Title: The Brighton Boys in the Radio Service

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Release date: July 15, 2007 [eBook #22079]

Language: English

"At Least Ten Thousand of Them," He Announced.

The BRIGHTON BOYS in THE RADIO SERVICE

BY
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ILLUSTRATED

THE JOHN C. WINSTON COMPANY
PHILADELPHIA

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Illustrations

The Brighton Boys in the Radio Service

CHAPTER I

"For Uncle Sam"

"Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their——"

It was that old practice sentence of typists, which is as old as are typewriting machines, and Joe Harned, seated before the told-style, noisy, but still capable machine in Philip Burton's telegraph office, had rattled it off twenty-five times and was on his twenty-sixth when suddenly, very suddenly, his mind began to work.

Or rather it might be said that an idea, the *big idea*, danced unceremoniously into his brain, and, beginning to take definite and concrete form, chased a score of other smaller ideas through all the thought-channels of his handsome, boyish, well-rounded head.

He came to a full stop and gazed steadily at the upturned paper in the typewriter in front of him. Twenty-fives times he had written that sentence, and twenty-five times with mechanical precision and true adherence to time-honored custom he had finished it by tapping off the word "party."

It was a formula of words which some genius had devised for the fingering practice it gave one on the keyboard, and Joe Harned had written it hundreds of times before, just as thousands of others had done, without giving a thought to its meaning, or the significance that the substitution of a single word would give it.

He read it again, and as if it were the result of an uncontrollable impulse, his fingers began the rapid tap-tap-tap. And this time he substituted the new word that the *big idea* had suddenly thrust into his mind.

Joe gave the roller a twirl, the paper rolled out, dropped to the floor, and he grasped for it eagerly.

Even Joe was surprised. He hadn't realized that in his enthusiastic haste he had pushed down the key marked "caps."

In bold, outstanding letters near the bottom of the sheet was an historic sentence, and Joe Harned—Harned, of Brighton Academy—had devised it.

> "NOW IS THE TIME FOR ALL GOOD MEN TO
> COME TO THE AID OF THEIR COUNTRY!"

Joe gazed at it again for a moment, and then let his eyes travel across the little office to where red-headed, freckle-faced, big-hearted and impetuous Jerry Macklin was rapping away at another typewriter, and, two feet away from Jerry, "Slim" Goodwin, "one-hundred-and-seventy pounds in his stockinged feet, and five-feet-four in his gym suit," was working the telegraph key with a pudgy hand.

"Jerry!" he called. "Oh, Slim! Come over here a moment, both of you. I want to show you something."

Jerry immediately ceased typewriting, but Slim was reluctant to release the telegraph key. However, as Joe began folding the paper in such a way that only the last sentence showed, their aroused curiosity brought both of them to his side.

"Read that," said Joe, trying to suppress the quiver in his voice, and holding the paper up before them. "Read it carefully."

One lad on either side of him, they hung over Joe's shoulder and followed his bidding.

"Right!" shouted Jerry, as he came to the last word. "Joe, you're a wizard, and what you've written there is the truth."

"Ain't it—I mean isn't it?" added the delicate Slim Goodwin, and, partly to hide his grammatical error, but mostly to express his enthusiasm, he gave Joe a one-hundred-and-seventy-pound whack on the back that sent him sliding out of the chair and half way under the typewriter table.

"Say!" Joe remonstrated. But just then Philip Burton, telegraph operator and genial good friend of all three of the lads, bustled into the room, a sheaf of yellow telegrams in his hand.

"What's all the excitement?" he asked, striding toward the typewriter just left by Jerry.

"Why," explained Slim, "Joe's just done something that means something."

"Impossible," said Mr. Burton, turning toward them with one of those irresistible smiles which

long ago had made him the boys' confidant.

"If you don't believe it, read this," commanded Jerry, thrusting the paper before the telegrapher's eyes.

Mr. Burton read it through and then turned to the three boys again. "Well?" he asked.

"It means what it says," explained Jerry. "Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their country." 13

"And we're 'good men,' ain't—aren't we?" demanded Slim, drawing in his stomach and throwing out his chest as he straightened up to his full five-feet-four-inches "in his gym suit."

"None better anywhere," said Mr. Burton in a tone that showed he meant it. "But just how do you contemplate going to the aid of your country?"

It was Joe's turn to say something, and he did. "By enlisting," he announced, briefly but firmly.

"Yes," agreed Slim, "that's it, by enlisting."

"Uh-huh," said Jerry, nodding his head vigorously and watching Mr. Burton's face for evidence of the effect of their decision.

"And when did you determine upon that?" the telegrapher asked, with increasing interest.

"Well," said Slim, his face now painfully red from his efforts to keep chest out and stomach in, "it was finally decided upon just now, although we have talked about the thing in a general way many times."

"You really mean to enlist—all three of you?" Mr. Burton demanded.

"Yes, sir," they chorused, "all three." 14

"Good!" exclaimed the man who had been their friend and helper. "Fine! I'm proud of you," and he proceeded to shake hands heartily with each in turn.

"Have you decided upon the branch of the service you intend to enter?" he then asked.

Joe looked at Jerry, Jerry looked at Slim, and Slim cast a helpless glance back at Joe.

"I see you haven't," said Mr. Burton hastily, "and I'm glad of it. Now how about the Signal Corps?"

"What do men in the Signal Corps do?" asked Jerry.

"Do they fight?" demanded Slim.

"Yes," Mr. Burton replied, "they do some fighting on their own account, and often in tough places and against discouraging odds. But they do even more than that. Without their assistance no general would dare lay plans for a battle. The Signal Corps keeps the commanders posted, not only as to the whereabouts and disposition of his own troops, but also of those of the enemy. The Signal Corps is the telephone, the telegraph, the wireless, and often the aviation section as well, of the American army, and often of the American navy, too."

"Isn't that great?" exclaimed the breathless Slim, as Mr. Burton went over to the ticker to answer the code call for his station. 15

During the ten minutes that he was engaged in receiving and sending messages, the boys perfected plans for notifying their relatives of their intention. Had their attention not been so entirely taken by the subject under discussion they would have seen Herbert Wallace—another and very unpopular student at Brighton—pass by the office window, stop for a moment to stare at them, and then step away quickly in the direction of the door, near which they were standing.

"Well, what's the verdict?" asked Mr. Burton, having finished his duties.

"The Signal Corps is our choice," said Joe, speaking for all, "but how do we go about getting into it?"

"I think I can arrange that," Mr. Burton informed them. "You boys have been studying telegraphy under me for more than six months, and I'm willing to certify that each of you can now handle an instrument. In addition to that, you are able to take down messages on the typewriter as they come over the wire. Yes, sir," Mr. Burton finished, "I think your Uncle Sam will be mighty glad to get three such lads as you, and I know the recruiting agent to put the thing through." 16

So it was arranged that the three lads should return to the dormitory, write the letters which were to procure them the desired permission to enlist, and then inform the headmaster of their intentions.

Joe and Jerry, who had roomed together throughout their entire three years at Brighton, already were well on with their epistles of explanation when Slim, whose room was seven doors down the corridor, dragged himself in, looking more downcast than any boy in Brighton ever had seen him look before.

"No use," he informed his two friends, a choke in his voice. "They won't have me. I'm overweight."

"Oh, now, Slim, what are you worrying about that for? I don't believe any such thing," counseled Joe.

"It's true, though," affirmed Slim. "That's the worst part of it; I saw it in the book. I'm toting

around about twenty pounds more than the government wants, and I'd have to stand on tiptoe in high-heel shoes to meet the requirement in height."

Poor Slim! He showed his disappointment in every look and every action.

"What kind of a book did you see it in?" asked Jerry, in a tone almost as sad as Slim's.

"In the manual," Slim groaned. "Herb Wallace showed it to me."

"That settles it," exclaimed Joe. "If Herb Wallace had a hand in it anywhere there's something wrong. I'll tell you what we'll do, fellows. We'll go and ask the headmaster."

Now the headmaster of Brighton had once been a boy himself. He could be stern, even cruelly severe, when occasion demanded, but he was kind of heart and broad of understanding.

Before him the three lads laid their case, as before the final tribunal.

"H'm," said he, when all the details had been related and the all-important information asked. "You say Herbert Wallace showed you this in a manual?"

Slim solemnly affirmed that that was the case.

The headmaster pushed a button on the side of his desk and in a few seconds his secretary, a big, bluff fellow, appeared.

"Bring Herbert Wallace here at once," said the headmaster. And in five more minutes, while the headmaster was shrewdly questioning the three lads as to the seriousness of their determination to enlist, the secretary returned, accompanied by young Wallace, flushed and shamefaced.

"Well, Wallace," said the principal of Brighton, "I hear you've been studying up on military subjects. Intending to get into the fight?"

Herbert Wallace hung his head and muttered an unintelligible reply.

"Now look here, Wallace," spoke the headmaster sternly, "where did you get the military manual from which you gave Goodwin the information that he could not pass the examination for the army?"

"I—I got it from the library, sir."

"Got it without permission, too, didn't you?" pursued the headmaster.

"Yes, sir," said Wallace, in confusion.

"And didn't know that it was out of date, and that the requirements were completely changed after the United States entered this war, eh?"

"No, sir," answered Wallace, on the verge of a breakdown.

"I'll decide upon your punishment later," announced the headmaster. "See me here at four o'clock. Meanwhile, Wallace, be careful where you get information, and be careful how you dispense it."

And Herbert Wallace, utterly humiliated, was glad to flee from the room.

"I don't think," said the headmaster, "that any of you will have difficulty passing the examinations. I dislike to see you go, but you speak the truth when you say that your country does need you, and I pay a great tribute of respect to you for the patriotism and courage with which you step forth to shoulder your obligations. Others already have gone from Brighton. Still others will go in the future. God bless all of you, and may you return safe and sound to reap the full benefits of the democracy for which you are going to fight."

The suspicion of tears dimmed the kindly eyes of the headmaster, and each boy choked up as he bade him good-by.

But, after all, this was no time for sadness. Young gladiators were going forth to the fray. And so we will skip over the farewells the following day, in which the parents of each lad, with many a heartache but never a word of discouragement, bade the boys Godspeed in the service of their country.

The three lads, together with fifteen others, formed a detachment of the recently enlisted who were to go to the Philadelphia Navy Yard for further assignment. Just before the train pulled out a students' parade that seemed to include every boy in Brighton marched to the station to see them off.

One of the lads carried a large transparency on which was printed:

"They Brighten the Fame of Brighton"

And just as the train pulled out, and there was great cheering and waving of hats and handkerchiefs, Joe, Jerry and Slim, leaning from adjoining windows, sang out in chorus:

"For Uncle Sam."

CHAPTER II

Into the Service—A Spy

A brilliant October morning was just breaking when a final bump of the train ended the none too musical snoring of Slim Goodwin and he came to a sitting posture, his first yawn almost instantly to give way to an exclamation of surprise.

It was strange scenery he was gazing upon, and for the moment he had forgotten where he was. The grinning faces of Joe and Jerry, whom he had awakened half an hour before with his sawmill sleeping serenade, brought him to a realization of his surroundings.

"Where are we?" he asked, now fully awake.

"I imagine it's Philadelphia," answered Joe, "although I've never been there."

"Well, let's climb out and see," was a suggestion from Jerry which found ready response in the other two; and a moment later, while half the passengers were still asleep, they were investigating the mysteries of Washington Avenue, near Broad Street, in the Quaker City. 22

Strings of freight cars were stretched out on the sidings, and either side of the railroad yard was flanked by large manufacturing buildings, which already were showing preliminary signs of industrial activity.

"You are enlisted men, sirs?" queried a deep voice just behind them, and all three turned, somewhat startled to find they were not alone.

They faced a young giant of a fellow, who wore the khaki uniform of Uncle Sam, with a sergeant's stripes upon his sleeve. He was unable wholly to suppress a smile as Slim came to a difficult and not entirely regulation salute.

"We are," answered Joe. "We just stepped off that train to get a breath of fresh air and to learn where we were."

"No harm done," the sergeant responded in a friendly tone. "You are in Philadelphia, and the only restriction upon you now is that you are not to stroll too far away. We leave here in a short while for the navy yard, where mess will be served."

"Mess? That's breakfast, ain't—isn't it?" asked Slim anxiously. 23

"Yes," the sergeant replied, "and a good one, too."

Each boy touched his cap respectfully as the non-commissioned officer turned to return to the train.

"Hope we have sausage," said Jerry in an undertone; "but I'm hungry enough to eat anything they give me."

"Same with me," Slim added in melancholy tones; "but I guess I'll have to diet some until I'm sure, certain, and solidified in the service."

At that instant the shrill blast of a whistle brought their attention back to the train, where the sergeant was signaling them to return. Three automobiles had arrived, and into these our three friends and the other fifteen recently enlisted men climbed, for the trip to League Island, where is located one of the Nation's largest and most important navy yards.

Down wide, asphalted Broad Street the party sped, past solid rows of handsome dwellings, and then across the stretch of beautiful park that was once a mosquito-ridden marshland, and to the gates of the navy yard.

Here the detachment of marines on guard gave the boys their first close association with the spirit of war. As they swung through the gates a virtual wonderland of the machinery of sea battles greeted their eyes—powerful battleships, lithe and speedy cruisers, spider-like destroyers, tremendous colliers capable of carrying thousands of tons of coal to the fleets at sea, and in the distance a transport, waiting to take on its human freight of Uncle Sam's fighters for foreign battlefields. 24

On the parade ground several companies of marines were going through maneuvers, while on every ship bluejackets were engaged in various tasks, and activities were in full sway in the many large manufacturing buildings at the lower end of the yard, near the waterfront.

It was a scene to inspire the lads with a full appreciation of the great military and naval service of which they were to become a part, and in their patriotic enthusiasm they forgot even their healthy young appetites.

Mess was in one of the big barracks, where they mingled with hundreds of others, some of whom were raw rookies like themselves, others of longer experience, and some of previous service in Haiti and elsewhere.

The big sergeant, whose name they learned was Martin, brought the entire eighteen together immediately after the meal, and they joined a score of others who had arrived a few days before. All were then marched to another building, where their instructions began, and they were informed that before night they would be uniformed. 25

This was welcome information, indeed. To get into the uniform of Uncle Sam! Every young man in the group breathed a little deeper and drew himself up a little straighter at the thought.

We will not trace Joe, Jerry and Slim through their initial instruction, for it had lasted less than an hour, when an orderly hastily entered the room, saluted the officer who was acting as instructor, and then talked to him for a moment in an undertone.

The officer's countenance underwent a curious change. Finally he turned toward the youths before him.

"Are there any men here who are already telegraphers?" he asked.

Instantly Joe, Jerry, and two others arose, while Slim tried to, but had great difficulty getting himself out of the small, school-child's sort of desk at which he was seated. Finally he managed it by sliding out sidewise, the way he had entered, instead of attempting a direct upward rise. 26

"How many of you can use the international code?" the officer continued.

Thanks to good old Burton, Joe, Jerry and Slim were as familiar with that as they were with the Morse American code. The other two men resumed their seats. Sergeant Martin had entered the room. Apparently he was not at all displeased to find the three polite young men whom he had addressed earlier in the day, now able to show greater capabilities than the other men in the detachment.

"You are excused from further instruction here at this time," the officer announced to the trio. "You will accompany Sergeant Martin for further orders."

And they hurried from the room with the non-com., who they instinctively knew was their friend.

What was this new experience that lay before them? They were not long in learning, and the information almost carried them beyond the restraints of good discipline and to the indulgence in three ripping good cheers.

Sergeant Martin could be a hard taskmaster when it was necessary to be so, but, like the headmaster of Brighton, he did not believe in needless red tape, nor did he delude himself that the stripes upon his sleeve made him a better man—except in official authority—than the one who wore none at all. He realized the curiosity that must be consuming the three lads, and he was not averse to satisfying it. 27

"Selected for service aboard a transport bound for Europe," he announced briefly.

"Thank you, sir," said Joe, not entirely able to control the happiness in his voice, while Slim's excess stomach almost entirely disappeared in the abnormal expansion of his chest. Jerry could find no other dignified way of expressing his great pleasure than by quietly poking Slim under the ribs, to the entire undoing of that young man's military attitude.

"Do we go at once, sir?" inquired Joe deferentially.

"Probably to-morrow evening," said Sergeant Martin, as they arrived at the building housing the captain and staff in charge of men of the Signal Corps then stationed at the navy yard.

It was the busiest office the three boys had ever seen. Typewriters were clicking, telegraph instruments were at work, orderlies were hurrying about, and every man in the place was engrossed in his own particular task. 28

Sergeant Martin guided them to an inner office. Here they confronted an austere gentleman whose uniform denoted that he was a captain, and whose whole bearing bespoke military service.

The three boys were dumbfounded to learn that he already had their names on a card before him. They were getting a new idea of the efficiency of Uncle Sam's service.

The captain made numerous notes as he questioned them about their experience, general knowledge, and extent of their education. He eyed Slim shrewdly as he inquired whether they thought they might be subject to seasickness.

"Young men," he said abruptly, "this country is engaged in the greatest war in all history. Considering your youth and present lack of experience, yours is to be a part of great responsibility. You look like capable and courageous young Americans, and I believe you are. I have confidence that you will bear your share of the burdens of war with credit to yourselves and glory to your country. With one other man of more experience, you will be placed in charge of the wireless and other signal apparatus aboard the transport *Everett*, leaving within thirty-six hours. Sergeant Martin will now aid you in procuring your uniforms." 29

The three boys came to full military salute, the captain returned it, they swung upon their heels like seasoned soldiers and departed behind their friend, the young giant of a sergeant.

An hour later, fully uniformed, they were taken to the *Everett* and down into the wonders of the transport's wireless room, where they were introduced to Second Lieutenant Gerald Mackinson, who was to be their superior officer on the perilous trip.

Lieutenant Mackinson was a square-jawed young fellow with keen eyes, bushy hair and a good breadth of shoulders. He had been an electrical engineer prior to entering the service, and had gained his promotion three months before strictly upon his merit and knowledge, which were the qualities he demanded in others. He already had been "across" three times, and he knew the many problems and dangers that would confront them. 30

Satisfied by his questioning that the three young men who were to accompany him "had the

stuff in them," Lieutenant Mackinson then began instructing them in the elementaries of the radio.

It seemed, though, that that day was destined to be one of interruptions, but not, however, of the sort to be of disadvantage to the three boys from Brighton. For, just as the sudden ending of their instructions in class in the morning had led to their assignment to a transport, to start overseas within thirty-six hours, so the call now which required Lieutenant Mackinson's presence elsewhere, indirectly led to a new and thrilling experience for the lads.

"I am ordered to report to aid in the repairs to the wireless of another vessel," said the lieutenant, after perusing the order that a private had brought to him. "It will require until late to-night to finish. Inasmuch as this is probably the last night that you lads will spend on land for some time, you might as well see a little of the city, if you care to, but be sure that you are within the gates of the yard before ten o'clock."

He then gave each of the boys a pass, and told them to be aboard the *Everett* not later than half-past ten o'clock, and departed for the special work to which he had been called. 31

"Wouldn't you like to be a lieutenant, though?" exclaimed Joe enthusiastically. "Just imagine being called from ship to ship to help them out of their difficulties."

And, discussing their aspirations and what the future held for them, the three young men from Brighton went to mess, afterward brushed their brand-new uniforms of the last possible speck of dust, and left the navy yard for a stroll through the southern section of the city founded by William Penn.

How far they walked none of them knew. They had turned many corners, and their conversation had covered a wide field—always, however, turning upon some military subject—when a church clock tolled out nine times.

"I think we had better return," said Slim, who was beginning to tire under the long day's strain and excitement.

"Yes," agreed Jerry, "but which way do we go?"

They were, in truth, lost. Uniformed as they were, they were ashamed to ask directions, and finally agreed that Joe was right in indicating that they should walk straight southward. 32

Twelve blocks southward they walked, and the damp, marshy atmosphere assured them that they were nearing the river, but their only hope now, as they plodded across desolate and deserted dumps, and even invaded a truck patch or two, was that they would strike a road that led around to the navy yard entrance.

"What's that?" exclaimed Jerry in a hoarse whisper, grasping a boy on either side of him by the arm. "Did you hear?"

"I thought I heard something," averred Slim, also lowering his voice. "What did it sound like to you?"

"We are almost upon the river bank," said Joe. "It was someone rowing, but it sounded to me as though they were using muffled oars."

While the boys stopped to listen, the rowing began again, very slowly, very cautiously, and then there was a muffled splash.

At the same instant a great flashlight to the south began playing first upon the sky, and then, in a slow arc, down the river and then inland toward themselves.

Although they did not come quite within its radius, the boat they had heard was between them and the light! It was a row boat, evidently heavily laden, for it rode low in the water, and it was occupied by one man, who was crouching in the bottom as though to avoid discovery! 33

Just as suddenly as it had appeared, the searchlight was obscured, and the blackness of the night was more intense by contrast.

"That light was at the navy yard," said Joe, beginning to peel off his coat. "Jerry, you're a fast runner. By heading straight in the way I'm looking you ought to be able to get to the yard in ten minutes. Do it as quickly as you can. Slim will stay here."

By this time Joe had stripped off his shirt and preparing to unlace his shoes.

"And you," blurted Jerry and Slim, almost at the same instant, but still in guarded tones, "what are you going to do?"

"I'm as safe as a duck in the water, and almost as noiseless," responded Joe calmly. "I'm going to swim out and see what is going on. That man out there is a spy!"

34

CHAPTER III

If red-headed, freckle-faced Jerry Macklin, star sprinter of Brighton, ever ran in his life he ran that night. Down across the uneven, hill-dotted dumps he tore at a speed that would have put his school records to shame. Three times he fell, but each time on the instant he was up and off again, without even a thought as to whether or not he had injured himself.

And all the time he kept repeating in his mind, "There's a spy out there planning dangerous things for the navy yard and the United States. Joe's in the icy water watching him, and I must get help as fast as I can."

It was good, too, that he did put forth the last ounce of his strength. Sergeant Martin was just passing through the navy yard gate as Jerry arrived, his uniform covered with loose ashes and dirt, and his hands bleeding from stone cuts received in his falls.

To Sergeant Martin, between gasps, Jerry managed to blurt out enough to make the other 35
understand. Within two more minutes Sergeant Martin had imparted the vital information to the captain of the company of marines charged with guarding the navy yard for that particular night. The captain sent two aides scurrying, one to his major, the other to the office of the navy yard commandant.

Twenty marines, fully armed, were hurried aboard a launch that constantly was kept under steam for just such an emergency, and, with Jerry directing, the boat swung out to Joe's aid.

