"OVER THE TOP"

BY AN AMERICAN SOLDIER WHO WENT

ARTHUR GUY EMPEY

MACHINE GUNNER, SERVING IN FRANCE

(Continued from last week.)

The driver of the ambulance was a corporal of the R. A. M. C., and he had the "wind up," that is, he had an aversion to being under fire.

I was riding on the seat with him while Atwell was sitting in the ambulance, with his legs hanging out of the back.

As we passed through a shell-destroyed village a mounted military policeman stopped us and informed the driver to be very careful when we got out on the open road, as it was very dangerous, because the Germans lately had acquired the habit of shelling it. The corporal asked the trooper if there was any other way around, and was informed that there was not. Upon this he got very nervous and wanted to turn back, but we insisted that he proceed and explained to him that he would get into serious trouble with his commanding officer if he returned without orders; we wanted to ride, not walk.

From his conversaion we learned that he had recently come from England with a draft and had never been under fire, hence his nervousness.

We convinced him that there was not much danger, and he appeared greatly relieved.

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. The fields on each side of the road were dotted with recent shell holes, and we passed several in the road itself. We had gone about half a mile when a shell came whistling through the air and burst in a field about three hundred yards to our right. Another soon followed this one and burst on the edge of the road about four hundred yards in front of us.

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. The driver was trembling like a leaf, and every minute I expected him to pile us up in the ditch. 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 o' 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 it 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 said 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 woebegone 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 know 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—'Shun! 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, when suddenly the officer made a left wheel, and we found ourselves in a sort of enclosed courtyard.

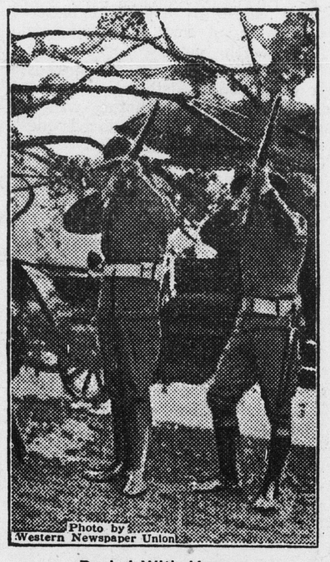

Photo by Western Newspaper Union.

Buried With Honors.

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 unpile 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 3:28 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—'Shun!"

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 considerate way in which an execution is concealed 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 finger 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 momentous morning the landlady put the morning paper at his place before he came down to breakfast. Taking his seat he read the flaring 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.

(Continued next week).

FOR AND ABOUT WOMEN.

DAILY THOUGHT

Life is not so short but there is always time for courtesy.—Emerson.

Since the creators of style are cooperating with the government and advising us to use less wool, spring costumes show much originality and ingenuity. Makers of women's clothes have agreed to use not more than 4½ yards of woolen material in any suit or frock; when possible, not more than three yards will be required, and it is, of course, advisable to eliminate wool altogether and wear suits of satin, jersey, silk, or similar fabrics. In America, women have been accustomed to wear such materials only in summer, or in frocks beneath heavy coats, but the satin suit may yet become popular for early spring use. Jersey has made its bow in a new form this spring, artificial silk being used instead of pure silk or wool. This new jersey should be very satisfactory, since it is somewhat heavier than the older materials of this type.

A suit need not be wholly of wool, of course; very interesting combinations are made of serge, tricotine or gabardine, with satin or silk. The tunic skirt lends itself particularly well to such combinations, since the tunic can be of the heavier material and the underskirt of satin or silk. A suit, made with such a skirt, may have a vest of the satin, or may have collar and cuffs of the lighter weight material which is used in the skirt. Materials of the same weight are frequently used together, a plaided or checked material being made with a plain fabric harmonizing in coloring. Plaids are very fashionable this spring, the darker colors being most favored. Tans, grays, browns, especially the ever popular tete de negre, and all shades of blue, are shown in the various woolen materials.

