arabs below, for they were standing upright, apparently searching for some way down the precipitous wall. Then Nasir let himself over what looked a sheer edge. The big American followed. It was slow work, regular mountain climbing.

FROM time to time Burke turned an anxious eye back in the direction of Deraa, but there was no sign of life that way. Like two flies the figures on the opposite wall crept lower and lower. Perhaps twenty feet from the bottom they hung to the same spot irresolutely for what seemed several minutes. Then, with a wild sudden yell they flung themselves down the whole distance, dropping into the midst of the animals. The two herdsmen leaped to their feet. Weatherby's fist caught one of them on the point of the chin, and the big beast that had risen with Nasir clutching its hump, bowled the other herder over in its mad rush. In a trice the stampede was on.

But by this time Burke also was on his way down, and the tribesmen imme-

diately below were on their feet bawling at the top of their lungs. Halfway down he gave them a swift glance and saw that they were running after the flying animals. The stratagem was working, but would the stampede be able to break past the Arabs at the mouth of the ravine? He hurried on. Suddenly, forty feet from the bottom, he lost his hold and began to fall. An outjutting jagged bit of rock broke his speed again, and he tore the skin from his fingers as it slipped through them. Then with a whack that nearly drove the wind out of him he hit the sand, rolled over half stunned and staggered to his feet.

A sharp yell brought him to his senses. Reeling around he saw that the Weled Ali sheik had spotted him and had turned from pursuit of the camels with a half dozen of his men. The Sopwith lay close, but Burke knew that he couldn't possibly get it started before they reached it. He was hemmed in completely, insurmountable walls behind and on each side, and the Weled Ali in front. And it was written plainly in Yusef ibn Gasim's crafty, glittering eyes that the long-bladed knife he held in his right hand would make certain of one prisoner for Djemal Pasha.

Burke drew the service revolver from the folds of his clothing and, leveling it at the sheik, pulled the trigger. An ominous, heart-breaking click sounded—nothing more. Again he pressed his finger—eyes fixed desperately on the half dozen yelling figures advancing toward him and scarce a dozen yards away. Again that click. Lost! Grabbing the revolver by the barrel, the flyer determined to crack one head with the butt before they got him.

But suddenly a great resonant voice roared echoing through the ravine.

"Yusef ibn Gasim! Yusef ibn Gasim!"

A half dozen yards away the sheik hesitated, the blood-lust still in his eyes, and then came on again. He was within

a few feet of the waiting airman when that voice rang out again, mingled this time with old Mahmoud ibn Trad's cry of warning:

"In the name of Allah, O sheik!"

Yusef turned—and his men turned. And they saw a strange and arresting sight. They saw the towering figure of Abdulla el Amr advancing toward them. But held high above his head by the scruff of the neck the American bore the sheik's fifteen-year-old son, Bender. In his other hand gleamed a knife—its intent clear. Behind him, like cowed sheep, the rest of the Weled Ali followed, their breaths held in fear.

Yusef saw—understood. He knew that the blood of the airman would be paid for in the blood of his only son—the son of his age and therefore doubly loved. A dry, choking sob tore itself from his frantic throat. He plunged to his knees with outstretched hands. Horror showed on his lined face.

"I cry mercy, el Amr!" he cried. "In the name of Allah and his apostle, spare the lad!"

HALTING a yard from the kneeling man, Weatherby surveyed him with a godlike scorn. He knew the meaning of this moment, and the value of its dramatic force upon the cowed Weled Ali behind him. It was a moment to prolong in the interests of prestige. So when Yusef cried out: "Give me my son!" he answered coldly, yet in a voice that all could hear:

"No, by Allah! Bender is my hostage against the trickery of the Weled Ali, and the trickery of their sheik who is more treacherous than a viper. The lad goes with me to el Auruns at Azrak and he shall say whether I give him back to you or not. But if one hand is raised in treachery before we get there, he dies—by this knife—for the sins of his father!"

Old Mahmoud cried out imploringly: "We are your men, O el Amr! Re-

turn our camels to us and we follow you to the ends of the earth!"

But Weatherby's face was still cold as he turned on the huddled pack.

"Your camels are gone to Azrak, and I do not stop them. If you want them back you must go there for them on foot to make supplication before el Auruns to whom they now belong. And while the hot sand burns your feet and the mirage tortures you, learn what honor is, so that men can trust you from this day forward. Stand back now while el Bourque flies his bird from here! I have spoken!"

Beaten and shamed, the Weled Ali moved back against the side wall of the ravine.

Laughing, Burke addressed the American, as the latter joined him, the boy still held at arm's length.

"That was neat! Many thanks! I think it evens us up this trip. I was in a nasty hole!"

An ironic smile broke the big American's gravity.

"It was sheer luck," he confessed. "I was just mounting a camel when I saw the boy dashing toward me, outstripping the others. Then I realized that he might come in handy as a means of insuring the Weled Ali's prompt return to Lawrence's fold again. I had no idea you'd be in difficulties. As a matter of fact I hardly realized your plight until it was almost too late."

Burke grinned.

"Hop aboard! I think I've had enough of this ravine for one day!"

A few minutes later the Sopwith was winging east.

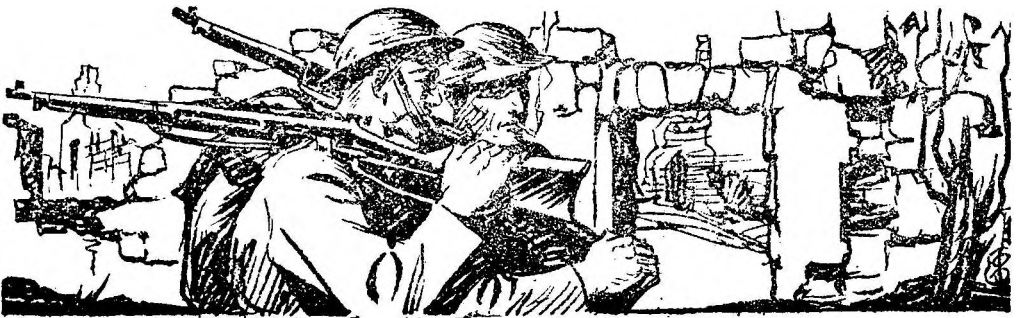
THE sun was just setting that night when a cavalcade rode into Azrak out of the west. A hundred camels appeared with one rider, and it was with ostentation that this one drove his beasts toward the tent of el Auruns, in front of which at this hour the Arab sheiks would be gathered for coffee. As his caravan drew opposite the tent, the rider slipped nimbly from the back of the leading camel and, with his chest stuck out ludicrously, swaggered up to the seated gathering.