Rapidly as Jerry had traveled the distance between the spot where Slim waited and the navy yard itself, it seemed like ages to Joe, out there in the icy water, a quarter of a mile from shore.

At first the tense excitement of the manhunt had made him unmindful of the low temperature, and he swam with strong, even, silent strokes that sent his lithe body gliding through the current noiselessly; but when he had come within forty feet of the rowboat its lone occupant had turned suddenly, as though scenting danger, and Joe, after waiting for a few seconds to see what might happen, considered the absolute silence an omen of danger and had dived under 36
water, staying there as long as he could, and coming to the surface at an entirely different point from the boat.

After that the cold got to the very heart of him. His muscles grew numb, he felt his strength waning, and he had to bring the whole force of his will to bear to keep from turning back to shore.

But just as Jerry had maintained his courage and strength by keeping constantly in mind Joe's plight, so Joe stuck to his terrible task, suffering the most severe punishment, by an unwavering confidence in Jerry's ability to get assistance in the shortest possible time.

He could see and hear that the man in the boat was working hastily, even laboriously; and every few seconds there was the smothered splash of something heavy being dropped carefully overboard.

And then, at the most inopportune moment, just when Joe was head and shoulders out of the water, not more than twenty feet away from the boat, the searchlight was thrown full upon him.

He dived; but not before the other man saw him. Joe, swimming ten feet under water, and as 37
hard as he could with the current down stream, knew that he had been discovered, for he heard the quick rap-rap of the oars, the sound dying away as the little craft sped toward shore.

When he did come to the surface it was with the certain feeling that the fatal searchlight had been played upon the scene two minutes too early, and just in time to prevent the capture red-handed of a very questionable character, undoubtedly carrying out some plot for an enemy government.

For as distinctly as he could hear the oars thrashing the water toward shore, he could discern the steady but subdued puffing of a steam launch racing up the river.

Joe was now on the point of exhaustion. He was flapping the water desperately, but he was making no progress, and he was having the greatest difficulty keeping himself afloat. He tried to cry out, and this final effort took his last bit of strength.

The steam launch was then perhaps thirty feet away, but Jerry's words, "Right about here," floated to him as from the opposite side of the river. The boat's searchlight that was then suddenly thrown on blinded him; he lost all account of things, and had the vague feeling of 38
sailing across great spaces on fleecy white clouds.

When he regained partial consciousness Sergeant Martin was in the water with him, and trying to raise his body over the side of the launch; then he relapsed again, for what seemed to him hours, but what was actually only about two minutes, and was awakened to his real senses by the shouts of Slim, on shore.

"Slim's got him," Jerry almost shouted. "Hurry, captain, right off this way to the shore. Slim must have him. Listen to Slim's bellow."

And if there wasn't a first-class ruction in progress just upon the spot from which Slim's vocal signals were emanating, then Slim's voice was deceptive, indeed.

As a matter of fact, there was the finest sort of a fracas afoot.

Slim, on shore, had been a silent and anxious witness to the sudden turning on of the navy yard

searchlight, and to all that it exposed—the boat, the man at work in it, Joe in the water, and his discovery by the boat's occupant.

And then, as the light was extinguished, and the whole affair was engulfed in darkness, Slim heard the rapid beating of the oars upon the water, and the rower heading toward shore—and Slim.

Unable to see the craft approaching, he traced its course by sound, and when the man stepped ashore Slim was only a few yards away. Discerning a shadow just ahead of him, the youth threw himself at it with his whole weight, only to grunt his pain and disgust as he came into violent contact with the trunk of a dead tree.

The sound, however, startled the enemy into an exclamation which revealed his whereabouts, and a moment later the two were locked together and rolling over the ground, Slim with a desperate grip upon the stranger's throat, and the latter landing blow after blow upon Slim's stomach.

It was during this mêlée that Slim spied the searchlight of the launch and let out his first call. After that most of his "bellows" were involuntary and but punctuated the rapid-fire attack with which the other man was landing his blows just above Slim's waist-line, or where his waist-line should have been.

As the launch headed toward shore, its searchlight trained over the bow, the man of the rowboat resorted to more desperate tactics. With a tremendous jerk he managed to free his throat from Slim's grasp. An instant later he gave the youth's neck a twist which almost broke it. Then he landed a vicious kick which put poor Slim out of business.

Just as the marines from the launch were climbing ashore the fellow sped off into the denseness of the night; and as his footsteps died away all present trace of him was gone. A dozen of them searched for an hour, but without result, and further investigation along that line had to be abandoned until the following day.

Meanwhile, however, all three lads were hurried back to the navy yard for fresh clothing and other repairs; having received which, together with hot coffee from the cook at the barracks mess, they were permitted, at their own earnest solicitation, to return to the scene with four marines who were to be stationed along that section of the shore for the balance of the night.

What they saw upon their arrival astounded them. Three additional launches had arrived upon the scene, and the commandant of the navy yard was himself directing matters.

He had in his hand a slight rope that ran down into the water, and close beside it was a hose line attached to an apparatus in the boat. The boys knew at once that a diver was at work down on the river bed.

From the side of another launch anchored parallel with the first, and fifteen feet distant, four husky bluejackets were waiting expectantly to divide their strength on two stout ropes that were being attached to something down in the water. The third launch played its flashlight upon the work, while the fourth steamed about, doing patrol duty.

Even as the boys watched, the commandant gave a signal and the sailors began hauling upward on the two heavy ropes. In a moment an oblong box, about two feet long, a foot wide and of the same depth, came dripping from the water. As it was brought to the boat's side two other men grasped it carefully and placed it in the bottom of the launch. Then the ropes, which were attached to a guide line, were hauled down into the river again.

"What does it mean?" Joe asked of Sergeant Martin, who had changed his clothes and arrived back ahead of them.

"What does it mean?" repeated the big sergeant. "It means that you three young men are due for several credits and early recognition, or I'm much mistaken. The man you discovered has not yet been caught, but he cannot escape for long. And when he is captured it will be a long time before he is free again.

"You lads have frustrated a dangerous plot by an enemy government. The river bottom seems to be paved with those cases. They've taken out a dozen already. One of them was opened, and, just as expected, it proved to be a water-tight container for smokeless powder!

"The government that had those boxes hidden there undoubtedly was scheming to have plenty of ammunition ready for use if it ever managed to land its men on American soil.

"But you boys appeared here just in time to blow up the whole plot. You have been in your first real action in the service of your country, and you have come off with flying colors."

CHAPTER IV

When the boys arose the following morning, each somewhat stiff and sore from the experiences of the night before, it was with a feeling of happy anticipation that made their physical discomforts seem like trivial things.

For before nightfall the twin screws of the large transport *Everett* would begin to churn the waters of the Delaware, her bow would be pointed down stream, and the great voyage of adventure would be started.

But in the meantime there was much for the lads to learn. Up to the present every moment had been occupied to the exclusion of such instructions as were absolutely necessary to know, in order that they might give the best service to their country.

And so they responded early to a summons from the superior officer in charge of men in the Signal Corps at that station. By him they were informed of the serious mission upon which they were bound, and of the responsibilities that would fall upon them should the transport, by any mishap, become separated from its armed convoy. 44

No message picked up at sea or elsewhere, he told them, was to be repeated to anyone but the superior officer to whom it was directed; and any calls for another vessel or station were to be ignored by them, even if their aerial should pick the words up.

They were told of the fine loyalty demanded of men in their branch of the service, and given some idea of the sacrifices they might be called upon to make.

"The success of this war," said Major Briggs, "depends upon the courage and ability with which each man in it performs the immediate task before him. Whether the whole world shall fall under the iron hand of a merciless tyranny, or the peoples of the various nations may govern themselves in the freedom of democracy, now depends largely upon the men of the United States. We must regard the responsibilities thrust upon us as a glorious opportunity to serve all of mankind."

Thrilled with the nature of the great work ahead of them, Joe, Jerry and Slim hurried down the long length of the navy yard to where the *Everett* lay moored to her slip, the center of much activity. 45

Steam already was up, as they could see from the thick black clouds of smoke that curled upward from her smokestack. Big cranes, operated by powerful winches on the vessel and on shore, were hoisting cases of various sizes and shapes upon the lower decks and into the hold. A small army of men helped complete the loading of the ship, and one group was experiencing considerable difficulty in trying to persuade unwilling mules to board the transport for Europe.

The boys hurdled over piles of food and ammunition, wended their way through scores of stacks of ordnance, and finally over a gang-plank to the vessel. There they saluted and reported to the officer of the day, who directed them to go at once to the wireless room.

As they entered there Lieutenant Mackinson was busily engaged in "tuning up" his instruments. He stopped when he saw them and reached into an inner pocket, from which he produced three large oblong envelopes. One was addressed to each lad, and as they accepted them they saw that each was closed to prying eyes by the official seal of Uncle Sam. 46

Swept by various emotions, the boys stood there gazing first at the envelopes and then at Lieutenant Mackinson.

"Well," said the lieutenant at last, with an amused smile, "do you want me to retire while you read your communications?"

"Oh, no, not at all, sir," Joe hastened to say, and as if to prove the statement all three envelopes were ripped open and the single sheet of paper in each drawn forth.

Especially addressed to each lad, the letters were identical and read:

> "I hereby convey to you my heartiest congratulations upon the efficient and heroic manner in which you and your two friends discovered and frustrated a plot to conceal enemy ammunition in the vicinity of this naval base. You all displayed true American courage; and I wish you every success for the future."

The letters were signed by the commandant of the Philadelphia Navy Yard.

"Look at that," said Slim, pushing his letter at Lieutenant Mackinson, utterly forgetful of the fact that the other man was his superior officer. "Ain't—isn't that fine, though? For the commandant to mention it that way, I mean."

"Yes," admitted Lieutenant Mackinson, "but he wouldn't have mentioned it that way if you hadn't deserved it." 47

"I'm not going to lose that letter," announced Jerry.

"Nor I," added Joe, "although we only did what any other fellows would have done under the same circumstances."

"Well," said Lieutenant Mackinson, "it showed that you were to be depended upon in an emergency, and emergencies are likely to crop up at any time in our work, so let's get down to business."

He immediately began explaining the apparatus of the wireless room—how messages were sent and received; the power of the batteries and their auxiliaries; the switch-board regulating voltage; the automatic recording apparatus—in fact, every detail connected with the intricate mechanism of an up-to-date wireless.

"There was a time," explained Lieutenant Mackinson, "when the sending of a message almost deafened the sender. It was like being in the midst of a machine-gun assault. But recent improvements have eliminated that. You may see for yourselves."

And the lieutenant tapped off the *Everett's* own signal call with little more sound than is made by the sending of a message with the ordinary telegraph instrument. 48

"We have a sending and receiving radius of from five hundred to eight hundred miles," Lieutenant Mackinson continued. "Of course, it doesn't compare with the great wireless station at Radio, Virginia, one of the largest in the world, where one tower is six hundred feet high and the other four hundred and fifty feet in height, and each charged with two hundred thousand volts, giving a radius of three thousand miles; but it is sufficiently powerful for practically every purpose required at sea."

"Wasn't Marconi a wonderful man?" said Jerry in true admiration.

"Yes, he was; no doubt of that, and he still may contribute much to the science, for he is not old yet," the young lieutenant answered. "But still, full credit must be given where credit is due, and in that respect it must be acknowledged that Marconi only assembled and perfected to practicable purposes the discoveries and inventions made before his time.

"Radio-telegraphy might be briefly traced in the names of Faraday, Maxwell, Hertz—the discoverer of the Hertzian rays—Righi, Lodge and Marconi. All of them contributed something to the evolvement of the present highly efficient and dependable wireless. Marconi should, and does, receive great credit; but the others, the pioneers, the real discoverers, should not be forgotten or overlooked." 49

The lieutenant's words threw a new light on the history of the wireless for the boys from Brighton, and they were anxious that the officer should tell them more; but at that moment Lieutenant Mackinson caught the faint recording of a distant wireless call for another station, far down the Atlantic coast.

"Here," he said hastily, turning to Joe, who was nearest him, "see if you can catch this message."

He slipped the receiving apparatus over Joe's head, and tightened up the ear-pieces, then pushed toward him a pad and pencil.

Into Joe's ears came the faint but distinct sounds of a distant call:

-· ··· -· ··· -· ···

"N S," Joe jotted down on the sheet before him.

"A ship at sea calling Newport News," Lieutenant Mackinson informed the other two, who waited impatiently for Joe to begin recording the message. 50

Newport News acknowledged the call, and then the vessel's wireless continued:

·--- ·- ··· ·--· · ·-·

And Joe, transcribing, wrote: "JASPER." Following this came:

-·· · - ·- ·· ·-··

The other boys looked on in chagrin, while Lieutenant Mackinson's countenance took on an amused smile, as Joe wrote down the word "DETAIL," and then nothing else but the initials "N. N.," which ended the message.

"Don't make sense," announced Slim in a discouraged voice. "You must have missed part of it."

"No, I didn't," Joe replied, looking anxiously toward the lieutenant.

"I guess he got it all," the young officer assured them, at the same time unlocking a little closet and taking a leather-bound book from an upper shelf. "Let's see."

He turned to the J's and ran his finger down the page until he came to the word "JASPER."

"That means 'We have coaled,'" he said, writing the words out on the pad. 51

"Oh, it's in code," said Slim apologetically; "I didn't know that."

"DETAIL," the lieutenant announced, finding that word. "'Understand and am following sealed orders'. That's the *North Dakota*. She has coaled at sea and is now starting upon some mission known only to her commander and the naval authorities."

Almost as he finished speaking the *Everett* gave a lurch, her whistle was tooted two or three times, the engines started turning, and the big boat began to vibrate under the pressure.

There was a shout from the thousand or more who had crowded to the river's edge, responded to by the fifteen hundred khaki-clad young men who were lined up at every point of vantage along the vessel's side.

"And we're off, too," shouted Lieutenant Mackinson.

"Hurrah!" cried the three boys from Brighton in the same breath, as they double-quicked it

behind the lieutenant to the upper deck.

The scene was one to inspire the most miserable slacker. Somewhere in the upper part of the yard a band was playing Sousa's "Stars and Stripes Forever." From the windows of the ordnance and other buildings at the lower end of the yard workmen hung forth, waving hats and handkerchiefs, and joining in the shouted well-wishes of those along the shore. The crews of every fighting craft in that part of the river sang out friendly advice to those aboard the transport, and two miles down the channel could be discerned the smoke from the stacks of the armed convoys that were to give the *Everett* safe passage to her destination.

Among those at the water's edge the boys could discern the big form of Sergeant Martin, and even as distance welded them in an indistinguishable mass, they could still see him, towering above the others, his hat describing wide circles through the air.

"So long, fellows; we'll meet you over there," shouted the men of the last vessel they passed.

As though by prearrangement the fifteen hundred men on the *Everett* began singing, "I'm Going Over," sang it to the end of the first verse, then stopped, and from a point well down the river could hear those they had passed taking up the second stanza.

Hours later, out upon the ocean, the dim lights ashore fading one by one, the fighters for Uncle Sam gave one last, long, lingering look at their native land. And Jerry, voicing the spirit of all, cried out:

"Farewell, United States."

CHAPTER V

The Fight in the Wireless Room

"Oh my; oh, my!" wailed Slim weakly, his head hanging over the side of his bunk. "I never felt worse in all my life. I never felt half so sick."

"Never mind," urged Joe, soothingly, "you'll soon be feeling better now."

"Yes, *he* will," moaned Jerry, miserably, from the opposite bunk; "*he* will, but I won't."

The wind howled, the big ship gave a forward and downward lurch, and Jerry would have slid from his bunk but for the quick action of Joe.

"I think I'm going to die. I wish I would," gasped the red-headed boy when he was again laid out at full length. "I had the measles and the mumps at the same time once, but I never felt like this. Why don't they steer this old boat through the waves, instead of trying to jump her over them?"

"There's a heavy sea running," explained Joe; "that's what makes the *Everett* ride so roughly."

"Wish I was back at Brighton," Slim groaned dismally.

Two hardy youths strolling along the deck, who hadn't been touched by the epidemic of seasickness, stopped to peer in at the porthole. They had mischief in their eyes, and as they caught sight of Slim's humorously pathetic countenance, one of them muttered in a low but distinct voice: "How'd you like to have some fried sausage, and some plum pudding, and some ——"

"Shut up!" bawled out Jerry with what strength he had left.

With a loud laugh the two withdrew their heads and disappeared.

At that moment the ship's physician, accompanied by Lieutenant Mackinson, arrived to give what further comfort he could to the seasick lads.

"It is clearing," the lieutenant told them, while the doctor measured out a powder for each boy. "The wind has died down and the sea is becoming calm."

"Oh, yes," the physician added, "in an hour or so you will be feeling better than you did before. Seasickness has a tonic effect, but it's rather a bitter dose."

"Sure is," said Slim weakly.

Nevertheless, it was just about an hour later that Jerry, feeling his nausea leave him almost as suddenly as it had appeared, raised himself on one elbow and looked across at his companion in misery.

"How do you feel, Slim?" he inquired.

"Almost human again," the stout lad replied.

"Going to get up?"

"Guess I can in a few minutes."

"I'm going to try it now," said Jerry. "Seems as if the pilot of this ferry had learned to steer her a whole lot better than he did earlier in the day."

"Yep," agreed Slim, sliding from his bunk. "Certainly was tough, wasn't it?"

"I feel sort of weak in the legs yet," said Jerry, by way of answer. "Let's go up on deck and get some fresh air."

"Stomach feels as empty as a vacant house; how's yours?" Slim inquired.

"Nothing in it but the lining, and I guess most of that's pried loose. We've got to wait more than two hours for mess, too."

"How about some fried sausage, and some plum pudding, and some——"

Jerry laughed for the first time that day. "That fellow certainly did make me mad," he admitted. 57

"Yeh, he made you mad," said Slim in a remorseful tone, "but he made me sick."

On deck a hundred or more vigorous young men were exercising their muscles in various forms of athletic sport. Here a group crowded around a contest in broad jumping, eagerly echoing the distances made, and there the men of another throng loudly applauded their favorites in a stiff boxing bout, while on another part of the deck a pair of one-hundred-and-eighty-pound huskies were struggling in a friendly wrestling match.

A bright sun shone upon a sparkling sea, and the air was just crisp enough to be invigorating. At that moment Joe came up to inquire how his two chums felt.

"Fine," declared Jerry.

"Like a two-year-old," added Slim. "That doctor was telling the truth. I believe I never felt better in my life," and he began flapping his arms up and down like a rooster flails the air with its wings.

"A fat man's race three times around the ship!" a youth yelled, spying Slim's activities.

"Hurrah!" cried the crowd. "Get them started."

The jumpers, the wrestlers, and the boxers immediately suspended their respective contests to enjoy the innovation. 58

Slim was trying to back away, protesting that he "couldn't run for a cent," when a familiar, smiling countenance intruded itself in the circle of good-natured faces with the suggestion: "Well, how about a plum pudding, then?"

Slim and Jerry at once recognized him as the youth who had similarly suggested a plum pudding, also sausage, at a most inopportune time.

"Have you got one?" Slim demanded, his spirit aroused.

"Sure have," announced the other, "and I'll make it the stake."

Another shout went up as a second group pushed before Slim another youth who, so far as size, shape and avoirdupois was concerned, might have been his twin brother. They looked at each other and both burst into a hearty laugh.

"Hello, Skinny," said the stranger.

"Howdy, Delicate?" Slim came back at him, quick as a flash. "Want to race?"

"Don't particularly want to race," responded the other lad, "but I'm awfully fond of plum pudding."

"And sausage?"

"Is there going to be a sausage in it, too?" asked the stranger, evidencing increasing interest. 59

"Only yourself," Slim announced, laughing and jumping back quickly to avoid any belligerency his joke might inspire in the other.

But he took the joke as good-naturedly as he did the howls of delight from the crowd, and the two peeled off their coats and discarded their hats as a couple of youths marked off the starting and finishing line, while others "cleared the deck for action."

"This will be the tape," said a tall lean fellow, as he tied one end of a string to the rail, at a point just above the starting line. "After you have passed here the second time we'll stretch this out, and the first one to touch it will be the winner."

"Right," said the fat boys together, leaning over in true sprinter fashion so far as their stomachs would permit them to stoop.

One of the one-hundred-and-eighty-pound wrestlers winked to his comrades and hurried down into the lower part of the ship on some mysterious errand.

"One, two, three—Go!" shouted the self-constituted referee.

And Slim and Delicate went! True, neither of them got what sportsmen would call "a flying start," but they got away, nevertheless, and with all the grace and speed of—two loaded hay wagons. 60

"Whoopee!" yelled one in the crowd. "Look at 'em go! You can't see 'em for dust!"

"Two dollars on the knock-kneed guy," shouted another.

Slim turned his head for the fraction of a second to learn whether this insult had been directed at him, and his opponent gained a lead of a foot.

"Go it, you deerhounds," shrilled an Irish tenor in the crowd. "Work your feet, not your arms."

"The elephant leads; come on, you whale!" shouted another.

By this time the runners had made the curve at the bow of the boat and were coming up the starboard side, toward the stern.

On the nearest armed convoy an officer was taking in the contest through a pair of marine glasses, and apparently enjoying it immensely.

"Hooray! Hooray!" yelled the crowd of onlookers as Slim spurted and the pair rounded the stern and came down to the tape at the end of their first lap, neck and neck. Both were puffing like porpoises. 61

"Hey, Sausage, you've got a flat tire," cried a youth as they passed.

And from another: "Your engine's knocking, Skinny. Reduce your spark."

So the good-natured raillery continued while the two fat boys drove doggedly on, now at considerably reduced speed, but still side by side, each determined to capture that plum pudding.

They had passed the tape a second time, snorting louder and in shorter gasps than before, and with the biting repartee still assailing their ears, when the man who had disappeared into the hold of the ship came into sight again, carrying a large can.

"Quick!" he warned those about him. "Right here—before they see."

And he proceeded to divulge the contents of the can as a heavy grease, almost the color of the deck, which he began to smear heavily thereon over the entire surface that the runners would have to cover, from a distance fifteen feet away from the tape.

"They're on their way," whispered a voice, and the crowd parted to give the two the proper space in which to finish the race. There was an air of great expectancy among the onlookers. 62

The lads were still struggling along neck and neck, but Slim's leg work was so timed as to make him the first to strike the grease. He slid, tried to regain his balance, skidded into his competitor, who also was floundering for a foothold, and then, progressing to a spot where the grease was thicker, both feet went out from under him and he went down, kicking Delicate's foundations from under him, also.

The crowd yelled with laughter, and the breath went out of poor Slim with a terrible snort, as Delicate came down squarely upon Slim's stomach. And thus, the most ludicrous sight imaginable, they went sliding under the tape.

