

"Over the Top"

By An American Soldier Who Went

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Machine Gunner Serving in France

Panting and out of breath, we tumbled into our front-line trench. I tore my hands getting through our wire, but, at the time, didn't notice it; my journey was too urgent.

When the roll was called we found that we had gotten it in the nose for 63 casualties.

Our artillery put a barrage on Fritz' front-line and communication trenches and their machine-gun and rifle fire suddenly ceased.

Upon the cessation of this fire, stretcher bearers went out to look for killed and wounded. Next day we learned that 21 of our men had been killed and 37 wounded. Five men were missing; lost in the darkness, they must have wandered over into the German lines, where they were either killed or captured.

Speaking of stretcher bearers and wounded, it is very hard for the average civilian to comprehend the enormous cost of taking care of wounded and the war in general. He or she gets so accustomed to seeing billions of dollars in print that the significance of the amount is passed over without thought.

From an official statement published in one of the London papers, it is stated that it costs between six and seven thousand pounds (\$30,000 to \$35,000) to kill or wound a soldier. This result was attained by taking the cost of the war to date and dividing it by the killed and wounded.

It may sound heartless and inhuman, but it is a fact, nevertheless, that from a military standpoint it is better for a man to be killed than wounded.

If a man is killed he is buried, and the responsibility of the government ceases, excepting for the fact that his people receive a pension. But if a man is wounded it takes three men from the firing line, the wounded man and two men to carry him to the rear to the advanced first-aid post. Here he is attended by a doctor, perhaps assisted by two R. A. M. C. men. Then he is put into a motor ambulance, manned by a crew of two or three. At the field hospital, where he generally goes under an anesthetic, either to have his wounds cleaned or to be operated on, he requires the services of about three to five persons. From this point another ambulance ride impresses more men in his service, and then at the ambulance train, another corps of doctors, R. A. M. C. men, Red Cross nurses and the train's crew. From the train he enters the base hospital or casualty clearing station, where a good-sized corps of doctors, nurses, etc., are kept busy. Another ambulance journey is next in order—this time to the hospital ship. He crosses the channel, arrives in Blythe—more ambulances and perhaps a rig for five hours on an English Red Cross train with its crew of Red Cross workers, and at last he reaches the hospital. Generally he stays from two to six months, or longer, in this hospital. From here he is sent to a convalescent home for six weeks.

If by wounds he is unfitted for further service, he is discharged, given a pension, or committed to a soldiers' home for the rest of his life—and still the expense piles up. When you realize that all the ambulances, trains and ships, not to mention the man power, used in transporting a wounded man, could be used for supplies, ammunition and re-enforcements for the troops at the front, it will not appear strange that from a strictly military standpoint, a dead man is sometimes better than a live one (if wounded).

Not long after the first digging party, our general decided, after a careful tour of inspection of the communication trenches, upon "an ideal spot," as he termed it, for a machine-gun emplacement; took his map, made a dot on it, and as he was wont, wrote "dig here," and the next night we dug.

There were twenty in the party, myself included. Armed with picks, shovels and empty sandbags we arrived at the "ideal spot" and started digging. The moon was very bright, but we did not care as we were well out of sight of the German lines.

We had gotten about three feet down, when the fellow next to me, after a mighty stroke with his pick, let go of the handle, and pinched his nose with his thumb and forefinger, at the same time letting out the explosion, "Gott strafe me pink, I'm bloody well gassed, not 'alf I ain't." I quickly turned in his direction with an inquiring look, at the same instant reaching for my gas bag. I soon found out what was ailing him. One whiff was enough and I lost no time in also pinching my nose. The stench was awful. The rest of the digging party dropped their picks and shovels and beat it for the weather side of that solitary pick. The officer came over and inquired why the work had suddenly ceased, holding our noses, we simply pointed in the direction of the smell. He went over to the pick, immediately clapped his hand over his nose, made an "about turn" and came back. Just then our captain came along and investigated, but after about a minute said we had better carry on with the digging, that he did not see why we should have

stopped as the officer was very faint, but if necessary he would allow us our gas helmets while digging. He would stay and see the thing through, but he had to report back to brigade head-

quarters immediately. We wished that we were captains and also had a date at brigade headquarters. With our gas helmets on we again attacked that hole and uncovered the decomposed body of a German; the pick was sticking in his chest. One of the men fainted. I was that one. Upon this our lieutenant halted proceedings and sent word back to headquarters and word came back that after we filled in the hole we could knock off for the night. This was welcome tidings to us, because—

Next day the general changed the dot on his map and another emplacement was completed the following night.

