



"OVER THE TOP"

AN AMERICAN SOLDIER WHO WENT

ARTHUR GUY EMPEY

MACHINE GUNNER, SERVING IN FRANCE

(Continued from last week.)
SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—Fired by the news of the sinking of the Lusitania by a German submarine, Arthur Guy Empey, an American, leaves his office in Jersey City and goes to England where he enlists in the British army.

CHAPTER II—After a period of training, Empey volunteers for immediate service and soon finds himself in rest billets "somewhere in France," where he first makes the acquaintance of the ever-present "cooties."

CHAPTER III—Empey attends his first church services at the front while a German Fokker circles over the congregation.

CHAPTER IV—Empey's command goes into the front-line trenches and is under fire for the first time.

CHAPTER V—Empey learns to adopt the motto of the British Tommy, "If you are going to get it, you'll get it, so never worry!"

CHAPTER VI—Back in rest billets, Empey gets his first experience as a mess orderly.

CHAPTER VII—Empey learns how the British soldiers are fed.

CHAPTER VIII—Back in the front-line trench, Empey sees his first friend of the trenches "go West."

CHAPTER IX—Empey makes his first visit to a dugout in "Suicide Ditch."

CHAPTER X—Empey learns what constitutes a "day's work" in the front-line trench.

CHAPTER XI—Empey goes "over the top" for the first time in a charge on the German trenches and is wounded by a bayonet thrust.

CHAPTER XII—Empey joins the "suicide club" as the bombing squad is called.

CHAPTER XIII—Each Tommy gets an advanced bath.

CHAPTER XIV—Empey helps dig an advanced trench under German fire.

CHAPTER XV—On "listening post" in No Man's Land.

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 s'y, 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.

CHAPTER XVI.

Battery D 238.

The day after this I received the glad tidings that I would occupy the machine gunners' dugout right near the advanced artillery observation post. This dugout was a roomy affair, dry as tinder, and real cots in it. These cots had been made by the R. E.'s who had previously occupied the dugout. I was the first to enter and promptly made a signboard with my name and number on it and suspended it from the foot of the most comfortable cot therein.

In the trenches it is always "first come, first served," and this is lived up to by all.

Two R. F. A. men (Royal Field Artillery) from the nearby observation post were allowed the privilege of stopping in this dugout when off duty.

One of these men, Bombardier Wilson by name, who belonged to Battery D 238, seemed to take a liking to me, and I returned this feeling.

In two days' time we were pretty chummy, and he told me how his battery in the early days of the war had put over a stunt on Old Pepper, and had gotten away with it.

I will endeavor to give the story as far as memory will permit in his own words:

"I came out with the first expeditionary force, and, like all the rest, thought we would have the enemy licked in jig time, and be able to eat Christmas dinner at home. Well, so far, I have eaten two Christmas dinners in the trenches, and am liable to eat two more, the way things are