Colorings and materials chosen, the maid who would a-shopping go will find that she has but little choice in the matter of the lines of her new costume. The silhouette must be straight and flat, no matter how it is achieved. Although the new skirts are narrow, they are so made that there is no restriction of movement, for the woman of today is too much occupied with her own duties and war relief work to be bothered by hampering modes. The short jacket, fashioned on Eton or bolero lines, is to be popular, although the woman who prefers a longer coat will find that she has not been forgotten. One suit, which somehow managed to come within the regulations regarding the use of wool, had a plaited coat which came to the finger tips; perhaps the necessary material was obtained by making the skirt particularly narrow. These suits, which are made wholly of wool, should be of cheviot or homespun, since such fabrics are less easy to combine with other materials than are serges or tricotines.

The popularity enjoyed during the winter by separate dresses and coats has not waned, and the new spring coats are decidedly smart in appearance. Tweed, cheviot, jersey, duvetyn, all are used for them, and they emulate the frequently mentioned silver-lined cloud by possessing linings which may well be shown to the world occasionally. Nothing could be smarter than a plain colored coat lined with checked material, and linings of plain colored silk with effectively placed bands of a contrasting color are equally interesting. Both coats and dresses seek to be taken for each other this spring; the coats, by being trimly belted and collared as coat dresses have been for so long, the dresses, by acquiring trimly tailored bodices and narrow sleeves. For house wear, foulard has made its customary spring appearance, blue predominating as usual. Taffeta is chosen for many an attractive frock, the fabric lending a somewhat "dressed-up" air which may be counteracted by severity of line. One-sided draperies and fastenings are much in vogue just at present, and an occasional bustle drapery bears witness to the lingering fondness for that style.

Separate skirts, especially those of satin or taffeta, are effective when worn with the dainty hand-made blouses that are being shown in such variety; and the woman who has a last season's silk or satin dress, which she wishes to remodel, will find it possible to make a fashionable separate skirt from the material on hand. As for the blouses, they are here in great variety. Georgette, batiste, handkerchief linen and similar materials are used for the frilled or much-tucked blouses; the beautifully colored crepes which are shown for summer frocks make exquisite blouses when used with white collars and cuffs and some of Rodier's fabrics are most effective when thus used. One, of pale blue and white checks marked off with machine hemstitching, is unusually attractive blouse material, and another of pale yellow with a hint of lavender is almost as good. Interesting combinations are made of white and colored materials, a yoke of one being hemstitched to a blouse of the other. Much can be done with hemstitching, small pieces of Georgette frequently being combined in this way.

The hand-made blouse has never been more popular nor more befrilled, although it may follow the example of a blouse of pale blue batiste and boast a severely high collar and a front whose only trimming was hand-sewn pin tucks. The more strictly tailored blouses are usually of linen, and these also show combinations of two colors. Crepe de chine is also used for these waists, and blouses of dark taffeta are worn with tailored skirts.

A hat, which is chosen now with a summer's wear in mind, may well be of one of the new rough braids combined with silk; such combinations are effective and wear well. Feather trimmings are to be fashionable, burnt ostrich being among the most popular. Many of the wings are artificial ones, so one may choose these in preference to the others. Flowers are highly conventionalized, and oddly colored fruits will bring delightful color schemes into being, on more than one fashionable hat this spring.

—

Cleveland has over 10,000 women Red Cross workers.

—

New York is the first State with a heavy immigrant population to give the complete vote to women.

FARM NOTES.

—Pennsylvania farmers on March 1 held about 42 per cent. of the 1917 oats crop.

—Statistics show that only 63 per cent. of the 1917 corn crop was of merchantable quality.

—It is estimated that 40 per cent. of the wheat produced in Pennsylvania is shipped out of the counties where grown.

—Buttermilk is equal to skim milk for feeding hogs, while whey is half as valuable. Whey, being low in protein, is not well suited for young pigs and should be fed to older animals.

—By substituting grain, green feed, buttermilk, and whey for skim milk in animal feeding, much skim milk may be released for use in cooking, for condensing, or for making cottage cheese.

—Ordinary grass pasture, or green rye, oats, sorghum, rape, clover, alfalfa, peas or beans can take the place of skim milk after the little pigs get a start. Much green feed can be raised without greatly reducing the acreage of other crops.