"Behold!" he cried, waving a grandiloquent hand at the passing herd. "I bring the camels of the Weled Ali as a present to el Auruns! Alone I have driven them from the hills east of Deraa. Mark it down, who can write, that Nasir the carpenter had done this thing!"

A great roar of laughter rose, but was suddenly hushed as old Auda abu Tayi darted a swift finger before him and cried:

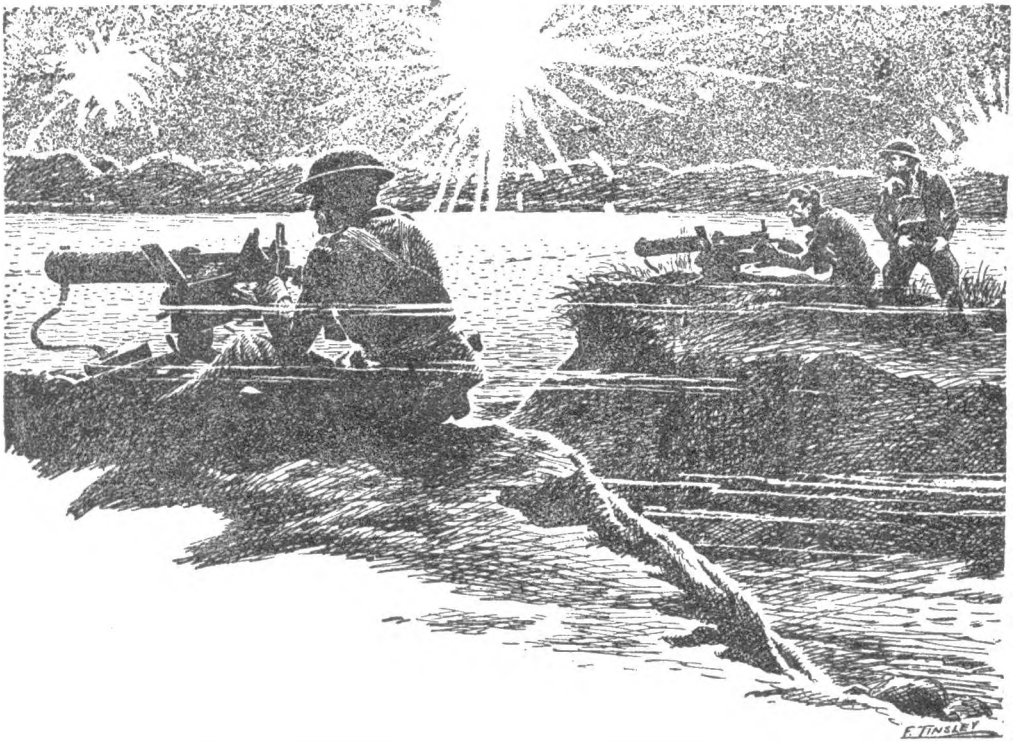
"Look, el Auruns, in the name of Allah!"

Over the crest of the hill two miles westward came the footsore Weled Ali, staggering through a cloud of dust and shame to meet their judgment.



Three Bad Men

By Robert Carse



They loved action, that trio who had fought with the Rough Riders of '98, and they got it, up where the Heinies had a river to cross.

THEY were exactly that—three bad men. A number of rather unhappy individuals serving his Imperial Spanish Majesty found them so when, with the rest of Roosevelt's Rough Riders, they came up San Juan Hill, seeking and finding trouble. Of the trio, perhaps big Joe Jepson of Nevada was the toughest, although to compare any one of the three with either or both of the remaining two was always a hard job. Jepson was big, lean, silent; he had been a cow poke from Sonora to Alberta, a gandy dancer, a prospector, a honkatonk bouncer in the gold and silver towns.

Mike Slagoe and "Ricky" Murphy, the other two, had been dock wallopers, prospectors before and after the days of the rush in Alaska, and like Joe Jepson, just naturally bad men, who said very little about themselves, even when alone with each other.

Of course in that Spanish War volunteer outfit there were other tough, quick-fighting gentlemen, but none who possessed quite the degree of toughness held by that bad trinity. Offhand, they didn't care whom they fought—as long as it was fighting. And more than once, usually with a guardhouse finale, they fought one another. Once, while

in the Tampa camp, Slagoe jumped Joe Jepson over what the bystanders considered nothing at all. Jepson all but killed him.

But a few nights later, being a bit more drunk than sober, Slagoe came back for more, turning this time to Ricky Murphy. The squat, broad-faced Irishman fought like a frenzied wild cat; but the drunken man, who had the jump on him, beat him to his knees half a dozen times. Ricky Murphy stayed there after that.

IT was not more than a week after the taking of San Juan Hill that Murphy and big Joe Jepson squared off toe to toe in the center of the company street. And before the more peaceably minded could separate them, Ricky Murphy, who had been licked by Mike Slagoe, who, in turn, had been whipped to a raw pulp by Joe Jepson, had staggered the allegedly toughest one in the lot—Jepson—time and again. Men who witnessed that fight still swear that had it gone one minute more Ricky Murphy would have driven the tall, saturnine Jepson to his face—and kept him there, too.

Strangely enough, after that they did not fight any more; that is, with one another. They centered all their activities on the Spaniards. Finally that was over. With something like reluctance they gave up the blue-flannel shirts, khaki breeches and tall Krag-Jorgensens, and shook hands silently with each other. No one of them knew the other two's plans. In fact, like most men of their type after finishing a hitch in the service, they were undetermined as to the future.

Six months later, though, Ricky Murphy was in the marine guard of a battle wagon attached to the Asiatic Squadron; Mike Slagoe was a top-kick in the Philippine Constabulary rounding up the Moros; and big Joe Jepson, who had had enough of fever and the

tropics, was back in his old stamping ground—Sonora to Seattle.

