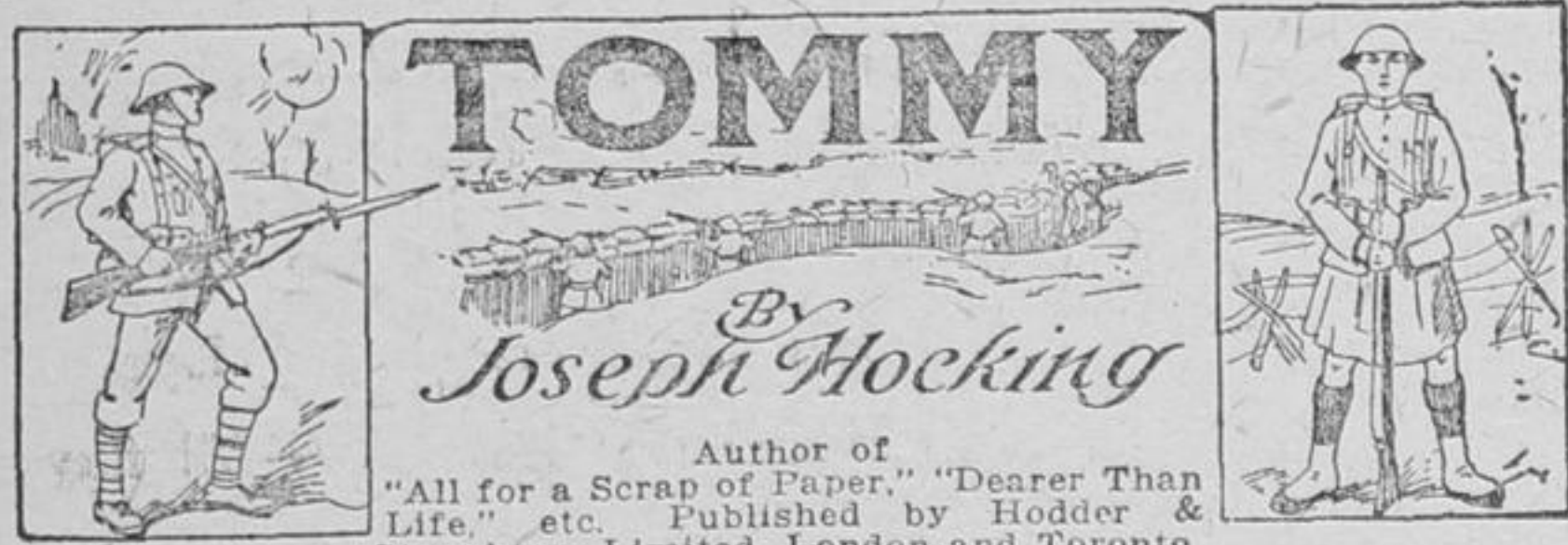


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TOMMY

By Joseph Hocking

Author of
"All for a Scrap of Paper," "Dearer Than
Life," etc. Published by Hodder &
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CHAPTER IV.—(Cont'd.)

They spent all the night in the troop-train, which was crowded almost to suffocation. Where they were going they didn't now, scarcely cared. Sometimes they were drawn up to a siding where they would stay for hours, then the train crawled on again. Presently the morning broke and Tom saw a flat and what seemed to him, after Surrey, an uninteresting piece of country. Everything was strange to him, even the trees looked different from those he had seen in Surrey. On and on the train crawled, until presently they had orders to alight.

It was now early morning, and after breakfast they were formed in marching order. Tom took but little notice of the country through which they marched, except that they were on a straight road, which was paved in the middle. As the day advanced the sun grew hot and scorching, but the men marched on uncomplainingly; there was little merriment, but much thought. Presently noon came, and again they stopped for food, after which there was another march. By this time Tom realised that he was indeed in the zone of war. He saw what looked to him miles of motor wagons filled with food and munitions, numbers of ambulance wagons marked with the Red Cross. More than one body of horse soldiers passed him, and again he saw numbers of men bivouacked near him; but everywhere there were soldiers, soldiers. Tom could not understand it, it was all so different from what he expected, neither could he see any order or purpose in that which was taking place around him. There was activity and movement everywhere, but he could co-ordinate nothing, he was simply bewildered.

Towards evening there was another resting-time, and each man gladly threw himself full length on the grass. For a moment there was a silence, then Tom heard a sound which gave him a sickening sensation; he felt a sinking, too, at the pit of his stomach: it was the boom, boom, boom of guns. "Look at you' airship in the sky!" cried one of the men. Each eye was turned towards it, then they heard the boom of guns again, after which there were sheets of fire around the aeroplane, and afterwards little clouds of smoke formed themselves.

"I am getting near at last," thought Tom. "I wonder now—I wonder—"

CHAPTER V.

Tom discovered presently that his destination was the Ypres salient, one of the most "unhealthy" places, to use the term in favor among the soldiers, in the whole of the English battle line. Here the most tremendous battle ever fought in our British Army took place—indeed, one of the most tremendous battles in the history of the world. A sergeant who was in a garrulous mood described it to Tom with a great deal of spirit.