The odor from the dug-up, decomposed human body has an effect which is hard to describe. It first produces a nauseating feeling, which, especially after eating, causes vomiting. This relieves you temporarily, but soon a weakening sensation follows, which leaves you limp as a dishrag. Your spirits are at their lowest ebb and you feel a sort of hopelessness and a mad desire to escape it all, to get to the open fields and the perfume of the flowers in Blighty. There is a sharp, prickling sensation in the nostrils, which reminds one of breathing coal gas through a radiator in the floor, and you want to sneeze, but cannot. This was the effect on me, surmounted by a vague horror of the awfulness of the thing and an ever-recurring reflection that, perhaps I, sooner or later, would be in such a state and be brought to light by the blow of a pick in the hands of some Tommy on a digging party.

Several times I have experienced this odor, but never could get used to it; the enervating sensation was always present. It made me hate war and wonder why such things were countenanced by civilization, and all the spice and glory of the conflict would disappear, leaving the grim reality. But after leaving the spot and filling your lungs with deep breaths of pure, fresh air, you forget and once again want to be "up and at them."

CHAPTER XV.

Listening Post.

It was six in the morning when we arrived at our rest billets, and we were allowed to sleep until noon; that is, if we wanted to go without our breakfast. For sixteen days we remained



Entrance to a Dugout.

in rest billets, digging roads, drilling, and other fatigues, and then back into the front-line trench.

Nothing happened that night, but the next afternoon I found out that a bomber is general utility man in a section.

About five o'clock in the afternoon our lieutenant came down the trench and stopping in front of a bunch of us on the fire step, with a broad grin on his face, asked:

"Who is going to volunteer for listening post tonight? I need 'em men." It is needless to say no one volunteered, because it is anything but a cushy job. I began to feel uncomfortable as I knew it was getting around for my turn. Sure enough, with another grin, he said:

"Empey, you and Wheeler are due, so come down into my dugout for instructions at six o'clock."

Just as he left and was going around a traverse, Fritz turned loose with a machine gun and the bullets ripped the sandbags right over his head. It gave me great pleasure to see him duck against the parapet. He was getting a taste of what we would get later out in front.

Then, of course, it began to rain. I knew it was the forerunner of a miserable night for us. Every time I had to go out in front, it just naturally rained. Old Jupiter Pluvius must have had it in for me.

At six we reported for instructions. They were simple and easy. All we had to do was to crawl out into No Man's Land, lie on our bellies with our ears to the ground and listen for the tap, tap of the German engineers or sappers who might be tunnelling under No Man's Land to establish a mine-head beneath our trench.

Of course, in our orders we were told not to be captured by German patrols or reconnoitering parties. Lots of breath is wasted on the western front giving silly cautions.

As soon as it was dark, Wheeler and I crawled to our post which was about halfway between the lines. It was raining bucketfuls, the ground was a

sea of sticky mud and clinging to us like glue.

We took turns in listening with our ears to the ground. I would listen for twenty minutes while Wheeler would be on the qui vive for German patrols.

We each wore a wristwatch, and believe me, neither one of us did over twenty minutes. The rain soaked us to the skin and our ears were full of mud.

Every few minutes a bullet would crack overhead or a machine gun would traverse back and forth.

Then all firing suddenly ceased. I whispered to Wheeler, "Keep your eye skinned, mate; most likely Fritz has a patrol out—that's why the Boches have stopped firing."

We were each armed with a rifle and bayonet and three Mills bombs to be used for defense only.

I had my ear to the ground. All of a sudden I heard faint, dull thuds. In a low but excited voice I whispered to Wheeler, "I think they are mining. Listen."

He put his ear to the ground and in an unsteady voice spoke into my ear:

"Yank, that's a patrol and it's heading our way. For God's sake keep still."

I was as still as a mouse and was scared stiff.

Hardly breathing and with eyes trying to pierce the inky blackness, we waited. I would have given a thousand pounds to have been safely in my dugout.

Then we plainly heard footsteps and our hearts stood still.

A dark form suddenly loomed up in front of me; it looked as big as the Woolworth building. I could hear the blood rushing through my veins and it sounded as loud as Niagara falls.

Forms seemed to emerge from the darkness. There were seven of them in all. I tried to wish them away. I never wished harder in my life. They muttered a few words in German and melted into the blackness. I didn't stop wishing either.

All of a sudden we heard a stumble, a muddy splash, and a muttered "Donner und Blitzen." One of the Boches had tumbled into a shell hole. Neither of us laughed. At that time—it didn't strike us as funny.

About twenty minutes after the Germans had disappeared something from the rear grabbed me by the foot. I nearly fainted with fright. Then a welcome whisper in a cockney accent. "I sy, myte, we've come to relieve you."

Wheeler and I crawled back to our trench; we looked like wet hens and felt worse. After a swig of rum we were soon fast asleep on the fire step in our wet clothes.

The next morning I was as stiff as a poker and every joint ached like a bad tooth, but I was still alive, so it did not matter.