Joe Jepson, riding aimlessly south about two years later, at loose ends since the finish of a Montana fall round-up, came into the cow town of Buckley. Slipping saddle and "thirty years' gathering" from his big bay riding horse, he fed and watered the animal in the livery-stable shed, then entered slowly the Rose of Madrid bar. A few minutes afterward, having done away with several shots of bar magic, he was engaged in conversation by a small group of serious-faced men. Joe knew one of that group, a man who had been for a time his company commander during the Cuban unpleasantness.

His former captain and the other men of the group soon put their case in its entirety before him. Buckley was, they explained, a cow town, shipping point and headquarters for the whole valley. A nice little town, but one which, unfortunately, right now was in the throes of a cattle war. Joe nodded somberly, having already noticed the unmistakable signs of Colt and Winchester activity about the bar.

Then he asked his one question of the evening: What did all this mean to him?

His answer was that they unitedly thought he would be an excellent man to fill the empty office of sheriff, suddenly and sadly vacated by the former incumbent some eighteen hours before—cause, an acute overdose of lead poisoning. On the heels of this rather sobering statement the gentlemen made haste to explain that they would be quite willing to pay Joe three hundred dollars, cash, a month for his services. Joe answered quietly that he would be quite willing to work for that sum. Soon after that the group broke up, the component parts riding home to sleep peaceably for the first time in months.

THE acceptance of that peace officer's job in the town of Buckley was the definite turning point in the life of Joe Jepson. His first six months in office were rather bloody and interesting. Then the crowd of customers for the town hoosegow and the cemetery beyond the Baptist Church suddenly disappeared. Joe Jepson had proven himself a tougher man than the opposition; peace and prosperity had come for good to Buckley.

At first Joe felt lonely and unhappy. Then he met the daughter of the Baptist minister. Joe had very little to do, and had saved a big portion of his three hundred dollars a month. He fell in love and, before he himself and the rest of the town had got over it, was married and the owner of a sixty-acre ranch just outside of town.

Of his two companions of San Juan Hill and the Rough Riders, Jepson did not hear until the summer of 1917. They met on the dock at Hoboken beside a transport which was taking Slagoe and Murphy and some ten thousand other warriors to France. The clarion of war had brought Ricky Murphy from the Atavik Islands, Mike Slagoe from a rather pleasant life of pearl smuggling in the Gulf of California, and Jepson from the quiet of his Buckley ranch.

All three were well over the age limit, but all three were still tough men, possessed of the same marvelous physiques which had taken them through the malaria and dysentery of the Cuban campaign. When they met on the big concrete dock they had not seen each other for almost twenty years.

Mike Slagoe wore the leather-faced canvas puttees and red hat cord of the field artillery. On his blouse sleeve was a new, dark piece of khaki which bore on it the three chevrons of a sergeant; on his lined, brown face was the old, somber grin. Ricky Murphy wore his campaign hat well over one eye, about it

the blue hat cord of the infantry, on his sleeve, also, the chevrons of a sergeant.

Waiting at ease with their outfits, while the Red Cross fed them and the transport sailors let down the extra gangplank ladders, the two met. Slagoe saw Ricky Murphy first; he crossed over and the two silently shook hands. They were rolling a butt apiece from Ricky Murphy's tobacco when a tall figure stopped in front of them and a strangely familiar, even voice announced:

"No smokin' and back to yer outfits!"

Mike Slagoe looked up no farther than the military police arm band worn by the man in front of them.

"Aw, go t' hell!" he pleaded good-naturedly.

Then, instinctively, he snapped up his hands from his web pistol belt, sprang back a pace and lifted his eyes to the face of the man who had spoken. The uppercut aimed at his jaw barely missed it and took off his campaign hat as it passed upward. He stopped his own blow just in time. He laughed aloud then and croaked out of the side of his thin-lipped mouth to Murphy:

"Lookit, 'Irish'; they got 'im in the M. P.'s!"

He unclenched his right hand and held it out to the tall and gray-headed man who stood in front of them.

"How you come, Jepson?"

JEPSON stated that he came all right, and the three shook hands. They asked no questions of one another, except that Ricky Murphy asked the strapping sergeant of M. P.'s if he would like a roll of tobacco. This Jepson refused, remarking simply that he could not smoke while on duty. Murphy and Slagoe stared at one another, then at Jepson, with eyes of disbelief. Jepson saw and understood that look, but failed to resent it; twenty years of keeping peace and some four-

teen years of living quietly had all but basically changed Joe Jepson.

"Well," drawled Ricky Murphy hoarsely, "see yuh somewhere in France, hombre!"

He pulled down his blouse coat beneath his belt, slipped up his hat head strap a bit more, so that article of equipment was still farther over his right eye, and swung off toward his own outfit. But Slagoe waited for a moment, heavy fingers resting upon his canvas-covered cartridge clips, quizzical eyes on the level ones of Jepson.

"How come they pushed yuh intuh the M. P.'s with th' lousy marines, old-timer?"

Jepson shook his head slightly, not at all angered.

"I joined me," he said slowly, "a doughboy outfit, too. But the colonel heard I was a sheriff in peace time, so he transferred me here. I'm happy. Better fall in with yer outfit now, soldier."

"Yeah!" Slagoe nodded, and smiled wryly. "Hope yer still callin' deuces an' treys when I git back here, hombre. I'll bring yuh a coupla them German generals to help tote yer stick an' gat!"

He waited just a second longer to let that insult sink in and see if there were any reaction. There was none. So he turned and swaggered back to his command, nicotine-stained cigarette butt still between his browned teeth. Half an hour later the long, brown lines of men filed aboard, silently and without confusion. Warps were cast off, taken aboard. Tugs panted and backed off into the stream, the big camouflaged transport swinging sluggishly after them.

From the dock Joe Jepson watched it with peaceful eyes, but for just a moment after it had finally gone from sight down the misty stream the old, wild nostalgia gripped him fiercely, hotly. Then he wheeled about, brought back his shoulders, barked his orders—

once more an M. P., a middle-aged man, and a keeper of the peace.

IN the training areas behind the front, eager for action, already discontented with the old, familiar discipline, Ricky Murphy and Mike Slagoe got repeatedly drunk and disorderly and were busted to privates in their respective outfits. But, in their first action, up with the French, both got back their warrants again; and Ricky Murphy, after a little wheat-field incident with a Chauchat rifle and a wandering Brandenburg battalion, was recommended in regimental orders for the Croix de Guerre. They were, both their colonels said officially and otherwise, all right as long as they were fighting. Two bad men.

