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Smashing the German Lines, by Josephine Chase**

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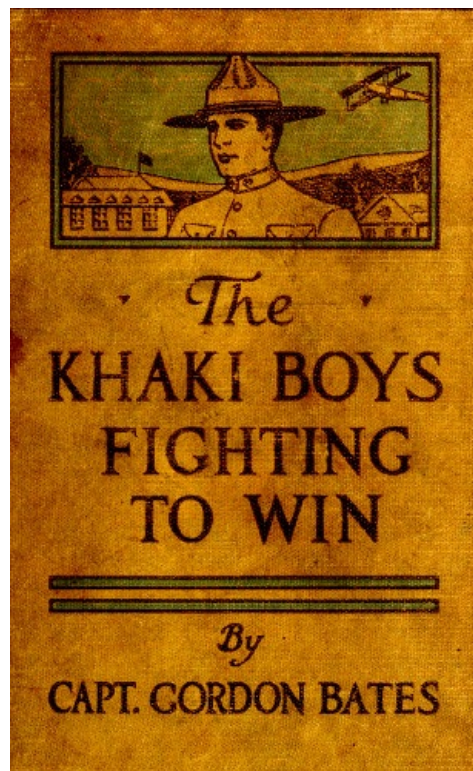
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE KHAKI BOYS FIGHTING TO WIN; OR,
SMASHING THE GERMAN LINES ***



The Khaki Boys Fighting to Win
OR
Smashing the German Lines

By
Capt. GORDON BATES

Author of "The Khaki Boys at Camp Sterling," "The
Khaki Boys on the Way," "The Khaki Boys
at the Front," "The Khaki Boys
Over the Top," etc.

NEW YORK
CUPPLES & LEON COMPANY

THE KHAKI BOYS SERIES

By CAPT. GORDON BATES

THE KHAKI BOYS AT CAMP STERLING
or Training for the Big Fight in France

THE KHAKI BOYS ON THE WAY
or Doing Their Bit on Land and Sea

THE KHAKI BOYS AT THE FRONT
or Shoulder to Shoulder in the Trenches

THE KHAKI BOYS OVER THE TOP
or Doing and Daring for Uncle Sam

THE KHAKI BOYS FIGHTING TO WIN
or Smashing the German Lines

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The Khaki Boys Fighting to Win

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THE KHAKI BOYS FIGHTING TO WIN

CHAPTER I BURIED ALIVE

Distant rumbles, like those of some far-off thunderstorm, penetrated even to the dugout, which was constructed under a greater depth of earth than usual. At times some fearful, though far-removed, explosion would cause the solid ground to tremble, while articles on the rude shelves of the shelter would fall down with resultant crashes.

"Some bombardment—that!" exclaimed one of a number of khaki-clad soldiers who were busying themselves in varying fashion in their bomb-proof quarters.

"I should say so!" agreed another. "If our boys keep this up long there won't be enough Germans left for us to have a scrimmage with!"

"Don't you fool yourself, Bob!" exclaimed Sergeant Jimmy Blaise. "There are more Germans left alive than we have any idea of. There'll be plenty left for you to tackle."

"Now your mind's relieved on that score, would you mind passing that oil can, Bob?" requested Roger Barlow. "There's a spot of rust on my gun, and if we're going to have another big fight soon I don't want the lock to jam at a critical time."

"Another big fight, eh?" mused Robert Dalton, as he complied with his bunkie's request. "That's about all we've been doing lately."

"That's what we're here for," suggested Sergeant Jimmy. "And the more big fights we have the sooner it will be over."

"You said something!" chimed in Franz Schnitzel, who, in spite of his Teutonic name, was one of the best of Uncle Sam's doughboys. "It's the only way to make the stupid Germans, not to call them anything worse, realize that we're not here to play tag with them. The heavier the fighting, the quicker they'll be ready to give up. But what's the use of talking about more fighting? Here we are, relieved of duty for to-day, at least, and let's enjoy it while we can. We'll be back in the trenches soon enough."

"That's so!" agreed Jimmy. "Hello over there, Iggy!" he called to a lad sitting at a table on which

glowed an electric light. "Are you writing in Polish or English?" he asked, for the lad he addressed as "Iggy," but whose name was Ignace Pulinski, was laboring with pen, ink and paper.

"It is English I am writ him, an to my mothar," was the answer. "No more Polish do I him write. I am a 'Merican now and for always."

"That's the way to talk, Iggy!" cried Bob. "Do you want any help with that letter? It seems to be more important than usual."

"Sure him is reportment," agreed Iggy, looking up and drawing in his tongue, which, while writing, had been stuck out of his mouth, following every laborious movement of his pen. "I am to my mothar sending my share of the money that Sergeant Jimmy broke up on us."

"Oh, you mean the five thousand francs he whacked up with us, Iggy," laughed Franz. "That's the word, 'whacked,' not broke, though no matter how much money someone whacks up with you, you'll be broke as soon as you haven't any."

"English him is a queer talk," sighed Iggy. "But I am writ to my mothar that I send her the two hundred dollars Sergeant Jimmy gave me. By jolly, that's a heap of money!" and his eyes glistened. "My faothar—he work many a days and he never get so much. But I no send this to my faothar—he is of no good. To my mothar this money goes, and she will kick for joy."

"You mean she'll dance for joy!" laughed Jimmy. "That's all right, Iggy. No offense meant," he went on as he saw his Polish friend look at him rather sharply. "You want to learn English, you know, even if it is a queer language, and you told us to correct you when you made mistakes."

"Sure. So I did. I am of a thanks to you. But my mothar, she will of joy have a lot when she gets this money. It—it is more as she haf ever seen of a once," and there was something in Iggy's tone that put a stop to further joking on this line.

The Polish lad went on with his letter-writing. As he had said, he was enclosing a money order for two hundred dollars. This was his share of a reward of five thousand francs which Sergeant Jimmy Blaise won for putting out of the way a certain "Charles Black," who, it turned out, was an Austrian spy named Adolph von Kreitzen. Jimmy, who in private life was wealthy, had insisted on sharing his reward with the other of the "Five Brothers," as the Khaki Boys were often called.

"Need any help, Iggy?" asked Bob, as he saw the Polish lad shake his head as if in despair over some knotty point in the letter.

"Well, I maybe do," was the answer. "I should tell my mothar about how I was out on night-work, and I of help capture that Russian spy of the name Alexandraiovitch Tarbotchanitzitschi. That is a hard name to spell."

"Spell! You can't spell that name!" and Jimmy Blaise exploded in a laugh. "You can get your tongue around it a whole lot better than any of us, but it can't be spelled. Just put in a wheeze, a couple of sneezes and a hiccough. Then you'll have the name, Iggy."

"Well, I guess maybe you got it right," assented the Polish lad. "I just tell my mothar I of capture a Russian spy what the Germans have—what you call made bad. I tell her the name when I get home."

"That's the idea!" agreed Bob. "Home!" he exclaimed. "Say, fellows, where have I heard that word before?"

"That's what I was wondering," chimed in Roger Barlow. "It sort of rhymes with bath-tub, pie, broiled steaks—"

He was interrupted by a dog-eared magazine which Jimmy tossed at him, narrowly missing hitting the electric lamp by which Iggy was writing his letter.

"Here! Cheese it! Do you want to douse the glim?" expostulated Schnitzel. "We won this dugout from the Germans after too much hard work to let you put it on the blink now. It's the best place we've had to rest in for some time. Don't go putting it on the kazook!"

"I apologize," said Sergeant Jimmy, humbly enough. "It's great to have electric light, isn't it? Those Huns certainly went to a lot of work to make this place like home for their officers. Electric lights, decent berths, and places where you can take it easy and write letters."

"They never thought we'd get this far, I guess," remarked Bob.

And what he said was true. There had been a sudden and substantial advance on the part of the American army, and they had overwhelmed the German lines at this sector, running the Boches several miles back. Thus long lines of well-made German trenches, including a number of dugouts fitted up rather more elaborately than usual, were left in the hands of the Allies in general and the Americans in particular.

The one in which the five Brothers were taking their rest after some severe fighting had been arranged with electric lights, and after the battle the wires were repaired, the dynamo hitched on again, and the place rendered habitable. It was an exceptionally deep dugout, and was safe from all but the very heaviest bombardments of the German guns. And there had been bombardments from time to time ever since the Americans had swept irresistibly and victoriously over the Boche lines.

"Well, this can't last forever," remarked Bob, as he nibbled at a bit of chocolate.

"What we want to do," declared Franz, as he slyly took a bit of Bob's confection, "is to wallop the Huns good and hard, and then put 'em where they can't do any more harm. Then it's us for the

good old U. S. A."

"Yes, and it'll be you for the outside if you snibby any more of my lollypop!" exclaimed Bob, with a grin as he moved away from Schnitzel. "I got this off a Salvation Army lassie this morning, and she said I wasn't to give any of it away."