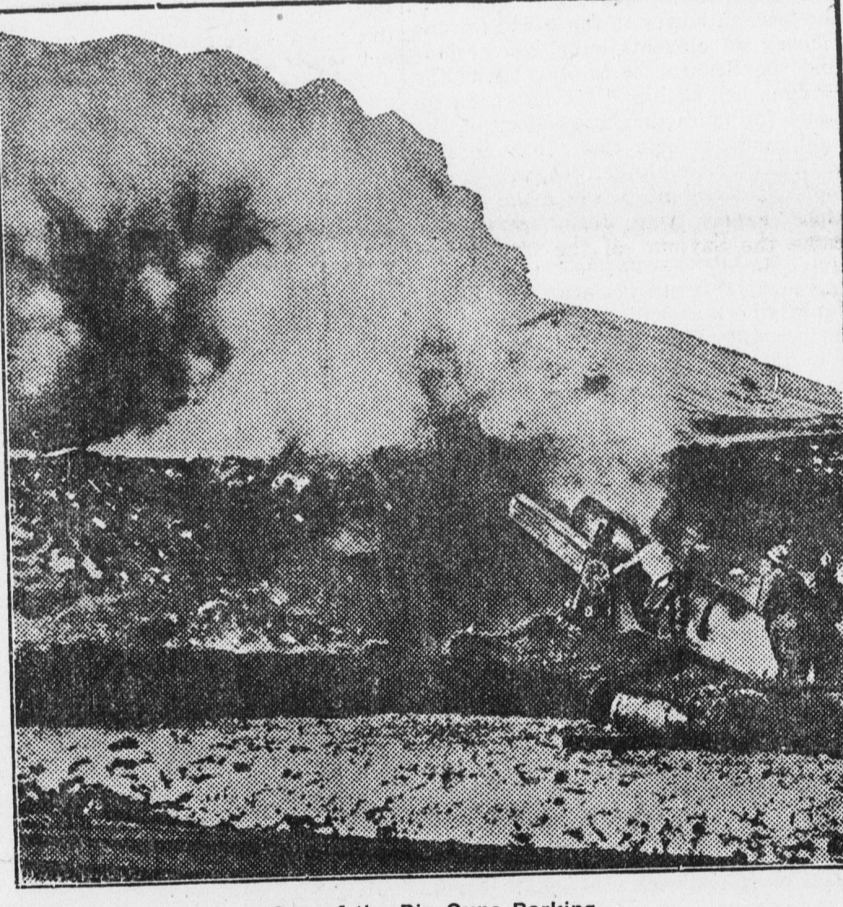
pointing. That is, if Fritz don't drop a 'whizz-bang' on me, and send me to Blighty. Sometimes I wish I would get hit, because it's no great picnic out here, and twenty-two months of it makes you fed up.

"It's fairly cushy now compared to what it used to be, although I admit this trench is a trifle rough. Now, we send over five shells to their one. We are getting our own back, but in the early days it was different. Then you had to take everything without reply. In fact, we would get twenty shells in return for every one we sent over. Fritz seemed to enjoy it, but we British didn't; we were the sufferers. Just one casualty after another. Sometimes whole platoons would disappear, especially when a 'Jack Johnson' plunked into their middle. It got so bad that a fellow, when writing home, wouldn't ask for any cigarettes to be sent out, because he was afraid he wouldn't be there to receive them.

"After the drive to Paris was turned back, trench warfare started. Our general grabbed a map, drew a pencil across it, and said, 'Dig here.' Then he went back to his tea, and Tommy armed himself with a pick and shovel and started digging. He's been digging ever since.

"Of course we dug those trenches at night, but it was hot work, what with the rifle and machine-gun fire. The stretcher bearers worked harder than the diggers.

"Those trenches, bloomin' ditches, I call them, were nightmares. They were only about five feet deep, and you used



One of the Big Guns Barking.

to get the backache from bending down. It wasn't exactly safe to stand upright, either, because as soon as your napper showed over the top a bullet would bounce off it, or else come so close it would make your hair stand.

"We used to fill sandbags and stick them on top of the parapet to make it higher, but no use; they would be there about an hour and then Fritz would turn loose and blow them to bits. My neck used to be sore from ducking shells and bullets.

"Where my battery was stationed a hasty trench had been dug, which the boys nicknamed 'Suicide ditch,' and, believe me, Yank, this was the original 'Suicide ditch.' All the others are imitations.

"When a fellow went into that trench it was an even gamble that he would come out on a stretcher. At one time a Scotch battalion held it, and when they heard the betting was even money that they'd come out on stretchers, they grabbed all the bets in sight. Like a lot of bally idiots, several of the battery men fell for their game, and put up real money. The 'Jocks' suffered a lot of casualties, and the prospects looked bright for the battery men to collect some easy money. So when the battalion was relieved the gamblers lined up. Several 'Jocks' got their money for emerging safely, but the ones who clicked it weren't there to pay. The artillerymen had never thought it out that way. Those Scotties were bound to be sure winners, no matter how the wind blew. So take a tip from me, never bet with a Scottie, 'cause you'll lose money.

"At one part of our trench where a communication trench joined the front line a Tommy had stuck up a wooden signpost with three hands or arms on it. One of the hands, pointing to the German lines, read, 'To Berlin'; the one pointing down the com-

munication trench read, 'To Blighty,' while the other said, 'Suicide Ditch, Change Here for Stretchers.'