Following that twelve days together on the transport, Murphy and Slagoe did not meet in France until the late summer of 1918. Sergeant Joseph Jepson, of the military police, they had not heard or thought of. Their minds were filled with sundry other things: the consumption of French alcohol in quantities, the annihilation of men who had the misfortune to wear field gray and funny coal-scuttle helmets, the instruction of their platoon and battery mates in Black Jack and Spit in the Ocean.

As far as they were concerned, Jepson was back in Hoboken telling fighting men not to light cigarettes; and he could stay there. He was not the tough, two-handed Joe Jepson they had known and battled with.

Ricky met Slagoe again during the Meuse-Argonne business. It was up near the Rierzey bridgehead, where Slagoe's battery of 75s had just settled down after a forced hike of over a hundred miles, with dying, underfed horses, in three days. Murphy's outfit, held up at the bridgehead, had suffered a tough period of shelling and machine-gun fire from the hard-bitten

German rear guard entrenched on the heights across the little river.

His outfit too had come in a hurry, marching day and night in what the officers sanguinely held out to be the last great advance of the War. But rolling kitchens, supply wagons, everything but combat packs and Springfields had been left behind. A harassed young lieutenant colonel, with a new mustache and a new flesh wound in his right arm, had sent Ricky back to find them; for food—hot soup, hot slum—was what the outfit wanted to see more than anything else.

RICKY picked up a half dozen willing volunteers and started back, following the shell-pounded sunken road that led through Rierzey toward the rear. Three miles behind the P. C. of his own outfit he came across the echelon of an American 75 battery. The men of the echelon were without their regular rations, too, but they had several horses, which had promptly died when they had been taken from the traces.

These had been judiciously butchered. Fires had been built and several discarded French infantry bayonets put to excellent use as spits. Ricky and his half dozen, stumbling wearily along the shell-pocked road, smelled sizzling steak, and stopped. Without hesitation or preamble they left the road, climbed the shattered bank and entered the weird remnants of the woods where was the artillery echelon and, also, the broiling steaks.

"How aboutcha, huh, soldier?" asked Ricky of a dirty artillery man who crouched over one small fire. "Give us some o' that meat?"

The dirty artillery man at once told Ricky to go to a well-known place and stay there in total discomfort. Ricky was at best a man of few words; at his hip was his issue .45 Colt automatic, the flap open. He reached for it silently.

"Up in the air, guy!" advised a hoarse voice behind him.

Ricky put them up in the air, turned his head. An unshaven man, wearing the faded chevrons of an artillery sergeant, stood behind him, an automatic tenderly held in his grimed right hand.

"'Lo," said Ricky, unsmiling.

"'Lo," said the artillery sergeant with the gun. "You hungry, Irish?"

"The truth you preach, Slagoe. We ain't et right fer days."

"Tell them birds with yuh to sit down an' you come with me, Murphy. We'll be back."

"Hear that?" asked Ricky Murphy.

The "birds" signified that they did by squatting down on their hams, mournful eyes on the artillery man with the now ripely ready steak. Just for a second did Mike Slagoe's eyes run over that line of haggard faces. Then he stepped swiftly to the side of the dirty artillery man at the fire, took the steak and bayonet spit ungently from his hands and told him in six strong words to join his comrades at the next broiling fire; these doughboys had been fighting and deserved hot food far more than a lousy echelon gold-brick.

WITH the six in the undisputed possession of the steak, Murphy and Slagoe moved on, following a winding little path through the once dense woods.

"How you come?" asked Slagoe, as they walked.

"Come high, soldier, but we ain't seen chow fer days. Up by that lousy bridge. Sent me back with them guys to find the chow guns."

"Ain't no chow guns from here to Rierzey. Major sent me back from th' battery with a hoss to find out. I know."

"Where we goin' now?"

"Up to a old Jerry P. C. one o' the telephone sergeants who's a good guy found. Schnapps, black bread, cheese

and Frog wine. You guys musta sent them Jerries outa here in a hurry, huh?"

"We did."

They walked the rest of the way through the darkening woods in silence. From time to time they stumbled over dead bodies and discarded equipment; the attack and advance had gone so rapidly through here that the burial details had not got in their work as yet.

Suddenly, and without warning, Mike Slagoe stopped, reached down and lifted up a dirty, soggy blanket, thus letting a weak flood of light out into the darkness. Murphy's oversensitive nose twitched. Wine, cheese, bread, tobacco! Slagoe had doubled forward and was sliding into the fox-hole mouth of the dugout. Eagerly the infantry noncom followed him.

Half a dozen men, sergeants and corporals of the echelon and the battery telephone detail, were squatted about a candle end tilted on the cracked patent-leather top of a German officer's dress helmet. All of the half dozen were eating busily, but looked up with suspicious eyes at the stranger. Slagoe nodded with a jerk of his head toward Murphy.

"Sergeant is from th' doughboy outfit up by the river. Buddy o' mine. Soldiered with me in Cuba. Give us th' bread an' *vino*, Jack. Leap to it, soldier. Atta baby!"

Ricky Murphy ate and he drank, and ate and drank again. The other men in the dugout watched him with understanding eyes; here was a guy who had not seen real food and liquor for weeks. They did not begrudge it to him now. When he could eat no more, they plied him with excellent *vin ordinaire*, with the German officer's powerful brandy.

The husky, square-built infantry sergeant announced to the world his thanks, adding that he was a new man. He even broke into a bit of song for the company, singing an old tune of the

Cuba days, "A Hot Time in the Old Town To-night." But abruptly he stopped, and became very serious, very grave, his thoughts moving back to the starving men of his outfit, lying without warm blankets, good water or tobacco even, under the incessant machine-gun, rifle and *minnewerfer* fire of the Germans up by the river. He had been given a definite and serious detail by his skipper, and here he was with his belly full, a good American cigarette between his lips, in a warm dugout, his job not even started. He looked up and took in the group of noncoms around him with thoughtful eyes.

"Any of you hombres," he asked, "know where there's any more chow floating around loose?"