"Pity you didn't get some for all of us," commented Roger. "Did they open a fresh box?"

"Yes, just got a new lot in," said Bob. "I was going to tell you about it and advise you to go out and get your share when we got to talking about Iggy's letter."

"Him is all done now—my letter," declared the Polish lad. "I can for the chocolate go!"

"We'll all have a go at the chocolate!" put in Jimmy. "Come on, fellows. We've been in here long enough. Let's get a bit of fresh air without running danger of poison gas. No telling how soon we'll be sent to the front again. Me for a large, juicy slice of chocolate!"

"We're with you!" cried his four chums.

"Well, I wish I could of see my mothar when she open this letter and of the two hundred dollars take out," said Iggy, as he gave the epistle to a messenger to see that it was mailed, together with cards and letters previously prepared by the other Khaki Boys. "She will hop—no, that is not the word—she will dance for of joy."

"Well, let us dance out and get the chocolate while the going's good!" cried Jimmy.

As he spoke a deeper boom from some distant, great gun came to their ears, and the ground trembled.

"Sounds as though they were coming nearer," commented Bob.

"Or else they're using longer range cannon," added Roger.

"Well," said Jimmy, "as long as we——"

He never finished the sentence. In the midst of it the words were drowned, swallowed up, obliterated in one great crash. It seemed to be exactly on top of the dugout of which the five Khaki Boys were now the only occupants.

And coincident with the crash there came complete darkness, while the deafening noise was followed by smaller concussions.

"It's a cave-in! The walls are collapsing!" cried Bob.

"I'm covered with dirt!" came Roger's voice faintly from the darkness. "Fellows, we're buried alive! Buried alive!"

And the echoes seemed to send back, mockingly:

"Buried alive! Alive!"

CHAPTER II A STRANGE SIGHT

For a moment after the dramatic announcement of Roger Barlow to the effect that he and his chums were in such dire straits, there was intense silence. Silence and darkness reigned in the dugout that, a moment before, had been light and the scene of as much gaiety as can perhaps ever be attained so near the war front. And the hearts of the five Brothers turned sick with fear.

Then Jimmy, perhaps because he was more used to commanding than his companions, though they were all non-commissioned officers, took charge of the situation.

"I say!" he called aloud, after making sure that the worst that had happened to him was numerous cuts and bruises. "I say, are any of you badly hurt?"

"I seem to be all there," answered Roger. "But I'm caught under a beam or something."

"Don't try to wiggle out yet!" warned Jimmy. "You may bring the whole place down about our ears! Wait until I see if I can get my hand in my pocket and bring out my flashlamp. I hope it isn't broken."

"I can get at mine!" came from Franz.

"Are you all right?" asked Jimmy.

"Yes, except for a crack on the head that made me see stars for a minute."

"Stars!" cried Bob. "We'd be well off if we could see comets now. It's as dark as a bucket of tar in here. What happened, anyhow? I believe we must be under tons of earth and rocks."

"I guess we are," said Jimmy, and his voice had a solemn note in it. "We must be buried alive, as you said. The Huns must have dropped a bomb from an aeroplane straight on the location of this dugout, which, of course, they knew. Or else they've got the range with one of their big guns. But wait, I can flash my glim now. We'll soon see what the trouble is."

"Has anyone heard a peep out of Iggy?" asked Roger. "Of course we can't see one another, but we can hear. I say, Iggy, are you all right?" he called, and by his voice it would seem that Roger

was not much hurt.

There was silence for a moment, and then the tones of the Polish lad were heard. Iggy said:

"I dunno if I am here, or by a deadness alretty. Only I haf a much pains in my foot. Maybe he is cracked!"

"Let us hope not!" said Jimmy, as he switched on his pocket flashlight. "Oh, I see him!" he cried. "You are under a heap of dirt and sandbags, Iggy. We'll soon have you out."

As Jimmy flashed the light, Bob and Franz began digging with their hands. They very quickly freed Roger. It was soon evident that Iggy, also, could be freed; but when this was accomplished his head sank back limply and his eyes closed.

"He must be worse hurt than we think," said Franz solemnly. "Is there any way out of this hole?"

"There is one if it hasn't been closed by the explosion," answered Jimmy. "Wait until I get my bearings. This is the main German dugout for this section of trench—that is, it was," he added significantly. "Now from here, as I recall it, there ran a tunnel into another bomb-proof. If we can dig our way to that we may be saved yet. And we've got to dig our way out, fellows. We may be buried alive, but it's up to us to dig our way out. But first we'd better get Iggy some water, if we can find any. I'm afraid he's in a bad way."

And while the five Brothers are trying to solve one of the many hard problems that came to them during their war career, I will take a moment to inform my new readers something of the lads themselves.

They were called the "Khaki Boys," and they were first introduced in the volume named "The Khaki Boys at Camp Sterling." Jimmy Blaise, otherwise known as James Sumner Blaise, the son of wealthy parents, Roger Barlow, an orphan who had tried various ways of making a living, Robert Dalton, who after the death of his parents had become a "cub" newspaper reporter, Franz Schnitzel, and Ignace Pulinski, had established a Brotherhood during their preliminary camp training.

They had many thrilling times together during the early days of the participation of the United States in the big conflict, and they formed friendships that meant much. They started for France together, and in the second volume, "The Khaki Boys on the Way," their experiences on the water have been detailed. Being torpedoed was only one of many thrilling things that happened to them. Eventually the five Khaki Boys reached the actual fighting ground, and in "The Khaki Boys at the Front," will be found set down their experiences as real fighters. In that book may be learned how Jimmy earned the reward of five thousand francs by disposing of the "tiger man." And it was this reward, or rather, his share of it, that Iggy sent to his "mothar," as he called her.

In the fourth volume, entitled, "The Khaki Boys Over the Top," are related the details of some rather curious happenings. Jimmy had entrusted his five thousand francs to the care of a friend, Sergeant Maxwell, and, after a certain skirmish, when the five Brothers went over the top, the sergeant was reported missing. The five thousand francs also disappeared.

What effect this had on the Khaki Boys, and how, later, they were saved from almost sure death by a strange officer, and how they denounced this officer as a spy—all this will be found in the fourth book. At the close, the boys, after many hardships, were united again, and they were waiting for the resumption of the heavy fighting where we find them at the opening of this present tale.

Among their friends the five Khaki Boys numbered the "Twinkle Twins," otherwise John and Gerald Twinkleton, two aviators, whose cousin, Emile Voissard, was known as the "Flying Terror of France." He was more than an ace, and it was in helping him that Jimmy won the reward. There was, too, Jimmy's friend Margaret, of Buffalo, but he had small hope of seeing his "girl" in those strenuous war days.

Of course boys like the five Brothers could not progress as they had and not make enemies. The very fact that Jimmy, Roger and Franz were sergeants, while Bob and Ignace were corporals was enough to cause some jealous feelings among the squads they often commanded. And even in camp this had been shown, before they were promoted. There was one young soldier, Private Bixton, who acted very despicably toward the five friends until he was sent to a military prison, mainly through the instrumentality of Jimmy and his chums. For Bixton was a scoundrel, as well as a deserter.

So, it can be seen, the five friends did not have it altogether easy. They fought hard, and they were wounded more than once, but not seriously enough to keep them long away from the firing line.

And now, after having fought hard and been given a short leave of absence, part of which they had spent in the old German dugout, the Khaki Boys are again in trouble, caused by the collapse of the underground place when the big shell or the bomb exploded.

Putting aside, for the moment, all thought of trying to dig their way out of their underground prison, the Khaki Boys proceeded to do what they could for the unfortunate Iggy. Their flashlights gave considerable illumination to the otherwise dark hole, and by looking around Jimmy and the others saw what had happened.

The shell, bomb, or whatever it was, must have landed squarely on top of the dugout. And though this top proper, being made of concrete, was some distance underground, it had been made to collapse as one might push in the end of an egg. The roof of the dugout was depressed while the

walls still stood upright, though much cracked. The place was filled with débris.

It was owing to the fact that the strong, thick walls held that the boys' lives were not at once crushed out. They had been along the edges, and not standing in the middle, when the crash came.

"Lift him over to one side, and we'll see if we can tell what's the matter with him," suggested Roger.

Accordingly they scraped as much dirt and débris off the Polish lad as possible, and then half lifted and half dragged him over to a pile of blankets.

"Feel any better?" asked Jimmy, as he gave his friend another drink from a canteen.

"Yes, of a little betterness am I," was the answer. "But do not of mind me. I can get alongs. Look for a way out of these place if you can find him. Do not mind me."

"Well, maybe I'd better be looking to see if I can find the old tunnel," said Jimmy. "We'll need to find that, anyhow, to get ourselves out, as well as Iggy. Roger, you come with me. Bob and Franz can stay with Iggy. We'll be back as soon as we can," he added.

