

"Over the Top"

By An American Soldier Who Went
ARTHUR GUY EMPY
Machine Gunner Serving in France

CHAPTER XXII.

Punishments and Machine-Gun Stunts. Soon after my arrival in France; in fact, from my enlistment, I had found that in the British army discipline is very strict. One has to be very careful in order to stay on the narrow path of government virtue.

There are about seven million ways of breaking the king's regulations; to keep one you have to break another.

The worst punishment is death by a firing squad, or "up against the wall," as Tommy calls it.

This is for desertion, cowardice, mutiny, giving information to the enemy, looting, rape, robbing the dead, forcing a safeguard, striking a superior, etc.

Then comes the punishment of sixty-four days in the front-line trench without relief. During this time you have to engage in all raids, working parties in No Man's Land, and every hazardous undertaking that comes along. If you live through the sixty-four days you are indeed lucky.

This punishment is awarded where there is a doubt as to the willful guilt of a man who has committed an offense punishable by death.

Then comes the famous field punishment No. 1. Tommy has nicknamed it "crucifixion." It means that a man is spread-eagled on a limber wheel, two hours a day for twenty-one days. During this time he only gets water, bully beef and biscuits for his chow. You get "crucified" for repeated minor offenses.

Next in order is field punishment No. 2.

This is confinement in the "clink," without blankets, getting water, bully beef and biscuits for rations and doing all the dirty work that can be found. This may be for twenty-four hours or twenty days, according to the gravity of the offense.

Then comes "pack drill" or "drill-ers" parade. This consists of drilling, mostly at the double, for two hours with full equipment. Tommy hates this, because it is hard work. Sometimes he fills his pack with straw to lighten it, and sometimes he gets caught. If he gets caught, he grouches at everything in general for twenty-one days, from the vantage point of a limber wheel.

Next comes "C. B." meaning "confined to barracks." This consists of staying in billets or barracks for twenty-four hours to seven days. You also get an occasional defaulters' parade and dirty jobs around the quarters.

The sergeant major keeps what is known as the crime sheet. When a man commits an offense, he is "crimed," that is, his name, number and offense is entered on the crime sheet. Next day at 9 a. m. he goes to the "orderly room" before the captain, who either punishes him with the "C. B." or sends him before the O. C. (officer commanding battalion). The captain of the company can only award "C. B."

Tommy many a time has thanked the king for making that provision in his regulations.

To gain the title of a "smart soldier," Tommy has to keep clear of the crime sheet, and you have to be darned smart to do it.

I have been on it a few times, mostly for "Yankee impudence."

During our stay of two weeks in rest billets our captain put us through a course of machine-gun drills, trying out new stunts and theories.

After parades were over, our gunners' crews got together and also tried out some theories of their own in reference to handling guns. These courses had nothing to do with the advancement of the war, consisted mostly of causing tricky jams in the gun, and then the rest of the crew would endeavor to locate as quickly as possible the cause of the stoppage. This amused them for a few days and then things came to a standstill.

One of the boys on my gun claimed that he could play a tune while the gun was actually firing, and demonstrated this fact one day on the target range. We were very enthusiastic and decided to become musicians.

After constant practice I became quite expert in the tune entitled "All Conductors Have Big Feet."

When I had mastered this tune, our two weeks' rest came to an end, and once again we went up the line and took over the sector in front of G-wood.

At this point the German trenches ran around the base of a hill, on the top of which was a dense wood. This wood was infested with machine guns, which used to traverse our lines at will, and sweep the streets of a little village, where we were billeted while in reserve.

There was one gun in particular which used to get our goats, it had the exact range of our "elephant" dugout entrance, and every morning, about the time rations were being brought up, its bullets would knock up the dust on the road; more than one Tommy went West or to Blighty by running into them.

This gun got our nerves on edge, and Fritz seemed to know it, because he never gave us an hour's rest. Our reputation as machine gunners was at stake; we tried various ruses to locate and put this gun out of action, but each one proved to be a failure, and Fritz became a worse nuisance than

ever. He was getting fresher and more careless every day, took all kinds of liberties with us—thought he was invincible.