"All bets are off," shouted the other man who had been boxing; "they broke before the finish."

Side by side, too breathless to articulate, the two fat youths lay there gasping for breath, while those gathered about them made mock gestures of "first aid to the injured." Nobody had been hurt, however, and the victims of the prank took it in the way it had been intended. 63

Delicate, whose real name was Remington Bowman, proved to be as good a sportsman as Slim, and they went down the deck arm in arm when the mess call was sounded. And it was evidence of the good fellowship of the owner of the plum pudding that he did share it with both of them directly after the meal was over.

"You fellows earned it," he said. And they agreed that they had.

That evening it was Joe's turn to do watch in the wireless room with Lieutenant Mackinson until eleven o'clock, at about which time the young officer retired to his bunk just off the operating room, and Slim came on, to work until three a. m., when he was relieved by Jerry, who stayed until seven o'clock, at which time the lieutenant again assumed charge until relieved by Joe.

It was a standing order, however—at least until the younger men became more experienced with the wireless—that Lieutenant Mackinson immediately should be apprised of the sending or receiving of any messages.

This first evening out the lieutenant complained of a headache, and, acquiescing in Joe's urging, had gone upon deck to get the air. Perhaps fifteen minutes had elapsed when Joe thought he heard someone prowling about stealthily in the battery room. 64

His first thought was that the lieutenant had returned to make certain that everything was all right, but a moment's consideration convinced him otherwise.

Whoever was in the adjoining room was making every effort to keep his presence there from becoming known!

It gave Joe a queer sort of feeling. What should he do? To seek the lieutenant and bring him back might require several minutes. Meanwhile the intruder might accomplish his object—whatever it was—and disappear.

He decided to act upon his own initiative. Tiptoeing across the room, he turned off the electric switch, which threw the wireless room into utter darkness except for the meagre moonlight

filtering through an open porthole.

Then, just as silently, he re-crossed the room to the door leading to the battery room; slowly and without a sound he turned the knob and opened the door to a sufficient width to permit him to peer in. That room also was in darkness, with only one porthole open.

Cautiously the intruder seemed to be feeling about for something connected with the batteries. 65

Listening intently for a moment, to get the exact location of the other man, Joe flung open the door and made a flying leap in the other's direction. The man was leaning over, and Joe landed squarely upon his back.

With a muffled exclamation of surprise the man jerked himself forward and Joe went hurtling over his head, his arms, however, still clasped tightly about the other man's neck.

Joe knew in an instant that he was in combat with a man larger and more powerful than himself, but his own youth and suppleness were in his favor.

Throwing all his strength into the movement, he twisted about and at the same time jumped, so that he managed to wrap his legs about the other man's waist. With another lithe movement he was again upon his back and reaching for his antagonist's throat, at the same time squeezing with all the strength of his powerful young limbs upon the other's ribs.

Back and forth across the narrow confines of the little room they staggered, now one having a temporary advantage, and again the other. Just as Joe was managing to fasten his fingers in at 66 the throat, and the other was hammering terrible elbow blows into his stomach, the bigger man stumbled. As he fell he turned, and his full weight came down upon the lad, almost crushing him.

Joe was not done for yet, however. With the strength of desperation he held on to the other fellow's shirt. He felt something hard and metallic under it, and in a new grasp included that in his fist.

Again the struggle began. Unable to break Joe's grip, the intruder tried to sink his teeth into the lad's wrist. Failing in this, he gave an evidence of his strength by rising, dragging Joe upward with him.

There was an instant of terrible whirling about the room, and then the man landed a smashing blow on Joe's jaw. Still gripping the man's shirt, and the unknown metallic thing beneath it, the lad reeled. The shirt ripped, there was another sharp snap, and the boy fell backward, dazed.

He heard the man run swiftly, almost noiselessly toward the stern of the ship; brilliant and many-colored lights flashed before his eyes—and he knew no more.

There was an Instant of Terrible Whirling about the Room.

67

CHAPTER VI

When Joe came back to consciousness it was with his head pounding terribly, and Lieutenant Mackinson bending over him, swathing his face with a cool wet cloth, while Jerry and Slim, whom the lieutenant had wakened, were standing nearby, one holding a basin of water, the other a bottle containing a liniment or lotion.

"You've been done up pretty badly," said Lieutenant Mackinson, as Joe went through the painful motion of moving his head from left to right, letting his gaze take in the now lighted wireless room.

"Yes," he answered with an effort. "Nothing serious, though, I guess." And then, full recollection coming to him, "Did he get away?"

"Who?" asked the lieutenant quickly. "Who was it beat you up so?"

"I don't know," Joe answered. "I discovered him in the battery room. We fought in the dark." 68

With the aid of the others he raised himself to a sitting posture, then stood up and walked rather unsteadily across the room, took a long quaff of cold water and dropped heavily into Lieutenant Mackinson's Morris chair.

At the same time he gazed for the first time at what he had been holding tightly clutched in his right hand ever since the knockout blow had been delivered. The other three also were staring at it in open amazement.

"What is it?" asked Joe, as the lieutenant crossed the room and took the thing from him for a closer examination.

"What is it?" Lieutenant Mackinson repeated. "Why, lad, this is the German iron cross! Tell us what happened here."

With the young officer seated before him, and his two pals standing at either side of his chair, Joe, quietly, quickly and as carefully as he could, gave them every detail of the occurrence, from the moment he had first heard sounds in the battery room, to the time that the other man ran away and he lapsed into unconsciousness.

While Joe was relating his story the lieutenant examined and re-examined the iron cross, the bit of broken chain still attached to it, and the piece of brown woolen army shirt which the lad had torn away with it. As the latter finished, the young officer hurried into the battery room, accompanied by Slim, to make a survey there. 69

In ten minutes he returned, his face pale, his jaws clenched.

"There must not be a word of this to anyone," he warned them. "I am going to report to the captain at once. Someone has been tampering with the batteries, and he had with him a portable wireless which he evidently intended to attach."

"You're the original little discoverer, all right," said Slim in open admiration, addressing Joe as the lieutenant hurried from the room. "And you certainly were game, to take the beating you did."

"Yes, he punished me some," Joe admitted. "But I got in a little work on him, too. The only trouble is that I'm afraid I didn't blacken an eye, or break a jaw, or otherwise do any damage that might be apparent and so lead to the fellow's discovery."

"The nerve of it, though!" broke in Jerry.

"A German spy, doubtless masquerading as an American soldier, and right here on a United States transport loaded with fifteen hundred soldiers and tons of guns and ammunition." 70

"Yes," said Joe contemplatively, "that's the very serious part of it all—the fifteen hundred soldiers and tons of guns and ammunition."

"Sh-h-h-h!"

Slim, who was standing nearest the door, had heard footsteps. A moment later the lieutenant reappeared, accompanied by the captain of the *Everett*.

When the boys had been presented, the captain abruptly requested Joe to repeat every detail he had told Lieutenant Mackinson. As he did so the captain gazed compassionately upon his injuries.

"And where is the instrument that you discovered?" he asked of the lieutenant when Joe had concluded.

The young officer stepped into the battery room, returning with a small, but evidently powerful, portable wireless transmitter and receiver.

"H'm," exclaimed the captain, examining it carefully. "Of German make."

"Exactly, sir," replied Lieutenant Mackinson, "and evidently quite new—probably never used more than once or twice before."

"This is very serious business," said the captain impressively. And then, addressing Joe: "Did you get a look at the other man? Would you know him if you ever saw him again?" 71

"No, sir, I did not even get a glimpse of him. But I thought, sir, that perhaps——"

"Yes," encouraged the captain in a kindly tone. "Go on with your suggestion."

"I thought, sir," Joe continued, "that if we could find a man aboard with his shirt torn in such a way that this piece would fit, and especially if he had the other end of this chain in his possession, then it might be pretty definitely assumed that he was the man who was in the battery room."

"The chain—perhaps," said the captain slowly, "although that seems doubtful. As to the shirt, no."

And, unbuttoning his jacket, he produced from beneath it a torn and crumpled brown woolen shirt.

"We found this about twenty feet from here as we were on our way," he continued. "It resembles, but it is not, a regulation army shirt. It is of the same texture and color, but it differs in minor details easily discernible. It is my opinion that the man who wore this shirt bought it and wore it for this very purpose, so that, if necessary, he might discard it and still have the one which came to him through the Quartermaster's Department. We evidently have to deal with a very crafty enemy, and one as bold as he is unscrupulous. 72

"Lieutenant, what do you make of his manipulations in the battery room?"

"There is no doubt in my mind, sir," Lieutenant Mackinson answered, "that he was about to connect up this instrument and then hide it for future use where it could not easily be seen."

"I believe you are right," said the captain. "And then what use did he intend to make of it?"

"Evidently his intention was not a loyal or friendly one," the junior officer continued. "It would seem to me that his probable purpose was to divulge to German submarines our whereabouts when we came within their zone."

Apparently the commander of the ship agreed with him, for he made no immediate answer. For several moments he remained in meditative silence, his brow wrinkled, as though he was turning the whole thing over and over in his mind.

"From the very fact that he wore such a garment," the captain said at last, "it would seem that this man is among the regularly enlisted men on this ship. However, that is by no means certain. There is this certainty, however: If he would go to such desperate lengths once, there is every possibility that he will do so again—only more cautiously than before, for now he knows that his presence on board is known. 73

"The most rigid investigation must be started at once, and for that, Lieutenant, I will require your assistance. Leave these young men in charge of the wireless room, unless something unusual or in the nature of an emergency occurs.

"As for you gentlemen," he continued, turning toward the three boys from Brighton, "you are commanded not to mention a single word about this whole occurrence to another soul. If any one should question you, with a seeming knowledge of what happened here to-night, report the matter to me at once."

"Yes, sir," the three boys responded, saluting, and the captain departed, motioning Lieutenant Mackinson to accompany him.

By this time Joe was stiff and sore in every joint. Jerry and Slim insisted that he retire immediately, and helped him off with his clothing. 74

Nor was there any objection from Jerry, whose turn in the wireless room was to begin then and last until one o'clock in the morning, when Slim suggested that he would stay on with him, "just to talk things over."

"All right," said Jerry, "and then I'll stay on during your shift, until Joe relieves us in the morning. We can get a good sleep to-morrow, anyway."

And so the long night began. The dull song of the engines, far, far below, became like the monotonous droning of giant bees, and the wash of the salt water against the side of the ship was a constantly recurring *swash-h-h—swish—swash-h-h—swish* as the vessel plowed on and on through the darkness, toward the submarine zone and Europe and the battlefields and the trenches and the men—millions of them—of the Allied armies.

It was near midnight, and the boys had fallen silent, Jerry with the wireless headpiece over his ears, Slim standing near the porthole, gazing out at the lone swaying light that indicated the position and the progress of the cruiser convoy on the port side.

Suddenly Slim whirled around, his face pale, his muscles tense, and with a motion to Jerry signaled silence. As the latter removed the gear from his head, Slim tiptoed across the room to him. Placing his lips close to Jerry's ears he said: "I thought I heard someone in the battery room. Listen!" 75

There was no doubt of it this time. Both boys heard the sound. It was of someone softly feeling about, as though in doubt as to his exact position.

"Quick!" hissed Slim into Jerry's ear. "You get the captain and lieutenant; I'll wait here."

And as Jerry disappeared through the room in which Joe was sleeping, so as not to give suspicion to the man in the battery room, Slim slid into Jerry's chair and centered every faculty upon listening to the almost inaudible movements in the next chamber.

He could tell instinctively that the man was feeling about the walls with his hands. And not

unnaturally, recalling Joe's experience only a few hours before, it gave Slim a creepy sort of feeling.

Then all sound ceased. Try as hard as he would, he could not hear a thing. He rose from the chair and went closer to the intervening door. All was silent!

A few seconds later the captain and lieutenant, accompanied by Jerry, came hurrying into the room. Without an instant's delay the captain turned the knob and they entered the battery room, switching on the light at the same time.

Apparently not a thing had been touched, but the outer door was ajar. The lieutenant jumped to it and peered out, but no one was to be seen. He closed and locked the door and began an inspection of the batteries.

"Everything seems to be all right," he said finally; and then, his eyes traveling to the table, he stopped short.

"The wireless instrument," he gasped. "It's gone!"

"Where was it left?" the captain demanded sharply.

"On that table there," Lieutenant Mackinson answered. "I placed it there myself, as you probably will remember, just before we went out together."

"I remember," the captain admitted.

"That spy has been back," the junior officer continued. "Back in this very room after his instrument, and he intends to use it yet if he can!"

CHAPTER VII

The Timely Rescue

It was no pleasant thought to contemplate the presence of a bold, even desperate, agent of an enemy government, on board an American transport carrying approximately two thousand souls.

That he was capable of going any lengths, if necessary, already had been proved; and the evidence of his evil genius might come in horrible form at any instant.

Nevertheless, neither the excitement nor the potential danger of the situation was sufficient to prevent Jerry and Slim from taking a full eight hours of much-needed sleep, while Lieutenant Mackinson, Joe and three other officers whom the captain had taken into his confidence in the matter, followed out every possible clue in pursuit of a solution of the baffling mystery.

The record of every enlisted man and officer on the vessel had been most carefully probed, without building up enough suspicion to warrant the singling out of any individual as the probable offender.

Likewise an investigation of the members of the crew had failed to develop anything tangible, even directly suspicious. It was a case of watch everybody, take every precaution, and be prepared for anything. Only nine men on the vessel, however, including the spy himself, knew anything about it, and the rest were in utter ignorance of the treachery that might be directed against them at any time.

Refreshed by their sleep, Jerry and Slim arose about four o'clock that afternoon. Joe, who had rested easily throughout the later excitement of the preceding night, was still in the midst of the investigation and was not then to be found. Jerry had some letters to write, so Slim went to the upper deck alone.

Seeing no one that he knew, and his mind weighted anyway with the menacing mystery of the strange happenings of the night before, he sat down on a coil of rope, just in the lee of the forward smokestack, to think the whole matter over for the twentieth time.

He was thus absorbed when something, at first vague and indefinite, then clearer and clearer until it was unmistakable, began to impress itself upon his mind. Like the awakening call that comes to a man in a sound sleep—seemingly as a far-off whisper that gradually gathers volume and strength until finally the sleeper awakes with a start to find someone standing directly over him, loudly and insistently calling his name—so Slim came to a realization of the strange series of sounds that were being repeated within a few feet of him.

Could it possibly be only the crackling of the steam-pipe that ran along the smokestack to the whistle—a crackling merely from the pressure within? For a moment Slim thought an over-wrought imagination was playing tricks upon him. But he rose hastily and crossed the short

intervening distance.

Clearly and distinctly it came to him then. Someone in another part of the vessel was rapping desperately upon that pipe! And in the long and short dashes of the international code that someone was repeating a single word—"Help! Help! Help!"

In another instant, using the heavy end of his jackknife as a crude transmitter, Slim was tapping off the reply:

"Who are you—and where?"

"Lieutenant Mackinson," the message began to come back. "Locked in closet off engine room. Can't make self heard. Can you help?" 80

"This is Slim," the youth rapped back upon the pipe. "Caught your message on deck. Am coming with help at once."

And he dashed down the deck toward the captain's quarters, almost bowling over the captain's aide as he hurtled into the sanctum of the ship's commander unannounced.

"Well?" the captain demanded sternly. "Why all the haste?"

"Lieutenant Mackinson," Slim blurted out; "he's locked in a closet down near the engine room."

"Locked in a closet!" the captain repeated incredulously. "How do you know?"

"He gave a telegraphic call for help on the steam-pipe which runs through there and connects with the whistle," the lad explained. "I was on deck and heard it. I talked with him over the pipe."

"There is no time to lose, then. Come with me." And the captain himself hurriedly led the way down through the lower depths of the ship, where it became hotter and more oppressive with every step they took.

They had taken a route by which they escaped the attention of anyone else on the ship.

"It should be right about here somewhere," the captain announced, as they approached a 81
particularly dark passage. For a few steps they felt their way along, and then stopped to listen.

There was nothing but the dull and constant hum of the engines and the almost insufferable heat.

"The other side," said the captain in a lowered voice, as they failed to find any trace of the imprisoned lieutenant where they were.

They were crossing a short gallery when Slim abruptly signaled a halt.

"I thought I heard something," he said. "It sounded like another call."

They stood silent a moment, and then, faint and indistinct, apparently from somewhere several feet ahead of them, they both heard repeated that which had made Slim stop. As the letters were tapped off upon the pipe the lad repeated them for the information of the captain.

"S-M-O-T-H-E-R-I-N-G."

"Smothering!" echoed the commander of the ship. "Great Scott! I believe I know now where he is. This way," and he started down the passageway toward a narrow stairs leading to a still lower chamber in the vessel.

Three turns—two to the right and one to the left—and the captain stopped again to listen. 82
Seemingly from within the wall, right at their elbows, there came a feeble knock. The officer whipped out a pocket flashlight. They were directly in front of a heavy wooden door. It was locked.

"Run get a cold chisel or a heavy screwdriver and hammer," the captain ordered, and Slim hastened away, to return two minutes later with all three tools.

"Stand back as far as you can from the door," said the captain, placing his lips close to the keyhole. But there was no response from within.

Realizing now that Lieutenant Mackinson must have lost consciousness, and that moments might mean life or death to him, the captain worked with feverish haste. He drove the heavy chisel into the crack between the door and the jam, and then, standing off to get a wider swing with the hammer, struck it sidewise.

A panel of the door cracked and loosened. Two more attempts and the panel fell in strips to the floor. Thus given something for a grip-hold, the captain, who was a massive man, took hold with both hands, put his right foot against the wall, and, with one tremendous tug, into which he 83
threw the whole weight of his body, brought the entire door from its hinges.

The captain went staggering backward from the force of his effort and the weight of the door.

The unconscious form of Lieutenant Mackinson tumbled out upon the floor. His face was almost blue from suffocation.

The captain sounded three short, sharp blasts upon a whistle which he had taken from his pocket, and two oilers came running to the spot.

"Help us carry this man to fresh air immediately," he ordered. "He has been overcome."

With one of the oilers carrying the lieutenant by the feet, and the other man and Slim at either shoulder, the unconscious young officer was carried up flight after flight of steps until, the

captain leading the way, they arrived at the promenade deck.

A seaman was dispatched for the ship's surgeon, who arrived a few minutes later to find the first-aid efforts of the four men just bringing Lieutenant Mackinson back to consciousness.

As the physician forced some aromatic spirits of ammonia between his lips the lieutenant 84
opened his eyes and gazed about vaguely.

"What's the matter?" he asked weakly; but before anyone could answer he had relapsed again, and there was another wait of several minutes.

But this time the lieutenant's mind was clearing.

"Somebody shoved me—in that closet," he gasped, "and then—slammed and—locked—the door."

He recognized the captain and the doctor. As his eyes closed again he added, in an almost inaudible whisper: "I was getting too close on somebody's trail."

The captain looked at the ship's doctor significantly and dismissed the two oilers with instructions to return to their duties.

"Found him locked in a small compartment down near the auxiliary engine room," the commander said briefly. "Hotter than blazes, and no air whatever where he was. He made his whereabouts known by tapping a message on a steam-pipe."

"H'm," said the doctor, whose youthful appearance might not give a stranger a proper measure of his long and varied experience. "Nearly suffocated, too. He couldn't have lasted there much 85
longer. His heart action is pretty weak even yet. Better have him removed to his bed, and kept there for the rest of the day, at least."

At that moment Jerry came hurrying down the deck. He was visibly excited, but, unlike Slim, he did not forget that not only must a soldier never permit his feelings to run away with him, but that he must be equally mindful of respect for superiors.

And so, even as two men carried Lieutenant Mackinson away, he remained standing at salute, waiting for the captain to recognize him with a return of the salute.

"And now what?" asked the captain.

Jerry stepped forward, with difficulty repressing his excitement.

"I stepped out of the wireless room for only a few moments," he said. "When I returned I found this lying upon the table."

He opened his left hand. In it lay a piece of light chain, both ends broken.

"Beside it," he continued, "was this note."

From his pocket he extracted a piece of paper, the edges of which were roughly torn. He handed it to the captain, who read aloud:

"Let this be a warning that no further interference will be of avail."

The captain looked from the note to the chain. There was no further word on the paper, and no 86
signature.

"I believe, sir," said Jerry, "that this is the rest of the chain which was attached to the iron cross torn from the man caught in the battery room."

The senior officer of the vessel took from his pocket the cross, with its two bits of chain still dangling from it. He placed the ends to the chain which Jerry had found in the wireless room.

"You are right," he said simply. And there could be no doubt about it.

The captain's face clearly showed the worry on his mind. The ship's physician, who had been told all about the affair, immediately after Joe's discovery of, and battle with, the mysterious stranger, appeared equally anxious.

"A man is discovered at night in the battery room of the wireless department of this ship, clearly upon an unfriendly mission," said the captain, half to himself and half for the benefit of the others, summing up the evidence thus far known to them. "He gives battle to the man who discovers him, and finally succeeds in knocking that man out and escaping. But he leaves behind him a portable wireless instrument, and a German iron cross, with two bits of the chain 87
attached.

"A few hours later that same night he returns to the battery room and succeeds in recovering the portable instrument.

"To-day Lieutenant Mackinson, while pursuing an investigation of the affair, is shoved into a closet and only escapes death from suffocation by making himself heard as he telegraphs for help over a steam-pipe.

"It must have been while we were rescuing the lieutenant that the same man again enters the wireless room and leaves there this chain, which had been attached to the iron cross, and also this note of warning.

"The impudent effrontery and the cunning treachery of this man constitute him a menace to every other person aboard this ship. We are not safe while he is free.

"This German spy must and shall be found."

CHAPTER VIII

The Death of the Spy

The inability of Lieutenant Mackinson to add a single word of further information to what he had said as he regained consciousness on the promenade deck increased the mystery.

The young lieutenant, it seemed, had been following a trail which he believed was leading him closer and closer to the object of the hunt, and it was in forging the links of this chain of circumstantial evidence that the young officer was led into the lower depths of the ship.

"From a sailor who did not know why I was inquiring," he told the captain, "I learned that on the night the unknown man invaded the battery room this sailor had seen another member of the crew, presumably from the engine or boiler room, throw aside something as he hurried along the passageway leading from the wireless room. He was in his undershirt.

"The sailor said he was about to investigate when he saw us come along, and you stooped to pick up whatever it was that had been thrown away.