The two boys climbed over the débris, flashing their pocket torches at intervals, so as not to use up the batteries too quickly. Bob and Franz made Iggy as comfortable as possible.

"Seems to me the place was over here," observed Jimmy, as he pulled aside some loose and splintered boards.

Quickly Jimmy flashed the gleams of his small lamp over the cracked and broken walls of the dugout. At first he had no success, but finally he found what he was looking for.

"Here it is!" he cried. "An old door! It's been closed for some time, but here it is."

"Can it be opened?" asked Roger.

"That remains to be seen," replied Jimmy, as he limped nearer to it, for he had been struck on the leg by a piece of timber and he was painfully lame.

An examination showed that the door, though broken and jammed, was capable of being forced open. This was done by Roger and Jimmy, using pieces of planks for levers. At last the broken door swung to one side on its burst hinges, and beyond it a dark tunnel was seen.

"Here's the place!" cried Jimmy. "Now if we can go along this until we reach the other bomb-proof we shall get out all right."

"Yes—if we can," said Roger significantly. "Well, we've got to try, that's sure. Can't stay here very long. It may come down about our ears."

"I don't know about Iggy, though," went on Jimmy. "Of course we could carry him, but it would be hard work."

However, they were not compelled to do this. For when Roger and Jimmy went back to where they had left Bob and Franz looking after the wounded Polish lad, they found that Iggy could walk by leaning on the shoulder of someone.

"That's good!" exclaimed Jimmy. "Now then for the tunnel! But take it easy, everybody. We may be going into a blind lead, or a place worse than this. So go slow!"

And slowly and cautiously they entered the tunnel, Roger and Jimmy in the lead. One of them flashed a pocket torch at intervals, for the way was rough and treacherous.

Suddenly Roger, who had got a little in advance of Jimmy, caught the latter by the arm, and, pointing ahead, in a whisper, asked:

"What's that? Who are they?"

Jimmy, looking to where his friend pointed, uttered a guarded exclamation. He was gazing at a strange sight.

CHAPTER III

ANOTHER PUZZLE

"What's the matter up ahead there?" came the demand from Schnitzel, who, with Bob, was helping along the disabled Iggy. "Why don't you go on, Jimmy?"

"Is the way blocked?" asked Bob. "Are we stuck again?"

"Keep still back there!" fiercely whispered Sergeant Jimmy. "Don't make such a row, or they'll hear you!"

"Who?" asked Franz, and this time he lowered his voice to the desired pitch. "Are there some Germans up ahead? Did the blowing up of our dugout mean that our lines are smashed?" His voice was anxious. He and Bob could not see beyond the place where Roger and Jimmy had come to a halt.

"Just wait a minute," advised Jimmy, still keeping to a whisper. "Rodge and I just saw something that may be all right, and may be all wrong. We're going to see what it is. We'll tell you when we

come back. Stay where you are with Iggy. It may not be safe to go on any farther."

Bob and Schnitzel let Iggy lean up against the tunnel wall. The Polish lad closed his eyes and made himself as comfortable as possible. His two companions looked ahead along the dark shaft which connected the two former German dugouts. They could dimly see Jimmy and Roger moving ahead, now and then cautiously flashing their pocket torches.

And the strange sight that had so startled the two leading Khaki Boys was this. In the second dugout, which did not seem to have been much damaged by the blast that, for a time, had buried the Khaki Boys, Roger and Jimmy saw four men. They stood in the middle of the old dugout, which had not been used in some time, and on a table, about which they were congregated, burned a candle stuck in the neck of a bottle.

But the curious fact about it all was that while two of the men wore the regulation American army uniform, the other two were in civilian attire. And it needed but an instant's thought on the part of Roger and Jimmy to make them understand that there was something vitally wrong here.

Civilians were not only not supposed to be so far within the front lines, but they were actually forbidden. It was against all military rules and regulations. No one without a uniform was allowed so near the front—even the newspaper correspondents being rigidly required to conform to certain rules in this respect.

The reason for this was obvious. So stern were the necessities of war that it was imperative that each man bear some distinctive mark. He was either a friend or a foe, and the only way this could be told, where there were so many thousands, was by a uniform.

Of course, the wearing of a uniform did not guarantee that the man inside it was a friend. He might be a spy. But the appearance of men in civilian garb within the army lines caused suspicion at once. And this suspicion was at once engendered in the minds of Roger and Jimmy.

"What do you think of that?" whispered Roger.

"I don't think very much," was Jimmy's answer, as they paused at an angle in the tunnel and gazed forward into the candle-lighted dugout. "It looks bad to me."

"That's what I say. Those are two doughboys, or some of our Sammies, anyhow. As for the other two—say, I haven't seen anyone in civies for so long it looks strange. What do you think those two civilians can be doing there talking to two of our men?"

"I give it up—at least for the present," said Jimmy. "It's another puzzle—like the time when we saw Captain Frank Dickerson at the red mill, maybe."

"They could be French refugees," went on Roger. "Maybe they have been held prisoners by the Germans, and just got away."

"Well, that's a possibility, of course," assented his chum. "But they don't look as if they had been in prison. They're too well dressed, and they look too well fed for that. In fact they look more like Germans than Frenchmen."

"They do," assented Roger, as he peered over his friend's shoulder. "Still you can't always tell. At one time we thought Captain Dickerson looked like a German, but he wasn't. But the fact that these men are in civilian clothes is what gets me. They haven't any right so far inside our lines dressed like that."

"You're right," said Jimmy. "There's some sort of a mystery here. It may turn out all right, and it may be all wrong. I'm going to——"

Jimmy interrupted himself to utter an exclamation of surprise, for suddenly one of the men leaned over the table and blew out the candle, leaving the dugout in darkness. And, almost as if this was a signal of some sort, there began a furious bombardment, the echoes of which came to the ears of the Khaki Boys.

"They're at it again!" cried Roger.

"Those are our guns!" declared Jimmy. "We're paying the Huns back for smashing our fine dugout!"

"The one we took from the Germans," added his chum. "Say, Jimmy," he went on. "You know all this around here used to be within the German lines; this tunnel and the dugouts."

"Of course I know it," returned Jimmy. "What of it?"

"Well, maybe there's a secret passage leading over to their new lines and trenches from here. Maybe that's how those two civilians got in here."

"Nothing like that!" declared Jimmy. "The German lines are too far away from here now. Besides, why would two lone Germans venture back in the enemy's camp? It isn't reasonable."

"Well, there's something queer," declared Roger, "and we'd better report it."

"I guess so," agreed the young sergeant. "But now what shall we do—go ahead or wait here?"

"Let's show a light and go on," decided Roger, for they had darkened their flash torches on seeing the burning candle. They had stood in the darkness while looking into the dugout containing the four men.

Jimmy hesitated a moment. He did not at all like the situation. It was "extremely ticklish," he said afterward. To show a light now, when the four men were in darkness, would mean that Jimmy and Roger would be targets for any hostile act. They would be in plain view while the others were

not. Roger guessed something of what was passing in Jimmy's mind for he said:

"There can't be any danger. Those were two of our own doughboys there."

"Yes," was the answer. "I guess we can take a chance. But have your automatic ready while I show the glim. No telling what may happen."

Roger let a faint gleam escape from between two fingers which he pressed over the small bulb of his pocket flash lamp. He directed this gleam into the dugout, and then he and his chum received another surprise.

For the place was empty. The four men—two soldiers and two civilians—had disappeared!

As Jimmy and Roger stood in the tunnel, a few feet away from the door leading into the dugout, from behind them came Bob's voice.

"Say!" he whispered, "are you fellows going to stand there chinning all day? We want to get Iggy somewhere so we can see what the matter with him is! What's the row, anyhow—why the traffic hold-up?"

"Something queer going on here, that's all," answered Roger. "Come on now—the way's clear. Wow! Hear that gun!"

"One of our big new ones," remarked Jimmy, as the concussion shook the tunnel and rattled down particles of dirt from the sides and roof.

"If there's fighting going on we ought to be in it!" exclaimed Franz, as he and Bob started on again with the disabled Iggy. They could see the dim gleam of Roger's lamp ahead of them.

"Oh, we'll get in it as soon as anyone," remarked Jimmy. "But first we want to find out what's going on here. Come on, fellows. We can get out of the tunnel and into this dugout, anyhow. This place seems to be all right. I know my way out. The cave-in didn't extend this far back."

This was true. The big shell that had brought their rest dugout down about the heads of the Khaki Boys had done no damage here. One end of the tunnel—that nearest the big underground shelter—was partly demolished, but the end connecting with the second dugout was not disturbed.

Into this dugout, then, went the five Khaki Boys, Iggy shuffling along by putting his arms over the shoulders of Franz and Bob. They had been obliged to proceed sideways in single file along the narrow tunnel, but the dugout was large enough to accommodate a dozen or more.