Then one of our crew got a brilliant idea and we were all enthusiastic to put it to the test.

Here was his scheme:

When firing my gun, I was to play my tune, and Fritz, no doubt, would fall for it, try to imitate me as an added insult. This gunner and two others would try, by the sound, to locate Fritz and his gun. After having got the location, they would mount two machine guns in trees, in a little clump of woods to the left of our cemetery, and while Fritz was in the middle of his lesson, would open up and trust to luck. By our calculations, it would take at least a week to pull off the stunt.

If Fritz refused to swallow our bait, it would be impossible to locate his special gun, and that's the one we were after, because they all sound alike, a slow pop-pup-pup.

Our prestige was hanging by a thread. In the battalion we had to endure all kinds of insults and fresh remarks as to our ability in silencing Fritz. Even to the battalion that German gun was a sore spot.

Next day, Fritz opened up as usual. I let him fire away for a while and then butted in with my "pop-pup-pup-pup-pup." I kept this up quite a while, used two belts of ammunition. Fritz had stopped firing to listen. Then he started in; sure enough, he had fallen for our game, his gun was trying to imitate mine, but, at first he made a horrible mess of that tune. Again I butted in with a few bars and stopped. Then he tried to copy what I had played. He was a good sport all right, because his bullets were going away over our heads, must have been firing into the air. I commenced to feel friendly toward him.

This duet went on for five days. Fritz was a good pupil and learned rapidly. In fact, got better than his teacher. I commenced to feel jealous. When he had completely mastered the tune, he started sweeping the road again and we clicked it worse than ever. But he signed his death warrant by doing so, because my friendship turned to hate. Every time he fired he played that tune and we danced.

The boys in the battalion gave us the "Ha! Ha!" They weren't in on our little frameup.

The originator of the ruse and the other two gunners had Fritz's location taped to the minute; they mounted their two guns, and also gave me the range. The next afternoon was set for the grand finale.

Our three guns, with different elevations, had their fire so arranged, that, opening up together, their bullets would suddenly drop on Fritz like a hailstorm.

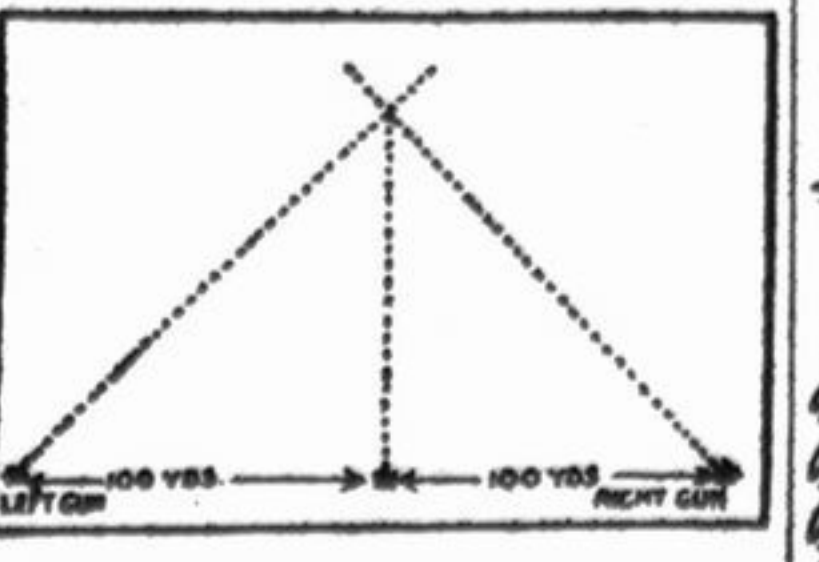
About three the next day, Fritz started "pop-popping" that tune. I blew a sharp blast on a whistle, it was the signal agreed upon; we turned loose and Fritz's gun suddenly stopped in the middle of a bar. We had cooked his goose, and our ruse had worked. After firing two belts each, to make sure of our job, we hurriedly dismounted our guns and took cover in the dugout. We knew what to expect soon. We didn't have to wait long, three salvos of "whizz-bangs" came over from Fritz's artillery, a further confirmation that we had sent that musical machine-gunner on his Westward-bound journey.