"Farther down from this guide post, the trench ran through an old orchard. On the edge of this orchard our battery had constructed an advanced observation post. The trees screened it from the enemy airman and the roof was turfed. It wasn't cushy like ours, no timber or concrete re-enforcements, just walls of sandbags. From it a splendid view of the German lines could be obtained. This post wasn't exactly safe. It was a hot corner, shells plunking all around, and the bullets cutting leaves off the trees. Many a time when relieving the signaller at the 'phone, I had to crawl on my belly like a worm to keep from being hit.

"It was an observation post sure enough. That's all the use it was. Just observe all day, but never a message back for our battery to open up. You see, at this point of the line there were strict orders not to fire a shell, unless specially ordered to do so from brigade headquarters. Blime me, if anyone disobeyed that command, our general—yes, it was Old Pepper—would have court-martialed the whole expeditionary force. Nobody went out of their way to disobey Old Pepper in those days, because he couldn't be called a parson; he was more like a prate. If at any time the devil should feel lonely and sigh for a proper mate, Old Pepper would get the first call. Facing the Germans wasn't half bad compared with an interview with that old firebrand.

"If a company or battalion should give way a few yards against a superior force of Boches, Old Pepper would send for the commanding officer. In about half an hour the officer would come back with his face the color of a brick, and in a few hours what was left of his command would be holding their original position.

"I have seen an officer who wouldn't say d—n for a thousand quid spend five minutes with the old boy, and when he returned the flow of language from his lips would make a navy blush for shame.

"What I am going to tell you is how two of us put it over on the old scamp, and got away with it. It was a risky thing, too, because Old Pepper wouldn't have been exactly mild with us if he had got next to the game.

"Me and my mate, a lad named Harry Cassell, a bombardier in D 238 bat-

tery, or lance corporal, as you call it in the infantry, used to relieve the telephonists. We would do two hours on and four off. I would be on duty in the advanced observation post, while he would be at the other end of the wire in the battery dugout signaling station. We were supposed to send through orders for the battery to fire when ordered to do so by the observation officer in the advanced post. But very few messages were sent. It was only in case of an actual attack that we would get a chance to earn our 'two and six' a day. You see, Old Pepper had issued orders not to fire except when the orders came from him. And with Old Pepper orders is orders, and made to obey.

"The Germans must have known about these orders, for even in the day their transports and troops used to expose themselves as if they were on parade. This sure got up our nose, sitting there day after day, with fine targets in front of us but unable to send over a shell. We heartily cursed Old Pepper, his orders, the government, the people at home, and everything in general. But the Boches didn't mind cussing, and got very careless. Blime me, they were bally in-sulting. Used to, when using a certain road, throw their caps into the air as a taunt at our helplessness.

"Cassell had been a telegrapher in civil life and joined up when war was declared. As for me, I knew Morse, learned it at the signaller's school back in 1910. With an officer in the observation post, we could not carry on the kind of conversation that's usual between two mates, so we used the Morse code. To send, one of us would tap the transmitter with his finger nails, and the one on the other end would get it through the receiver. Many an hour was whiled away in this manner passing compliments back and forth.

in the observation post the officer used to sit for hours with a powerful pair of field glasses to his eyes. Through a cleverly concealed loophole he would scan the ground behind the German trenches, looking for targets and finding many. This officer, Captain A—by name, had a habit of talking out loud to himself. Sometimes he would vent his opinion, same as a common private does when he's wrought up. Once upon a time the captain had been on Old Pepper's staff, so he could cuss and blind in the most approved style. Got to be sort of a habit with him.

"About six thousand yards from us, behind the German lines, was a road in plain view of our post. For the last three days Fritz had brought companies of troops down this road in broad daylight. They were never shelled. Whenever this happened the captain would froth at the mouth and let out a volume of Old Pepper's religion which used to make me love him.

"Every battery has a range chart on which distinctive landmarks are noted, with the range for each. These landmarks are called targets, and are numbered. On our battery's chart, that road was called 'Target 17.' Range 6000, 3 degrees 30 minutes left. D 238 battery consisted of four '4.5' howitzers, and fired a 35-pound H. E. shell. As you know, H. E. means 'high explosive.' I don't like bunning up my own battery, but we had a record in the division for direct hits, and our boys were just pining away for a chance to exhibit their skill in the eyes of Fritz.