"They aren't here!" exclaimed Jimmy, as he quickly looked around the place, Roger having relighted the candle in the bottle.

"Who aren't here?" Franz demanded.

"The four men we saw when we stopped so suddenly," Jimmy explained. "They've gone!"

"Where?" Roger wanted to know.

Jimmy pointed to a rude door leading out of the tunnel. It was answer enough.

"Say, you fellows act as though there was a dark mystery here," complained Bob, as he helped Iggy to a seat on a box.

"I'm beginning to think there is," was Jimmy's answer. And hardly had the words passed his lips than from the door leading out of the dugout came a voice saying:

"Come on now! We can get 'em this way, I guess!"

The four Khaki Boys drew their revolvers and stood tense and waiting, forming a protecting screen in front of Iggy.

CHAPTER IV RECOGNITION

Naturally, after what had happened and bearing in mind the strange sight Roger and Jimmy had witnessed, there was but one thought in the minds of at least four of the Khaki Boys—Iggy was temporarily out of it. And this thought was that some disaster had overtaken the American forces above ground while much was happening to them below ground, in the dugout and tunnel. Perhaps the Germans had made a counter-attack, retaken the trenches from which they had been driven, and were now about to swarm down into the dugout, where the Khaki Boys were, to capture them.

"Don't give up!" cried Jimmy fiercely. "Stand 'em off as long as you can, and then——"

Once more he was interrupted by a voice coming from the passage leading from the dugout.

"Lively now!" was the command. "There's a bare chance we may get 'em out this way, but we've got to hurry!"

"You won't get us out alive!" said Bob fiercely, and he looked around the dugout for some way of escape. There were only two entrances—or exits—whichever one might choose to call them—the one by which the boys had emerged from the tunnel, and the other by which they hoped to leave.

But this last was now blocked by an approaching party.

"Stand together, boys!" said Sergeant Jimmy in a low voice.

"Shall I douse the glim?" asked Franz.

He was about to blow out the candle when into the dugout came hurrying a squad of khaki-clad soldiers, and it needed but a glance from the Khaki Boys to show them that they were their own comrades of the 509th Infantry. Lieutenant Morrison was in charge—an officer of whom the five Brothers were very fond.

"Here they are!" cried the lieutenant. "How in the world did you boys escape? We saw the place where the big German shell struck, and we didn't think there'd be more than half of you left alive after the dugout caved in, as it must have done. Yet here you all are."

"One's missing, sir," said a corporal.

"There were five and——"

"Here I iss!" exclaimed Iggy. "Part of me is alive, anyhow!"

There was a laugh at this—a laugh that told of overstrained nerves being mercifully relieved.

"Is he badly hurt?" asked Lieutenant Morrison, as he looked at the Polish lad, his friendly guard moving away from in front of him.

"Something fell on one foot when the dugout gave way under pressure from the Hun shell," explained Roger. "I hope it isn't bad."

"Well, we'll get him to a dressing station as soon as possible," went on the young officer. "There's been a merry ruction up above, as I suppose you boys have guessed. As soon as I got things a bit straightened out, some one told me about a party being on leave down in the old German dugout, and I at once organized a rescue squad. How did you manage to escape?"

Jimmy and his chums related their experience, and, in turn, Jimmy asked:

"Have the Huns put one over on us?"

"They tried to," was the grim answer. "But I think we gave them back a little better than they sent. We've got the upper hand now, but how long we can keep it is another question. There's going to be a big fight soon."

"Good!" cried Franz, his eyes brightening. "The more the fights, and the bigger they are, the sooner the Boches will quit."

"Let us hope so!" ejaculated the lieutenant fervently. Then, as he caught sight of the revolvers in the hands of the four non-commissioned officers, he asked, with a show of surprise: "What's the game? Did you have to shoot any Huns to get out of the dugout after it collapsed?"

"Why, no, sir," answered Jimmy. "The Germans didn't break in—it was only the big shell they sent over. But you must have met them if you came along the tunnel just now."

"Met who?" Lieutenant Morrison queried.

Jimmy explained, Roger putting in a word now and then. The officer shook his head.

"We met no one," he remarked. "It's queer, too, for there doesn't seem to be any side passage from this tunnel, though there may be some we don't know about. We didn't stop to look, as a matter of fact. As soon as I heard there were some of our boys in the smashed dugout I began to plan a rescue. Some one remembered this unused tunnel and dugout, just as you remembered it, Sergeant Blaise, and this was the only way we could get in to save you. But we met no one on our way."

"That's queer," declared Jimmy.

"It is," agreed Lieutenant Morrison. "This matter must be reported to headquarters. But now let's get out of here. No telling when this place may come down about our ears."

Iggy was feeling a little better, having had the weight off his injured foot for a while, and soon they were progressing along the tunnel toward the exit. This tunnel was wider, and on the way along it the four Khaki Boys, as well as the members of the relief party, looked for side openings or shafts.

"Here's one!" exclaimed the lieutenant. "Corporal White, you take a man and go along it and see if you can find any trace of the four mentioned by Sergeant Blaise. Be on the alert. Even two of the men being in American uniforms would not guarantee anything. But this is probably how they eluded us," he said to Jimmy, nodding to indicate the passage.

A little later the party emerged from the tunnel that led into the dugout, and they were welcomed by their comrades, many of whom had thought that Jimmy and his chums had been killed, or at least badly wounded when the big German shell smashed in the top of the shelter.

Iggy was taken to a dressing station, and later it was learned that he was not as badly hurt as was at first feared. He would be back in line again within a few days, it was said.

The exploration of the side passage leading off from the tunnel amounted to little. Corporal White said he saw no trace of the four men, but he reported that there was a maze of passages leading from the one he examined, and it was possible for the four to have hidden in these, or to have made their escape along one of the dark, winding tubes of earth.

"Well, this makes the mystery all the more puzzling," said Jimmy, when he and his chums talked

it over. "I certainly would like to know who those fellows were—especially the ones in uniform."

And there was a deeper mystery about it than he even dreamed of.

But little the worse from their nerve-racking experience in the collapsed dugout, Jimmy and his chums finished their period of leave and once more took their places with their comrades, ready to fight or do anything else required of them. Iggy was given a detail as orderly to a major, which made his duties light. But he was anxious to get on the firing line again.

It was early one morning—quite a zero hour, in fact, though none was set—when suddenly there began a furious firing from the German lines, removed only a short distance at this particular part of the front where the Khaki Boys were stationed.

If the German gunners hoped to take the Americans by surprise, and by a sudden and unexpected barrage pave the way for an attack, they must have been sorely disappointed. For almost at the very instant that the German pieces began their grim music there was response from Uncle Sam, and in greater volume.

But it was not to be altogether an artillery duel. The word was passed up and down the line to get ready to repel an attack in force, and Jimmy, Roger, Bob, and Franz tumbled out of their blankets, their eyes heavy with sleep, ready for the fight.

It was not long in coming, for no sooner did they have their equipment on, from gas masks at the alert position to their canteens and mess kits, than they were ordered over the top.

"Forward! Forward!" was the cry.

The American fire, at first a mere reply to the challenge of the Boche artillery, was soon changed into a protecting barrage for the thousands of doughboys who scrambled out of their trenches, and in less time than would seem possible a fierce battle was raging.

Jimmy had one glimpse of Bob, Roger, and Franz being directed off to the right, while his party was ordered to the left. So, for the time, Jimmy lost sight of his chums.

The battle was fierce and hot. In spite of the American barrage, the Germans broke through at one point, and there was hand-to-hand fighting, grim and terrible while it lasted.

Jimmy Blaise was in the thick of this. He had one vision of a big burly German charging him, his mouth wide open in a yell, and his bayonet dripping red. Then Jimmy's rifle spoke, and the German was no longer in front of the Khaki Boy, who leaped over his body to keep beside his comrades.

Sergeant Jimmy saw another Hun taking aim at Lieutenant Morrison, who was engaged with a German officer. There was no time to warn the lieutenant, and Jimmy did the next best thing. His bayonet put the Hun out of the battle for all time, and the lieutenant, who had just defeated his opponent, turned with a look that meant much to Jimmy. There was no time for words.

Guns and shells were crashing on all sides. The Germans had brought up some machine guns, and these were doing fearful execution among the Americans until the nests were located and the crews working the automatic death-dealers killed.

Sergeant Blaise led in one of these raids, and he and his comrades had swept triumphantly over the place, leaving only dead Germans to tell the tale, when Jimmy suddenly felt a great blow on his head. Instantly all became black around him, and he fell.

For one fearful moment the thought flashed through his mind that he was killed—that this was the end of it all. And then, as he landed with a thud on the ground, his senses seemed to come back to him.

His face was wet, and something seemed to cover his eyes. He put his hand to his face as he lay on the ground, a horrible fear coming to him that his eyes had been blown out.