That gun never bothered us again. We were the heroes of the battalion. Our captain congratulated us, said it was a neat piece of work, and, consequently, we were all puffed up over the stunt.

There are several ways Tommy uses to disguise the location of his machine gun and get his range. Some of the most commonly used stunts are as follows:

At night, when he mounts his gun over the top of his trench and wants to get the range of Fritz's trench he adopts the method of what he terms "getting the sparks." This consists of firing bursts from his gun until the bullets hit the German barbed wire. He can tell when they are cutting the wire, because a bullet when it hits a wire throws out a blue electric spark. Machine-gun fire is very damaging to wire and causes many a wiring party to go out at night when it is quiet to repair the damage.

To disguise the flare of his gun at night when firing, Tommy uses what is called a flare protector. This is a stove-pipe arrangement which fits over the barrel casing of the gun and screens the sparks from the right and left, but not from the front. So Tommy, always resourceful, adopts this scheme: About three feet or less in front of the gun he



drives two stakes into the ground, about five feet apart. Across these stakes he stretches a curtain made out of empty sandbags ripped open. He soaks this curtain in water and fires through it. The water prevents it catching fire and effectively screens the flare of the firing gun from the enemy.

Sound is a valuable asset in locating a machine gun, but Tommy surmounts this obstacle by placing two machine guns about one hundred to one hundred and fifty yards apart. The gun on the right to cover with its fire the

sector of the left gun and the gun on the left to cover that of the right gun. This makes their fire cross; they are fired simultaneously.

By this method it sounds like one gun firing and gives the Germans the impression that the gun is firing from a point midway between the guns which are actually firing, and they accordingly shell that particular spot. The machine gunners chuckle and say, "Fritz is a brainy boy, not 'alf he ain't."

But the men in our lines at the spot being shelled curse Fritz for his ignorance and pass a few pert remarks down the line in reference to the machine gunners being "windy" and afraid to take their medicine.

(Continued Next Week)

HIS MAJESTY BUNKER BEAN

Bunker Bean, a personal stenographer to a millionaire, is small of stature and meek of manner. He wishes to be different and dreams of the time when he will be a swaggering man of the world,—when he will, as he puts it, have "suffered."

His bolstered self respect causes him to gain interest in the eyes of "The Flapper," youngest daughter of his boss, and their attending a ball game together at the invitation of her father, strengthens the bond between them. He buys a dog he has long coveted simply because its name is Napoleon, but, having delved into that gentlemen's career, especially in affairs of the heart, Bunker decides that he must go further into his past Napoleon aving been, as he puts it, "pretty raw."

In the meantime Bunker and the Flapper become very friends indeed and especially as Bunker is obliged to be at her home a great deal to take her father's dictation.

However, with the able engineering of the Flapper's far-seeing and worldly-wise grandmother, matters are soon brought to a climax and that night Bunker finds himself solemnly telling his mummy that he is engaged to be married—that the Flapper doesn't believe in long engagements—that she is going to break the news to her father.

Next morning Bunker learns that the Federal stock he bought is going up and that his boss is trying to buy his way from him. Quite casually Bunker tells the broker that he believes he will keep his, although frantic efforts to make him sell are brot to bear upon him. He made about forty thousand dollars on the deal which he accepted.

With the acquisition of his money, Bunker notices the increased respectfulness of the officer force and is little surprised therefore in view of the breath taking manner in which things have been happening to him of late, when the Flapper calls up to say, that they are to be married the next day, sailing immediately for Europe.

That night, however, the catastrophe, occurs! Napoleon, the dog, being of an inquisitive turn of mind, investigates thoroughly the stuffing of Ramesses the Great, not hesitating to spread same, which happens to be very modern excelsior, ruthlessly about the floor, exposing the manufacturer's trademark. The blow is nearly too much for Bunker and he sits brooding moodily all night over the fact that after all he is nothing more than an insignificant little stenographer. He goes through the wedding dazedly the next day but his queer conduct, especially when he is heard to murmur something about having been all kinds of kings just the same, so frighten the bride's family that they decide to accompany the pair to Europe.