A BARKING, cynical but not unpleasant laugh was his answer. Food was as plentiful in the neighborhood as steam heat and marble bathtubs. Then a big, flat-footed telephone corporal shifted position beside the little charcoal fire in the center of the dugout and drawled slowly:

"Yeah, I do know o' some, doughboy, come to think on it. Slipped my mind because me own belly was full an' warm. Coupla Frog escort wagons full o' their combat rations—spaghetti an' that red sausage stuff, salami—in the ditch back by th' Rierzey crossroads. Partner an' me was stringing wire back past there this afternoon to D. H. Q. an' come across 'em. Was about to dig in on it when a coupla M. P.'s—the dogs!—heaved up over th' hill and the Heinies begun t' bang down on th' place about th' same time, so we heaved outa there. M. P.'s has established a straggler post back there, but a man could get it out if he was a good hand at a quick bursar."

"Thank you, buddy!" Without waiting any longer, Murphy clambered to his aching feet. "How aboutcha, Slagoe?"

"I'm your man, Rick."

"Thank yuh all, gents!"

"Ferget it! Glad we had it."

The two made their way cautiously out of the dugout. Slagoe leading as before. In silence they stumbled along the rough path back toward the battery echelon. Just as they reached the first sentry and the end of the picket line Murphy asked:

"How about them guys in my detail, Mike? Think we'll need 'em?"

"Naw. If you an' me can't swing it alone, it can't be swung. Let 'em sleep. If th' plugs on th' line was any good, I'd borry a couple and we'd pack it up that way. But wait until we get it, then we'll dope out some way o' moving it up. We got to come back up this road past th' echelon anyways, an' you can pick up your lads then."

"Uh-huh."

They were past the dim, carefully shielded camp fires of the echelon, had been passed by the last sentry, and now stood at the brink of the black road.

"Helluva time," grunted Murphy, "o' findin' them escort wagons in th' dark. Well, let's go."

SIDE by side, they swung down the shell-tortured surface of the once fine military highway. An occasional ambulance or dispatch carrier's motor cycle tore past them in the darkness, and twice they were challenged and passed by nervous sentries. In the woods far to their left a light German battery was firing, and at long intervals they could hear the mammoth roar of one of their own huge navy railroad guns, over by Vicoublon.

The way was lined with every describable type of broken rolling equipment, German, French and American, for all three armies had in turn held the territory they were now traversing. The telephone corporal's description of the strange food cache had been rough at best; the two, however, were quite

positive that they could find it. But the rough walking, the bad light and the knowledge that any minute they might be challenged and picked up by an M. P. patrol, put their nerves on edge.

"Where th' hell are we?" panted Murphy at last.

"Almost t' Rierzey crossroads. I been down here leadin' up ammo trucks to th' battery. Division H. Q. is in that old farm right across th' road—half kilo or so down. Huh! What's them look like to you, Irish?"

"Frog escort wagons. Hot danmy! That's us."

A short search proved that it was so. The two badly battered carts were piled high with well-wrapped supplies of the inevitable French army ration—spaghetti and salami sausage. A light shell had obviously struck on the offside of the carts, overturning them in the ditch. The drivers had seemingly taken their horses out of the traces, cursed the Boches, and gone on, or back.

"Sorry I didn't bring them six gold bricks o' mine now," snapped Murphy.

"Wouldn't 'a' done no good. Kill a platoon o' men t' carry that stuff from here t' where your outfit is. Pipe down an' come on, I got a idea."

Murphy knew his companion far too well to question him. They went on, along the weird road. A battered wooden sign rose before them spectrally in the darkness. They were at Rierzey crossroads, and within a thousand yards of divisional headquarters.

"Where yuh goin'?" rasped a sudden voice.

THE two did not answer; they drew their automatic and ran, crouched low. A .45 slammed heavy slugs over their heads; and Slagoe, always a disliker of gentlemen wearing the brassard of the military police, fired back at the flash of the gun. Another dangerously close volley was the answer, and then they were safely away, among the shat-

tered walls and outbuildings of Rierzey, headquarters of their division.

"Lousy M. P." laughed Slagoe. "Thought a couple o' hunks o' loose lead could stop us, huh? Dumber than dumb!"

"Who goes there?" challenged a sharp voice close at hand.

"Lieutenant Mackinney and Sergeant Lewis of C Battery echelon with fire correction orders. Wires are down past the crossroads."

"Pass, Lieutenant Mackinney and Sergeant Lewis!"

"Thank you, sentry!" snapped Mike Slagoe in his forced, smooth voice, his deep eyes bright with repressed laughter.

Behind them they could hear the weary sentry relax and drop his Springfield butt to the rubble of the wall where he stood, then they were alone again. Before them was a large, closely filled courtyard. Just as they entered it a motor-cycle dispatch carrier kicked his machine into life, opened the throttle and went roaring with mad optimism out into the darkness toward the front. Things, it seemed, were going on.

The two stood motionless for a moment, looking about them. On all sides were ambulances, staff cars of every make and description, from small, high-backed four-cylinder touring cars to a huge, gleaming, eight-cylinder limousine. Both men's eyes lighted simultaneously on the limousine, which bore on the door the two stars of a major general. In that, they knew, they could transport the equivalent of four escort wagen loads of spaghetti and salami to the front—to Berlin, if need be.

"Can yuh drive it, huh?" whispered the artillery man.

"Sure! I usta pilot one around a bit."

They crept softly to the bulky side of the big machine. A sleepy staff driver raised his head from the steering wheel.

"What th'——" he began.

Then Ricky Murphy slapped him over the bare head with a Colt barrel. They opened the door and dumped him out. Slagoe took his companion's Colt and sat with one gun in each hand as the Irishman jabbed at the starter, choked the stiff motor, then threw it into gear with a bang. They flung out of the courtyard in a roar of banging cylinders. Doors opened behind them, voices yelled, the sentry sprang out with upraised rifle; but they hurtled on, warm at heart, at last really enjoying their war.

JUST before they reached the crossroads they hit an immense shell hole and the heavy machine almost turned over. Murphy was forced to lessen his speed and throw the machine into second gear. And as he did so, a dark figure leaped onto the running board beside him. A Colt barrel was thrust hard against his ribs and a hard, hoarse voice said:

"Stop it and put yer hands in the air, buddy!"

Murphy could do nothing but obey. As the huge limousine rumbled to a stop, another voice spoke up. Slagoe's:

"How come, Jepson? I got two rods trained full on you. Savvy? Two. I'll drill you plenty if you open up on Irish. A fine M. P. an' a soldier!"

"Git out and down, Murphy," grated Jepson. "You're my prisoner."

Slagoe's voice cut in again.