To his great relief he found that his vision came back to him when he rubbed his hand over his eyes. And as he looked at his hand he found that it was not covered with blood, as he had feared, but with mud. A shell had exploded in a mud hole directly in front of Jimmy, and had deluged him with the mucky stuff, completely covering his face and eyes.

"But I'm hit, though," he mused, as he felt his head, and this time there was blood on his hand. But it did not seem to be an alarming amount. In fact, after the first shock, Jimmy felt as though he could get up and go on fighting. But an officer, leaping over him, sensed the situation and cried:

"Lie down where you are! Some one will come for you presently. We've got 'em on the run, but they may sweep this place with machine guns again. Lie still where you are!"

Jimmy had sense enough to obey, and presently he became aware of the fact that the firing in his immediate neighborhood was growing less. In a few minutes it seemed to die away altogether, and it was not long after that before two men came along with a stretcher.

"Here's a live one!" the leader cried, as he caught sight of Jimmy, who cautiously raised his head.

"Hurt much?" the second stretcher bearer asked.

"Don't know," was Jimmy's laconic answer. "Wait until I stand up and see."

But as soon as he tried to get on his feet he felt so weak and dizzy that he would have fallen had not one of the men caught him.

"I guess it's a first-aid station for yours, old man," was the grim comment. And Jimmy shut his

eyes.

When he opened them again it was to find himself lying on a sort of table, with a doctor bending over him.

"How do you feel?" asked the surgeon.

"Oh, sort of—sort of——" remarked Jimmy weakly.

"You'll do," was the reply. "Got a nasty knock on the head, but your skull isn't damaged—just a scalp wound. We'll wash you up a bit and send you back. Here, orderly, some water and bandages."

Jimmy closed his eyes and gritted his teeth. The mere touching of the wound on his head, to wash and bandage it, was most painful, but he did not utter a sound. Then he seemed to doze off, and when again full consciousness came to him it was to open his eyes in a temporary hospital. He was lying on a cot under a screen of bushes—a camouflaged place, to prevent, if possible, the Huns from dropping bombs from airships on this oasis of mercy.

And it was while lying on the cot, feeling more comfortable now that his head was bandaged, that Jimmy saw a squad of soldiers from the signal corps passing along the road. They had been ordered to the front to establish better communications, now that the German raid had been repulsed and the Boches were being forced to retreat.

As Jimmy looked at two men in the signal squad carrying a black box, which he recognized as one containing part of a wireless outfit, Jimmy felt a queer sensation.

"Why, I know those two fellows!" he told himself, as his eyes followed the marching twain carrying the black box. "I know them, though this is only the second time I've seen them, as far as I can tell. The other time was in the dugout. Those are the two army fellows who were talking to the two civilians. And now to find them in the signal corps! What does it mean?"

CHAPTER V BATTLING ONWARD

Well might Sergeant Jimmy ask himself that question. For a moment he feared lest the injury to his head had caused his brain to wander so that he "saw things." But as he looked about on other sights—noted wounded men being brought in, saw fresh fighters rushing up to the front, to be ready if called on—and when he again looked toward the marching squad of the signal corps Jimmy felt sure that his brain was normal.

And there was no doubt, in his mind, of what he saw. He looked again at the two doughboys who had attracted his attention. They were in strong sunlight, and Jimmy was sure he could not be mistaken.

"They're the same two who were in the dugout talking to the two men in civilian clothes," murmured the wounded lad. "And those two civilians might be almost anyone. I only hope they weren't German spies! That would be fierce—to have two of our men meeting German spies secretly. But hold on—wait a minute. There may be another angle or twist to this game."

Jimmy raised himself on his elbow and looked after the disappearing signal corps squad. The two men carrying the black electrical box were in the rear now.

"They're the same two—no question of that," decided Jimmy. "But I may be wrong in thinking they were having a secret meeting with spies. Those civilians may be spies, but I don't believe any of our soldiers would be in any underhand scheme with them. Maybe they were laying pipes to capture the spies, or even bag bigger game. I guess that was it. Hang it! I wish I could get up and follow them. I'd like to have a talk with those fellows!"

But when Jimmy tried to sit up he found how weak he really was. The blow on the head had put him out of the fighting for the time being.

"Anything I can do for you, old man?" asked a Salvation Army worker, coming along just then. He had been going about giving hot soup to such of the injured as could take it, and now it was Jimmy's turn.

"Yes, I would like a bit," answered Jimmy Blaise to this rough and ready angel of mercy in the guise of an unshaven Salvation Army man. "That's great!" murmured Jimmy, as the soup brought new life to him.

He felt so much revived that a few minutes later, when an orderly came past and stopped beside Jimmy, the Khaki Boy began a conversation.

"Is the signal corps ordered to any special place?" he asked.

"Oh, no, just out on general work," was the answer. "The Germans shot away some of our telegraph lines, and they're going to repair 'em, I guess. Wish I was with 'em, but I can't be," and he sighed.

"Like that sort of work?" asked Jimmy.

"You bet! I'm a telephone repair man back home, and I was in the signal corps until I got a wound

that put me out. I'm getting better, and I'll soon be able to chuck this orderly berth, put on my spurs and take my pliers again."

"Know anyone in that signal corps bunch?" asked Jimmy.

"Sure! Every one. I've been working with 'em ever since this shindig started."

"What's in that black box the two rear men carried?" asked Jimmy, though he pretty well knew what the answer would be, as he had seen such boxes before.

"Part of a wireless outfit," was the answer. "I was just taking up that work when I got my wound stripe."

"Who were the two lads carrying the box?" persisted Jimmy.

"You mean the wireless box? Oh, they were two lads named Bixton. One—Wilbur—is a private. His brother Aleck is a corporal."

"Wilbur and Aleck Bixton," said Jimmy, and at once his brain began to do some active work.

"Yes, they claim to be experts in wireless work," went on the orderly. "But, for my part, I think they're a couple of——"

"Orderly!" came a sharp command from a surgeon, "I need you over here."

Some more wounded were being brought in.

"See you later, old man," said the surgeon's assistant to Jimmy. "Hope you get out of this dump soon."

"Same here," and Jimmy smiled. He did not feel the pain so much now, for he was thinking of something else.

"Bixton!" he said to himself. "Aleck and Wilbur Bixton! Where have I heard that name Bixton before? Was it——Ha! I have it! Back at Camp Sterling! Private Bixton! The rascal we helped send to prison, where he belonged. No wonder that name stuck in my mind! He's in prison still, I'm sure, for he was given a long term for desertion and rascality."

Readers of the first volume of the Khaki Boys series will, no doubt, readily recall the incidents referred to.

"Bixton!" mused Jimmy. "It isn't a common name. And yet there may be more than one who can lay claim to it. I wonder if these two Bixtons in the signal corps can be any relation to the Bixton we knew. Let's see—what was his first name—um—no, I can't recall it. Don't know that I ever heard it. But the Bixton part sticks in my mind.

"And I'm sure these two Bixtons—Aleck and Wilbur—were in the dugout with the suspicious-looking civilians. Now, of course, there may be nothing wrong in that, and yet if they're any relation to Private Bixton, late of Camp Sterling, I shouldn't put it past them to have been up to something crooked. The thing to do is to find out for sure if the two here are related to the one left behind. That's what I'll do as soon as I get on my feet! Say, maybe I'm on the track of as queer a mystery as the poison one back in camp!"

Jimmy was not quite as strong as he had thought, for, after trying to puzzle this out and piece together the various threads of thought in his mind, he felt very much exhausted. A little later he was sent to a temporary hospital, where he remained for three days.

During this time Jimmy had no chance to pursue his inquiries about the Bixtons. But he did a lot of thinking. Meanwhile, the tide of battle lulled, but it was only temporary—everyone knew that.

There came a day when Jimmy could rejoin his friends, and he found Iggy with them ready to welcome him, for the Polish lad had recovered from his injuries sustained in the dugout.

"Well, how do you feel, Jimmy?" asked Roger.

"Fit as a fiddle!" was the answer. "That little crack on the head is hardly sore now. The doc told me to wear a cotton pad over it under my tin hat, though, to keep the pressure off. And now, fellows, I've got a bit of news for you."

"Haven't won another five thousand francs reward, have you?" asked Bob.

"No. Wish I had. But this is about something else. Say, you fellows remember Private Bixton, back at Camp Sterling, don't you?"

"I should say I did!" cried Schnitzel, who had good reason to recall the scoundrel. "What about him?"

"Well, there are two fellows here," resumed Jimmy, "who are of the same name and——"

"Fall in! Fall in!" came a sudden order.

There was no time to tell more. Word had come from the front of activity along the German lines, and it was feared there was to be an attack.

Nor were the fears groundless, for the Khaki Boys had no sooner reached the front-line trenches, being sent up to relieve men that had long been on duty, than word was passed along that a big battle was soon to begin.