"While I was talking to him another member of the crew, evidently also from the boiler or engine room, brushed by us. He had disappeared when the sailor said to me, 'I think that was the fellow—the one that just went by.' Not wanting to arouse his suspicions, I ended the conversation with a casual remark, and then strolled away until I was out of the sailor's sight, and then hurried as fast as I could toward the engine room.

"I do not know that part of the ship well, and it was very dark down there. I was groping my way along when I thought I heard steps just ahead of me. I stopped to listen, and when the sound was not repeated I proceeded onward.

"All of a sudden I was grasped by the neck and one arm from behind, and thrown into that closet. Before I could utter a word I was a prisoner behind a locked door. I called several times, and, receiving no response, realized that I must be some distance from anyone else and that the noises of the engines completely drowned out my voice.

"Every moment it became more stifling in there, and I had no doubt that I had walked directly into a death-trap. It was then I began signaling on the steam-pipe. I guess it was a mighty lucky thing for me that Slim Goodwin strolled out on deck just at the time he did."

And that was all that Lieutenant Mackinson could tell. The mysterious stranger remained what he had been from the first—a desperate and dangerous and unknown spy, lurking somewhere upon the American transport *Everett* with the evident intention of making the ship's position known to German U-boats when the *Everett* and her convoy of cruisers and destroyers entered the danger zone.

Then it was, with the lieutenant temporarily disabled as a result of his experience, that the three boys from Brighton, who seemed somehow to have been selected by Fate as the despoilers of all the spy's plans, put their heads together to devise a scheme of capture.

"We've got more than one good reason for wanting to get this fellow," Slim reminded the others with considerable warmth, during the course of their deliberations. "First and foremost, of course, is our plain duty to our country, to which he is an enemy and a traitor.

"But, in addition to that, there is that knockout that he handed to Joe, and the midnight scare he gave Jerry and me, and finally his effort to kill Lieutenant Mackinson by slow suffocation, not to mention the nerve of the fellow in coming back the way he has."

"Yes," added Jerry, "we owe him a lot, and it is up to us to figure out how we can square the debt."

"Well," said Joe, "I think I've got a plan that will work; but we've got to remember that we are dealing with a very shrewd man."

"Well, what's your suggestion?" Slim demanded.

"That we divide our forces," answered Joe solemnly, "lie in wait and try to ambush the foe."

"Right!" cried Jerry. "Joe, you'll be a general before this war's over."

"Along what lines do we disperse our forces, General?" asked Slim.

"Along what lines would His Royal Stoutness suggest?" demanded Jerry.

"Oh, you don't have to keep reminding me that I'm a trifle heavy," Slim replied in a peevish tone.

"A trifle heavy! Get that, will you," echoed Jerry with a gale of laughter. "A trifle heavy! Oh, my!"

"You'll find out if I sit on you," Slim threatened, in a belligerent tone.

"Come now," said Joe, "this isn't making any progress toward capturing the spy."

"No," Jerry responded, "and that's our first duty, even if it is a trifle heavy."

"I've warned you," Slim snapped out.

"Quit it now," ordered Joe. "Let's get down to serious business."

"All right," agreed Jerry. "Shake, Slim, just to show there's no hard feelings."

"Won't do it," Slim muttered.

"Oh, yes, you will," counseled Joe. "Shake hands, the two of you."

Slim's good nature overcame his feigned reluctance, but as Jerry grasped his hand he gave Jerry a jerk that nearly took him off his feet.

"Now we're square," said Slim, as Jerry rubbed his nearly dislocated shoulder.

"Well, that pull *was* a trifle heavy," muttered Jerry, determined to have the last word.

"Now my plan is this," said Joe, facing the other two seriously. "The nearer we come to the zone of the German submarines, the more this man will try to arrange to notify them of our presence, and to do that he will have to use the wireless somehow. It seems likely that he would make his effort at night, because then it is easier for him to escape detection. 93

"Now if we let Lieutenant Mackinson sleep during the day we could so divide up the work as for all of us to get some sleep, and then all could do watch at night.

"The lieutenant could be in the wireless room, and one of us in the battery room, while the other two did duty outside. If one of us should hide under that stairway at the upper end of the passage, and the other in that alcove at the other end, no one could reach the wireless or battery rooms without our seeing.

"It would be tiresome and monotonous work, all right, but it might accomplish the result."

"I'm willing," said Jerry, "but you and I will have to do the outside work. Slim's a trifle heavy to get into either one of those hiding places."

"Well, I'll cover the battery room," said Slim, ignoring Jerry's remark. 94

"Let's see Lieutenant Mackinson, then," suggested Joe, and they went to find the young officer who was convalescing from his encounter with the spy. When he had approved the plan they got the O. K. of the captain.

And so it was, four hours later, with the lieutenant in the wireless room, and Slim in the battery room adjoining, and Joe and Jerry stowed away in the hiding places selected, their long night vigil began.

Hour after hour dragged itself by without a development, the intense silence broken only by the sounds of the engines and the wash of the sea against the ship. To the three boys, unable to see or talk to each other, and Joe and Jerry scarcely daring to move, the minutes lagged like hours, and the hours like dull, black, endless nights.

Dawn came, and with it new activities in all parts of the vessel, but without a reward for their watch, and as the two lads crawled from their places of concealment at either end of the passage, to join Slim and Lieutenant Mackinson, there were mutual feelings of disappointment, but none of weakened determination.

"What luck?" asked the captain, coming in at that moment. 95

"None, sir, at all," the lieutenant responded.

"Very well, then, try it again to-night," the commander ordered. "But in the meantime all of you get some sleep. You may get better results to-night, for by then we will be coming to the outer fringe of the submarine zone. I will arrange for another man to stay in the wireless room during to-day, and if an emergency arises he will call you."

So the four young men went to bed for some much-needed rest and sleep, and when they awakened it was almost time for mess—directly after which they were to take up their night watch again.

"I hardly think we will be troubled with U-boats to-night," the captain told them, "for it is perfectly clear and there will be a full moon. The sea is calm and we readily could discern a periscope a long distance away."

Truly it was a beautiful night. And it was in this alluring quiet of seemingly absolute peace that one of the tragedies of war soon was to be enacted.

The Brighton boys and their friend and superior officer, the lieutenant, had been in their appointed places hardly more than an hour when Joe and Jerry at the same instant caught the sounds of some sort of scuffle on the deck above. 96

It came nearer and clearer until finally, as it reached a point near to the top of the stairway under which Joe was concealed, the latter could discern the fog-horn voice of the first assistant engineer.

"G'wan with ye, now," he commanded, breathing heavily, as though from some violent physical exertion. "G'wan with ye, I say, or ye'll be findin' it mighty unhealthy fer ye. It's meself that'll be moppin' up the deck with ye if ye try to get gay once more."

The first assistant engineer was a mighty mountain of a man, but his voice broke off as the commotion started again. Certainly he must have a rough customer to deal with, thought Jerry,

if he, with all his great physical strength, could not entirely quell him.

"Ye will, will ye?" hissed the voice of the engineer again. "Thry to bite me, eh?" and there was the terrible smash of a fist, and the unmistakable sound of a man falling upon the deck. "Ye dirty hound, I've a mind to boot ye into the sea."

And then there were other voices. Jerry heard the captain demanding an explanation, and the ship's doctor spoke. 97

"I found him tamperin' with the wires near the dynamos," the first assistant engineer was saying. "I niver liked his looks annyway, if ye'll pardon me, sir, fer sayin' it. And whin I asked him what he was about, he thried to git away. I grabbed him, and he showed fight. I guess I give 'im all he wanted, though, that last time."

"So?" said the captain, in a voice so stern it made Joe wince. "And what does this fellow do aboard the ship?"

"He's a third-class machinist, sir," the engineer replied. "But if ye'll excuse a word from me, sir, I think he's a first-class crook."

"Yes, and I believe he's worse than that," the captain added; and then, in a voice which seemed to shake the vessel: "Stand up!"

There was a strained silence for a moment. Then—

"Get Lieutenant Mackinson and those boys," the captain continued, and the ship's surgeon started down the stairway to find that Joe and Jerry already were summoning Slim and the lieutenant. 98

"It looks as though we'd caught the man," the doctor whispered.

As the four reached the deck where the captured man stood between the first assistant engineer and the captain, who had by this time taken out his revolver, there was a gasp of astonishment from Joe, followed by a louder "Holy smoke!" from Slim.

"Do you recognize this man?" the captain asked in a sharp tone.

"I should say I do, sir," Joe responded. "*He is the man who was planting ammunition in the waters near the navy yard that night before we sailed*!"

"The very same one, sir!" Slim exclaimed, with equal positiveness.

The ship's surgeon, who had followed the others upon deck, stepped closer for a better inspection of this enemy. At the same instant the prisoner, striking out with both hands, knocked the captain's revolver hand into the air, and thrust the engineer from him. Before anyone could interfere he was dashing down the deck toward the stern.

Just as he took a wild, headlong leap over the rail the captain fired. While the captain, through a speaking tube, was instructing the man in the pilot house to signal below "Reverse engines," the others rushed to the stern of the ship. 99

Far behind them in the foamy trail left on the moonlit water by the vessel they saw what seemed to be the head of a man bobbing up and down—and then it entirely disappeared. The ship was turned, and that portion of the sea searched, but without avail.

"Gone," said the captain in tones of very evident relief. "Well, it was death for him, one way or another, and he took his choice."

As the captain and surgeon moved away from the stern rail of the *Everett*, the three lads and the lieutenant still stood there, gazing far out to sea.

"The man who made me nearly freeze to death in the water," spoke Joe, as though thinking aloud.

"And pummeled my stomach until it was sore for three days," echoed Slim, in sad reminiscence.

"And made me run a mile in nothing, flat," added Jerry.

"And fought me to a knockout finish later," mused Joe.

"And nearly smothered me to death," spoke the lieutenant. 100

"And was finally corralled by an Irish engineer!" said Slim.

"Gone," concluded Jerry, "and no one here will mourn his departure."

101

CHAPTER IX

The Periscope at Dawn

That night the boys had ample evidence that they were inside the submarine zone, where anything might happen at any minute. Not a light was permitted on any of the ships, and they traveled along in the most peculiar fashion and over the most irregular course, never going at more than half speed and not more than a mile or so without a complete change of direction.

For no apparent reason whatever the engines would slow down and entirely stop, and in that position they would remain for ten, fifteen, twenty minutes or even half an hour, and then start up again on another tack.

"I believe we've become separated from our convoy," said Slim, who had been upon deck, and now entered the wireless room where Joe and Jerry were watching Lieutenant Mackinson make some readjustments of the wireless mechanism. "The pilot doesn't seem to know the course. 102
Say, wouldn't it be great sport if we should be lost from the others? But I wonder why the captain does not wireless them?"

"No need," Lieutenant Mackinson assured him, "for we are not lost, nor are we separated from them. Every vessel in this fleet is simply carrying out a program secretly arranged long in advance, and which was in the nature of a sealed order which the various captains did not open until this morning.

"I dare say that our convoy is as near us now as at any time during the voyage, and that it is maintaining the same position at all times, going through the exact maneuvers that the *Everett* is performing."

"It is to fool the submarines?" asked Joe.

"Exactly," the lieutenant replied. "Our government is taking every precaution, and no unnecessary risks. You see, there is no way of keeping absolutely secret the departure of our transports. Nor is there any assurance that the information does not go directly to the German authorities, and from them to the commanders of the submarines. Our actions are designed to prevent them from estimating our course or position.

"It was their knowledge of that fact, and their determination to learn our whereabouts in 103
another way, which doubtless led to that spy being aboard this transport. I feel——"

Suddenly the lieutenant ceased speaking, and all four, as of one accord, sprang toward the radio instruments.

"Listen!" Lieutenant Mackinson commanded, as he jammed the headpiece over his ears.

"*SOS*"—the most tragic of all the calls of the sea, was coming to them as a frantic appeal sent out through the air to any and all who might hear and respond.

"*SOS*," the lieutenant wrote down hurriedly as the message came through space. And then:

> "American—*Memphis*—submarine pursuing—53½ lat.—17 W. lon.—running fifteen knots three points south of west."

The entire message was repeated, and then there was silence—the dense and seemingly impenetrable silence that had existed before.

Came the nearer and more powerful crackle of the radio.

"One of our destroyers is replying," Lieutenant Mackinson announced, and one by one he jotted down the words: 104

> "Continue same direction. U. S. destroyer be with you in about two hours."

"Understand you," the return message came back a moment later. "Submarine still on stern. Has fired two shots, but both missed."

It was a thrilling moment for the boys from Brighton. Out there in the blackness of the night an American fighting craft was separating itself from the rest of the fleet to run full speed to the assistance of a helpless merchantman, and, if possible, to do battle with the enemy U-boat.

For an hour and a half they sat there, speculating as to the possible outcome.

"I'd give a month's pay to be aboard that destroyer," exclaimed Jerry enviously. "That's the sort of excitement I like. Just imagine coming up to that merchantman just in time to save her from destruction, and then having a regular battle with the submarine, and finally watching her sink, with a shell hole torn in her side!"

"Yes," added Slim, "and imagine being aboard that merchantman, with a shell hole torn in her side before the destroyer arrives!"

"It's pretty cold swimming on a night like this," said Joe. "I've tried it, and I know." 105

Lieutenant Mackinson, still seated before the wireless instrument, signaled them for quiet again. Another message was coming through space. It was in code, but was one that was easy for the lieutenant to translate, for he had heard it before.

> "Submarine disappeared. Returning to fleet. Convoying *Memphis*."

"Go on deck, keep your eyes busy off the port bow, and you may see something interesting," the lieutenant told them.

Following the suggestion they went above and had stood there for perhaps fifteen or twenty minutes when suddenly the lookout in the crow's nest sang out: "Destroyer approaching, two points off the port bow."

Almost at the same instant there loomed out of the dense darkness a faint light, apparently miles away. For a moment they would see it, and then it would be gone, only to reappear again, another time to be extinguished. But obviously all the time it was coming nearer.

They noted, too, that a similar process was being enacted by the cruiser in the lead.

"What does it mean?" asked Slim.

"The destroyer is just using another sort of wireless," Joe explained. "She is blinking her identity to the fleet, and the cruiser out there is signaling recognition." 106

The next time the destroyer signaled she was almost abreast of them, but about two miles away to the north. Her message then could be read by all the boys. The words it spelled out, however, were a complete riddle:

"Love—sky—sand—curtain—run."

It was not for several hours that they learned that the captain of the destroyer had flashed a message that he would convoy the *Memphis* several miles further westward, and then rejoin the others, and that the fleet commander, in flashing back "bundle," had given his O. K., with an admonition for speed.

There being no further necessity for the spy watch which had been maintained on the previous night, the boys drew lots to determine which one should do duty until morning in the wireless room, and it fell to Joe.

But the first faint gray streaks were hardly painting the eastern sky when Jerry and Slim, unable to sleep longer, came out upon deck to take for themselves a general survey of the danger zone. 107

"What's that?" cried Slim suddenly, staring off over the stern of the *Everett*.

"Smoke!" echoed Jerry, excitedly.

"Yes, smoke from the stack of the destroyer," said Joe, who had come up behind them without being heard. "We just got her signal a moment ago."

"How far do you suppose she is away?" asked Slim.

They were speculating upon the distance between the two vessels, when Slim, speechless for the moment, pointed to what seemed to be little more than a dark speck on the water about a mile astern and to the west of them—for at that time their zig-zag course pointed them almost due north.

"Submarine approaching astern!" sang out the man in the crow's nest.

It was as though the startling message had been megaphoned to every man aboard the *Everett*. At the same time the cruiser of the fleet began maneuvering herself between where the periscope showed the submarine to be and the transport itself.

Almost simultaneously the U-boat came to the surface and one of the big guns on the cruiser belched forth a shell that apparently fell a short distance the other side of the submarine. The U-boat itself let loose a shot, and with such accuracy that only the sudden maneuver of the transport at that instant saved it from being hit. 108

By this time the decks of the *Everett* were crowded with the khaki-clad soldiers of Uncle Sam whom the Germans were trying to prevent from getting into the trenches by sending them to the bottom of the Atlantic.

The cruiser had headed straight for the U-boat, while the destroyer was coming up behind it with even greater speed.

For some reason that never will be known the commander of the submarine had ignored the destroyer entirely, although it was difficult to imagine that he had not seen it. The general supposition later aboard the *Everett* was that something had happened to his batteries and he was unable to submerge.

"Hurrah!" shouted hundreds of men on the *Everett* in unison as the torpedo-boat destroyer opened fire.

And the aim of her gunners was deadly! for just as the U-boat began to submerge, one of the big projectiles from the destroyer hit her squarely amidships. There was a terrific explosion, the stern of the undersea craft was lifted upward, clear of the water, she stuck her nose into the briny deep, and without another second's delay, dove to the bottom, a wreck. 109

As the tremendous pressure of the water crushed in her air tanks, great bubbles rose to the surface and broke, causing rippling waves to roll outward in increasingly large circles. Then a flood of oil came to the surface of the sea, and the final evidence of the tragedy was obliterated.

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CHAPTER X

From that moment the watch on each vessel in the fleet was redoubled, and there was constant speculation, especially among the soldiers, as to whether another submarine would be sighted, and, if so, under what circumstances.

They had now abandoned the zig-zagging course and were taking a direct route around the north of Ireland and toward the North Channel.

On the following morning two additional destroyers bore down upon them from opposite points off the bow almost simultaneously, and as they came both code-telegraphed their identity. With these extra convoys it seemed indeed unlikely that a submarine would get near them, or, if it did, would attempt to do other than make its own safe escape.

Fair Head, at the northeast corner of Ireland, gave them their first sight of land since they had left the shores of America; and for many of them this first glimpse of Erin's Isle brought with it 111
the sentimental thrill of seeing the country where their parents had been born and spent their youth—for there was many a lad of Irish ancestry aboard the *Everett*.

Rounding Fair Head without mishap or contact with a submarine, the danger from that source was practically over. The convoy was reduced to a cruiser and destroyer, and thus they laid a southeasterly course to what your old-time sailor would have described as "a piping breeze."

They flanked the Isle of Man off its westward coast, and thence sped directly across the Irish Sea and into the harbor of Liverpool.

Their arrival was unannounced. It was only one of many, and a thing to which the people of that and other cities of England and France had become quite accustomed. Nevertheless they welcomed the hosts of Uncle Sam in the warmest manner, and in every possible way showed the deep sense of appreciation and feeling of increased safety with which they viewed the arrival of more and more thousands of American troops in their land, on their way to the trenches of France to help conquer the common enemy.

But there was not much time to be spent in Liverpool. Indeed, they had scarcely become 112
accustomed to feeling their feet on solid ground again before the order to march was given, and they left the river front to go to the railroad station.

There they received a plain but substantial meal, were inspected and admired by their British cousins, and then boarded the long troop train that already awaited them.

"Take your seats, Yankees!" shouted the bearded conductor jovially, and the boys piled in.

The details of that ride through England the boys from Brighton never will forget, although it was a long and tiring trip from Liverpool all the way to Dover, on the channel which separates England from the mainland of Europe.

They crossed fair fields and beautiful streams that reminded them of their own native land, and came within view of giant ancient forests. They passed through cities and towns and again came out into the open country.

Occasionally there were stops, when the soldiers were allowed to leave the train "to give their legs a stretch." At such times they were greeted affectionately on all sides by the men and women of England. 113

"Hi say, Slim, old top," Jerry imitated good-naturedly as they boarded the train again after one of these delays. "Hi say, did you 'ear that 'andsome little Hinglisher out there say as 'ow 'ealthy you looked?"

"Did 'e?" asked Slim, grinning.

"'E did," answered Jerry. And then, winking to Joe. "But 'e added, old top, that 'e thought you looked a trifle 'eavy."

Only the sudden jolt of the starting train saved Jerry from the wallop that Slim directed at him; and had it landed, Jerry doubtless would have found it "a trifle 'eavy," also.

There was a general laugh from the others in the car, for all three of the boys from Brighton had become immensely popular with their companions in arms, all of whom by this time had become well accustomed to this sort of gentle fun between the red-headed Jerry and "the 'ealthy, 'eavy lad" called Slim.

When they had been riding for another hour they came upon one of those vast English concentration camps where thousands of young Britons were being trained and equipped for war.

As the train slowly, very slowly, passed around the outer edge of this camp, England saluted 114
America, and America saluted England through their fearless young warriors. The young Britons shouted, waved flags, threw their hats into the air and sang. And the Americans, hanging from the car windows, and crowded out upon the platforms and steps, returned the demonstration with something for good measure.

From this point forward the journey constantly was punctuated by scenes and incidents significant of war. Here was an ambulance and Red Cross unit mobilizing for removal to the very heart of smoke and battle and bloodshed; there stood a row of houses whose battered roofs and tottering walls testified to a ruthless aerial night raid of the Germans.

It fired the blood of the Americans as they were reminded that these meagre evidences of Boche barbarity were as nothing compared to the deliberate and vicious ruin wrought in Belgium and northern France.

Dover at last—the channel port which marked the beginning of the last lap of their journey to France! The boys hardly could wait until the train came to a stop, to get a glimpse of the water, across which lay the scene of the bloodiest war in all history—a war in which they were to take an important part.

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"They say this channel is awfully choppy," said Slim apprehensively, as they left the car. "Do you think, Jerry, that we're likely to get seasick again?"

"Don't know," responded Jerry, also somewhat dubiously, "but there's one consolation about it—it's only a short trip."

Never had the three boys from Brighton anticipated such co-ordinated efficiency in the workings of a war machine. They had expected long delays, frequent disappointments and protracted periods of training before they should reach the front-line trenches.

Instead, they experienced consistent progress, many pleasant surprises and few disappointments; and now, upon reaching Dover, they soon learned that if it was at all possible they would board a transport that same night for the French side of the channel.

From the train they were marched to a great cantonment on the edge of the city. The procession there was like a triumphant march, with throngs lined along the streets to cheer them as they passed.

For more than a year before, enemy propaganda in the United States had constantly preached that England was weary of the war. This did not look like it. The very atmosphere breathed the spirit of "carry on," of renewed determination to fight to a finish.

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Amid such a spirit the Brighton boys reached the cantonment and after a hasty roll-call sat down to what they one and all pronounced a "fine feed."

They rested for several hours and then were again ordered to fall in. The march was begun to the docks, where three steamers to be used as transports were being loaded with provisions and ammunition.

Together with other American troops which had been awaiting their arrival, they went aboard the transports, but it was not till long after midnight that they were under way.

Not a light was permitted on board. Not even the officers were allowed to strike a match or to smoke. No unnecessary noises were permitted, and the whole proceeding spoke of the secrecy of war work and the danger of revealing their plans or their whereabouts to any prowling enemy.

