

Over the Top

By An American Soldier Who Went

ARTHUR GUY EMPEY Machine Gunner Serving in France

When we at last turned into the open road we were not so confident. On each side there had been a line of trees, but now, all that was left of them were torn and battered stumps.

I told the driver to throw in his speed clutch, as we must be in sight of the Germans. I knew the signs; that battery was ranging for us, and the quicker we got out of its zone of fire the better.

I preferred the German fire. In the back Atwell was holding onto the straps for dear life, and was singing at the top of his voice:

We beat you at the Marne. We beat you at the Aisne. We gave you hell at Neuve Chapelle. And here we are again.

Just then we hit a small shell hole and nearly capsized. Upon a loud yell from the rear I looked behind, and there was Atwell sitting in the middle of the road, shaking his fist at us. His equipment, which he had taken off upon getting into the ambulance, was strung out on the ground, and his rifle was in the ditch.

I shouted to the driver to stop, and in his nervousness he put on the brakes. We nearly pitched out head first, but the applying of those brakes saved our lives. The next instant there was a blinding flash and a deafening report. All that I remember is that I was flying through the air, and wondering if I would land in a soft spot. Then the lights went out.

When I came to, Atwell was pouring water on my head out of his bottle. On the other side of the road the corporal was sitting, rubbing a lump on his forehead with his left hand, while his right arm was bound up in a blood-soaked bandage. He was moaning very loudly. I had an awful headache and the skin on the left side of my face was full of gravel and the blood was trickling from my nose.

But that ambulance was turned over in the ditch and was perforated with holes from fragments of the shell. One of the front wheels was slowly revolving, so I could not have been "out" for a long period.

The shells were still screaming overhead, but the battery had raised its fire and they were bursting in a little wood about half a mile from us. Atwell spoke up. "I wish that officer hadn't wished us the best of luck. Then he commenced swearing. I couldn't help laughing, though my head was nigh to bursting.

Slowly rising to my feet I felt myself all over to make sure that there were no broken bones. But outside of a few bruises and scratches I was all right. The corporal was still moaning, but more from shock than pain. A shell splinter had gone through the flesh of his right forearm. Atwell and I, from our first-aid pouches, put a tourniquet on his arm to stop the bleeding and then gathered up our equipment.

We realized that we were in a dangerous spot. At any minute a shell might drop on the road and finish us off. The village we had left was not very far, so we told the corporal he had better go back to it and get his arm dressed, and then report the fact of the destruction of the ambulance to the military police. He was well able to walk, so he set off in the direction of the village, while Atwell and I continued our way on foot.

Without further mishap we arrived at our destination, and reported to brigade headquarters for rations and billets. That night we slept in the battalion sergeant major's dugout. The next morning I went to a first-aid post and had the gravel picked out of my face. The instructions we received from division headquarters read that we were out to catch spies, patrol trenches, search German dead, reconnoiter in No Man's Land, and take part in trench raids and prevent the robbing of the dead.

I had a pass which would allow me to go anywhere at any time in the sector of the line held by our division. It gave me authority to stop and search ambulances, motor lorries, wagons and even officers and soldiers, whenever my suspicions deemed it necessary. Atwell and I were allowed to work together or singly—it was left to our judgment. We decided to team up.

Atwell was a good companion and very entertaining. He had an utter contempt for danger, but was not foolhardy. At swearing he was a wonder. A cavalry regiment would have been proud of him. Though born in England, he had spent several years in New York. He was about six feet one, and as strong as an ox.

We took up our quarters in a large dugout of the royal engineers, and mapped out our future actions. This dugout was on the edge of a large cemetery, and several times at night in returning to it, we got many a fall stumbling over the graves of English, French and Germans. Atwell on these occasions never indulged in swearing,

though at any other time, at the least stumble, he would turn the air blue. A certain section of our trenches was held by the Royal Irish rifles. For several days a very strong rumor went the rounds that a German spy was in our midst. This spy was supposed to be dressed in the uniform of a British staff officer. Several stories had been told about an officer wearing a red band around his cap, who patrolled the front-line and communication trenches asking suspicious questions as to location of batteries, machine-gun emplacements, and trench mortars. If a shell dropped in a battery, on a machine gun or even near a dugout, this spy was blamed.

The rumor gained such strength that an order was issued for all troops to immediately place under arrest anyone answering to the description of the spy.

Atwell and I were on the qui vive. We constantly patrolled the trenches at night, and even in the day, but the spy always eluded us.