(Continued Next Week)

THE Y. M. C. A. ON THE BATTLE FRONT

In their fight against the Kaiser, American soldier boys under shell fire in France are being given all possible comforts and assistance, according to an announcement just received here from the National War Work Council of the Y. M. C. A. At the present time there are more than 250 American Y. M. C. A. secretaries under shell fire. These men have been with Pershing's troops from the time they landed on foreign soil.

A total of \$5,000,000 is being expended monthly by the Army Y. M. C. A. in its work for the American troops at home and abroad. There are 2,500 Y. M. C. A. workers in France and England and 3,000 in American camps.

Because of the increasing need for men in this service and the force necessary to operate the entire canteen system in France, efforts are being made to enroll at least 1,000 more business and professional men of high standing who are willing to go to France for every kind of Y. M. C. A. service before July 1.

It is estimated that 8,000,000 feet of film are being exhibited weekly to the soldiers at home and abroad. A recent shipment of athletic equipment for the troops in France consisted of 79,680 baseballs, 19,000 bats, 10,000 gloves and mitts, boxing gloves, volley balls, and various other kinds of apparatus for promoting the play spirit among the troops in their leisure hours.

The Y. M. C. A. has established a chain of huts and dugouts along the front lines occupied by American troops "over there" and is meeting the needs of the Sammies as they take their places alongside their Allies. The Y. M. C. A. huts on the Russian front have been demolished by German guns and the 150 secretaries there have retired before the advance of the Huns and are now established in Siberia awaiting an opportunity to return to Russia.

Had Not Changed Much.

A negro, who was so singularly lazy as to be quite a problem, got converted in a revival. His associates in the church were extremely anxious to know whether he would not bestir himself and go to work. The negro attended a meeting and offered a prayer, in which occurred the petition: "Use me, Lord, use me—in an advisory capacity."

CURTISS Theatre

SATURDAY, May 18th

Matinee and Night

Matinee all seats 10c.

Children under 14, 11c; Adults 20c, including tax

Today we offer you J. Stuart Blackton's

"THE WORLD FOR SALE"

A big story of Racial Conflict and the great Northwest. Romantic adventures and thrills galore are in this big wonderfully produced Paramount picture, from the novel by Sir Gilbert Parker, which is a pretty good sign that this production is one that you cannot afford to miss. Coming soon—Charlie Chaplin in "A Dog's Life" and Douglas Fairbanks in "Heading South."

Added Attraction

Selected Vaudeville at the Curtiss every Saturday that all the family may and will wish to see. We are now open Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday, showing only the best pictures. Watch for showing date of all Arcraft and Paramount productions at the Curtiss.

CURTISS Theatre Attractions

for TUESDAY, MAY 21st

Seats 10 & 15c; War tax 1 & 2c

Antonio Moreno in "The Angel Factory"

with Helen Chadwick and an excellent supporting cast.

Shorten the long days—see the fine selected plays which are always exhibited at the Curtiss. We also wish to announce that we have booked all of the great Pathe Colored Scenic Movies, the finest in the world, and the Harold Lloyd comedies for every Tuesday at the Curtiss. This Tuesday we show

Triple Divide Mountain, Glacier Park and Japan the Floral.

See all of this. Instructive—Educational—Interesting.

Curtiss Theatre Attraction

for WEDNESDAY, May 22nd

Seats 10-15c; War tax 1-2c

GET IN ON THIS

Jack Pickford in his big Paramount success "The Spirit of '17"

by Judge Willis Brown

A real live nephew of your Uncle Sam, with a very splendid cast and exceptionally good directorship. A timely love story of Patriotism. You are assured of a really high class entertainment. Don't miss it, and let every boy and girl in Downers see this play. It will prove its educational to them.

Have you purchased your tickets yet for the home talent show to be given by the Downers Grove Campfire Girls assisted by other local talent, on Thursday, matinee and night, at the Curtiss, Decoration Day. Keep the Date—Get your Tickets. Two shows at night and one in the afternoon.

CURTISS THEATRE

THIS THURSDAY MAY 23rd

Seats 10-15c; War tax 1-2c

We Offer

Constance Talmadge in "Scandal"

In her new Select picture which is scheduled for showing at the Curtiss today Constance Talmadge portrays the character of a spirited, spoiled and capricious society girl with the depth of her real Womanliness unstirred. Scandal is a great picture and we are going to give it a great showing, bring your friends, they will appreciate it. The story deals with the dangers of bucking the old conventional standards of Society. A Heroine stops the clock of convention and tries to wind it again.

Have you purchased your ticket for the Boy Scout picture for Decoration Day. Local talent show will be given by Campfire Girls and others. Get tickets from the Campfire Girls or at the Curtiss.