With the dawn, scores of the men were on deck, including Joe, Jerry and Slim—and they were well within sight of land. Preparations already were being made for their landing, and a great excitement prevailed on each of the ships. Their long-held hopes were coming to fruition.

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France at last!

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CHAPTER XI

Tapping the Enemy's Wire

The following morning all of those who had arrived on the transports were established in a concentration camp, but it was merely for the purpose of inspection of men and equipment, and was not to be for long. It was that same day that the three boys from Brighton were for the first time assigned to a regular unit of the Signal Corps.

Also, with a real thrill, they learned that they were almost immediately to see war service, for American troops were already in the trenches.

It was a happy circumstance for the three lads that they had had such close association with Lieutenant Mackinson, for, without question, he already had gained an enviable reputation, and when he was ordered to emergency service, and told he might choose the five men who were to be under his direction, his three assistants on the trip across were the first ones named.

The other two were Tom Rawle, a fellow proportioned like their first friend in the service, Sergeant Martin, and a wiry, energetic, quick-speaking youth named Frank Hoskins.

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"We have a long trip before us," Lieutenant Mackinson informed them, "and we leave here on a special train in two hours. In a short time we will be in the thick of it."

It was joyous information for the five, and they set about their few preparations with a zest only experienced by boys knowing they have important work to do, and feeling capable of doing it well.

"How long have you been over?" Joe asked of Tom Rawle.

"Got here two weeks ago," the big fellow answered. "But I haven't had any real service yet. I was assigned once to Cambrai, but before I reached there a big drive was under way, the Germans were being pushed back, and the detachment to which I had been assigned was so far forward that my orders were changed and I was sent back here."

"Did you get within sound of the big guns?" asked Slim excitedly.

"I should say so," answered Tom Rawle. "And so will you within a few hours. Isn't that so, Hoskins?" 120

"Yes," answered Frank, "and when you do you'll get a new idea of the fighting qualities of the French and Americans, going shoulder to shoulder against the Boches."

"Hoskins knows," explained Rawle, "for he got nearer than I did."

"Only for a short time," Frank corrected modestly, "but they called it my 'baptism of fire.' I was out one night with an advance party. We were nearly ambushed, and had to beat a quick retreat."

"Well, tell them all about it," demanded Tom Rawle, impatient at Frank's unwillingness to talk much about himself.

"Oh, they fired on us from a distance of about a hundred yards," the other lad admitted, "and it was a surprise party for fair, I can tell you. When bullets begin singing around your head for the first time, and especially when they come without any warning from the enemy, or any expectation on your part, it does give you rather a peculiar sort of feeling.

"They got one of the fellows in our party with a bullet in the arm, then we all dropped on our stomachs and wriggled our way back into our own lines without any further damage. But we did some rapid wriggling, you can bet. There wasn't any time wasted by any of us, and inasmuch as 121 we were apparently outnumbered, we did not fire back, for fear of giving them an exact range of our whereabouts.

"After that I was sent back along the rear lines on an inspection trip which brought me all the way to this point, where I was held for the formation of this unit."

"Say, that must be thrilling—to be a member of an advance party like that," said Jerry, his enthusiasm as fiery as his hair. "I wonder if we'll get any work like that?"

"You sure will," responded Rawle, "and plenty of it. You needn't worry on that score."

At that moment Lieutenant Mackinson arrived to inquire if all their preparations had been made, and if they were ready to board the special.

"All ready," they answered, and the lieutenant led the way to the train.

They found several others already aboard, who were to make at least a part of the trip with them. There were half a dozen men who had been slightly wounded in the trenches, and now, completely well, were returning to their regiments. Also, there was a wire company of the Signal Corps, which was going to join another American unit. 122

For the first three or four hours of the trip the lads, even including Hoskins and Rawle, found the returning young veterans the center of all interest, and from them they heard many serious and amusing stories, many true tales of the attack and retreat, of shot and shell and shrapnel and the hand grenade and the poisonous gas bombs thrown by the Boches.

And then, one by one, the soldiers of Uncle Sam dropped off into long and restful slumber—slumber that was to fit them for hard and difficult duties ahead.

"This is where we get off," finally announced Lieutenant Mackinson, shaking the lads into wakefulness. "We leave the train here and travel the balance of the distance by automobile."

Never had the boys seen such a powerful looking car as that to which an orderly led them. Without the waste of a moment they climbed in—Lieutenant Mackinson, our three friends, young Hoskins and the towering Rawle. In another instant they were speeding across the country with the break of dawn.

But their trip now was far different from the one they had had across England. Where, in that 123 country, they had seen big concentration camps, and men preparing for war, with an occasional evidence of war's effects in a building wrecked by a night air raid, here, in the eastern part of France, they came upon actual war in all its fateful progress, with whole towns demolished, forests and orchards blotted out—stark ruin written over the face of the earth.

With a clear right-of-way, their high-power machine swept past ammunition and food trains—long strings of powerful motor trucks driving toward the scene of action. They came upon towns and villages in that area known as "behind the lines," where French, American, Belgian and British soldiers were recuperating after hard days and nights in the front-line trenches.

By this time they were well within sound of the heavy guns, and their driver told them that the artillery duel then going on had been in progress for forty-eight hours at least.

"Sometimes it lasts for a week or more, you know," he said, "in preparation for a great infantry

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advance. But I understand that this time they expect to go forward before the end of to-day."

"Which, means," added Lieutenant Mackinson, "that we probably will get a chance to get right into the thick of it."

On and on they went, and nearer and nearer to the scene of actual battle they came. They passed the third-line trenches, and now, in places, they seemed to be in a straight line with some of the concealed artillery that was pounding away at the enemy in terrible detonations that shook and rocked the ground every minute.

At the second-line trenches their orders called for a halt. They did not have to be told that there was "something doing." The road, so far as the eye could reach backward over the route they had traveled, was a constantly moving line of motor trucks, coming forward with men and shells, while out ahead of them, tremendous and menacing, big tanks—the biggest things the boys ever had seen propelled on wheels or tractors—were pursuing their uneven course toward the front, in preparation for a new kind of assault.

"They look like miniature battleships on land, don't they?" exclaimed Slim.

The others agreed that it was about the best description that could be given of these massive 125
fighting machines, equipped with guns and men, that could travel with their own power practically anywhere, across shell holes, over trenches, through barbed wire—the most human piece of war mechanism that had yet made its appearance on the battlefield.

Summons to a long-delayed meal gave a welcome interruption to their guesses as to just what their first duties would be, and they had scarcely finished their substantial rations of food when an orderly informed Lieutenant Mackinson that he was to report at once to the field headquarters.

"Await me here," he said to the five men under his immediate command. "I probably will be only a short time."

And, indeed, it seemed to them that he had hardly time to reach the headquarters when he was seen returning hurriedly. He gave some hasty instructions to the chauffeur, and the latter immediately began a quick examination of his engine and tires, which promised another early move.

"We go forward as far as we can by automobile again," the lieutenant informed them, "and after dark to-night we are to establish an outlying communication from the farthest skirmish points to headquarters." 126

Almost as he finished the sentence, they were started, but now their progress frequently was impeded, and occasionally a shell broke so close to them as to jar the machine from its course.

None of the men in the rear seats of that car were cowards, but, aside from Hoskins, it was their first experience under actual fire, and they marveled at the coolness of the driver, who seemed not to mind at all the dangerous quarters they were in.

When they climbed out of the machine, half an hour later, Joe remarked upon it in tones of open admiration.

"It's nothing," the youthful chauffeur replied. "You'll get used to it, too."

As he turned the automobile and started backward, Slim suddenly remembered that they hadn't even heard his name.

"Don't know it," said Hoskins, "but he was wounded twice in the trenches, I heard while we were waiting for the lieutenant. That's why he's driving a car now. He has seen enough service to know that nervousness doesn't help."

They had been directed to the quarters of Major Jones, in charge of the Signal Corps men in 127
that section, and it was with considerable surprise that the boys learned, upon arriving there, that they were to accompany the lieutenant into the superior officer's presence for instructions.

He was a man, they found, about forty years old, already grizzled and hardened by his field experience. And he knew how to convey orders and transact business without a moment's delay.

"You are to follow the red-ink lines on this map," he told Lieutenant Mackinson, as they all leaned over his desk to follow the tracing of his pencil, with which he showed them the course they were to take.

"When you have reached this point"—indicating a heavy spot about midway of the map—"you will seek a suitable location from which to establish communications. You will determine whether it can be done by wireless. As soon as you can do so, report what progress you have made. Use every caution, for you will be in the country occupied by the enemy. You should leave here about seven o'clock this evening. It is now six."

Fifteen minutes later they had examined their arms and equipped themselves with a full supply 128
of small-arms ammunition, portable wireless instrument and antennæ, and three rations each of eating chocolate.

The latter article is dispensed to every soldier in the American armies just prior to an engagement in which he may become separated from his unit or companions, and, if wounded, might otherwise starve to death.

The remaining three-quarters of an hour they spent in close study of the map that Major Jones had given them, and promptly at seven o'clock they started upon the dangerous mission.

With nightfall the big cannonading had noticeably shut down, but to the south of them artillery firing still could be heard distinctly. It was a black night and they proceeded with the greatest caution.

They did not dare use the flashlights that each of them carried, and frequently all of them would have to drop suddenly flat upon the ground as a big rocket went up from either side, lighting the whole section for trace of skirmishing parties.

In this way they went forward, yard by yard, until they reached a thick clump of trees. There, after listening intently for several minutes without hearing a dangerous sound, they spread out their coats, tent-like, while Lieutenant Mackinson, with gingerly flashes of his light, examined the map again, to make certain of their location. 129

They had hardly progressed a hundred feet further when the unlucky Slim tripped and went sprawling on the ground with a pained but suppressed grunt.

"Sh-h-h-h!" warned Lieutenant Mackinson in a whisper, while Tom Rawle, quietly chuckling at the fat lad's misfortune, aided him to his feet.

"Down flat!" said Mackinson again, as he discerned several shadows moving across a space a considerable distance to the north of them.

For fully ten minutes, which seemed like an hour, they lay there, not daring to move. They watched the enemy scouting party get a like scare, and then, after what seemed to be a whispered consultation, turn back to the German lines.

"What did you fall over?" the lieutenant finally asked of Slim, in a scarcely audible tone.

"I just found it," replied Slim. "It's a wire. Here, let me have your hand." And he guided the lieutenant's fingers to that which had been the cause of his downfall. 130

"Copper!" exclaimed the lieutenant. "Hoskins, let me have that kit."

And without the aid of a light he extracted from the leather case which Hoskins gave him a very small telegraph instrument. The instant it was attached to the wire the receiver began to tick irregularly.

Neither Rawle nor Hoskins understood German, but to the others they were words easy to translate.

They had accidentally struck an enemy wire and had tapped it! That part of the message which they had intercepted read:

> "—lead enemy to believe whole attack centered from your position, but main assault will be a flank move around Hill 20"

At that instant a fusillade of bullets cut the ground all about them, and the six men suddenly realized that they were under a pitiless and well-directed machine-gun fire.

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CHAPTER XII

The S O S With Pistol Shots

To move from the position they were in was impossible. All that they could do, imprisoned there as they were within a steel and leaden wall of rapidly falling machine-gun bullets, was to hope that the gunners would not change their aim, even by the fraction of a point, and that neither side would send up a torch rocket to divulge their exact whereabouts and bring sudden death or mortal injury to them all.

They knew now that they had been discovered by the enemy scouting party which they had observed a short time before—as they thought, without the others knowing of their presence there in "No Man's Land."

They also realized now, when it was too late, that the Germans had returned to their own lines, after that brief consultation, in order to procure the machine-gun with which to wipe them out.

And through it all they dared not return the fire, could not even utter a word to each other without fear of giving the enemy a closer range upon them. 132

It was a terrible three minutes for that isolated little group of Americans, for bullets were striking all around them, the nearest not more than ten feet away, and there was every possibility that another detachment might be flanking them, to cut them off later in their retreat, in case the machine-gun did not effectively do its deadly work.

There was but one desperate course open to them, and that Lieutenant Mackinson ordered at

the instant the firing ceased.

"Run!" he ordered, in a shrill whisper. "Run straight toward our own lines for about a quarter of a mile and then detour to the south."

And off they started, each with all the speed he had in him. The renewal of the machine-gun fire compelled them to take a zig-zag course, however, and in this way for the first five minutes they all kept together.

Then Tom Rawle, who, with the lieutenant, had been a little in the lead, gradually dropped back until he was abreast of Joe and Jerry, who were running together, and then behind them, reaching Frank Hoskins and Slim, who were bringing up a loudly puffing rear. 133

Finally, as they began to pass him, too, and his lagging pace became noticeable, he urged them ahead and told them not to mind him.

"I got one of those bullets in the hip," Rawle told them, to the surprise of all, for up to that moment he hadn't uttered a sound. "It cuts down my speed, but it's nothing serious, I guess. You keep right on and I'll follow as rapidly as I can."

"I'm almost winded myself," said Slim. "I'll stick with Tom; you fellows keep right on. We'll join you in a few minutes after you stop. Joe, I'll give that 'whip-poor-will' call if we can't locate you. At any rate, we know our way back to the American lines."

"Not so loud," warned Lieutenant Mackinson, as he slowed down. "I guess you are right," he continued. "You stay along with Rawle, but the two of you try to follow as quickly as possible, so that we can get Tom back to the lines for medical attention. It is necessary that I have the others with me, though, for we must not only accomplish our mission, but also give the commander that intercepted German message."

And so the little group parted, there in the blackness of night "somewhere in France," the lieutenant, Hoskins, Joe and Jerry to forge ahead as rapidly as they could in a detour that would again take them back into the enemy territory, but in another place, while Slim and the wounded Rawle came along at a slower pace. 134

The latter had been wounded more seriously than he knew, though, and he had not gone more than three hundred yards further before the loss of blood had so weakened him that he had to stop running and hobble along in a painful, limping gait, leaning heavily upon Slim's shoulder.

"Guess I'll have to quit," he said, a little later on. "Can't go much further." And even as he spoke he sank to the ground.

While Tom Rawle assured him that it "wasn't much of a wound," Slim, who was doing the best he could to stop the flow of blood with his handkerchief, knew that it was a bad injury, indeed, unless it was given early attention.

"I'll try to get one of the others to return," he said, "and then we can send to our lines for a stretcher to get you in."

"Nonsense," said Rawle, "I can walk; I'll show you."

But it was a pitiful effort, and unsuccessful, and Tom himself had to admit that he "guessed he was out of business" for a little while. 135

Thereupon Slim puckered up his lips and imitated the low but far-carrying call of the whip-poor-will—the call that he and Joe and Jerry had used so much to summon each other at Brighton.

He remained silent for a moment listening, but there was no answer except the distant rumble of the heavy artillery fire. He repeated the call several times. Here and there to the north of them occasional rockets went up from either line, but their brief light divulged nothing in the way of encouragement.

"It's not doing you any good to sit here without attention," said Slim at last. "Here is your revolver right alongside you. I will be back within half an hour. I am going to scout around for help."

"But don't take any chances for me," Tom Rawle warned him. "I guess I could crawl back to camp, at that."

"No, you couldn't," Slim declared, "and mind you don't try it. I'll be back for you in a very short time."

He disappeared in the direction that the rest of the party had taken, leaving Rawle there to await his return. Half an hour later he managed to find the spot again, but without the aid he had gone to get. Not a trace of the others had he been able to find. 136

But that was not the worst of it. Tom Rawle, helpless for all his big body and physical strength, lay stretched out upon the ground unconscious, a pool of blood by his side!

Slim put his water flask to the wounded man's lips and tried to rouse him, but without avail.

"*Whip-poor-will-l-l*," whistled Slim. "*Whip-poor-will-l-l.*" But the sound was lost somewhere in the denseness of the night, and there was not even an echo for response.

Slim was growing desperate. At any time they might be discovered by an enemy scouting party, and then they would either be bullets' victims or prisoners of war. Yet he knew that he could not hope to carry Tom Rawle back to the American lines. Rawle's dead weight would have been a difficult burden for a man of twice Slim's strength, and he knew it.

What should he do? Unnecessary delay might cost the other man's life. Already his wound had caused him to lose consciousness.

As he turned the thing over in his mind there came faintly, ever so faintly, to him from far, far to the south, as though but a breath of wind, the familiar "*Whip-poor-will*." 137

"*Whip-poor-will-l-l*," shrilled back Slim.

He waited, but there was no answer. It was as though a whip-poor-will itself was mocking his plight.

"*Whip-poor-will-l-l*," Slim whistled again, and thrice, but each time there was nothing but the grim silence for reply.

"Tom," he whispered into Rawle's ear, gently shaking the wounded man. "Tom, can you get up? I'll help you back. We can make it somehow together."

But here again only the weak breathing of his comrade testified to their plight.

"Better to take the one chance that's left us," muttered Slim to himself, as he pulled Rawle's revolver from under him, to make sure that it was fully loaded. "Yes," he continued, "it's better to risk discovery than this fellow's life."

He took his own automatic from its holster and carefully examined it also.

Then, with a revolver in either hand, pointing them into the air and with fourteen shots at his disposal, he began firing.

Bang-Bang-Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang-Bang-Bang! 138

The shots rang out on the night air like a series of interrupted explosions. But to the trained ears of the other men of the party—Lieutenant Mackinson, Joe, Jerry and Frank Hoskins—two miles away, they carried their call for help.

It was the S O S of the international code, but in a new sort of wireless—by pistol shots!

Trembling for the results that his desperate action might bring upon them, Slim waited, bending now and then over the unconscious form of Tom Rawle.

But in fifteen more minutes his inventive genius was rewarded. From a considerable distance, but each time more distinctly, now came the repeated call of "*Whip-poor-will*," and in less time than it seemed possible that they could make it, the other group had returned.

In low commands the lieutenant then directed affairs, and in exactly the way that he had been carried out of the hold of the *Everett* on the verge of suffocation, so they carried poor Tom Rawle back to their own lines.

And when he had been placed upon a cot in the first emergency hospital, Lieutenant Mackinson hurried off to make his report, in the honor of which all shared. 139

For not only had they found a location from which to wireless advance-line communications to field headquarters, but they had also intercepted a message, knowledge of which resulted in a quick change of plans by which the Americans were able to beat the enemy at his own game on the morrow.

"Rawle was suffering more from loss of blood than from any seriousness of the injury itself," the surgeon told them when they asked there of their friend's condition, on their way to their own quarters. "He will be around all right again in a week's time."

And so, much desperate work accomplished on their first night within the firing lines, the lads threw themselves upon their cots to dream of spies and captured Germans and injured soldiers and calls for help by new methods in wireless.

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CHAPTER XIII

The Cave of Death

It is one of the fortunes, or misfortunes, of war that a position gained one day, even at great human sacrifice, may be of no real or practical value whatever the next. So it was with the advance post of communication located by Lieutenant Mackinson and his party under such dangerous conditions during the night before.

The information which they had gained through tapping the enemy's wire enabled the American and French troops, operating together, to prevent the German trick from being carried into effect. More than that, it enabled them to turn the knowledge of those plans to such good advantage that the allied brigades swept forward in terrible force against the weakest points in

the enemy line. They pushed the whole Boche front back for more than a mile—at the very point where it had been considered strongest!

As a consequence, the point of communication which the lieutenant and his aides had established with so much difficulty was now well within the territory held by the American and French fighters. The requirements for a further advance now made it necessary to have another outpost point of communication as near to the enemy trenches as the first one was before the day's battle put the Allies a mile further forward.

And so, except for Tom Rawle, who was resting easy from his hip wound, the same party started out at the same tune for the same purpose on this second night, but with a very much sharpened realization of the obstacles they had to overcome and the chances they faced of being wounded or captured.

"We take an entirely different direction," Lieutenant Mackinson told them, as he looked up from the map he had been studying. "We go to the north and east and as close to the observation trenches as possible."

Now the danger of this can readily be seen from considering what an observation trench is. The front-line trenches of the opposing armies, of course, run in two practically parallel lines. But an observation trench runs almost at right angles with the front-line trenches, and directly toward the enemy trench, so far as it is possible to extend it. The extreme ends of these observation trenches are known as "listening posts," and often they are so close to the enemy lines that the men in the opposing army can be heard talking.

Lieutenant Mackinson and his aides, Joe, Jerry, Slim and Frank Hoskins, were to get their signaling location as near to an enemy listening post as possible! In other words, they were to court discovery in an effort to get just a few feet nearer the enemy than they otherwise would.

They went along much as they had on the preceding night, except, had there been light enough, it might have been noticed that Slim, in his walking, pushed his feet forward cautiously, and then in stepping lifted them high from the ground.

But as luck would have it they had not gone more than two hundred yards when a bullet whizzed within two feet of Jerry's head, followed by a shower of missiles that were directed entirely too close to them for comfort.

Instantly they dropped flat on the ground. In the distance ahead of them they could see three shadows stealthily crawling along toward them.

"Pick your men!" Lieutenant Mackinson ordered, in a whisper. "Fire!"

Their automatics let out a fusillade of bullets. Two of the shadows jumped slightly into the air, and then rolled over. The third man rose and started to run toward the enemy line. Frank Hoskins took deliberate aim and fired. The man dropped and lay still.

"Looks as though we got them," said Lieutenant Mackinson, "but they may be only pretending. Do not move for a few minutes."

While they were thus waiting, the enemy trenches sent up a glaring rocket. It fell shorthand failed to reveal them, but it plainly showed three German soldiers lying prone upon the ground, all of them apparently instantly killed.

"That's the part of it I don't like," muttered Slim with a shudder. "It isn't so bad when you are firing into a whole company or regiment and see men fall. At least, it doesn't seem so bad, for you don't know just which ones you hit and which ones some one else bowled over. But in this individual close-range stuff it leaves a nasty feeling."

"You are right," whispered Frank Hoskins, "but you'd better not talk any more about it now or some Boche may try the same close-range stuff on us."

Warned to silence by the lieutenant, they continued to creep along, only a foot or so at a time, stopping every few minutes to listen intently to see if their presence had been discovered.

On the night before they had been upon fairly level ground, but this night they were in a section that was all hills and hummocks and hollows. They would creep cautiously up the side of one mound, not knowing but that on the other side lay a group of Germans, perhaps out upon a similar mission.

For no one can tell what may happen in No Man's Land—that section belonging to neither side, before and between the front-line trenches of the opposing armies.