"Yes," he said, "you have come to an unhealthy spot; still it may be good for you. The blessed Huns thought they were going to break through here about last September when the battle of Wipers was fought. They had six hundred thousand men to our hundred and fifty thousand. Then that blooming Kaiser made up his mind that he would break through our lines, and get to Calais. Yes, it was a touch and go with us. Fancy four to one, and they had all the advantage in big guns and ammunition. You think those big guns? Wait till you have heard Jack Johnson and Black Maria. Talk about hell! Hell was never as bad as the battle of Wipers. I thought we were licked once. I was in the part where our line was the thinnest, and we saw 'em coming towards us in crowds; there seemed to be millions of 'em; we had to rake out every cook and bottle-washer on the show. Lots of our men were fresh to the job, too, and had never smelt powder, or felt the touch of steel. But, by gosh, we let 'em know! Four to one, my boy, and we licked 'em, in spite of their lig' gun, and their boasting. Aren't you proud of being a British Tommy?"

Tom listened with wide, staring eyes and compressed lips. There within a mile or two of the battle line he could picture all of which the sergeant spoke. As he looked he could discern too, here and there, dotted along this brown line, clouds of black smoke. All around him our guns were booming, while the distant sounds of the German guns reached him.

"Ay, it's a bit unhealthy," went on the sergeant, "but you will get used to it after a bit. There, hear that?" Tom listened and heard the screaming of a shell in the air; the note it made was at first low, but it rose higher and higher and then dropped again.

"When the note gets to about B flat," said the sergeant, "you may know it's soon going to fall, and as soon as it has touched the ground the shell bursts and tears a big hole up."

"Are many killed?" asked Tom.

"Ay, there's a good lot of casualties every day, but not so much as there was at the second battle of Wipers. That was fair terrible. You see, the Germans could not drive us back nor break our lines. That was why they started bombarding the city. I was here and saw it. Many you should have heard the women screaming, and seen the people flying for their lives. Whole streets of houses were burning, and all the time shells were falling and bursting. How many people were killed here God only knows, but there must have been hundreds of women and children. But what did those dirty swine of Germans care! They could not break our lines, and they had lost a hundred and fifty thousand men, so they turned their big guns upon the city. 'We can kill Belgian women and children, anyhow,' they said, 'and we can smash up the old town.' Are you a bit jumpy?"

"No n-n-no;—that is, a bit," said Tom.

"Ot, its quite quiet now," replied the sergeant. "I will walk through with you if you like and show you round. This is the great square; one of the biggest in the world. I saw it before it was bombarded; the Cathedral and the Cloth Hall were just wonderful; see what they are now! knocked into smithereens. See the trees around, how they are twisted and burnt? That house there I saw shelled myself. I had got a bit used to the shelling by that time, but I tell you it gave me a turn. It was the biggest house in the Square, and a great bomb caught it fair in the face; it seemed as though the whole world was shaking, and the noise fair deafened you. The house went down as though it were cardboard, and other houses around fell as though to keep it company, while others caught fire. Ay, they're sweet creatures, are those German swine."

"Doan't you hate 'em?" asked Tom.

"Hate 'em?" said the sergeant; "well, I don't know. Mind you, they are fine soldiers, and brave men too, or at least they seem brave; but it's discipline does it. They are just like machinery. Once when I was right in the middle of it, they attacked in close formation, and we turned our machine-guns on 'em. Ever seen a mowing machine in a wheat field? ever seen the wheat fall before the knives? Well, that's how they fell. Hundreds upon hundreds; but still they came on. Just as fast as one lot was killed, the others, knowing that they were going to certain death, came on, thinking they would wear us down by sheer numbers."

"Did they?" asked Tom.

"No, that time they didn't," replied the sergeant, "but another scrap I was in they did. That is their plan, you know; it is terribly costly, but when it succeeds it works havoc."

"Have you been wounded at all?" asked Tom.

(To be continued.)

Use of Rice in United States.

The increasingly important part rice is playing in feeding the people of the United States is shown in figures just compiled by the United States Food Administration. The production for 1914-1915 amounted to 1,064,205,000 pounds, with a per capita consumption of 11.34 pounds. This was increased in the 1916-1917 crop to 1,831,590,000 pounds, with a per capita consumption of 17.33 pounds. The large increase in consumption during the past year undoubtedly has direct relation to the high price of potatoes and wheat. The rice crop of India for the past year showed an increase of 1,255,000 tons.

"How many revolutions does the earth make in a day? It's your turn, Willie Smith." "You can't tell, teacher, till you see the morning paper."

INSANITY OF U-BOAT CREWS

ONE FACTOR IN THE TERRIBLE STRUGGLE.

German Man Power Waning and Need of Repairs Hampers Sub- marine Fleet.

Unrestricted submarinings were started seven months ago. A great deal has been learned by the British in that period, writes a London correspondent. A review of the life and death struggle which has been in progress suggests interesting questions. For instance: Why did the ratio of shipping losses show a great reduction during the season of long days, clear skies and bright moonlight? Why were German expectations so disappointed by the results of U-boat warfare during the summer that a political crisis in Germany was produced?