One day while in a communication trench, we were horrified to see our brigadier general, Old Pepper, being brought down by a big private of the Royal Irish rifles. The general was walking in front, and the private with fixed bayonet was following in the rear.

We saluted as the general passed us. The Irishman had a broad grin on his face and we could scarcely believe our eyes—the general was under arrest. After passing a few feet beyond us, the general turned, and sold in a wrathful voice to Atwell:

"Tell this d--n fool who I am. He's arrested me as a spy."

Atwell was speechless. The sentry butted in with: "None o' that gassin' out o' you. Back to headquarters you goes, Mr. Fritz. Open that face o' yours again, an' I'll dent in your napper with the butt o' me rifle."

The general's face was a sight to behold. He was fairly boiling over with rage, but he shut up.

Atwell tried to get in front of the sentry to explain to him that it really was the general he had under arrest, but the sentry threatened to run his bayonet through him, and would have done it, too. So Atwell stepped aside, and remained silent. I was nearly bursting with suppressed laughter. One word, and I would have exploded. It is not exactly diplomatic to laugh at your general in such a predicament.

The sentry and his prisoner arrived at brigade headquarters with disastrous results to the sentry.

The joke was that the general had personally issued the order for the spy's arrest. It was a habit of the general to walk through the trenches on rounds of inspection, unattended by any of his staff. The Irishman, being new in the regiment, had never seen the general before, so when he came across him alone in a communication trench, he promptly put him under arrest. Brigadier generals wear a red band around their caps.

Next day we passed the Irishman tied to the wheel of a limber, the beginning of his sentence of twenty-one days, field punishment No. 1. Never before have I seen such a woe-gone expression on a man's face.

For several days Atwell and I made ourselves scarce around brigade headquarters. We did not want to meet the general.

The spy was never caught.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The Firing Squad.

A few days later I had orders to report back to divisional headquarters, about thirty kilos behind the line. I reported to the A. P. M. (assistant provost marshal). He told me to report to billet No. 78 for quarters and rations.

It was about eight o'clock at night and I was tired and soon fell asleep in the straw of the billet. It was a miserable night outside, cold, and a drizzly rain was falling.

About two in the morning I was awakened by some one shaking me by the shoulder. Opening my eyes I saw a regimental sergeant major bending over me. He had a lighted lantern in his right hand. I started to ask him what was the matter, when he put his finger to his lips for silence and whispered:

"Get on your equipment, and, without any noise, come with me."

This greatly mystified me, but I obeyed his order.

Outside of the billet, I asked him what was up, but he shut me up with: "Don't ask questions, it's against orders. I don't know myself."

It was raining like the mischief. We splashed along a muddy road for about fifteen minutes, finally stopping at the entrance of what must have been an old barn. In the darkness, I could hear pigs grunting, as if they had just been disturbed. In front of the door stood an officer in a mack (mackintosh). The R. S. M. went up to him, whispered something, and then left. This officer called to me, asked my name, number and regiment, at the same time, in the light of a lantern he was holding, making a notation in a little book.

When he had finished writing, he whispered:

"Go into that billet and wait orders, and no talking. Understand?"

I stumbled into the barn and sat on the floor in the darkness. I could see no one, but could hear men breathing and moving; they seemed nervous and restless. I knew I was.

During my wait, three other men entered. Then the officer poked his head in the door and ordered:

"Fall in, outside the billet, in single rank."

We fell in, standing at ease. Then he commanded:

"Squad—Should Number!" "There were twelve of us. "Right—Turn! Left—Wheel! Quick—March!" And away we went. The rain was trickling down my back and I was shivering from the cold.

With the officer leading, we must have marched over an hour, plowing through the mud and occasionally stumbling into a shell hole in the road.



Buried With Honors.

when suddenly the officer made a left wheel, and we found ourselves in a sort of enclosed courtyard.

The dawn was breaking and the rain had ceased.

In front of us were four stacks of rifles, three to a stack.

The officer brought us to attention and gave the order to unlace arms. We each took a rifle. Giving us "Stand at ease," in a nervous and shaky voice, he informed:

"Men, you are here on a very solemn duty. You have been selected as a firing squad for the execution of a soldier, who, having been found guilty of a grievous crime against king and country, has been regularly and duly tried and sentenced to be shot at 3:29 a. m. this date. This sentence has been approved by the reviewing authority and ordered carried out. It is our duty to carry on with the sentence of the court.

"There are twelve rifles, one of which contains a blank cartridge, the other eleven containing ball cartridges. Every man is expected to do his duty and fire to kill. Take your orders from me, Squad—Should Number!"

We came to attention. Then he left. My heart was of lead and my knees shook.