Eventually on the last day out, he

realizes that when he thought he was a king he had acted in a kingly manner—and the opposite when he had thought he wasn't. So he decides to adopt his kingly manner again and sends for his wife. She comes and the two plan and successfully carry out their escape from the "taggers" as she ungratefully calls her worried family.

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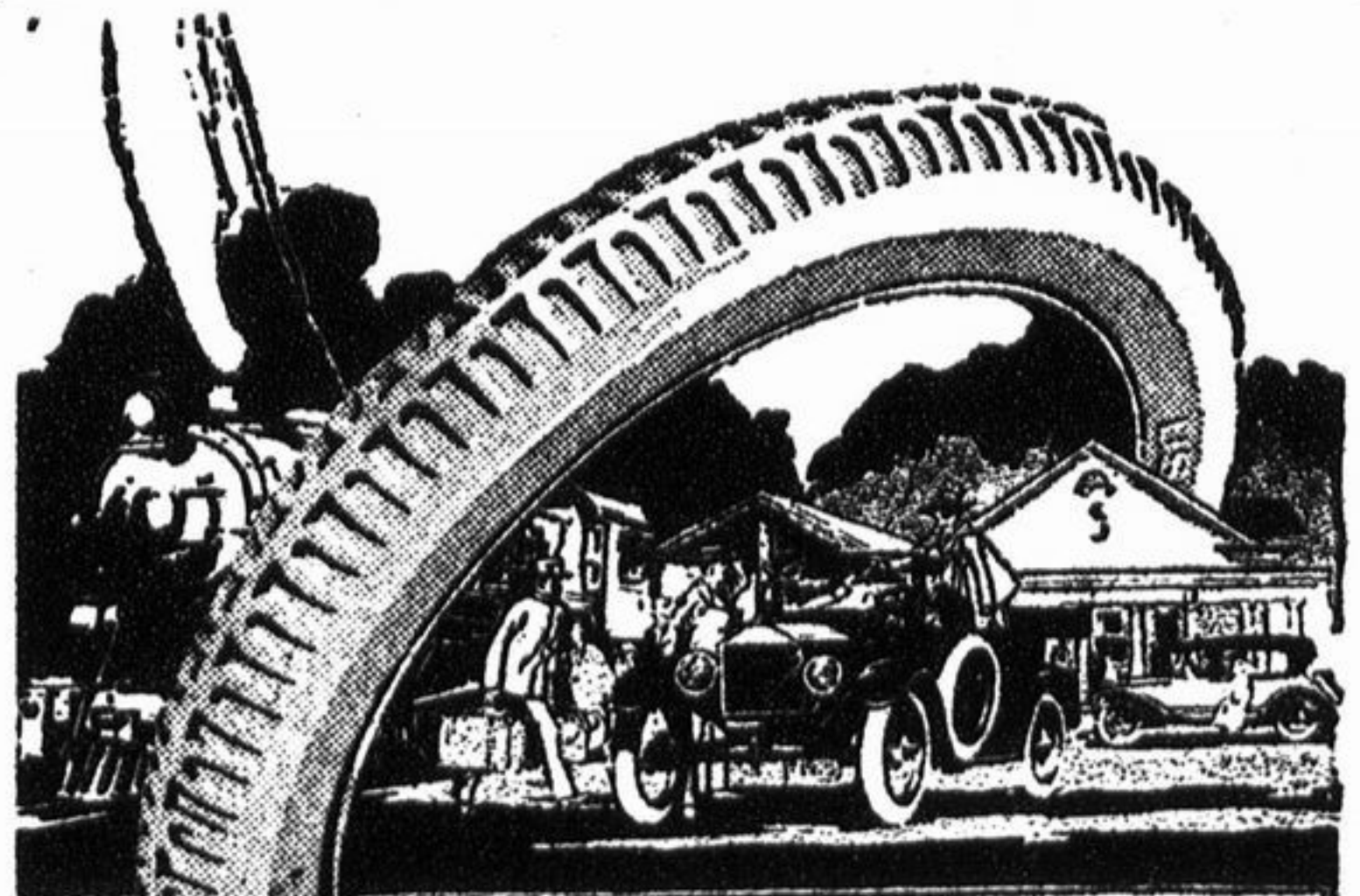
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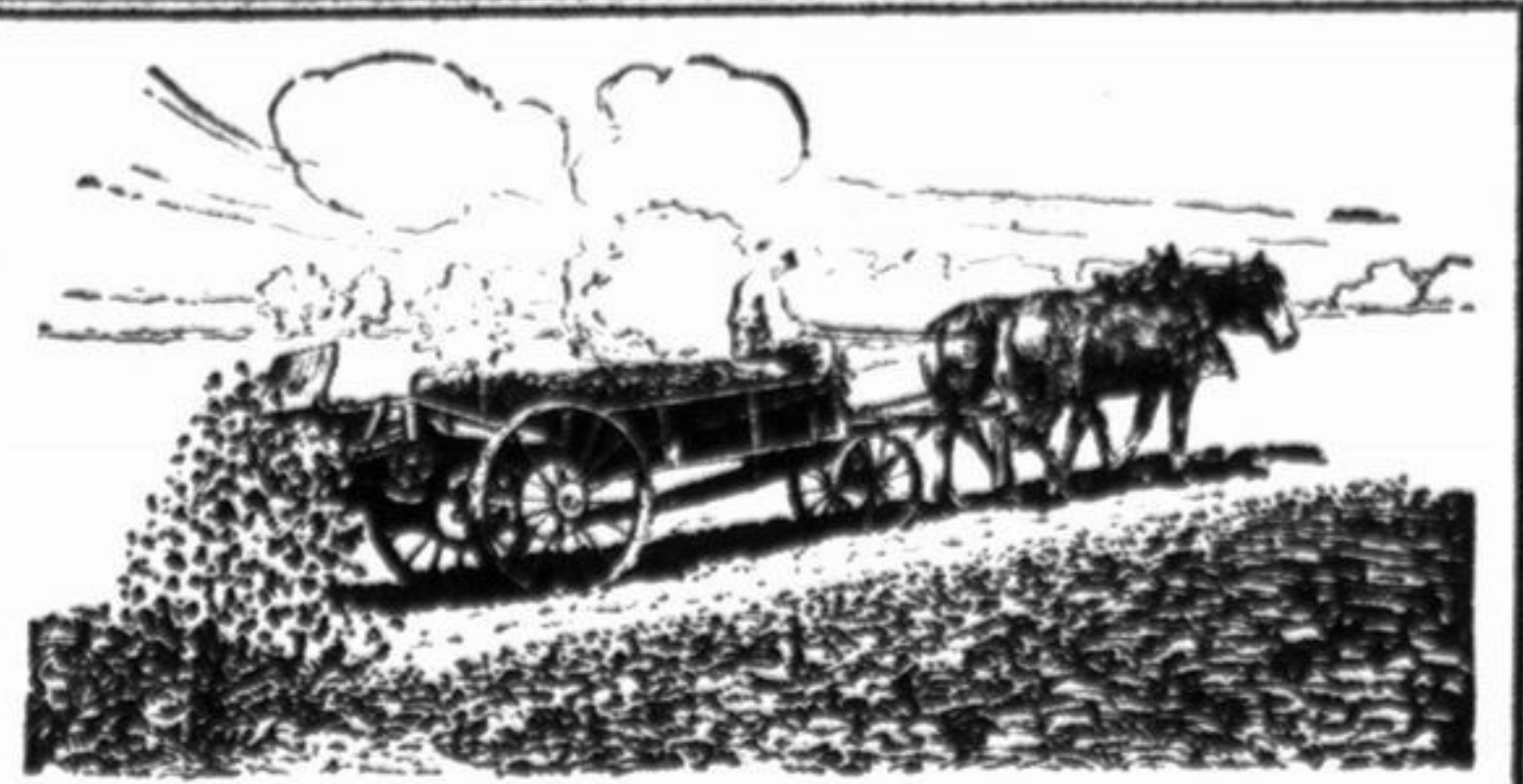
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