—Calves and pigs do well when some skim milk is fed, but they need it only for a short time and in limited quantities. Except when fed to very young animals, skim milk is fed most economically when supplemented with grain. For dairy calves skim milk may be substituted in part for whole milk on the tenth day. If the calves are vigorous they should receive a little grain and hay at two weeks of age, and it is safe to discontinue the skim milk five or six weeks later.

—Not all farmers are able to supply sufficient stable manure to furnish the soil with the required quantity of humus, and planters generally have learned that the quickest way to secure humus is to plant cow peas. This leguminous crop gathers the unused nitrogen from the air and unlocks with its roots the dormant potash and phosphoric acid in the subsoil. If, when the peas are sowed, they are given the necessary amount of phosphoric acid and potash in a fertilizer, the nitrogenous power of the pea will be increased, and when the stubble and roots are plowed under much of the mineral elements will remain in the soil ready to be taken up by the next crop.

—All skim milk should be used—none wasted. It should furnish the maximum of food to human beings and does this better when used direct, as cottage cheese, prepared buttermilk, or other by-products, than when fed to animals and converted into meat. Surplus skim milk may be used economically to feed hogs, yet 100 pounds of it, which will produce 15 pounds of cheese, produce only 4.8 pounds of dressed pork if fed with corn. Skim milk if made into cottage cheese furnishes nearly seven times as much protein and nearly as much energy as the dressed pork it would produce. Of course the most nourishment is obtained when skim milk is used direct, either for drinking or cooking. As far as possible, therefore, skim milk should be used for human food and only the excess fed to live stock.

—Commercial fertilizers when used alone act only as a temporary stimulus, but when used in connection with this legume, prepare the soil for a rotation of crops; say oats, or wheat, next year corn with cow peas, next castor beans, supplying with each crop the fertilizer best suited to its needs. As the cow pea will not grow profitably on very poor soil it must be given the fertilizers it requires. Let us see, then, what the cow pea will do for the farmer in return for the mineral fertilizers. It shades the soil and supplies the nitrogen. It goes deep in the soil and brings up the water and mineral matter needed by the plant. If sown thickly it will smother all the weeds and clean the ground for the next year's crop. It prepares the soil for every crop the farmer can plant. It will grow in every kind of soil and in any climate where corn, wheat or oats will mature in the north, and will flourish wonderfully far down in the tropics. It thrives in the long, warm summer, and by continued planting will bring worn-out lands back to their virgin condition.

—"While doing Farmers' Institute work in Indiana and Ohio this winter I found many things that should interest the farmers of Pennsylvania, one of which is the concrete feeding floor used by hog feeders," Says Chas. G. McLain, farm adviser of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture.

"This feeding floor is of a size to accommodate the number of hogs being fed and every one of the men using them speaks very highly of them from a sanitary and economical standpoint.

"The feeding floor is usually about 30 feet by 30 feet square and is from four to six inches thick. The thickness is usually governed by the nature of the ground on which the floor is built.

"The great advantage of a feeding floor is in the saving of feed, especially corn fed on the ear. If fed on the ground or a sod, as usually is done, much of the grain is lost while the hogs are shelling it as it is trampled into the soft ground. Another point is that this feeding is usually done in one spot and the result is if a rain comes it is worked into a mud hole and more grain is lost, and not only that but a very dirty and unsanitary spot is the result. Where this feeding is done on a concrete floor every grain is used by the hogs and the cobs can be cleaned off every day or two or as often as desired or is necessary.

"Where a number of hogs are fed the saving in grain is considerable. The sanitary point is one to give consideration as the hogs are not gathering up all kinds of filth from a concrete floor and the stench from a mud hole is eliminated.

"In talking with a number of men who are using the feeding floor the general concensus of opinion is that the cost of the floor is saved in a short time in the feed bill and those who are using them would not do without them for any consideration.

"This is a good permanent improvement and the first cost is the last for concrete improvements if properly put in are permanent and repairs are a negligible quantity."