"On the afternoon of the fourth day of Fritz' contemptuous use of the road mentioned the captain and I were at our posts as usual. Fritz was strafing us pretty rough, just like he's doing now. The shells were playing leap-frog all through that orchard.

"I was carrying on a conversation in our 'tap code' with Cassell at the other end. It ran something like this:

"Say, Cassell, how would you like to be in the saloon bar of the King's Arms down Rye lane with a bottle of Bass in front of you, and that blonde barmaid waiting to fill 'em up again?"

"Cassell had a fancy for that particular blonde. The answer came back in the shape of a volley of cusses. I changed the subject.

"After a while our talk veered round to the way the Boches had been exposing themselves on the road down on the chart as Target 17. What he said about those Boches would never have passed the reichstag, though I believe it would have gone through our censor easily enough.

"The bursting shells were making such a din that I packed up talking and took to watching the captain. He was fidgeting around on an old sandbag with the glass to his eye. Occasionally he would let out a grunt, and make some remark I couldn't hear on account of the noise, but I guessed what it was all right. Fritz was getting fresh again on that road.

"Cassell had been sending in the 'tap code' to me, but I was fed up and didn't bother with it. Then he sent O. S., and I was all attention, for this was a call used between us which meant that something important was on. I was all ears in an instant. Then Cassell turned loose.

"You blankety blank dud, I have been trying to raise you for fifteen minutes. What's the matter, are you asleep? (Just as if anyone could have slept in that infernal racket!) 'Never mind framing a nasty answer. Just listen.'

"Are you game for putting something over on the Boches and Old Pepper all in one?"

"I answered that I was game enough when it came to putting it over the Boches, but confessed that I had a weakening of the spine, even at the mention of Old Pepper's name.

"He came back with, 'It's so absurdly easy and simple that there is no chance of the old heathen rumbering it. Anyway, if we're caught, I'll take the blame.'

"Under these conditions I told him to spit out his scheme. It was so daring and simple that it took my breath away. This is what he proposed:

"If the Boches should use that road again, to send by the tap system the target and range. I had previously told him about our captain talking out loud as if he were sending through orders. Well, if this happened, I was to send the dope to Cassell and he would transmit it to the battery commander as officially coming through the observation post. Then the battery would open up. Afterwards, during the investigation, Cassell would swear he received it direct. They would have to relieve him, because it was impossible from his post in the battery dugout to know that the road was being used at that time by the Germans. And also it was impossible for him to give the target, range and degree. You know a battery chart is not passed around among the men like a newspaper from Blighty. From him the investigation would go to the observation post, and the observing officer could truthfully swear that I had not sent the message by 'phone, and that no orders to fire had been issued by him. The investigators would then be up in the air, we would be safe, the Boches would receive a good bashing, and we would get our own back on Old Pepper. It was too good to be true. I gleefully fell in with the scheme, and told Cassell I was his mate.

"Then I waited with beating heart and watched the captain like a hawk.

"He was beginning to fidget again and was drumming on the sandbags with his feet. At last, turning to me, he said:

"Wilson, this army is a blankety blank washout. What's the use of having artillery if it is not allowed to fire? The government at home ought to be hanged with some of their red tape.

It's through them that we have no shells."

"I answered, 'Yes, sir,' and started sending this opinion over the wire to Cassell, but the captain interrupted me with:

"Keep those infernal fingers still. What's the matter, getting the nerves? When I'm talking to you, pay attention."

"My heart sank. Supposing he had rumbled that tapping, then all would be up with our plan. I stopped drumming with my fingers and said:

"Beg your pardon, sir, just a habit with me."

"And a d—d silly one, too," he answered, turning to his glasses again, and I knew I was safe. He had not tumbled to the meaning of that tapping.

"All at once, without turning round, he exclaimed:

"Well, of all the nerve I've ever run across, this takes the cake. Those d—d Boches are using that road again. Blind my eyes, this time it is a whole brigade of them, transports and all. What a pretty target for our '4.5's.' The beggars know that we won't fire. A d—d shame, I call it. Oh, just for a chance to turn D 238 loose on them."