After standing at "attention" for what seemed a week, though in reality it could not have been over five minutes, we heard a low whispering in our rear and footsteps on the stone flagging of the courtyard.

Our officer reappeared and in a low, but firm voice, ordered:

"About—Turn!"

We turned about. In the gray light of dawn, a few yards in front of me, I could make out a brick wall. Against this wall was a dark form with a white square pinned on its breast. We were supposed to aim at this square. To the right of the form I noticed a white spot on the wall. This would be my target. "Ready! Aim! Fire!"

The dark form sank into a huddled heap. My bullet sped on its way, and hit the whitish spot on the wall; I could see the splinters fly. Some one else had received the rifle containing the blank cartridge, but my mind was at ease, there was no blood of a Tommy on my hands.

"Order—Arms! About—Turn! Pile—Arms! Stand—Clear."

The stacks were re-formed.

"Quick—March! Right—Wheel!" and we left the scene of execution behind us.

It was now daylight. After marching about five minutes, we were dismissed with the following instructions from the officer in command:

"Return, alone, to your respective companies, and remember, no talking about this affair, or else it will go hard with the guilty ones."

We needed no urging to get away. I did not recognize any of the men on the firing squad; even the officer was a stranger to me.

The victim's relations and friends in Blighty will never know that he was executed; they will be under the impression that he died doing his bit for king and country.

In the public casualty lists his name will appear under the caption "Accidentally Killed," or "Died."

The day after the execution I received orders to report back to the line, and to keep a still tongue in my head.

Executions are a part of the day's work, but the part we hated most of all, I think—certainly the saddest. The British war department is thought by many people to be composed of rigid regulations all wound around with red tape. But it has a heart, and one of the evidences of this is the consideration in which an execution is conceived and reported to the relative of the unfortunate man. They never know the truth. He is listed in the bulletins as among the "accidentally killed."

In the last ten years I have several times read stories in magazines of cowards changing, in a charge, to heroes. I used to laugh at it. It seemed easy for story-writers, but I said, "Men aren't made that way? But over in France I learned once that the streak of yellow can turn all white. I picked up the story, bit by bit, from the captain of the company, the sentries who guarded the poor fellow, as

well as from my own observations. At first I did not realize the whole of his story, but after a week of investigation it stood out as clear in my mind as the mountains of my native West in the spring sunshine. It impressed me so much that I wrote it all down in rest billets on scraps of odd paper. The incidents are, as I say, every bit true; the feelings of the man are true—I know from all I underwent in the fighting over in France.

We will call him Albert Lloyd. That wasn't his name, but it will do: Albert Lloyd was what the world terms a coward.

In London they called him a slacker. His country had been at war nearly eighteen months, and still he was not in khaki.

He had no good reason for not enlisting, being alone in the world, having been educated in an orphan asylum, and there being no one dependent upon him for support. He had no good position to lose, and there was no sweetheart to tell him with her lips to go, while her eyes pleaded for him to stay.

Every time he saw a recruiting sergeant he'd slink around the corner out of sight, with a terrible fear gnawing at his heart. When passing the big recruiting posters, and on his way to business and back he passed many, he would pull down his cap and look the other way from that awful fnger pointing at him, under the caption, "Your King and Country Need You," or the boring eyes of Kitchener, which burned into his very soul, causing him to shudder.

Then the Zeppelin raids—during them, he used to crouch in a corner of his boarding-house cellar, whimpering like a whipped puppy and calling upon the Lord to protect him.

Even his landlady despised him, although she had to admit that he was "good pay."

He very seldom read the papers, but one morning the landlady put the morning paper at his place before he came down to breakfast. Taking his seat he read the glaring headline, "Conscription Bill Passed," and nearly fainted. Excusing himself, he stumbled upstairs to his bedroom, with the horror of it gnawing into his vitals.

Having saved up a few pounds, he decided not to leave the house, and to sham sickness so he stayed in his room, and had the landlady serve his meals there.

Every time there was a knock at the door he trembled all over, imagining it was a policeman who had come to take him away to the army.

One morning his fears were realized. Sure enough, there stood a policeman with the fatal paper. Taking it in his trembling hand he read that he, Albert Lloyd, was ordered to report himself to the nearest recruiting station for physical examination. He reported immediately, because he was afraid to disobey.

The doctor looked with approval upon Lloyd's six feet of physical perfection, and thought what a fine guardsman he would make, but examined his heart twice before he passed him as "physically fit"; it was beating so fast.