There is no doubt that the Germans are turning out new submarines faster than the Allies are destroying them. Despite this, there are fewer submarines out in the fighting areas than three months ago. Probably not all the reasons for this state of affairs are known. Some of them have been made clear.

Manning submarines, with efficient crews is a hard task. Underwater cruising is a nerve racking business for men and officers alike. The commander never goes to his conning tower without the realization that it may be shot away with him in it. The men know that when their boat dives it may never come up again.

"Mystery Ships."

There is no sleep, no rest, no relaxation of strain from the moment the cruise begins. Competent authorities believe the Germans confront a harder task in manning than they do in building submarines.

A considerable number of submarine crews have been captured and sent to prison camps in England. I am not permitted to tell the proportion of these men who have shortly gone stark mad; but it is such as to testify eloquently to the horrors of their work.

Everybody has read about the "mystery ships" which have been sent out from British ports in great numbers. They look like merchantmen, sail the courses of merchantmen, and appear to the submarine commander, observing through a periscope, to be easy marks. But they are anything else.

By the time Herr Submarine Commander gets within comfortable range to take a sure shot the mystery ship has unmasked a bristling array of guns, big and little, and expert naval gunners are churning the whole surface around the submarine with shells. There's only one thing for the submarine to do, and that's to dive instantly, and it is lucky if it is quick enough.

Men and U-Boats Strained.

Between the mystery ships, which are peculiarly dangerous because any recklessness in dealing with them is likely to result fatally, and the flocks of destroyers that nowadays invest the areas where the submarines do most of their work things are decidedly lively for the submarine commander and his crew. The ideal submarine commander was described the other day by an officer of large experience in the danger zones as "a man who hasn't any nerves, who in all circumstances can be relied on to act without stopping to think. He mustn't stop to think. He must perform instantly and must do the right thing."

"To command one of these mystery ships is about the hardest task that is put up to a captain nowadays," the officer went on. "It can be imagined what a nerve destroying time he puts in. Yet his occupation is not to be compared for sheer constant, man kill-

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ing strain to that of the submarine commander on a cruise. I think there are still two or three commanders of mystery ships in continuous service after five months of it; the rest of them break down and have to take long leaves.

"If it wears out the men who have the easier task at such a rate as this it is not hard to understand the effect on submarine officers. Their men become unmanageable, and the officers have to be taken out of the service after a strictly limited period."

Life of U-Boat is Short.

Another difficulty that the Germans more and more experience is in keeping the submarines in good order. A submarine is an extremely delicate contrivance. No other vessel is subjected to the hard and continuous wear which it must live through.

The working life of a submarine is necessarily short, and when it is in port it requires endless attention, a complete overhauling and restoration. As the vessels grow older the requirements for repairs compel them to stay longer and longer in port. That is exactly what is making trouble for the German naval authorities now. It is possible that a further complication is presented by the difficulty of getting certain materials into Germany, but this is largely conjecture.

The decreasing efficiency of the older submarines together with the almost impossibility of finding skilled crews fast enough is supposed to account in the main for the fact that with a larger number of submarines at their disposal the Germans are not able to keep so many on the fighting line as formerly. Thus it may be said that while they have more submarines with every month—it is understood that they are turning out about a dozen of them monthly—the wear and tear is so great that the increased number are not able to cover as many miles or spend as many days cruising as the smaller number of new vessels formerly in the service.

Limits to Submarine Warfare.

There are some pretty distinct limits to the capacity for producing, manning and upkeeping submarines. Despite the fact that some German authorities have tried to give the impression that a general building programme involving both warships and merchant vessels is being carried on in Germany, the best information is that nearly all the maritime construction capacity of the empire is being devoted to turning out new submarines and maintaining the old ones in working condition.

The capacity to turn out new boats is bound to suffer increasingly as greater and greater demands are made

on the shipyards for the repair of old vessels. All these elements enter into any computation dealing with the Germans' capacity to carry on the submarine warfare indefinitely and their chances of making it successful.

SATAN QUITS HIS JOB.

The Devil sat by the lake of fire on a pile of sulphur kegs; His head was bowed upon his breast, his tail between his legs. A look of shame was on his face, the sparks dripped from his eye.

"I'm down and out," the Devil said; —he said it with a sob; "There are others that outclass me and I want to quit the job.

Hell isn't in it with the land that lies along the Rhine; I'm old and out of date and therefore I resign.

One Krupp munition maker with his bloody shot and shell Knows more about damnation than all the imps of Hell.

Give my job to Kaiser Bill, or to Ferdinand the Tsar, Or to Sultan Abdul Hamid, or some such man of war.

I hate to leave the old home, the spot I love so well.

But I feel that I'm not up to date in the art of running Hell,

And the Devil spat a squirt of steam at a brimstone bumble bee,

And muttered, "I'm outclassed by the Hohenzollern deviltry."

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