"With that star as my guide, I am certain that we have not turned from the proper direction," Lieutenant Mackinson whispered, as they came to a halt in a secluded spot that seemed as safe from attack as from observation. "We have passed the fifth hill. Fifteen more minutes should bring us to the place which Major Jones indicated on the map. It is a sort of natural trench. If we reach it all right we are to string a wire from there to our first observation trench to the northwest of it. I believe that the same place has been used for the same purpose before, during the long time that all this has been contested ground. An outpost there can observe and report every activity of the enemy in daylight, without himself being seen."

They began again to creep forward, now flat upon their stomachs, and only raising themselves from the ground a little way, but at infrequent intervals, in order to make sure of their position and that they were not being watched.

"Listen!" hissed Frank Hoskins, who was a little to the left of where the others were snaking

their way along.

They all stopped moving, almost stopped breathing.

"What was it?" Lieutenant Mackinson barely breathed, after several minutes of silence.

Hoskins crawled nearer before he spoke.

"How near are we, Lieutenant?" he asked:

"I should say about a hundred yards."

"Look straight ahead of us when the next rocket goes up," Hoskins suggested. 146

They had not long to wait for one of the great sky torches to come sailing over the side of the German trench, but from a considerable distance ahead of them.

"Did you notice anything?" Hoskins asked.

"I didn't," whispered the lieutenant. "Did you?"

"I thought I saw half a dozen men," said Joe.

"We'll wait, then, and see," said Lieutenant Mackinson.

In a moment another rocket went up, this time from the American-French side, and it clearly showed what Joe and Frank both had seen.

Six, perhaps seven or eight, men were crawling along, headed toward them.

"They are making for the same place," said Jerry.

"Exactly," replied the lieutenant. "It means that we have got to fight for it. We will have some advantage if we can beat them to the protection of the base of that hummock."

As rapidly as possible they started forward. Lying out flat, they would draw their feet upward and toward them, rising slightly and going forward upon their arms. This action, which put them ahead a few inches every time, they repeated times without number. But it was slow progress at best, and made slower by the interruptions of the rockets. 147

"We are almost there," Lieutenant Mackinson whispered, "but I think we have been discovered. Lie flat and don't make a move. By keeping my head in the position I have it I can watch that other group. If we have been seen it means a running fight to the mouth of that trench or cave."

Another rocket cut a glaring path across the sky. Again it was from the American-French side and illumined the black shadows strewn along the ground like little clumps of low-growing bushes.

"Ah!" exclaimed the lieutenant suddenly, and then, in the same breath: "Up and at 'em, boys!"

Before the others had an opportunity to realize what had happened, Mackinson was dashing at top speed toward the indicated trench or cave, firing as he went.

As they followed suit, but more careful in their shooting, for fear of hitting him, they realized that the men in the enemy group were doing the same thing—running as fast as they could for the same position. 148

"Drop!" ordered the lieutenant, and they did so, but it was as if he had issued the order for both sides, for the others were not a second later in seeking the security of the ground.

"Either side may begin playing machine-guns on us at any moment," the young officer whispered, between gasps for breath. "Forward as quickly as possible, and continue firing."

How they ever escaped the enemy bullets as long as they did none of them ever knew, but the men of the other side were just as doggedly determined, and no less courageous, even if three of their number already lay stretched out motionless and useless upon the ground.

And so the battle waged, until both groups were no more than fifty feet away from the mouth of the natural trench. Each moment brought them closer together, with the even more vigorous popping of their guns, for by now it was virtually a hand-to-hand battle.

Only four men now remained upon the side of the Germans, and, so far as numbers were concerned, the Americans seemed to have the advantage by one. But the score was evened an instant later, when one of the Boches "winged" Frank Hoskins, and his right arm fell useless at his side. 149

But Lieutenant Mackinson squared accounts for Hoskins by putting another German completely out of commission. A prompt return compliment knocked Jerry's revolver out of his hand. At this juncture Slim played a heroic part by laying low another German.

Seeing themselves now outnumbered almost two to one—for apparently they did not know that they had injured Hoskins—the two remaining Boches took one final, despairing survey of the situation, then turned and started on a dead run for their own lines.

Lieutenant Mackinson leveled his revolver at them, held it in that position for a moment, and then—perhaps it was an accident—seemed to elevate it slightly in the air and fired. Certainly neither German was hurt by the bullet, although it did seem to add a little to their haste.

"The position is ours," announced the lieutenant exultantly, and then, suddenly remembering that Frank Hoskins had been hit and that Jerry had dropped his gun, he inquired: "Hurt badly, Frank? And how about you, Jerry?" 150

"Nothing but a scratch," said Frank. "Took me right on the 'crazy bone' and made me jump for a

minute, but it's hardly bleeding now."

"Only hit my gun," announced Jerry, "and I recovered that."

There was no time for further conversation. The Germans had reached their own lines, and a machine-gun was being trained upon the Americans. They rushed headlong to the north side of the little mound, and into the opening of a natural cave.

The earthwork made them as solidly entrenched as though they were behind their own lines, and only heavy shells could dislodge them. But they had work to do, and the nature of it required that they do it quickly.

The entrance faced almost directly north and into No Man's Land, so that the light of an electric flash, such as they all carried, hardly could attract the attention of either side.

"Joe," said the lieutenant, sizing up the situation, "it is not safe to leave the enemy unwatched for a single second. I think it would be well for you to stay on duty outside, while the rest of us rig up the instrument and begin to unspool the wire. Hoskins, you're hurt, so you stay here with Joe. But both of you be mighty careful not to expose yourselves where you'll stop a German bullet." 151

With Lieutenant Mackinson leading, Jerry just behind him and Slim bringing up the rear, they crossed the five feet of narrow passageway back into the natural dungeon.

The lieutenant switched on his light. Involuntarily and with a startled gesture he stepped back.

"Jumping Jupiter!" exclaimed Jerry, "what's that?"

Slim, peering ahead of the other two, ejaculated something between a shriek and a groan.

Strewn about the ground of that cave, in every conceivable position of misery and torture, were the bodies of half a dozen dead men, all Germans.

The lieutenant's hand that held the light trembled slightly as he stared at the ghastly scene before him, but he was grit and courage right through to the heart.

"This is bad business," he said, "but we are under orders and we must go through with it. We cannot move the bodies out to-night." 152

He stepped further into the dark hole, and the other two lads followed.

Suddenly from behind them there was a grumbling, roaring crash, pierced by a cry of warning from Joe, outside.

The three whirled around, and for a moment no one could utter a word.

The mouth of the dungeon had completely caved in!

"Trapped!" gasped Jerry, who was the first to find his voice.

Even the lieutenant seemed dazed.

"Trapped," echoed Slim, "in the cave of death."

153

CHAPTER XIV

DESPERATE MEASURES

Never did three young men face a more terrible or more horribly gruesome situation. Here they were, locked in a natural dungeon behind a wall of dirt and rock probably four or five feet thick. Not only that, but the cave already contained the bodies of six men whose fixed and glassy eyes stared at them as though in mockery and warning, and the already foul air was becoming more stifling every moment.

In a dull way they realized that they probably could not survive more than two or three maddening hours in that death chamber.

"It may not be so bad as it seems," said Lieutenant Mackinson in a voice that seemed unnatural in that vault. "Perhaps it was only a slight cave-in."

He flashed his light about the hole. It was difficult to tell where the opening had been.

"Joe and Frank Hoskins!" cried Jerry, a new terror in his voice. "I heard Joe shriek!"

Slim, catching his meaning, snatched a rifle from beside one of the bodies, and with the butt of it began pounding frantically upon the side of the cave where the entrance had been. 154

There was no answering knock.

"Joe," shouted Jerry in a frenzied tone. "Joe! Can you hear me?"

No answer came, either from Joe or Frank.

"Pinned under tons of that stuff," gasped Slim, the words trembling upon his lips and a tear trickling down his cheek.

"I do not think so," the lieutenant assured them. "Both Joe and Frank were upon the outside when we entered."

"But they would try to get us out," said Jerry. "If they were out there they would give us some sort of signal that they were trying to help us."

"We might not be able to hear them," answered the lieutenant, even against his own judgment. "But look at it this way. Even though they never were inside here, they had a fair idea of what the place was like. They knew from that that we needed help, and needed it quickly. If one went alone, and anything happened to him on the way, the other might wait here indefinitely, not knowing whether he had got assistance or not. By going together they took the safest course." 155

And Lieutenant Mackinson's reasoning was correct. That was exactly the way Joe and Frank had figured it out, and, the latter forgetting all about his own wound, they had started as fast as they could for the American front.

"Keep cool, conserve your energy, and I feel certain everything will be all right," the lieutenant told the two friends with whom, in such a short time, he already had gone through so many harrowing experiences.

At that very same moment, a quarter of a mile away, Joe brought his companion to a halt, took out his flashlight, and, facing the American line, began making and breaking the connection in a way to give a number of short, even flashes.

Presently a light appeared, was extinguished and appeared again, at the edge of the American-French lines.

Joe had resorted to another sort of wireless—the "blinker"—and, not knowing the call signal for the station he was nearest, had given the prescribed call in such a case, a series of short flashes, or dots. The station had acknowledged, and he began sending his message out of the little battery in his hand: 156

"Americans. Three of party caught in cave-in. Need help."

And the answer was flashed back in the same code:

"Approach. Keep light on. Countersign."

Following these instructions, with Joe in the lead with the flashlight held out in front of him, they dashed on to the trenches. They gasped out the countersign, and were escorted by a sentry to the quarters of the officer of that particular section.

In a few words they told him what had happened.

Without an instant's delay the latter, a colonel of artillery, reached for his telephone.

"Ask Captain Hallowell to come here immediately," he said, and severed the connection.

He seemed already to have decided upon some sort of a plan, and his decisive manner gave the two lads a feeling of confidence in him. He reached into a drawer of his desk and drew out a large map. He ran his fingers across it and then came to a stop at a little black dot which appeared just in the angle of two converging red lines.

"Is that it?" he asked, turning to Jerry and Frank. 157

They examined the map carefully for a moment and then told him that it was.

Just then Captain Hallowell entered. His boots were spattered with mud, his face was grimy, and his eyes were bloodshot, indicating that he had been for many hours without sleep.

"Captain," said the colonel bluntly, "these young men are of the Signal Corps, as you you can see. They were detailed to-night to establish an outpost wire communication to Hill No. 8. You know it?"

"Very well, sir," the captain replied, his interest increasing.

"Well," continued the colonel, "they got there all right. But the other three in the party had hardly entered that hole when the entrance caved in."

"Great Scott!" ejaculated the captain. "I know that cavern. They can't last there long."

"Exactly," affirmed the colonel. "What is your suggestion?"

For a full moment Captain Hallowell was silent. "There is only one way," he said finally, "and that is a dangerous way. Blast them out."

"Blast them out?" repeated the colonel, but apparently without surprise. "How?" 158

"It would take too long to dig them out," Captain Hallowell answered. "And, besides, that could hardly be done without some sort of light, and that would attract enemy fire. There is but one chance, and that is to blast them out with one of our big guns!"

"Can you do it?" the colonel demanded again, in his blunt, insistent way.

"I will do my utmost to save them, sir," Captain Hallowell replied.

"Very well, then," answered his superior officer. "If you feel certain that is the only way, go ahead. Personally, knowing the place as I do, I see no other method myself. Have you the range?"

"I did have, sir," said Captain Hallowell, "but in such a delicate matter as this it would be necessary to be absolutely accurate. We have been firing practically all day, and the position of the guns changes slightly, of course. I would want to find a new and exact range."

He had noticed Frank's limp arm, and he turned to Joe.

"Take this flashlight," he ordered. "It is more powerful than yours. Get back there as quickly as you can, and follow to the letter these directions: Keep between us and that hill until you get to 159
it. Stay on this side of the hill and crawl around toward the entrance until you get to a point where you can place this light, facing us, two feet above the ground and one foot in from the outer surface extremity. Leave it there until you see three quick successive rockets go straight up in the air from here. After that I will give you three minutes in which to get back to a place of safety. I'll put that flashlight out of business, and I think I can liberate your friends."

"Is your injury a serious one?" the colonel demanded of Frank.

"Very slight, sir. Only a flesh wound," Frank responded eagerly.

"Then take this light," the colonel ordered, "and follow him at a distance of a hundred yards. If anything should happen to your friend, you follow the directions you have just heard."

"Yes, sir," the lads responded in unison, and, with a hasty salute, were off.

Three times did Joe drop to the ground, as a shadow seemed to move somewhere out in the distance before him. But each time he was up and off again almost upon the instant, thinking of his own safety only as that of his three friends depended upon it. 160

And what of those inside?

Even the courageous Lieutenant Mackinson was beginning to show the anxiety he felt, while Jerry and Slim, despite their bravest efforts, gave way to occasional expressions of the horror of the thing.

They had pounded upon the walls until they had been overcome with despair, and then they had set to work digging with the only instruments at hand—the bayonets on the German rifles.

But soon they realized that this, too, was as hopeless as the pounding, for it further exhausted the energy which the foul air was rapidly sapping, without making any apparent opening in the thick earthen wall that surrounded them.

"Well," said Slim at last, gulping back his nausea, and smiling almost in his old time way, "I'm as anxious as anybody to keep up hope to the last. But if this is to be our end, I guess we can face it as Americans should."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Lieutenant Mackinson, "I always knew that each one of you fellows had the right sort of stuff in you."

And Jerry, too, slapped him affectionately on the back. 161

"Slim," he said, smiling over at his chum, and ready for his pun, even under such circumstances, "my head is feeling a 'trifle heavy,' but I'm game to stand up to the last."

Thus they sat down to wait—for just what, they did not know—while at that very moment, four feet away from them on the other side of the wall, faithful Joe was setting up the flashlight exactly according to directions.

For a few seconds he waited, and then, three times in quick succession, a rocket went into the air from just behind the American lines.

Over there Captain Hallowell himself found the range, submitted it to his most expert gunner, who verified it, and then they waited for the three minutes to elapse, during which Joe was to seek a place of safety.

It was in that interval, too, that Fate intervened for those within the cave, for they were sitting with their backs to the very point against which the shell was to be directed.

"We need all our strength," Lieutenant Mackinson was saying. "So long as possible we want to remain in full possession of our senses. The air is purer near the floor. I think it would be better 162
to lie down."

And following his suggestion and example, the other two stretched themselves out in the middle of the cavern.

Within the American lines, at that point where a regiment of heavy artillery was stationed, Captain Hallowell raised his hand in signal to his gunner. Out on the parapet of the front trench an anxious colonel was standing, regardless of all danger, a pair of powerful glasses to his eyes. His vision was focused upon a little light far out in No Man's Land.

Two hundred feet away from that light Joe and Frank Hoskins lay prone upon the ground, silent, impatient, fearful, hoping.

With a quick motion the artillery captain swung his outstretched arm downward. There was a roar, a flash, and a great shell tore through the air. Out in No Man's Land there was a second explosion as the shell hit, and the target—a flashlight—was blown to atoms.

Over in the German trenches a sentinel chuckled at the thought of another wasted American

shell, but out of the hole that that shell had torn three pale, haggard, and exhausted youths were crawling to safety and God's fresh air. And across No Man's Land dashed two pals to greet them.

American determination and American marksmanship had saved three American lives. The German sentinel might have his laugh if he liked.

It was hours later before the three who had been imprisoned learned how their rescue had been effected; but they got an inkling of it as they came within four hundred yards of the American-French front.

"What are you doing?" Lieutenant Mackinson had asked, as Joe brought the party to a stop.

"Just a moment and you will see," Joe had responded.

And, first in wonder and then with a dawning understanding, the other three read off his flashed message:

"Signal Corps men, and whole party safe."

CHAPTER XV

The Surprise Attack—Promotion

During the week that followed, the lads were confined almost entirely to regular routine work, with nothing particularly exciting. Frank Hoskins' elbow wound healed quickly, without any serious results; and Tom Rawle, who had been under treatment at the field hospital, was able to get about the camp, although still pale and weak, and limping considerably from his injury.

But on the eighth day a veritable fury launched itself upon that section of the American-French front, in the shape of seemingly endless brigades of Boches that were hurled "over the top" of their own breastworks, across No Man's Land, and upon the first-line trenches of the Allies.

For several days the American and French aviators had been reporting heavy German formations in that region, evidently with the design of a terrific assault, but the allied commanders had not expected it so soon, and in truth they were not fully prepared for it.

It was a surprise attack in every sense of the word, with all the terrible carnage that such a battle brings.

Shortly before midnight of the preceding night a terrible bombardment had been directed against the American-French trenches, and their hidden artillery to the rear of them. This was kept up for about seven hours, and the duel of heavy guns shook the earth like a quake and was deafening.

Then, just as dawn was breaking, the infantry onslaught, participated in at some points by detachments of cavalry, began.

For three hours the Americans and the French fought stubbornly and with every ounce of strength and determination. Whole regiments and even brigades were wiped out on both sides, but the Boches, who had prepared every detail of the assault for weeks, were readier than their opponents and filled the gaps in their lines more quickly.

By noon it became apparent that the sacrifice of lives was becoming too great to warrant the Allies trying to hold their first-line trenches much longer, and that they must give them up, at least until they could re-mobilize their forces for a counter-attack.

The order was therefore given for those in the rear, including food and ammunition trains, field hospitals, etc., to fall back, in order to make way for the strategic retreat of those on the front when the moment for that retreat came.

Everything moved like clockwork, and with the greatest possible speed. And throughout it all men on both sides were shooting, shouting, shrieking, fighting, falling, while others, trapped in their dug-outs, either surrendered or fought desperately on until they fell wounded or lifeless before superior numbers.

Half a mile in the air, apparently over a point midway between what had been the first-line trenches of the opposing armies, a stationary balloon showed where Jerry and an observation officer were doing duty on that fateful day. Jerry was operating a telephone that ran directly to division headquarters, and hardly a moment passed when he was not repeating some observation of the other man in the basket with him, or relaying to him a query from the commander below.

Every detail of that tremendous battle Jerry knew. His own occasional glimpses over the side

informed him of the temporary reverses his own army was suffering, while the remarks of the officer told him where the Germans were meeting their bitterest repulses, where they were drawing up their heaviest forces of reserves, what quick changes were being made in their general line of formation, and how far back their forces seemed to extend.

Slim Goodwin, busy as he was with the wireless at headquarters, found time for occasional glances upward at that balloon, to make sure that thus far his friend was still safe.

And even in the thick of machine-gun fire and shrapnel, where Lieutenant Mackinson, Joe, Frank Hoskins and two or three others were laying a new line of communication, the wavering, swaying target was watched from time to time, and speculations made as to how long it could remain without being punctured by a bullet, thus forcing its two occupants to resort to their parachutes to make a landing.

168 It was now well into the afternoon. The Germans had swept into the places vacated by the Americans and French, and still the battle raged. It was now that Slim began to wait anxiously for the new development, which his familiarity with the secret orders issued made him know was coming.

And finally it did come, and in a way that staggered the Boches.

The Americans and French had retreated to a general line which permitted a quick re-mobilization to the best advantage. There their front-line ranks held firm, while the new formation was being effected behind them. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when this was complete.

Then, in concerted action, the lines opened at alternate points, and pairs, dozens, scores of the huge armored tanks rolled through, their big guns already blazing shells into the ranks of the disconcerted enemy.

Nothing could halt them. They climbed trench parapets, descended into gullies, came out upon level land, and over their whole path swept destruction to the Germans.

Unable either to resist or to stop the progress of the tanks, which were followed by whole divisions of infantry, the Boches were forced to retreat and not only abandon every foot of the ground they had gained, but to sacrifice a part of their own first line as well.

Scores of Huge Armored Tanks Rolled Through

169 It was one of the greatest and at the same time one of the most sudden reprisals of the war up to that time, and the victory that had been snatched from defeat was cheered by thousands of Americans and Frenchmen as they again took possession of their own trenches, or pushed onward across No Man's Land to occupy those which the Germans were now abandoning.

The sun was setting, and soon, in great measure, at least, hostilities would be suspended for the night.

Their work completed, Lieutenant Mackinson and his men were on their way back to make their report when they met Slim, who had been relieved for the night at headquarters.

"What time did Jerry come down?" Joe asked, after they had passed remarks about the various thrills of the day.

"Don't know," Slim answered, "but I saw them there at four o'clock, and they weren't there when I looked again, about half an hour later, so you can judge pretty well for yourself."

"Guess he had a pretty good bird's-eye view of the whole thing," said Joe, as they passed on, to meet again before mess. 170

Except for spasmodic outbursts here and there, the trench duel had almost entirely subsided, and the heavy roar of the artillery also was punctuated with longer pauses. Whatever the morrow might bring, the night promised to be fairly quiet, while each side took account of stock and made necessary repairs, or altered their plans to meet the new situation.

Our young friends were busy with wash basin, soap and water, taking off the grime in preparation for the evening meal and wondering where Jerry was keeping himself all the while, when suddenly a very strange thing happened beyond the enemy's line.

Lieutenant Mackinson was the first to discover it and call the attention of the others.

A Taube, one of the smaller, lighter, and more easily handled aeroplanes, and used in great numbers by the Germans, shot into the air at great speed from behind the Boche entrenchments. In its upward course its path was a dizzy spiral, and, if one on the ground might judge, its pilot seemed to be seeking a particular air channel. At least that was the way it looked.

Then, from almost the same point from which it had come into view, half a dozen other planes 171
rose into the air, following in the path of the first, and also flying at top speed. Up to then there was nothing so very strange about the whole procedure. It simply indicated that those manning the American and French anti-aircraft guns, and the aviators of those two armies, should get ready to repel an enemy air raid.

But the queer thing occurred when every one of the pursuing planes opened up their machine-guns almost simultaneously upon the first. And even this might have been considered a well-designed hoax, were it not for the unmistakable evidence that the first aeroplane, the Taube, had been hit.

Still going at maximum speed, and now on a straight line toward the American side, without seeking a further height, the Taube several times wavered, and, a moment later, almost turned over.

But the pilot righted her, and even as the pursuers began gaining, and still kept up an incessant fire, he pointed her nose downward toward the American lines.

Four American planes sailed off and upward to meet the oncoming German air armada. But from the ground it could be seen that the man in the observer's place in the Taube was making desperate signals. 172

The American planes maneuvered in such a way as to encircle the Taube, and yet at close enough range to examine her without particular menace to themselves. There were several seconds of criss-crossing and rising and descending, and then as a unit the American planes left the Taube and started after the German craft, which had hesitated, as though uncertain what further course to follow.

Several volleys of shots were exchanged, and the other German planes turned back toward their own lines. The Taube continued on its wavering, crippled, downward course toward the allied lines.

"Looks as though a couple of our men had been reconnoitering the German lines in one of their own make of machines," said Lieutenant Mackinson, as the Taube came within a hundred yards of the ground and righted herself for a landing.