"I'll tell you later what I started to say about Bixton," said Jimmy, who received instructions to take charge of a squad of men, none of his "Brothers" being in the squad. He hurried away, and a little later they were battling onward against heavy odds.

The Huns had sprung something in the nature of a surprise. It was another of their fierce attempts to break through the American line, and though they did not succeed, they placed parts of it in danger and it required the sacrifice of many lives to hold back the horde of fierce Boches.

"Come on, boys! Come on!" cried Jimmy Blaise, as he led his squad across an open field which, time and again, had been swept by machine-gun bullets. "Come on!"

And with cheers they followed him.

CHAPTER VI POOR SCHNITZ

Grim and terrible fighting now marked what turned out to be one of the decisive engagements of the war between the Americans and the Germans. At this sector of the front, and just about where the 509th Infantry was included in the army that was expected to smash the German line, there was what is called a "spear head." That is, the Germans had so thrust forward their forces as to occupy a small point of territory with its apex toward the American front. It was in such ways as this that the salients were made, and these were always dangerous.

Sometimes the danger was to the force making the spear point, for they laid themselves open to flank attacks. Again, the danger was to the side into which the point was thrust. For the point could be broadened and so spread out as to divide the defending line.

Indeed, the object of making a salient, or spear head, was just that—to divide and bend back the opposing force, to cut it in two, so that there should be confusion in the ranks, with consequent defeat.

The Germans, as has been said, had created a small spear head at this point, and it was in an endeavor to enlarge this by a surprise attack that the present fighting was undertaken.

And, naturally, the Americans had to rally to their own defense. Well they knew that, if the Huns once broadened the point, all sorts of disasters might follow. So it is no wonder that Jimmy and his chums, and every Sammie in the gallant American armies, fought to the death. And, likewise, with the hope of victory before them, it may well be assumed that the Germans also fought desperately.

Forward over the shell-pitted ground swept the Americans to meet the attack and beat it back if possible. Their own barrage, directed by aviators hovering above the contending armies, was working well. It gave protection, but, in a way, was nullified by a counter barrage laid down by the Boche gunners.

And not only was the shrapnel barrage sweeping over the one between the two contending forces, but there was a constant spray of machine-gun bullets, to say nothing of the fire from thousands of rifles.

Smashes, bangs, roars, and rattles, together with cheers of encouragement, yells of defiance, and screams of sorely wounded men mingled in one awful, hideous maelstrom of noise as the battle continued.

Jimmy Blaise led his small force onward, being directed, of course, by lieutenants, captains or majors in the advance. Two of Jimmy's squad were killed instantly by shrapnel, one on either side of him, and their blood spattered him. But he shut his teeth grimly and kept on. And yet in the midst of it all—even when he was fiercely yelling to his men to come on and while he fired his rifle until it was hot to his touch—he could not help thinking of his four Brothers.

Where were they? Had they been wounded—killed, perhaps? Or were they still fighting and struggling onward as was he, over the death-impending ground, leaping from shell-hole to shell-hole, now into some water-filled crater, now out again, ever going onward, onward, onward unless stopped by death or a disabling wound?

"Well, I can only hope for the best," mused Jimmy, as he paused a moment behind a hillock of dirt to get his breath. "This is fierce fighting! I only hope we smash through them!"

Then again he plunged into the horrible din and slaughter, rallying such men as he saw needed to be led, not because they faltered, but because they were bewildered by the terrible din all about them.

Meanwhile Roger, Bob and Franz found themselves close together as they advanced. They were rushing onward against a nest of German machine guns, taking advantage of such shelter as they could find between the bursts of fire.

"We've got to get them out of the way!" panted Franz, as he wiped the blood from his face—blood from a cut in his head caused by a fragment of a shrapnel shell which, had it gone a half inch closer, would have ended his fighting days.

"That's right!" agreed Bob. "They're holding up the advance at this point. Come on now. When they get through the next volley let's rush 'em. They must stop a moment to put in a fresh belt of cartridges."

"Their machine guns fire faster than ours—at least they load faster," observed Roger, as the three paused, even as Jimmy had done, in a crater to get a moment's respite. "That flexible belt of

cartridges goes in the firing chamber quicker than our brass clips do, I'm thinking."

"But, even at that, our boys work our guns to better advantage," declared Franz. "They've got the knack of jamming in the cartridge clips, and though the Huns ought to fire faster, they don't, as a rule. Well, come on! Let's get the job over!" he said grimly, addressing those around him, who were waiting for the word to go on and wipe up the nest of Hun machine gunners.

With yells they started out of the hole, but at that instant a shell descended directly on an old house where the Germans had made a stand, placing no less than ten machine guns in the structure, as was learned later. The shell came from the American lines, and was doubtless aimed according to directions signaled back by some Allied aviator. It fell directly on the house, and being an H. E. shell—that is, high explosive—the damage wrought was terrific.

In one great blast, directly in front of the boys, and so close as to scatter dirt and small stones all about them, the house that sheltered the Boches was blown apart. And with it went the machine guns and those serving the weapons. That nest was wiped out, and with wild yells the Khaki Boys rushed forward to take advantage of the gap thus made in the German line.

"Well, that saved us a lot of work," cried Franz, as they swept past the place where the house had been. Now it was but a hole in the ground.

"Yes, and it saved a lot of lives," added Bob. "But the job isn't finished yet. We've got to go on!"

"You said it!" came grimly from Roger. "Say, look on either side of us!" he added. "This is one of the biggest battles of the war."

And so it proved. As the boys, taking a little breathing spell just beyond the machine-gun nest, looked to either side of them up and down the conflicting lines, they saw how the tide of battle was going. And at no point were the Americans giving way. Ever they were pressing onward. The German spear-head was broken off and flattened—being rendered harmless. In fact, it was being turned so as to become a veritable thorn in the side of the Boche enemy.

Iggy, the Polish lad, rejoicing that he was again in the battle fighting for the beloved land of his adoption, had, early in the conflict, lost contact with Bob, Franz, and Roger. But this had happened before during fights, and Iggy was so desperately in earnest in firing his rifle at the foe, in rushing forward at the word of command, and in seeking such shelter as there was when told to, that he had little time to think of his friends.

Bob, Roger, and Franz, after passing the demolished machine-gun nest, soon found themselves, together with others of their company, in a small patch of woods.

"Rest here," directed a lieutenant. "There's a spring, and you can get some water. There'll be plenty of hard fighting yet, so take it easy when you can."

"Water! Oh, boy!" came the cries of delight from the thirst-parched and wearied lads. And never did liquid taste sweeter. It refreshed them more than can easily be imagined.

Then came the order to go forward, and in a fierce bit of fighting that followed, Franz Schnitzel found himself out of contact not only with Bob and Roger, but also away from any others of his company.

"This won't do! Got to get back!" he decided. "They must be off to my left."

He turned in that direction. Then, as he passed around a small knoll, he saw three Germans gathered about a machine gun down in a little depression. Something seemed to be wrong with the mechanism, and the three heads were bent over the breech.

"The beasts!" cried Schnitz in a hoarse whisper. "They must have hidden here when our lines passed over, and now they're going to pepper them from the rear. But not if I can stop it!"

Making sure that his rifle magazine was filled and that he had some hand grenades and that his pistol was where he could get at it, Franz worked his way quietly along until he was within a few feet of the three Germans.

"Hands up!" he suddenly cried, leveling his rifle.

Whether or not the Huns understood these characteristic American words is a question. But they could not mistake the tone of voice Schnitzel used. Immediately six hands were elevated, and with one accord, as the Germans turned and faced the lone lad.

"*Kamerad! Kamerad!*" they cried.

"That sounds like it!" said Franz grimly. "Take off your pistols and toss 'em on the ground. Then form in line and march. You're my prisoners!"

The men obeyed sullenly enough. By gestures Franz indicated that they were to march ahead of him back toward the American lines. His heart was jubilant at the capture. Not only had he prisoners, but he had, alone, cleaned up a machine-gun nest.

But alas for poor Schnitz! He had hardly marched his trio of Huns more than a few hundred feet when, as they turned around a clump of bushes, they came face to face with a large party of Germans led by a pompous captain.

Instantly the three prisoners set up a yell, explaining the situation, and with answering yells their comrades rushed toward them.

"I guess the game's up!" thought Franz grimly. "This was too good to last!"

He fired into the midst of the Germans, seeing two go down. Then some one either crept up

behind him and struck him or he was hit by a missile thrown or by a glancing bullet, for he suddenly fell and lost consciousness, and when he revived, under a rain of kicks bestowed on his prostrate body by a brutal soldier, it was to find himself in the midst of a circle of Huns.

"Get up, pig-dog of an American!" spluttered the German captain. "You will capture our men, will you? Now you are a prisoner. The tables are turned!"