"He is? Th' hell you preach! Sit still, Irish. Now listen, Jepson, hombre. I'm goin' t' count me one to five, slowlike, an' then bang down with both rods. See 'em? Huh! Plug Murphy, plug an old buddy, but it will be one lousy M. P. less. We stole this here boiler, sure. We ain't drunk; we're just goin' up th' road an' get some Frog chow an' take it up to Murph's outfit, up in the lines—— You usta be a good guy; you seem to kinda forgotten how. Put down your rod, tear that

damn rag off yer sleeve an' come on! I ain't talkin' no more, Jepson."

Slagoe's snarling, husky voice stopped, and for a moment the three remained utterly silent. Behind, they could hear motors starting and racing as other cars started after them in wild pursuit. Then Slagoe began to count. Ricky Murphy had always considered himself a really tough man, but now cold sweat broke out from beneath the leather lining of his tin hat and seeped down into his staring distended eyes.

"Four!" snapped Slagoe, and beside him Murphy gasped aloud.

"All right," broke in Jepson, in a low, uneven voice. "You're a coupla bad guys, you!"

He stepped down from the running board, and the other two could hear him slap his heavy automatic into its leather holster.

"Go ahead, or you'll get a twenty-year rap for this——"

He ducked; they all ducked, shoulders instinctively shrugged up, tin hats over their faces. A German G. I. can moaned with the sound of a thousand banshees overhead and crumpled awfully between them and Ferme Rierzey. Another followed it, and another. The road behind them was roaring white flame, shrieking bits of shell casing, shrapnel. What had been the line of their pursuers behind abruptly disappeared. The three had seen death and its workings many times before, but this took their breath away.

"C'm'on! Outa here! Get in, Joe!" roared Slagoe in a momentary lull. "We're goin' up. Ain't no more use fer you here now. And th' Jerries is sure puttin' on a show!"

IT was clearly so. All about them shells rooted, roared, ravished. A tremendous wall of rocking steel and explosive had settled down between the American front and support lines. No reënforcing troops could break through

that immense wave of death; and in a moment the lighter, quicker firing German guns would rip and tear at the shallow American front lines, newly taken and not yet fully consolidated and liaisoned. Jepson's work as an M. P. sergeant in charge of traffic and the stragglers' post at the crossroads was over. Too long, he told himself, had he been a peaceful man and a keeper of the peace. Here were two old, tough fighting buddies and the makings of a swell fight. Without word or further hesitation he sprang into the front seat beside Slagoe.

The limousine banged ahead as Murphy opened up on gas and spark. The Irish infantry sergeant ran with the headlights full on now; light no longer made any difference in this holocaust of flame and destruction. The bright beams fell across the two up-tilted escort carts. All three men leaped out and mightily heaved the French rations into the capacious rear of the general's limousine. They banged the doors securely shut and pounded crazily, swiftly, on again.

Opposite Slagoe's echelon Murphy slammed down on the foot brake and yelled at the artillery sergeant:

"You want to join your outfit?"

"No! Hell, no! Me for some real, ace-high action. I'll collect them gold brickers o' yours, though! Wait a minute!"

He sprang out, came running back in a minute, the sleepy-eyed doughboy detail at his heels.

"Hang on the runnin' boards!" belled Murphy at his command. "An', hombres, hang on good!"

HE whacked the car into second gear, came down hard on the gas pedal and off they went again, like a ship in a heavy sea. German 9.7s and lighter stuff made a conflagration of the night around them and they rode through a mad hell of shock and screaming steel.

Suddenly from a shell hole beside the road a young lieutenant jumped up, a bayoneted rifle in his hands. Murphy recognized the officer as one of his own regiment and brought the car whining to a stop.

"Here's th' chow, lieutenant!" he snapped. "What's goin' on ahead?"

"Heinies are putting a pontoon bridge across the river under protection of their barrage. Drove us out of those damn fox holes up there by the old bridge. We're digging in right here. All th' phone wires are shot to hell and every runner that's gone back has got his, trying. Can't get more than a couple of our own 75 batteries to help us out. Join your outfit, sergeant!"

"Yes, sir!" Murphy saluted, turned to the gaping, whispering detail. "Throw that chow outa there and take it along to where they need it! Savvy? Good!" He swung back to the driver's seat of the limousine, leaped in, opened his motor. "So long, loocey! Me an' me pardners is lookin' fer some real action!"

As the last armload of French sausage and spaghetti was swept out of the rear of the limousine, Murphy banged the big machine ahead. The two sat grimly beside him, staring with bright, slitted eyes, automatics in their hands, little caring where they went as long as they saw action—and plenty of it. The bad three had not been together since San Juan Hill.

Any number of times it seemed to them that the big machine was going to turn turtle, pin and kill them; but always, miraculously, Murphy kept it right side up, in the rough road, and going ahead. The terrific shell fire about them had slackened now, its place taken by the fast *rat-rat-rat* of German machine guns, and the slower, stubborn grumble of American Chauchats and heavier machine guns.

Suddenly Murphy brought the gen-

eral's sorely tried vehicle to a skidding, swerving stop.

"Git out, you guys!" he shouted. "And see what you kin find along the road in them little pockets there. Oughta be plentee Mills bombs, machine gun ammunition——"

The sector had formerly been a French one before the Americans had taken it over. In the thoughtful, careful French manner, small pockets had been dug in the clay walls of the road, and a considerable quantity of rifle and machine-gun ammunition and hand grenades left there, the French tactical staff having figured it out during four bitter years that the main avenue of a rear-guard action, and the main path of attack, was along the semisubmerged roads.

THE two gray-headed sergeants came running back now, their hands full.

"Dump th' tin apples in back—all yuh kin find. Put th' machine gun ammo in front, on th' floor boards an' in th' pockets. I'll be back!" yelled Murphy, and then disappeared, climbing the high bank to the left.

He was gone for quite a time, and when he returned, the two whispered to him that the first German patrols of the infiltrating advance were bombing and gunning the woods ahead and to right and left.

"Uh-huh," grunted Murphy softly. "I been up to see. We ain't five hundred yards from our old front lines an' th' river. They're comin' slow an' cautious; they been cut off by us so many times in th' last two months they move real slow unless they know they're safe in th' rear an' on both flanks. Ain't th' fightin' guys they usta be."

"What we going to do?" demanded Jepson, extremely eager for his promised and looked-forward-to action.