There was a general rush toward it as it hit the ground. Of its own momentum it rolled to within a two minutes' run of where the lieutenant and the others had been standing. In another instant it was entirely surrounded by a crowd of curious American soldiers. 173

But if they were surprised at seeing seated therein two men in the uniforms of the United States army, their feelings hardly compared with those of Lieutenant Mackinson, Joe, Slim and Frank Hoskins, as they recognized, stepping out of the Taube, Jerry and the observation officer with whom he had occupied the stationary balloon practically all of that day.

"Who are you?" "What happened?" "Where have you been?" and a score of similar questions were fired at them by the other soldiers as Jerry shook hands with his friends, and the officer smilingly made away to file his report.

"Well, to put it briefly," Jerry said, in answer to the general demands for information, "we were anchored off there most of the day in an observation balloon. Late in the afternoon a shell cut our cable, and almost before we knew it we had been carried behind the German lines.

"The fight was still commanding the attention of almost everyone, and after descending a little by permitting some of the gas to escape, we jumped over the side of the basket and came down on our parachutes. I landed in a deserted barnyard, and the officer hit the earth only a short 174
distance away.

"While we were hiding there, debating just what we should do, along comes a Taube, and its pilot decides to make a landing almost at that same place. Well, the officer being a pretty good pilot, we decided to have that machine. We got it, and I guess that pilot's head aches yet where I plumped him with the butt of my gun when he wasn't expecting anything of the kind.

"But some other German aviators saw the affair, apparently recognized our uniforms, and hardly gave us time to make a decent start.

"Say," Jerry concluded, "they certainly did pebble us with machine-gun bullets! I saw two bounce off the propeller, and one broke a wire on the left wing, making us flap around rather uncertainly for a few minutes. It was a great race, though, and we considered our greatest danger lay in landing on this side. We knew it would be recognized for a German plane, and we were afraid we'd be fired on before we could make our identity known."

Led by the lieutenant and Jerry, the party tramped back to where, shortly, mess was to be served. 175

"That air certainly does give a fellow an appetite," said Jerry, as he splashed more of the clear cold water over his face.

An orderly stepped up to Lieutenant Mackinson and handed him a large, officially stamped envelope. As he tore it open and read the brief note within, a pleased smile spread over his face.

From the same envelope he extracted three smaller ones. He handed one to each of the lads who had accompanied him over on the *Everett*, according to the way they were addressed.

Opening them, the boys could hardly suppress their jubilation. Stripped of their official verbiage, the letters informed the young men that each of them was made a corporal, Joe for valorous service in saving the lives of "three Americans entombed in a cave; Slim for heroism and presence of mind in saving and bringing back to the lines an American soldier," and Jerry "for coolness and courage, and for the information gathered behind the enemy's lines."

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CHAPTER XVI

A Tight Place

Major Jones was paying his compliments in a very brusque, business-like, but kindly way. Before him, standing at attention, Lieutenant Mackinson and Corporals Joe Harned, Jerry Macklin and Slim Goodwin were awaiting important orders.

"The manner in which all of you have performed your duties in the past has won you the esteem and confidence of your commanding officers," Major Jones said.

"Your striking services not only have led to promotion, but to another important trust, upon which much may depend. Through the mountains to the east of us a company of engineers is cutting a rough road. They work under great handicaps and frequently are harassed by enemy detachments. But they are making progress.

"This road is being cut for the purpose of permitting the passage of a wireless tractor, of which you men are to be in charge. Through a part of that section an old telegraph line still remains, but it does not connect in a direction to meet our requirements.

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"Reports received this morning indicate that by night the engineers will have put the road through to a selected point where you will have the least difficulty in concealing your tractor and its aerials. From your position there you will keep constant vigil, for you will be able to inform us long in advance of any effort of the Boches to come through that way.

"The road winds about the mountain side, and in some places is quite steep. But the ground is now hard and the motor will make the pull. Good-by, and good luck to you."

An hour later, with Frank Hoskins, who was an experienced driver, at the wheel, they started for their destination in one of the big, high-powered trucks which not only carry a complete wireless equipment but also provide enough space for sleeping quarters for half a dozen men.

As a matter of fact, these trucks are so designed that, if it is necessary, they can carry a crew of ten men, while by means of a special clutch and gear the engine is made to drive an alternator for generating the necessary electrical energy which, under the most adverse atmospheric conditions, will give a sending and receiving range of at least one hundred miles. In ideal weather the radius increases to as much as two hundred and fifty miles.

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A powerful mechanism which in its operation resembles the opening of a giant pair of shears, raises the mast and umbrella-shaped antenna, and the average time in getting the apparatus ready for service is only about eight minutes.

The entire tractor, including crew, weighs close to five tons, and it can be easily imagined that its operation on a steep and treacherous mountain road was far from easy and anything but entirely safe.

With them the lads carried sufficient rations to last them five days, it being understood that their larder would be replenished at the necessary intervals.

They also took with them a radio pack-set, which is another wireless apparatus that can be carried about with little difficulty. This they had in the event of any unexpected emergency. The entire pack-set could be carried about in a suitcase, and after it was set up its current was generated by turning a crank by hand. Its range, under ordinary atmospheric conditions, was about twenty-five miles.

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The first few miles of their journey were accomplished with little difficulty, but as they struck the uneven, newly-made road, their troubles began to increase. At times the jolts were so severe that it seemed they would shake the electrical apparatus loose from the tractor, while some of the inclines were so steep that, after attempting and failing to make them once, they had to go backward and then try again, with increased speed.

It was bitterly cold, and while Frank and whoever at the time sat beside him on the front seat kept reasonably warm, being directly behind the hard-working motor, the others frequently got

out, to run along for a quarter or half a mile to limber up their stiffened joints and get their blood in circulation again.

One of their greatest difficulties came when, more than three-fourths the distance to their destination, and at one of the narrowest points along the road, they met the large truck bearing back toward camp the company of engineers.

The wireless tractor was chugging along under a heavy strain, but the other truck was coming down the steep grade under the compression of its engine, to accelerate the use of the brakes. And with the little warning they had, the two drivers brought their big machines to a stop less than ten feet apart.

It was impossible for the truck containing the engineers to back up. And the first widening in the road over which the wireless men had come was fully a quarter of a mile behind. There was no other course than for Frank to reverse, and, with a man on either side of the tractor in the rear, directing every slight turn of the wheel, to go back to that point.

Once the engine stalled, making the stability of the whole weight of the heavy tractor depend upon the brakes. Frank grabbed the emergency, and jammed it on with all his strength, but not before the machine had gained a momentum which made it a question for a few thrilling seconds whether or not the brakes would grip and hold it.

As they finally rounded the turn which gave them the brief space of wider road, and the engineers' truck passed by, the men waving each other a cheery farewell, the boys from Brighton gave a sigh of relief.

When they reached what they decided should be their destination, almost at the end of the road and in a dense bit of wooded section which would obscure them from enemy observers, they brought their tractor to a stop. With pick and shovel they began building an earthen oven, in which they might cook their food, and from which they might keep reasonably comfortable, without being seen.

A light snow began to fall, and, mess over, the lads decided to retire for the night. Before doing so, however, they set up the mast and aerials and made the connection to the storage battery. It was agreed that they should sit up in two-hour shifts, to be ready to receive any message that possibly might come, but it was arranged that the other four should divide this duty, allowing Frank, who had driven the truck over the entire trip, a full night's sleep.

So the night passed, with the lads taking turns at the lonely vigil. The snow continued, the wind increased almost to a gale, and the temperature dropped still lower.

Fully eight inches of snow lay upon the ground when gray daylight came and Slim, the last man on watch, awakened the others. The storm was diminishing, but still they could see only a few yards distant from the tractor.

"Guess I'll warm up chopping some wood," said Joe, as he took an axe and left the others still dressing.

In half an hour he had brought in enough to cook the breakfast and last half the day, and while Slim acted as cook, Jerry started out to fell more saplings.

Before noon the clouds broke, the sun came out, and its reflection from the pure white glistening snow was almost blinding.

"A snowball fight," suggested Jerry, and the others took up the idea as a boon to dispel the monotony of their isolation.

With the lieutenant "umpiring" from the little wireless room of the tractor, Joe and Frank "stood" Jerry and Slim, and from a distance of a hundred feet apart the battle began.

One of Frank's well-aimed missiles caught Slim squarely in the mouth, just as he was calling out some challenging remark, and from the window of his post Lieutenant Mackinson laughingly shouted: "Strike one!"

Slim, spitting and blowing out the icy pastry, gathered all his strength to hurl a ball back at Frank. But he "wound up," as baseball pitchers call that curving swinging of the arm just before the ball is thrown, with such vigor that he lost his balance. His feet went up into the air and he came down ker-plunk! but the snowball left his hand with what proved to be unerring aim.

Joe, letting out a howl of laughter at Slim's accident, caught the tightly packed wad of snow right in the ear. He turned his back to the "enemy," and, leaning forward, began pounding the other side of his head to dislodge the snow.

Of a sudden he straightened up, uttering an exclamation of surprise.

"Lieutenant!" he shouted. "Look here!"

The lieutenant jumped out of the tractor, and the others followed him on the run to where Joe and Frank were gazing off down into the opposite valley.

Two, perhaps three, miles away, a winding, twisting line of black against the snow was pushing its way laboriously around the mountain base.

"Germans!" exclaimed Lieutenant Mackinson. "Wait until I get my field glasses, but do not stand where they might see you with theirs."

From positions within the clump of trees the lads watched the line spread out and slowly but surely forge its way ahead. The lieutenant returned with his glasses.

"At least ten thousand of them," he announced at last, after gazing down at them for fully a minute. "And nobody knows how many more behind. We must notify the camp at once."

He ran back to the tractor, followed by all but Jerry, who remained to observe the enemy's further movements.

In two or three minutes the wireless operator at headquarters signaled back for them to go on with the message.

"About ten thousand enemy troops proceeding through eight inches snow, bound northwest around eastern base of mountain," Lieutenant Mackinson's message ran. "Am observing and will report progress. Any orders?"

In another five minutes the wireless clicked back: "Are any of enemy flanking mountain on south?"

Jerry, who at that moment entered the tractor, informed them that the Germans had divided into two diverging lines, apparently for that very purpose. 185

There was a considerable pause after this was flashed to headquarters. Meanwhile Jerry had gone back to his post of observation, accompanied by Frank and Slim.

"How many big guns?" was the next query from the commanding officer of the American forces in the sector.

Joe rushed out to where the other three were standing, and from them returned with the information that already they had counted seven headed toward the north, and five being hauled toward a place where they might round the southern base of the mountain.

This news was sent through space to the American army; and the lads who were the silent witnesses to what the enemy had intended and fully expected should be a secret movement, waited in silence for further developments.

"Can you get back over the same road with tractor?" was the next message that came, and Lieutenant Mackinson called for the more expert judgment of Frank Hoskins before answering.

"We can try it," said Frank in a rather doubtful tone, "but it's risky business. It will be as much as we can do to follow the road, and we can't hope to see the ruts and bumps. The worst part of it is, though, that the tractor is so heavy it may not hold the road. However, we can try." 186

The lieutenant repeated the gist of this to headquarters, and the message came back: "Better try."

But by the time this decision was reached the fire in the earthen oven had almost entirely died out, and the engine of the tractor, which had been drawn up to it, had become so cold that they had to build another fire, to get hot water to put into the radiator, before they could get it started.

And then the perilous journey began.

With Frank at the wheel, and running the engine only in low gear, as compression against gaining speed, the lieutenant and Joe trotted ahead, one on either side of the road, to indicate the course of the crude highway.

Jerry and Slim, inside the big truck, were doing their best to hold things in place as they rocked and jolted over the deep ruts and gullies.

It must have been this series of terrible jars that finally splashed grease and oil in on the brake bands. Whatever the cause, it suddenly became apparent at one of the steepest and sharpest turns in the whole route that the brakes were not holding. 187

"Look out!" Frank shouted to Joe and the lieutenant ahead, as he realized the truck was getting beyond his control. "Better jump!" he advised Jerry and Slim, standing just behind him.

As Lieutenant Mackinson and Joe ran to either side of the road, the tractor slid by them at increasing speed. Slim and Jerry, following Frank's bidding, leaped from the rear and landed unharmed in a snow-bank.

"Run her into the side of the mountain," shouted Lieutenant Mackinson, and that was exactly what Frank was doing. It was the only possible way of saving the tractor from gathering more and more momentum, and, finally beyond all control, leaving the road and hurtling down the steep slope.

With all his strength Frank swung the wheel so as to turn the right side of the car at an angle up the mountain wall that flanked the road. In this position the machine was still traveling along with great force when it struck a thick abutting ledge of rock.

There was a sudden jolt, a sharp crack, and Frank was hurtled forward head first into the snow. 188

When they had brushed him off and made certain that he was uninjured, except for an awful jarring up, they began an examination of the machine.

The right front wheel had been crushed to splinters, the axle was bent, and the machine was wedged so far under a split edge of the granite as to be, for the time at least, totally useless.

"Better go back to where we were first," Lieutenant Mackinson said at last. "We'll take the pack-set with us, and we can probably advise headquarters of our predicament with that, and also inform them of the progress of the enemy movement."

Wearily they turned about, each man loaded down with the necessities that they had to take

with them from the wrecked tractor. It was nearing night when they reached the apex of the mountain again, and their first desire was to see whether the Germans had entirely passed around the mountain.

So far as they could see they had!

But the Boches had done more than that. Their heavy guns were being sent around either side of the base of the mountain, each quota being part of a good-sized army. But they were sending another strong detachment up and over the mountain itself! 189

And the first section of it was less than a mile below, spreading out in such a way that while a part of it would come over the top, other parts would go around either side, and they would be fan-like in shape, forming a virtual comb in the search for any enemies who might be lurking there.

"The pack-set!" ordered the lieutenant. In a very short time it was set up, and Jerry was grinding the crank to generate power while the officer flashed out the headquarters call.

In a moment a message began to come: "J-X. J-X. J-X. J-X."

Lieutenant Mackinson nervously began tapping the key again, but the only reply was the insistent call for J-X, which was the code call for themselves.

"No use," said the young officer at last. "We can catch them, with their stronger range, but we haven't radius enough to send to them."

"Those troops cannot reach here until after dark," said Slim.

"No," Lieutenant Mackinson acknowledged, "but they are in such numbers that we could not hope to keep our identity or presence hidden, and they are getting around the mountain quicker than we could get down and beyond their line." 190

"It looks as though we were hemmed in," said Frank Hoskins in an even tone.

"Yes," agreed Jerry, "and in a tight place."

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CHAPTER XVII

The Lieutenant's Invention

While the others speculated upon various means of escape, and in turn found every one of their suggestions useless, Lieutenant Mackinson had remained silent and in deep thought. Finally, his countenance showing that he had arrived at a conclusion, he turned to the others.

"Come with me," he said simply, "it is the only way."

"Where are you going?" Joe asked quickly.

"Back to the tractor," the lieutenant replied. "Hurry! We still have time, but none to waste."

"But we can't repair the tractor," Frank argued.

"No, we can't," Lieutenant Mackinson admitted, "but we may do something even better than that."

"What?" queried all the lads at once.

"Come with me and we'll see what can be done."

And without granting them any further information then, Lieutenant Mackinson swung his share of the burdens to his shoulder and started down the rough mountain road, the others following, and likewise bearing the various necessities which, only a short time before, they had labored so industriously to carry up the mountain. 192

As they neared the point where they had left the wrecked machine the young officer turned to Joe, who was nearest to him.

"Do you remember," he asked, "seeing that wire of the old telegraph line just about a hundred yards below where we ran the truck into the wall?"

"I saw it," Joe admitted, "but I didn't pay any further attention to it."

The others had come up within hearing distance.

"Well," the lieutenant responded, "if you had traced its course you would have seen that it is swung from this mountain to the one directly to the south, just at the point where the valley between narrows down to little more than a deep ravine."

"But it doesn't run into our lines," Frank objected again.

"That's true," Lieutenant Mackinson admitted again, "but it may serve our purposes just the same." 193

"How?" Slim asked entreatingly. "Tell us what your plan is, Lieutenant."

"No," replied the young officer in teasing tones, "I don't want to raise your hopes until I determine whether it can be accomplished."

And he plodded on toward the tractor, refusing to answer another question. Indeed, it is doubtful if he heard them, for he was busy with some important mental calculations—problems that required his engineering knowledge and ability, and that had directly to do with the personal safety of every man in the party.

"What tools have we here?" he asked of Frank Hoskins, as they arrived at the wrecked wireless tractor.

Frank opened up a tool chest that showed a great variety of implements in almost every size and shape.

"Good," said the lieutenant, as he looked up from where he was rummaging in another part of the car. "Here, Jerry," he commanded, "let me have that mallet and cold chisel and then help me rip a couple of these boards off the floor."

He had laid aside a large pulley wheel, several nuts and bolts and some heavy copper wire. With the aid of the mystified Jerry he tore two stout boards up from the floor of the tractor. 194

"Now we've got to work rapidly, fellows," he said, "for it will soon be dark, and we don't want to attract attention to ourselves by making a light.

"Here is what I am going to try to do: That wire is strung really from mountain to mountain, running down a slight grade from where it is fastened here to where it is tied up over there. I don't know how strong it is, or how securely it is fastened at the other end, but I'm going to find out.

"You've all seen those trolley-like boxes that run on wires in department stores, with which the clerk sends your money to the cashier's desk, and the cashier returns the change? Well, I'm going to construct something on the same principle, only I want to make it strong enough to carry my weight.

"If I can do that, and the wire holds, the incline is sufficient to carry a passenger to the other mountain without any propelling power. I'll try it first, and carry with me one end of this reel of copper wire. If I get over all right I'll attach the wire to the little oar and you fellows can haul it back for the next passenger, and so on until all of us are over." 195

Slim looked dubious. "How thick is that wire?" he demanded anxiously.

"You know Slim's a trifle heavy," Jerry reminded the lieutenant.

"Well," said Slim in a serious tone, "I'd rather fall into the hands of the Germans, and have some chance for my life, than spatter myself all over the bottom of that ravine."

While this conversation was going on, Lieutenant Mackinson was boring a hole about two inches in from each of the four comers of one of the planks taken from the floor of the truck.

"This ought to do for a seat," he said, as he began running pieces of the heavy copper wire, of equal length, through each of the holes.

He then laid this part of the work aside for a moment and began filing off one end of the riveted axle that held the pulley wheel in its frame. When he had knocked this axle out he tried one of the bolts and found that it fitted almost exactly, and that the wheel ran freely upon it.

"Have to have that wheel off to put the thing on the telegraph wire," he explained, as he began securely fastening the copper wires into the bottom of the pulley frame. 196

Completed, the thing looked for all the world like a miniature trapeze seat.

"Now," he said, slipping a wrench into his pocket, and buckling on his legs a pair of spurs such as all linemen use to climb a smooth pole, "I'm going to take this up that telegraph pole with me and fasten this thing on the wire. Then it's 'All aboard for the opposite mountain.'

"If I get over all right I'll give one flash of my light. If I don't—well, don't try the wire route."

Without wasting another second he dug one spur into the pole and started climbing upward, dragging his improvised car with him, together with the loose end of the reel of copper wire.

By this time it was pitch dark, and they could feel, rather than see, that he was tightening the bolt which hung the apparatus on the wire. The lads had placed a heavy stick through the reel, and two of them held either end of it.

"Let it run free," the lieutenant told them. "And don't forget the signal. I'm ready. Good-by!"

There was a sudden jerk on the reel and the wire began to unwind quickly. It literally spun round on the stout stick which they were holding. They just got a glimpse of the courageous lieutenant sailing off through space, a thousand feet above the bottom of the ravine. 197

The unwinding wire gave an added spurt, and then, pressure being released from it, it began to slow down.

"He's either on the other side, or lost the wire," said Slim, his nervousness showing in his voice.

Every eye was glued to the opposite mountain.

"Look!" almost shouted Jerry. "He's safe!"

Sure enough, the light had flashed out once in the blackness of the night, and then as suddenly disappeared.

The boys began hauling in on the copper wire, winding it again on the reel.

"Who's next?" asked Frank, as the last of the cable was being re-wound.

"Eenie, meenie, minie, mo," Jerry began to count out, when Joe suddenly interrupted.

By ten feet of heavy twine Lieutenant Mackinson had tied the spurs to the car so that they would dangle within reach of the lads on the ground. Attached to them was a note, which read: 198

> "Easy landing on soft slope. Let Slim come next before wire is weakened, because he is the heaviest. All can make it safely."

And so Slim, not entirely assured, and breathing somewhat heavily as he contemplated the distance he had to fall if the telegraph wire should break, was the next to climb a-straddle the crude "air-line" trolley, on its second trip to the opposite mountain.

In a few moments the light flashed out again and then disappeared, while Joe, Jerry and Frank hauled in on the cable to which the car was attached.

By mutual agreement it was arranged that Frank should be the next to go over, after which they would send the portable wireless, followed by Jerry, and finally Joe.

Lads of less courage never would have attempted such a perilous escape, but they made it without a single mishap. It was not until Joe, the last of the party, was just coming to a stop in the outstretched arms of his friends, that the Germans below, and on what was now the opposite mountain, seemed to sense something going on—or perhaps had seen the mysterious blinking of the flashlight—and let go a distant and futile volley of shots. 199

"No use, Boche," called the lieutenant mockingly, "we're out of your range. And now, having escaped you, we'll see what we can do to harass you."

Saying which he began opening up the pack-set wireless, while two of the others set up the umbrella antenna.

Lieutenant Mackinson began tapping off the headquarters call. It might have been the slightly nearer position they were in, or, so far as they knew, headquarters might have moved meanwhile, but in a very short time the operator there was responding.

The young officer gave an accurate account of the operations of the Germans, and particularly of their artillery. Headquarters thanked them, told them to stay until morning where they were, and then ask for further orders.

In less than half an hour the boom of heavy guns from the westward told them that they had given their information in time.

American artillery was dropping a rain of shells into the cuts in the mountain through which the Germans had to emerge with their guns to do any damage! Their whole plan, so carefully carried out, had been defeated!

200

CHAPTER XVIII

Slim Goodwin a Prisoner

"If I had a good rifle I could 'pot' half a dozen of them from here," said Jerry the following morning as he and the rest, standing back among the trees of the mountain in which they had sought safety, watched two long, converging lines of German soldiers marching back in the direction whence they had come on the preceding day.

"And we owe them that much for that nice, nifty little night trapeze act we had to do through space on their account," added Slim.

"Not to mention the wrecked tractor," put in Frank.

"Well," spoke Lieutenant Mackinson, calling them to the business of the day, "I guess we can make a report to headquarters now—and a good one, too."