From the recruiting depot Lloyd was taken, with many others, in charge of a sergeant, to the training depot at Aldershot, where he was given an outfit of khaki, and drew his other equipment. He made a fine-looking soldier except for the slight shrinking in his shoulders and the hunted look in his eyes.

At the training depot it does not take long to find out a man's character and Lloyd was promptly dubbed "windy." In the English army "windy" means cowardly.

(Continued Next Week)

In Praise of Music.

Music adds nothing but good; subtracts the evil; multiplies that which we already have; discounts our ailments and compounds all of our interest. If you believe this is true, "push" music. Aid the choir, choral and orchestral societies. Sympathize with and in every way support public-school music.

A foreign traveler in our country said he was deeply impressed with our silence. He heard no reapers sing in the field, he heard many a fire-carol, but no human songs. That reminds me of the old saying: "Blessed is the man who sings at his work." Take an interest in creating a musical atmosphere in the home, and soon America will be singing and we shall be able to take in music not only by the small channel of the ear, but through every pore of our bodies straight to the root of our souls.—The Musician.

Practice Handwriting.

For years business people have depended on the typewriting machine for their letters, and have neglected their handwriting. The dearth of machines is now being generally felt, especially in commercial houses, and once more it has become necessary to be able to write clearly and legibly.

For the first time the other day the head of a big business firm took the trouble to get specimens of the handwriting of his staff of female clerks. There were scarcely six who could write a really good hand. "People won't take the time to read a business letter unless it is legibly written," was his querulous comment.

Writer's Cramp.

Writer's cramp is a disease to which those who do much writing are liable toward middle age, and a person afflicted with it has no complete control over the muscles of the thumb, middle and fore-finger. The typewriter has proved the best resource of those who suffer from the ailment.



Saturday, July 13th

Matinee 3:15 Night 7:15 to 11:20 continuous

Jewell feature "The Price of a Good Time" Britain's Bulwarks Hearst - Pathe News Seats: Matinee, all 10 cents net; Night 11 & 20 cents net.

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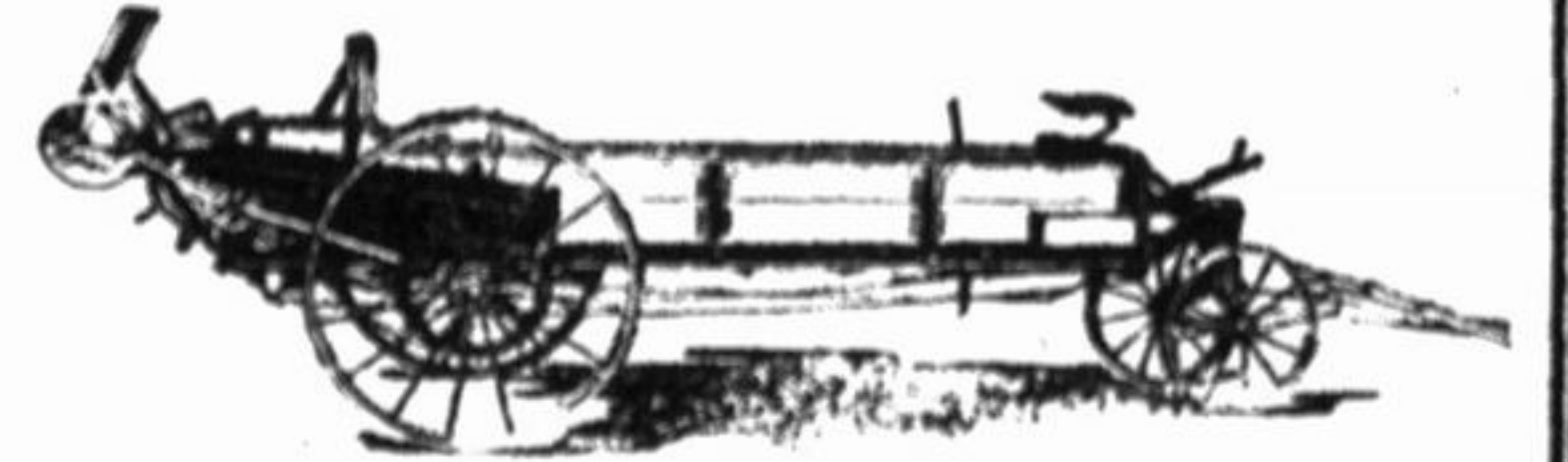
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Growing crops must have food—plant food—which they can get only from the soil. Naturally a well-fed crop does better, produces more, than one that is underfed. The only way to feed the crop is to feed the soil, and the easiest, best way to feed the soil is to spread stable manure properly.

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