"Plentee!" answered Ricky Murphy, and grimly smiled. "I just drug down two Browning guns th' boys was too

hurried to take with 'em. You *hombres* come up now an' help me tote 'em down. They're gonna be your *partic'lar* fun."

"What we going to do?" persisted Jepson.

"Still a regular M. P.!" laughed Murphy. "Them Jerries has just finished their pontoon bridge. I'm going to run the general's bus right down on it—— But you leave that to me. You *caballeros* are goin' to climb up th' banks on each side, set up your Brownings and dust all th' Heinies that try to stop me, that try to cross th' crick and then try to get back when that Jerry barrage is over an' our lads come up again. Big enough order for you, ain't it?"

The other two did not answer; they only smiled. Precious minutes had gone in argument, and now they rapidly pulled the two neat Browning machine guns down the bank of the road, secured them on the running boards and front fenders. Slowly, no longer daring to use his lights, Murphy started the staff car forward.

THREE times cautious German patrols banged down at it with streams of Mauser lead from the banks above, smashing wind shield and windows, but, being met with a savage, instantaneous and accurate Colt fire in return, retreated without doing serious damage. Low yellow flares showed through the shattered black trunks of trees ahead, and the three could make out dark pontoons, busily working men. Murphy brought the car carefully to a stop.

"You two out here. Right an' left flanks. Snap it up!"

They did, dragging guns and piles of ammunition belts after them. Murphy waited for a minute or so, humming a bar or two of "A Hot Time in the Old Town 'To-night," as he refilled his Colt clip. Then he eased the big, death-

laden limousine into first gear and slipped ahead.

The rough, shell-buffed road sloped slightly down toward the river and what had been the head of the old French steel bridge. Here the German pioneer troops now worked with feverish haste to complete their last pontoon spans and make a solid structure over which the majority of the waiting shock troops could pour.

The light of the calcium flares they worked in was poor, blinding their eyes to the outer darkness, where their own advance patrols were supposed to be mopping up what was left of the American front line. The sweating German pioneers and their officers did not see the black bulk of the huge limousine as Ricky Murphy stopped it, hand brake hard on, got out, pulled a firing pin from one of the Mills hand grenades in the back seat, very softly closed the door again, and let the hand brake off.

They did not see it either until it hit a cursing German pioneer-battalion major squarely between the shoulders, rolling him down and under, then rocked thunderously out across the whimpering, yet loosely secured pontoons. The startled men cursed and scrambled out of its way, some even jumping into the icy water of the little river. Some of those perhaps lived.

The rest did not, for, like one vast and awful bomb, the major general's treasured staff car burst upon them. The rest was chaos, which even Slagoe and Jepson, sitting behind their ready Brownings on the slopes above, could not make out clearly. There was one mighty, terrible sheet of orange flame, an uprush of water, torn bodies, smashed pontoons; then a small lapping of waves and the gasping cries of the wounded and dying. The German losses were frightful.

Those that remained living and in control of their muscles broke silently

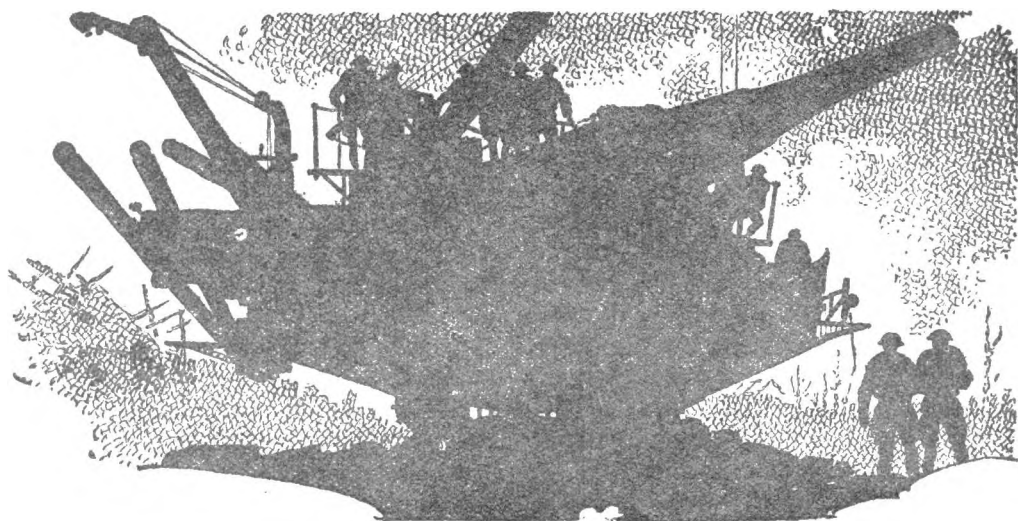
for the protection of the scrub brush along the banks. Then Jepson and Slagoe pressed down on firing and traverse handles, and those, too, died. In the black woods, where they crawled on hands and knees from one deserted American fox hole to another, the German patrols heard, and came back—to be met by a blast of death from the Brownings, which did not open up on them until they had just reached the old bridgehead.

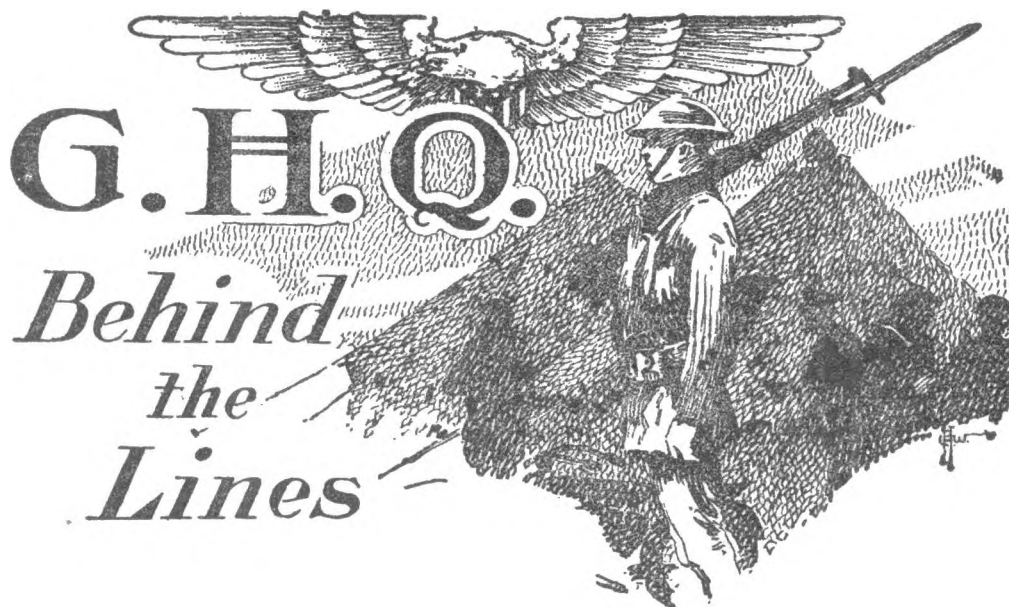
Across the river a frantic colonel of Silesian shock troops ordered his men to open fire. They did, stoically. With the bright leap of rifle flames as excellent targets, Jepson and Mike Slagoe let go anew, Murphy moving from one to the other with fresh belts of ammunition. That, too, was soon over.