He spoke in German, and, of course, Franz understood. Before he realized what he was doing he snapped back an answer in the same tongue, not thinking what the consequences would be.

"I won't be a prisoner long!" said Franz. Hearing his own language from an enemy prisoner, he reached the conclusion that the speaker was of German parentage. This seemed to enrage the Boche captain. With crimson face he yelled:

"Ho! So you are a renegade German, are you? You fight against your own countrymen! Well, we know the right punishment for that. Get up, you traitor!" and he kicked poor Schnitz brutally. "Drag him along if he won't walk!" cried the captain to his men, and some of them, with ready bayonets, drew nearer to Franz.

CHAPTER VII

DAYS OF SORROW

"We're smashing through! We're smashing through!"

It was Jimmy who cried this. A turn of the battle had thrown him in contact with Roger, Bob, and Iggy after some hours of fighting, and once more they were pressing onward again.

There had been only time for a hurried word of inquiry—enough to learn that none of the four was injured at all seriously, though each one had had narrow escapes.

"Seen anything of Schnitz?" cried Jimmy, as he leaped forward to the attack again.

"He was with us a little while ago," shouted Bob. "I guess we'll find him up ahead!"

They did not know the fate that had befallen poor Franz.

"Are you all right, Iggy?" asked Roger.

"Sure I iss! Of what is left of me. But I a piece of my tin hat dit leaf behind," and he showed where a bullet or a fragment of shrapnel had shorn away part of his steel helmet.

"Close call that," commented Bob.

"Oh, well, I should of worry haf dot it iss not mine head," said Iggy, with a smile.

And while the four, together with a vast army of Americans, were pressing on, the Germans were being driven back. It is no wonder that Jimmy had cried out that the Allies were smashing through.

For the spear-head had been bent back. No longer was it a menace, and, in their turn, the Americans were forcing one into the German line—a broader spear-head, with the consequent chance of dividing the foe's line and turning either flank.

"Come on, boys! Come on!" cried a lieutenant. "Let's finish the job. Only a few hundred more yards, and we'll have reached our objective!"

And on they rushed, some falling, destined never to see the final glory of the American arms, others staggering along, exhausted or wounded, but never slacking while they had life to move.

And finally, after a desperate struggle, the triumphant cry that Jimmy had raised was shouted all along the line:

"We're smashing through! We're smashing through!"

And, indeed, the German line was smashed at this particular sector. They were fleeing now—the Huns. Throwing aside their guns and equipment, there was a mad struggle to get away—anywhere for safety.

Back the Germans were pushed. They were in desperation, many of them. They feared the American guns, they feared the American infantry, and they feared the "*Teufel Hunds*"—the "devil dogs"—of Marines. And the fear was translated into flight.

"Cease firing!" came the whistled order, and it was with thankful hearts that Jimmy and his three Brothers dropped down on the shell-scarred earth, too exhausted to longer hold their guns or even to stack them. It had been a battle to the death, and death had been the portion of many.

Almost before the panting breath of the tired soldiers had been throttled down to normal came the order:

"Dig in!"

It was expected, but it was none too welcome. Nevertheless, they all knew the necessity of doing as they were told. At any moment the Germans might bring up reserves and make a counter-attack. This must be guarded against.

And so the weary Sammies had to scratch holes in the ground, like veritable animals, to obtain

shelter. Still no one murmured. They knew their very lives might depend on this rude shelter.

But as night settled down it began to be evident that the Boche had had enough. He was not going to make a counter-attack—at least not until his scattered forces were collected.

And then came a rest period, when such food as was available was eaten. It was not much—merely the emergency rations, but the soldiers were glad enough to eat them. They had advanced so far that it was impossible to bring up the kitchens in time.

"Where are you going, Jimmy?" asked Roger, as, after the hasty meal, he saw the young sergeant get up and move about.

"I'm going to see if I can get any word of Franz," was the answer. "You say he was with you fellows until just before you met me."

"Yes," said Bob. "He was with us when we were going to attack the house where the machine guns were. One of our shells saved us the trouble. Then we all went on and got into a sort of little gully. Right after that I missed Franz."

"I didn't see him after that, either," added Roger. "I hope he—I hope he's all right," he faltered.

"Oh, I guess he is," said Jimmy, but he could not get much conviction into his voice. Truth to tell, Jimmy did not really believe Franz was all right. Of course, he might have been swept to the right or the left in the waves of fighting and have been kept temporarily with some other detachment than his own. But several hours had now passed since the word had been given to cease firing, and Franz had not rejoined his own company.

"I'm going to see if I can get any trace of him," declared Jimmy.

"Maybe I'd better come along," suggested Roger. "Two can hunt better than one."

"All right," Jimmy assented. "Bob, you and Iggy stay here. Keep your ears and eyes open. Franz may come back while we're away."

Jimmy and Roger obtained permission to go back over the battleground to look for their comrade. It was a gruesome task, and the sights they saw were not pleasant. Here and there the stretcher bearers were busy taking the wounded to the nearest first-aid stations.

Roger led the way to the last place he had seen Franz. This was the little gully spoken of, where Schnitz had become separated from his companions just before he discovered the three German machine gunners, whom he made prisoners. But, of course, Roger and Jimmy knew nothing of this.

They searched as best they could in the fast-gathering darkness, but found no trace of Franz Schnitzel, nor did they get any word about him. Many to whom the two spoke knew the sergeant, but they declared they had not seen him except during the early part of the battle.

"Maybe he'll show up to-morrow," said Roger hopefully, when he and Jimmy turned back to join Bob and Iggy.

"Maybe he's back with the boys now," suggested Jimmy, trying to believe what he said.

But when they joined their chums there was no word from the missing "Brother," and it was with sorrowful hearts that they passed the night. Some of them were on guard duty, and through the long watches they waited eagerly for some word. But none came.

Then followed days of sorrow, for when morning dawned, bringing with it the work of constructing new trenches, Franz had not appeared, and when the roll was called he was listed as "missing in action."

"He's either dead or a prisoner," decided Jimmy, on the third day, when it was certain that Schnitz was not among the wounded.

"If he were dead wouldn't we find his body?" asked Bob.

"Not necessarily," answered Jimmy. "If a shell landed near him he——"

But he could not finish. It was not necessary. His comrades understood what he meant.

As for Franz, he was beaten and kicked to his feet and made to stagger on in the midst of his captors. The blow on his head had only stunned him. It was not serious, though very painful, and he felt in a daze as he was stripped of his weapons and most of his possessions and made to march in a round-about way toward the German lines. At this point the two forces were close together, and, as Franz had surmised, the Americans had fairly rushed over the machine-gun nest, or rather, they had passed on either side of it. And the Huns were preparing to use the weapon in a sort of rear action when Franz captured them, only, himself, to fall a like victim a little later.

"Traitor! Dog! Pig!" were some of the mildest epithets cast at Franz, as he was half-dragged along. Nor was it all mere words. He was kicked and cuffed, for the Germans seemed to like to vent their spite on him.

But Schnitz was game. Not a complaint did he utter. But he wondered what would be his fate and whither he was being taken.

"Another prison camp, I suppose," he reflected bitterly.

CHAPTER VIII

STARTLING INFORMATION

Conviction that Franz was in dire straits somewhere became almost certainty with Jimmy and his three chums as the days went by. But where, they did not know. A careful search had failed to reveal his body, and he was not among the wounded brought back to the hospitals.

But no inquiry could disclose where he was in case the Germans had him a prisoner. Jimmy told his chums that. And there was no positive proof that he was not killed. For many bodies were in such a state as to be unrecognizable, and from some even the identification disk was missing.

"Poor Franz!" sighed Bob, as the four talked it over together in the trenches or in some dugout, for they found several that the Germans had been forced to abandon. "It's just his luck to be captured again."

"Well, let's hope that he has that luck," suggested Roger. "Of course, it's tough luck, all right, but being captured, even by a Hun is some better than being killed. There's a chance if you're a prisoner—always a chance of escaping. But there's no escape from death. Of course, I know that to be in some of the prison camps is almost worse than death. But let's hope for the best."

"The worst of it is we can't do anything!" complained Bob. "That's what gets me—having to sit here and let him suffer maybe."

"It is hard," agreed Jimmy. "But we aren't doing much sitting around. There's too much else to be done. I've got to go out on listening post soon."

"I'm down for sentry go," added Roger.

"I a letter will write to mine mothar!" decided Iggy. "I from being up by de front door haf been, so I get a vacation."

"You're entitled to it," declared Jimmy. For the Polish lad had been assigned to a trench where German snipers were active, and more than one American had lost his life by the incautious exposure of just the top of his head. Iggy had had the luck to spot one of these pests, and had brought down the Hun, thereby winning the gratitude of his comrades.

But even the hardest kind of duty could not take from the four Brothers the sorrow that was in their hearts over Franz. It was almost worse than knowing he was dead, not to know what had become of him.