"I was trembling with excitement. From repeated stolen glances at the captain's range chart, that road with its range was burned into my mind.

"Over the wire I tapped, 'D 238 battery, Target 17, Range 6000, 3 degrees 30 minutes, left, salvo, fire.' Cassell O. K.'d my message, and with the receiver pressed against my ear, I waited and listened. In a couple of minutes very faintly over the wire came the voice of our battery commander issuing the order: 'D 238 battery. Salvo! Fire!'

"Then a roar through the receiver as the four guns belched forth, a screaming and whistling overhead, and the shells were on their way.

"The captain jumped as if he were shot, and let out a great big expressive d—n, and eagerly turned his glasses in the direction of the German road. I also strained my eyes watching that target. Four black clouds of dust rose up right in the middle of the German column. Four direct hits—another record for D 238.

"The shells kept on whistling overhead, and I had counted twenty-four of them when the firing suddenly ceased. When the smoke and dust clouds lifted the destruction on that road was awful. Overturned limbers and guns, wagons smashed up, troops fleeing in all directions. The road and roadside were spotted all over with little field gray dots, the toll of our guns.

"The captain, in his excitement, had slipped off the sandbag, and was on his knees in the mud, the glass still at his eye. He was muttering to himself and slapping his thigh with his disengaged hand. At every slap a big round juicy cuss word would escape from his lips followed by:

"Good! Fine! Marvelous! Pretty Work! Direct hits all!"

"Then he turned to me and shouted:

"Wilson, what do you think of it? Did you ever see the like of it in your life? D—n fine work, I call it."

"Pretty soon a look of wonder stole over his face and he exclaimed:

"But who in h—l gave them the order to fire. Range and everything correct, too. I know I didn't. Wilson, did I give you any order for the battery to open up? Of course I didn't, did I?"

"I answered very emphatically, 'No, sir, you gave no command. Nothing went through this post. I am absolutely certain on that point, sir.'

"Of course nothing went through," he replied. Then his face fell, and he muttered out loud:

"But, by Jove, wait till Old Pepper gets wind of this. There'll be fury flying!"

Just then Bombardier Cassell cut in on the wire:

"General's compliments to Captain A—. He directs that officer and signaller report at the double to brigade headquarters as soon as relieved. Relief now on the way."

"In an undertone to me, 'Keep a brass front, Wilson, and for God's sake, stick.' I answered with, 'Rely on me, mate,' but I was trembling all over."

"I gave the general's message to the captain, and started packing up.

"The relief arrived, and as we left the post the captain said:

"Now for the fireworks, and I know they'll be good and plenty." They were.

"When we arrived at the gun pits the battery commander, the sergeant major and Cassell were waiting for us. We fell in line and the funeral march to brigade headquarters started.

"Arriving at headquarters the battery commander was the first to be interviewed. This was behind closed doors. From the roaring and explosions of Old Pepper it sounded as if raw meat was being thrown to the lions. Cassell, later, described it as sounding like a bombing raid. In about two minutes the officer reappeared. The sweat was pouring from his forehead, and his face was the color of a beet. He was speechless. As he passed the captain he jerked his thumb in the direction of the lion's den and went out. Then the captain went in, and the lions were once again fed. The captain stayed about twenty minutes and came out. I couldn't see his face, but the droop in his shoulders was enough. He looked like a wet hen.

"The door of the general's room opened and Old Pepper stood in the doorway. With a roar he shouted:

"Which one of you is Cassell? D—n me, get your heels together when I speak! Come in here!"

"Cassell started to say, 'Yes sir.'

"But Old Pepper roared, 'Shut up!'

"Cassell came out in five minutes. He said nothing, but as he passed me

he put his tongue into his cheek and winked, then, turning to the closed door, he stuck his thumb to his nose and left.

"Then the sergeant major's turn came. He didn't come out our way. Judging by the roaring, Old Pepper must have eaten him.

"When the door opened and the general beckoned to me, my knees started to play 'Home, Sweet Home' against each other.

"My interview was very short.