MANY times that night, from the woods and from across the river, violent sorties attempted to shake loose that grim-mouthed, bright-eyed trio.

The result was death; they could not shake it loose and live. Near dawn the advance wave of grenadiers and automatic-rifle men, coming through the woods in their work of repossession of the territory lost during the night, were met by a party of some two hundred strapping Germans, their hands upraised, their baggy breeches, suspenders cut, flapping ludicrously about their ankles.

One of the German officers could talk a little English. With him an American captain conversed. Who had made them prisoners? What had happened to the quickly and cleverly laid German pontoon bridge? The interrogated Boche turned about and gestured bleakly toward the little slope above the old bridgehead. If, he told his captor in his halting English, the American officer would go up there, he would find three Americans, three very bad men, who would no doubt explain everything.





NO doubt the vast majority of readers of this magazine are of the male sex—and what is more, he-men—but it is very gratifying to the Brass Hats of G. H. Q. to learn through frequent letters that we have quite a following among the fair, that good old-fashioned term by which we still compliment the ladies. War, of course, always has been primarily a man's game, though women played a larger part in the last war than they ever did before. But war stories, packed with action, humor, tragedy, heroism and human drama, seem to hold a universal appeal. War isn't a nice business. No sane man would possibly preach it as a good pastime for humanity to engage in; but at the same time men at war have always supplied a wealth of material for the story-teller since time began, and that is why *OVER THE TOP* came into being—to furnish you with front-line fighting stories that pack an authentic "kick."

Getting back to our original subject, the readers of this magazine among the fair sex, we are going to let two ladies have the floor to-day. The following

letter comes from Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in praise of a story a little off our beaten track which a great many of you liked, judging from the mail.

G. H. Q.,

OVER THE TOP.

GENTLEMEN: Just a little word of appreciation for the pleasure I got out of one of the stories in your publication, *OVER THE TOP*. I should say not *one* of the stories, but *the* story, "Noncombatant," by one Ernest Paynter. I know just how much an author appreciates a little appreciation, and I want to say that I not only enjoyed the story to the fullest extent, but also that I am thankful that there are such authors as he is, and thank you for giving me the opportunity of becoming acquainted with his work.

That is the kind of stories we want—and more of them.

Sincerely yours,

CHARLOTTE PROBST.

AND here's a breezy epistle from a young lady in New Haven, Connecticut. Just read it—and see if you don't get as much kick out of it as we did.

G. H. Q.,

OVER THE TOP.

DEAR EDITOR: Please don't make your magazine so good. The house, the kid 'n' everything goes by the board until I've fin-

ished your book from cover to cover. I have to lock it up until I've finished the day's work, and then the "Boss" is home and wants to read it. Poor I'm!

We split our sides over "Rise, if Possible," by Empey, and we resplit over "The Last Shot," by Howard. Long life to their type-writers.

"The Noncombatant," by Paynter, was a corker. Have just finished the September issue. The Boss is asleep, 'n' I stole a march on him. Wait until he finds out. You certainly have a darn good man to open the list with. "The Renegade American" is a wow. "Not Quite Savvy Enough," by Carneson is good, too. "General Catch-as-catch-can," by Moses. Let's repeat on that, will you? I like his style. And Whitfield and Colvin are two aces. When will we get more of their ink slinging? Hope it is soon. I'm only sorry that Major Tracy's molars weren't knocked out by Rodier.

Sorry I am a girl, but I can and do enjoy your magazine just as much as if I were an ex—

Long life to you all and I hope you'll continue to put out such corking stories.

Sincerely,

DORIS J. HAM.

P. S. Will be twenty-one this week, 'n'

Hubby has promised to give me OVER THE TOP for a year.

Hip, hip, hoorah!

D. J. H.

WELL, men, that's a pretty nice letter, don't you think? In our last headquarters chat we sent out a call for more and better correspondence—the kind that makes the Brass Hats take their feet off their desks and sit up to "meet" the readers. We like you to drop in on us with a two-cent stamp, and we like to print a couple of letters each month for the interest of all of us. What say?

We'll bet Empey's yarn of "Jimmie Hicks, the Doughboy," in this issue went over big with every last one of you. We'll also bet that Anthony Autumn's account of three "Pals in Purgatory," which is the lead-off novel next month, will hit you right in the same spot. Want to take us up on it? All right, just don't miss the big December number. You'll be wise to reserve a copy. *Dismissed!*

G. H. Q. WOULD LIKE YOUR REPORT ON THIS NUMBER!

REPORT ON NOVEMBER OVER THE TOP

From: Address

To: G. H. Q., OVER THE TOP, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

Subject: My rating of the stories in this issue, as follows:

"Jimmie Hicks, the Doughboy"

"When the Line Broke"

"Find the Woman"

"A Drink on the Colonel"

"Boast of the Legion"

"Viper of the Sand"

"Three Bad Men"

Remarks:

Cornered!



Sanderson's face grew rigid as he saw the detective in the doorway, automatic in hand. At last he was cornered—on a speeding express, a thousand miles from his accomplice. Capture meant twenty years in prison. In a split second his lightning brain grasped the one chance of escape.

Maxwell Sanderson, "The Silent Cracksman," gentleman rogue, was again pitting his brain against the relentless forces of the law. The stakes were a hundred thousand in diamonds. But the lure of matching wits tempted Sanderson even more than the stakes.

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