With which he opened up the wireless and began repeating the call letters.

When headquarters had responded, the lieutenant gave them the glad tidings of the Boche retreat. That done, he proceeded to give the details of the wrecking of the tractor and of their 201

escape to the second mountain.

"Ought to be aviators," the operator at headquarters came back at him on his own account, and then added: "Wait for orders."

These came a few minutes later.

"Divide as follows: Lieutenant and two men return here; other two go forward at safe distance with portable, and report to-night."

Lieutenant Mackinson read them the message.

"Well," he asked, "which two are to accompany me back, and which two are to stay on the heels of the Boches?"

"I've got a scent like a deerhound," averred Slim.

"And I was born to be a scout," declared Jerry.

"You two spoke first," announced the lieutenant pleasantly, "so I guess that shall be your end of it, if that's what you want."

"Fine!" exclaimed Jerry and Slim in unison.

"Anyway," added the lieutenant, "I guess there'll be enough serious work for the rest of us when we get back. For instance," winking at the others, "there's that smashed tractor, Frank, that you will have to explain." 202

"Not so long as you were in charge of the party," Hoskins retorted quickly. And Lieutenant Mackinson, unable to determine whether the remark was a facetious evasion of responsibility or an indirect compliment to himself, on the ground that no act of his would be questioned, pursued his bantering no further.

"I guess," he said, "that Joe, Frank and I had better start back at once. You two will have to wait here some time before you can begin trailing that army. I'm sorry we can't stay with you, but I feel that we ought to report back as soon as possible."

And so the three of them began the preparations for their return, while Jerry and Slim watched and studied the movements of the regiments they were to follow.

"They seem to be pretty well tired out," said Slim at last. "Guess they didn't have any sleep at all last night."

"We're going to find it pretty heavy tramping through that snow, too," Jerry answered. "And with the wireless and rations we'll be carrying a hefty weight."

"Well, boys; we're off," announced Lieutenant Mackinson, and the separating parties shook hands all around. "Take care of yourselves," he admonished, "and we'll look for you back by to-morrow." 203

The officer, Joe and Frank started off on their long tramp back to camp, and Jerry and Slim watched them until they were out of sight.

"That looks like the last regiment of the Germans going over the opposite hill there, too," said Jerry, as they turned to observe the enemy army. "We can start in a short while."

And in half an hour, Jerry carrying the heavy pack-set and Slim toting the equally weighty rations and incidentals, they set off on the Boches' trail.

Out in the open, and especially in the mountains, distances are deceptive. Jerry and Slim learned this when they had been traveling for two hours, and the point where they had seen the last German disappear over a hilltop seemed as far away as when they started.

"Ever travel along in a train at night watching the moon, and notice how it seemed to move right along with you?" asked Jerry.

"Lots of times," answered Slim, as he puffed along, "Why?" 204

"Well, that's the way that hill seems to be traveling along, always keeping the same distance ahead of us."

"I've heard of armies 'taking' a fort, or a city, or a trench," said Slim. "Do you suppose those Germans are 'taking' that young mountain along with them?"

"Seems so to me," said Jerry, coming to a halt to shift the heavy pack-set to the other hand.

As a matter of fact, early evening—a cold, biting winter evening—was settling about them when they finally climbed to the crest of that hill to cautiously "see what they could see."

Far beyond the slope ahead of them, in the dim dusk, they could discern a mass of men, evidently halted for the night.

"That's their rear guard," announced Jerry, with the field glasses to his eyes. "I can even make out their sentries."

Slim took a look and agreed. "Hadn't we better report?" he asked.

"I think we ought to make this bunch of trees here our position, and then scout ahead a little first," said Jerry.

"All right," Slim agreed. "Which one of us shall go?" 205

"Let's toss."

They did, and it fell to the lad who had claimed to have the scent of a deerhound to go out and reconnoitre, while the "natural-born scout" remained behind.

Divesting himself of all his burdens but his revolver and ammunition belt, Slim started off. Leaving Jerry to arrange their effects, he gave that young man a real shock when he silently returned five minutes later unheard by Jerry, and, standing only half a dozen feet behind him, blurted out:

"Forgot my field glasses."

Jerry whirled around as though he had been shot. "Why don't you sneak up and try to frighten a fellow to death?" he demanded.

"Sorry," Slim apologized. "Thought you heard me coming."

"I believe you did it on purpose," Jerry growled, as the other youth again started off.

"I'll send in my card first next time," was Slim's parting remark.

"Well, be sure to make yourself known," retorted Jerry, "or I might mistake you for a Boche and send in a bullet."

Slim's laugh floated back and he disappeared down a ravine through which he was making for a higher point of observation further on. 206

Ten minutes elapsed and there was no sign of Slim. When a quarter of an hour had passed Jerry began to get worried. Had his friend perhaps fallen and injured himself? Had he lost his way? A dozen fears came into Jerry's mind, and at the end of another five minutes he decided that it was time to take some measure to learn the whereabouts of Slim.

Softly, but with great carrying force, he gave the well-known "Whip-poor-will."

The answer was the same that Slim himself had received that night in No Man's Land when the wounded and unconscious Rawle lay bleeding beside him—nothing but absolute silence.

A great dread that he could not have defined gripped Jerry's heart. Something had happened to Slim; there was no doubt about that. What was it? Injury? Death? Capture?

Again Jerry gave their mutual Brighton signal: "Whip-poor-will."

"He can't be entirely out of hearing," he argued. "There's some reason why he doesn't answer." It was fast growing dark. Sliding the pack-set and their other paraphernalia into a little gully which he easily could identify later, but where it would be entirely hidden from the view of anyone else who might chance upon the scene, Jerry set out in search of his friend. 207

It was a difficult task that he set himself, for he knew no more than the general direction that Slim had taken. But remembering that his chum had started off down the ravine, and that his purpose was to reach a higher hill a quarter of a mile away, Jerry took that route, too.

Two or three times as he stumbled along he snatched out his pocket searchlight and was about to use it, when some sixth sense, plus the mystery of Slim's absence, prevailed upon him to take his chances in the darkness.

Coming out of the ravine, he turned to the left and, by a steep incline, reached a ledge that seemed to be a natural pathway to one of the higher peaks.

Suddenly the heart within him seemed to stop beating.

Somewhere ahead of him, but seemingly upon a lower level of ground, men were talking! And they were talking in German!

As though a bullet had struck him, Jerry dropped forward upon the ground. Grasping the outstretched roots of a tree, he pulled himself up within its heavy black shadow. There, scarcely daring to breathe for fear of attracting attention, he lay and listened. 208

He thanked Brighton then for his understanding of the German language.

Slim Goodwin was a prisoner, and those men—how many there were of them he could not tell—were questioning him! Slim was pretending not to understand.

Jerry's brain worked rapidly. There was no use of his returning to the wireless and attempting to summon help that way, for even if aid was sent it would be hours before it could arrive, and, presuming that the rescuers could find the spot, there was every likelihood that the Germans would have departed with their prisoner before that time. No, assuredly, if Slim was to be rescued, he, Jerry, must do it. But how?

As he lay there thinking, he heard the one who seemed to be the officer in charge order another man to build a fire. As it crackled and began to blaze up, the reflection of the flame gave Jerry their exact location. Also it formed a curtain of light against which it would have been easy for him to have seen any Boche sentinel or outpost, had there been one between him and them. 209

Assuring himself that there was not, he crept cautiously forward, foot by foot, until he was at the edge of the shelf of rock and could gaze almost directly down upon them. The fire gave good illumination. There was a young German lieutenant and four of his men. A short distance away, in the shelter of some trees, five horses were tethered.

Slim finally had consented to talk—if what he was doing could be called talking. And in what was purposely the most miserably broken German imaginable, he was telling them that he got separated from his unit several days ago (which was true), and that he had been wandering about that part of the country for the last couple of days (which also was true), and that he did

not know where he was (which likewise was the truth).

While this was going on Jerry had scribbled upon a piece of paper: "Am near. Look lively if they sleep." This he wrapped around a small stone. For a moment all the Germans turned toward the fire, where one of the men was preparing supper. In that instant Jerry tossed the message straight at Slim's feet.

Slim gave a little start, recovered himself immediately, stooped over, and, pretending to wash his hands in the snow, unwrapped and hastily read the note, and then trampled it into the ground. When one of the Germans turned suddenly, he was innocently drying his hands.

CHAPTER XIX

Turning the Tables

To Jerry, lying there half frozen, stiff in every joint and scarcely daring to move for fear of making some sound that might not only divulge his presence and result in his own capture, but also prevent the escape of Slim, it seemed that never did it take men so long to eat a meal.

And as they ate, his own appetite became ravenous. The cruelest punishment of all was to lie there half starved and hear them vulgarly smacking their lips over the warmed-up remains of a chicken undoubtedly filched from a countryside barnyard.

But at last, after what seemed to Jerry to have been hours of feasting, they did finish. With a derisive laugh the German lieutenant gathered all the bones from every other tin plate and shoved them, with mock courtesy, toward Slim.

The latter was biding his time, and, his courage increased by knowledge that his friend was close by, refused to get angry. He merely waved the plate aside.

Their stomachs filled, the Germans almost immediately began to think about sleep. In truth, they all looked as though they had been up all of the night before, as probably they had. One of them, a mere youth certainly not yet out of his teens and the youngest in the party, yawned. The lieutenant saw it, and in a fit of apparently unreasonable anger said, in his native tongue:

"So! You want to serve notice that you desire to sleep? Very well, you shall do sentinel duty—and all night. And mind that you do not sleep!"

A pitiful look came over the boy's face, but without a word he saluted and departed to the circle of outer shadows to take up his long and tedious vigil.

Jerry felt genuinely sorry for him, but he sincerely hoped that the officer would not change his mind or relent. He knew the youth could not possibly stay awake the whole night through.

Half an hour later the other four Germans were conducting a spirited rivalry in snoring, and Slim, also, to all appearances, was fast asleep.

Not daring to move, Jerry kept his eyes constantly upon the young sentry. Frequently he yawned. Once or twice he stopped uncertainly before a stump and seemed about to sit down, then started on again around his monotonous beat. But his step was wavering, his eyes were heavy, and Jerry knew it was only a question of time—a comparatively short time—when nature would conquer, and the sentinel, too, would sleep.

Had he been able to bring himself to it, he could have shot the sentry and killed the others as they slept, before they could even have reached for their weapons. But he could not do that.

Better the other way, he told himself, even though it carried a greater risk.

And finally his own vigil was rewarded. The sentinel placed two or three more pieces of wood upon the fire, stood for a few moments within its genial warmth, looked dully at the others so soundly sleeping, and then crossed to the stump and sat down.

His rifle was on the ground beside him. His elbows rested upon his knees, and his chin in his hands. Presently his lids drooped and closed. His head, and then his whole body, sagged forward. He wakened with a start and changed his place to another tree more within the shadows. There he was able to lean back in a more comfortable position, and soon his heavy, even breathing assured Jerry that nature had, indeed, won.

Softly, without so much as a sound, he rose to his hands and knees. He tossed a pebble, which hit Slim upon the hand. The latter turned his head ever so slightly and gazed fixedly in Jerry's direction. Finally his decided wink indicated that he had made out the form of his friend.

Still upon all fours, and feeling every inch of the way, Jerry retraced his steps over the ledge. Quietly he slid down to the lower level and took a wide circle about the little camp, finally

closing in near to where the sleeping sentry sat. Deftly and silently he pulled the latter's gun from where it lay beside him. This he carried over to near where the horses were corralled. Slim now was watching his every move, but awaited Jerry's signal before he stirred.

Jerry then returned, and, so gently that the sentry never made a movement, lifted his loaded revolver from its holster. With this he tiptoed to Slim, placed the weapon in his hand and with a gesture bade him rise.

They were now masters of the situation, but Jerry did not want to take any chances. Two of the Germans were lying in such a position that he could get their revolvers, also. They did not carry rifles. This he accomplished after having stationed Slim in the shadows at such a point of vantage that he could cover all of the Boches, should they awaken. 215

One of the additional guns he gave to Slim; the other he kept himself. Thus doubly armed, they stepped over to the sleeping sentry, and while Slim pointed his two guns at the others, to prevent any hostilities upon their part, should they rouse, Jerry shook and awakened the bewildered sentry.

As he faced the two revolvers, and the changed situation suddenly dawned upon him, the young German's expression was pathetic. Apparently he was too stunned to speak a word. Jerry motioned him to take a position just behind the sleepers, which he did.

With Slim standing beside him, and their four revolvers pointed menacingly at the Germans, Jerry kicked the lieutenant upon the sole of his boot. The latter roused angrily and was about to give vent to his feelings when he looked into the barrels of the automatics. His exclamation was one of complete chagrin. 216

Slim stepped over and extracted his revolver, which he dropped into his own pocket. By the same process the other armed Boche was awakened, and in the same way he was disarmed. Then, with his foot, Jerry jabbed the remaining two back to consciousness.

"You are our prisoners," Jerry informed them, in their own language. "One hostile move from any one of you and you will be shot."

Forming them into pairs, and purposely leaving the sentinel as the single one of the party and in the lead, Jerry ordered them to walk toward where the horses were tethered.

He made two of the men put saddles and bridles upon the animals, and then compelled them to mount as they were paired—the lieutenant and one of his men upon one of the horses, two others upon another, the sentry alone upon another, but carrying a good supply of rations—while Slim and he each had an animal to carry themselves, the wireless and other paraphernalia when they should pick that up.

Thus, with hardly a dozen words having been spoken, they came through the ravine and at forced speed struck out across the level ground toward the mountain from which Jerry and Slim had come that morning. 217

"You!" the lieutenant hissed between his teeth at the sentinel as they came side by side. "What were you doing when this second American arrived? Asleep, eh?"

"I came up behind him. He never had a chance, for I did not make a sound," Jerry interposed in German, before the young Boche could make even an involuntary admission.

As they approached the base of the mountain where they had parted from Lieutenant Mackinson, Joe, and Frank early that day, the moon reached its zenith, and its beams, reflected upon the white ground, made the night almost as light as day.

Two hours later they were upon the identical spot from which they had wirelessed headquarters in the morning. It was midnight now as two of the Germans, working under Jerry's orders while Slim kept a weather eye on the others, set up the pack-set.

Jerry worked the key half a dozen times and then got an almost immediate response. The first query after he had identified himself was:

"This is Joe; where are you?" 218

"Just got back to where we left you this morning," Jerry ticked off into the air. "Bringing in a German lieutenant and four of his men as prisoners. Should arrive by daylight, as we have horses."

"Great," was Joe's radio response. "Have letter from Brighton and fine news. Will make your report."

And the pack-set was put back in its compact case, and, paired off as before, the journey was resumed.

"Say," said Jerry, as they urged their horses down the side of the mountain leading to fairly level ground all the way into camp, "I'm hungry enough to eat dog meat, but I guess we can hold out now until we reach our lines."

"Yes, I suppose so," Slim answered. "But how'd you like to have some sausage, and some plum pudding, and——"

"Don't," pleaded Jerry. "The idea is too much. My stomach is accusing me of gross carelessness now."

"Wonder what's in that letter from Brighton, and who wrote it?" said Sum, glad to change the subject and forget his own hunger.

"Can't imagine, but my own curiosity has been as to whether the fine news Joe mentioned comes from there or refers to something at headquarters." 219

And so, sore, tired and hungry, but happy withal, they continued on. The moon waned and set, and tradition proved itself—it became darkest just before dawn.

"Wait!" said Jerry, just at this stage of the journey, and he jumped from his horse to recover something that he had seen the German lieutenant drop.

It proved to be a packet of papers, bearing the official German army seal.

"Ah-ha!" Jerry cried, riding up to the officer and thrusting the documents out before him. "So you thought to get rid of them, eh? Well, we'll just take these along to headquarters, too. They may contain something of interest to our commanders. Yes?"

The lieutenant gave an ugly, menacing grunt, but refused to say a word.

Daylight came, and with it a clear view of the American lines. A quarter of an hour later they saw two horsemen coming toward them. Slim examined them carefully with his glasses.

"The lieutenant and Frank," he announced. "Guess Joe's still on duty." 220

And Joe was. He was just relaying to the commander of the American forces in France orders forwarded from London, and they were of the greatest import to the three boys from Brighton.

221

CHAPTER XX

The Great News

"Well, Sergeants, how are you?" Lieutenant Mackinson greeted them, as he and Frank came galloping up and swerved their horses around.

"Corporals, you mean, Lieutenant," Jerry corrected.

"No, I thought I meant sergeants," the lieutenant repeated. "In fact, I'm quite sure I did."

"What do you mean?" Slim demanded eagerly, for the moment forgetting all about their prisoners of war.

"Just what I said—sergeants," said Lieutenant Mackinson, smiling.

"Have we—Do you—" Jerry stopped to begin all over again, and the young officer interrupted him.

"I suppose it's a little like telling secrets out of school," he said, "but then, after all, it isn't any secret, for the news was out yesterday afternoon. A lot of promotions were announced. Frank's been made a corporal, and you boys—Joe, too—advanced to sergeant." 222

It was fully a minute before either lad could express himself, and the lieutenant and Corporal Hoskins took a full measure of enjoyment out of their apparent happy gratification.

"Lieutenant—" Slim began.

"Captain, if you please," Mr. Mackinson corrected amiably. "You see, I was in the list, too."

Slim and Jerry simultaneously brought their horses to a halt while they came to a full military salute.

As they approached Major Jones' headquarters with their prisoners, Captain Mackinson turned another way and Corporal Hoskins dropped back.

Briefly, and without undue emphasis upon their own hardships or courage or common sense, they gave the details of their activities since they had left, and of the capture of Slim and the subsequent taking of his captors.

"You have done well, exceptionally well," the major responded. "In consequence whereof it gives me great pleasure to inform you that you have been advanced to the rank of sergeant. In that respect I might remind you that the next step is to a commission, and that merit and courage will take a man to any command in the United States army. It is the only standard of advancement, and there is no other instrument of preferment. I am happy to know that you young men have started so well. You two, and the friend who also was advanced to sergeant with you, have brilliant futures before you." 223

They were saluting, preliminary to departure, when the major added:

"You will report to General Young, division commander, at ten o'clock."

A little bewildered by the salutes of those privates who knew of their promotions, even though

they did not yet wear upon their sleeves the two stripes indicating their advance to corporals, Jerry and Slim hurried toward the wash spigots, preliminary to an assault upon the mess tent.

There they met Joe, who had just come off duty as night wireless operator at headquarters. They shook hands, and then Slim demanded to know about that letter from Brighton.

"It was from our old friend, the telegrapher, Philip Burton," said Joe, "and it was written about three weeks ago." 224

"That's pretty quick delivery," said Slim. "What did he have to say?"

"Well, it seems they've had reports there of some of our experiences coming over, and Mr. Burton says some of the finest things."

"Good old Burton!" mused Jerry. "He always did credit us with being a lot better and brighter and more capable than we really were."

"Yes, and we owe him a lot," added Slim, "for he was really responsible in the first place for our getting here. If it hadn't been for what he taught us about telegraphy we'd never be sergeants now."

"That's right," said Joe. "Fellows, Mr. Burton's getting pretty well along now. He'll be an old man before very long. I wish we three could do something to really show him our appreciation of what he's been to us."

"We will," Jerry said. "We will. Let's make a promise to each other on that."

And with this good resolution made, they started for the mess tent.

The first fifteen minutes they gave over unstintedly to appeasing healthy and long-deferred appetites, and then Slim suddenly remembered Major Jones' final instructions. 225

"Wonder what we have to report at General Young's headquarters at ten o'clock for?" he queried. "I'm nearly dead for sleep myself."

"So am I," said Jerry.

Both of them caught Joe's averted smile.

"What's it for, do you know?" Jerry demanded.

"Well, fellows, I think I do," Joe answered. "But I only learned it over the wireless—and that's information gained in a professional way, you know, and therefore secret. So don't ask me to tell you. In another hour we'll go over. You know I've been summoned, too."

"No!" ejaculated Jerry. "Well, that's fine. But you'll be going over to learn something that you already know, while we'll be getting some real news, whatever it is."

"That's right," said Joe. "And maybe it will be real news."

Jerry and Slim both spent the intervening hour on their cots, and when Joe came to awaken them he found them snoring most unmusically.

"What do you think?" he demanded, as soon as they were wide enough awake to realize what he was saying. "That German lieutenant that you brought in had papers on him that showed the whole plan of the German campaign in this sector for a month ahead. You boys made a great capture." 226

At exactly ten o'clock they presented themselves to General Young's orderly, and a moment later were ushered into the presence of the supreme commander of that section of the American front.

"Young men," the general began bluntly, without other formalities, "you have signally distinguished yourselves for judgment, foresight, and courage from the moment of your enlistment, it might be said. I have before me your records, beginning from the time of your discovery of the spy at work in the waters near the Philadelphia Navy Yard.

"Congress has just passed a bill, and the President has signed it, providing for the higher military education of certain worthy young men in the army and navy, entirely at the expense of the government. Fortunately for the military service, these selections have been entirely removed from the realm of politics and are left to the commanders in the army and navy.

"At this school, which in many respects is similar to the Military Academy at West Point and the Naval Academy at Annapolis, young men will be thoroughly instructed in the specialized branches of military science. 227

"I am offering you three young men such appointments. I am doing so solely upon your records and upon my own confidence that you will make good to the country that offers you this opportunity. Will you accept?"

If someone had suddenly set off a bomb under the three boys from Brighton they hardly could have been more surprised.

"I don't know how to thank you," Joe stammered.

"I'll do my utmost to prove worth it," promised Jerry.

"It shall be my highest ambition," said Slim.

"Good!" said General Young, rising and shaking each lad by the hand. "I was confident that you would accept, and here are the appointments already made out."

He gave to each lad a large envelope, stamped with the army seal.

"Transportation has been arranged for you to leave here to-night," General Young concluded. "You will sail from England for the United States day after to-morrow. I wish you every success. I would be very glad to hear from you occasionally, and to know of the progress you are making. Good-by!"

It would be difficult to describe the ecstacies of delight in which Joe, Jerry and Slim left the quarters of General Young to impart the knowledge of their great good fortune to Captain Mackinson.

That warm friend listened to them until he could not keep his countenance straight any longer.

"I forgot to tell you," he said, "that I am to go back there, also, as an instructor."

"Isn't that luck!" exclaimed Slim, expressing the sentiment of the other two. "That just about makes it perfect."

So we leave the boys from Brighton—Joe and Jerry and Slim—leave them upon the threshold of the broader careers which merit has won them, and bid them carry always with them our very best wishes in their aspirations which we know ever will be onward and upward.

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