"Old Pepper glared at me when I entered, and then let loose.

"Of course you don't know anything about it. You're just like the rest. Ought to have a nursing bottle around your neck and a nipple in your teeth. Soldiers—by gad, you turn my stomach to look at you. Win this war, when England sends out such samples as I have in my brigade! Not likely! Now, sir, tell me what you don't know about this affair. Speak up, out with it. Don't be gaping at me like a fish. Spit it out!"

"I stammered, 'Sir, I know absolutely nothing.'

"That's easy to see,' he roared; 'that stupid face tells me that. Shut up. Get out; but I think you are a d—d liar just the same. Back to your battery.'

"I saluted and made my exit.

"That night the captain sent for us. With fear and trembling we went to his dugout. He was alone. After saluting we stood at attention in front of him and waited. His say was short.

"Don't you two ever get it into your heads that Morse is a dead language. I've known it for years. The two of you had better get rid of that nervous habit of tapping transmitters; it's dangerous. That's all."

"We saluted, and were just going out the door of the dugout when the captain called us back and said:

"Smoke Goldflakes? Yes? Well, there are two tins of them on my table. Go back to the battery, and keep your tongues between your teeth. Understand?"

"We understood.

"For five weeks afterwards our battery did nothing but extra fatigues. We were satisfied and so were the men. It was worth it to put one over on Old Pepper, to say nothing of the injury caused to Fritz' feelings."

"When Wilson had finished his story I looked up and the dugout was jammed. An artillery captain and two officers had also entered and stayed for the finish. Wilson spat out an enormous quid of tobacco, looked up, saw the captain, and got as red as a carnation. The captain smiled and left. Wilson whispered to me:

"Blime me, Yank, I see where I click for crucifixion. That captain is the same one that chucked us Goldflakes in his dugout and here I have been 'chucking me weight about in his hearing."

Wilson never clicked his crucifixion. Quite a contrast to Wilson was another character in our brigade named Scott; we called him "Old Scotty" on account of his age. He was fifty-seven, although looking forty. "Old Scotty" had been born in the Northwest and had served in the Northwest Mounted police. He was a typical cowpuncher and Indian fighter and was a dead shot with the rifle, and took no pains to disguise this fact from us. He used to take care of his rifle as if it were a baby. In his spare moments you could always see him cleaning it or polishing the stock. Woe betide the man who by mistake happened to get hold of this rifle; he soon found out his error. Scott was as deaf as a mule, and it was amusing at parade to watch him in the manual of arms, slyly glancing out of the corner of his eye at the man next to him to see what the order was. How he passed the doctor was a mystery to us; he must have bluffed his way through, because he certainly was independent. Beside him the Fourth of July looked like Good Friday. He wore at a Mexican stock saddle over his shoulder, a lariat on his arm, and a "forty-five" hanging from his hip. Dumping this paraphernalia on the floor he went up to the recruiting officer and shouted: "I'm from America, west of the Rockies, and want to join your d—d army. I've got no use for a German and can shoot some. At Scotland Yard they turned me down; said I was deaf and so I am. I don't hanker to ship in with a d—d mud-crunching outfit, but the cavalry's full, so I guess this regiment's better than none, so trot out your papers and I'll sign 'em." He told them he was forty and slipped by. I was on recruiting service at the time he applied for enlistment.

It was Old Scotty's great ambition to be a sniper or "body snatcher," as Mr. Atkins calls it. The day that he was detailed as brigade sniper he celebrated his appointment by blowing the whole platoon to rags.

Being a Yank, Old Scotty took a liking to me and used to spin some great yarns about the plains, and the whole platoon would drink these in and ask for more. Ananias was a rookie compared with him.

The ex-plainman and discipline could not agree, but the officers all liked him, even if he was hard to manage, so when he was detailed as a sniper a sigh of relief went up from the officers' mess.

Old Scotty had the freedom of the brigade. He used to draw two or three days' rations and disappear with his glass, range finder and rifle, and we would see or hear no more of him until suddenly he would reappear with a couple of notches added to those already on the butt of his rifle. Every time he got a German it meant another notch. He was proud of these notches.

(Continued next week.)