But there was nothing they could do. Jimmy spoke to their captain about it, but the officer shook his head.

"I've made inquiries," he said, "but there isn't a trace of the sergeant. Too bad, too, for he was a fine lad. We can only hope. And, if he is gone, make the beasts pay for him!"

It was about a week after the successful advance of the American forces when the spear-head had been wiped out and the German lines smashed completely through in several places that Jimmy and Roger were detailed to go some distance to the rear with messages and information for headquarters. They were assigned to a motorcycle and side car, Jimmy on the machine and Roger riding beside him.

"Well, this is a whole lot better than hiking it!" said Jimmy, as they started off.

"I don't—know—that—it—is!" stuttered Roger, as the car swerved from side to side over the rough roads. "When you walk you can go slow enough not to bite your tongue, but in this outfit you seem to hit only the high and low spots."

"It isn't what you'd call an asphalt pavement," agreed Jimmy, as he steered to one side to avoid a big shell hole. "But we'll get there."

Their journey was not exactly void of danger, for about halfway to the brigade headquarters, where they were to leave their messages, several Hun aeroplanes passed over the American lines. And at once some Allied machines came swooping along to give them combat. The German machines dropped several bombs, evidently searching out ammunition dumps, and one explosion took place in the road just before Roger and Jimmy passed over the spot on the motorcycle.

"Whew!" cried Jimmy, as he crouched to avoid the shower of dirt and stones. "That was a close one!"

"Too close for comfort!" agreed Roger. "Can you get around that hole?"

"Just about," murmured Jimmy. "It's some hole!"

But that was the only bomb that fell near them, and it was evident that it was not dropped for their discomfiture. For, though the Hun airmen might have observed the motorcycle shooting along beneath them, they would hardly have wasted a big bomb on it, when they might use the same weapon to set off a lot of American ammunition.

"They're getting a bit too personal," observed Roger, as they speeded on. "And look, Jimmy! There are a lot of our planes going to smash up the Huns now."

"Good enough!" returned Jimmy, not taking his eyes off the road ahead of him, for careful driving was required.

"Maybe the Twinkle Twins are up there," added Roger, gazing aloft.

"Maybe," assented Jimmy. And then, striking a fairly good stretch of road, he put on more speed, and they were soon at headquarters.

Most of the officers, as well as many of the men, were out watching the combat of the air. It soon terminated in favor of the Americans, and when two of the hostile craft had been shot down the others turned tail and fled.

"I hope our boys got the Hun who dropped the bomb so near us!" exclaimed Roger.

They delivered their message, and were waiting for an answer to be prepared when they observed a squad of signal corps men passing on their way to duty. The officer in command had to stop at brigade headquarters for instructions, and, leaving his men standing at ease, he went inside the old farmhouse which served as an office for the commanders.

"That's the same outfit the Bixtons are with," said Jimmy to Roger, recalling the incident of the dugout and his subsequent recognition of the two soldiers who had been talking to the civilians.

"Are they there now?" asked Roger.

"Don't see 'em. But maybe I can get some information. I'd like to know if Private Bixton, the chap we exposed at Camp Sterling, is any relation to the two men of the same name here."

Jimmy strolled over toward the men of the signal corps who were waiting for the reappearance of their officers. Some of the lads who formed part of the "eyes and ears" of the army nodded in friendly fashion to the two Khaki Boys, and Jimmy, selecting a man who seemed to be a veteran in fighting and in signal work, remarked:

"Haven't you a couple of fellows named Bixton in your outfit?"

"Why, yes, the Bixton boys are with us," was the answer of the private to whom Jimmy addressed himself. "That is, they belong to our outfit, but they're not here now. They're going to join us before we go much further to the front, though. Why, do you lads know 'em?"

"Not exactly," returned Jimmy. "We've seen 'em," he added, not specifying where. "But we knew a fellow back home—at Camp Sterling, to be exact—whose name was Bixton, and we wondered if he was any relation to these two here."

"Oh, ho! so you knew Mike Bixton, did you?" exclaimed the signal corps private, who gave his name as Anson.

"I didn't know his name was Mike," said Roger. "Guess we never heard his first name, did we, Jimmy?"

"Not that I remember. So he's a relative of these Bixtons, is he?"

"A cousin," volunteered Anson. "Course I don't want to get personal," he went on in a sort of free-and-easy Western style, "but what sort of chap was this Mike Bixton?"

Jimmy and Roger hesitated. It was hardly ethics to talk about a fellow soldier, and yet Private Bixton was out of that class. He was a deserter, entitled to no consideration, and he was worse than a deserter—he was, in fact, a traitor.

"Well, to be frank, and not to spread bad information, we didn't know very much good about Bixton of Camp Sterling," said Jimmy.

"I thought so!" chuckled Anson. "I thought where there was so much smoke there must be a bit of fire."

"What do you mean?" asked Roger.

"Well, these Bixtons here," went on Anson, stepping aside to speak more confidentially to Roger and Jimmy, "are making quite a fuss over their cousin, Mike Bixton."

"What sort of fuss?" asked Jimmy.

"Oh, saying he didn't get fair treatment, that he was misunderstood, that everybody was down on him, and all that. I don't know all the particulars, but I judge Mike must have been punished in some way at Camp Sterling."

"He was sent to prison as a deserter," said Jimmy.

"Cracky! As bad as that! Well, well! I suspected there was an African gentleman in the fuel heap somewhere," chuckled Anson. "That accounts for a lot."

"A lot of what?" asked Roger.

"A lot of talk by these Bixtons. They claim their cousin was persecuted by a couple of lads in Camp Sterling. Say these two lads—whoever they were—did all sorts of mean things to Mike Bixton in the training camp."

"And what's more," went on the old signal-corps soldier, "these Bixtons here say that if they ever find out who the two camp fellows were who helped send their relative away they'll do all sorts of things to 'em—treat 'em rough, and all that. I'd just like to see what they would do if they found out who the camp lads were. I'd just like to see. I'd give a lot to be there to see what happens when they meet those two fellows. They say it'll go hard with, 'em. I shouldn't like to be in their shoes. These Bixtons are tough lads and fighters! If they ever discover the two who were responsible for their cousin's predicament—whew! there'll be something doing."

CHAPTER IX

UGLY THREATS

Roger and Jimmy looked at one another. The face of Roger was a bit serious as Signaler Anson shook his head and repeated:

"It'll go hard with the fellows, whoever they are, who were responsible for the Bixtons' cousin going to jail."

"So you think it wouldn't be wise for the two lads who exposed Mike Bixton to let their identity be known to the two Bixtons in your signal corps, do you?" Jimmy asked.

"I'm positive it wouldn't be a bit wise," declared Anson. "But I guess it won't ever be known who those two fellows were."

"Oh, it might be," replied Jimmy easily.

"No, sir!" declared Anson. "That is, it won't if it's up to the fellows themselves to make their identity known. They'll lie low if they're wise and not give themselves away to these Bixton lads. They're fighters, I tell you, these two fellows—and bad fighters at that."

"Well, so are we!" exclaimed Jimmy, and in such a tone that Anson looked curiously at him, and asked:

"What do you mean? By any chance are you——"

"Yes, we're the two fellows who had a hand in putting Mike Bixton where he belongs," declared Jimmy. "Blaise is my name, and this is Roger Barlow," and he nodded at his chum. "He and I," he went on, "did the most, I suppose, in finding out Mike Bixton's mean tricks and exposing him. Of course, others helped us, but we did the most. And I am glad we did. I'd do it over again if I had to! This Bixton was one of the meanest sneaks that ever came over the pike! He tried to put the blame for a rotten trick on one of our friends. But his plan didn't work! Jail is too good a place for Mike Bixton."

"And are you really the fellows who put him there?" asked Anson.

"We two!" declared Roger, backing up his chum.

"I wouldn't have believed it!" confessed Anson. "I mean you look like peaceable chaps," he added.

"Oh, we can fight when we have to," said Jimmy, with a laugh. "And another thing. If these two Bixtons here want to know who it was that sent their cousin to jail, just refer them to us. If——"

At that moment Anson looked over Jimmy's head and what he saw seemed to astonish him. He made a frantic sign to Jimmy Blaise, but that lad, uncomprehending, went on saying:

"If these Bixtons here want to know who sent their cousin to jail, tell them we did—Roger Barlow and Jimmy Blaise, both sergeants in the 509th Infantry. Tell 'em that!"

"You can tell 'em yourself," said Anson, with a queer grin on his face. "There the two Bixtons are, right behind you!"

Jimmy wheeled, to see the two soldiers he had noticed in the dugout confronting him. At least, he was almost certain they were the same ones, though, as he admitted later, he might have been mistaken. But there was no mistaking the fact now that the two Bixtons were ugly-looking chaps. They scowled at Jimmy and Roger, and Aleck advanced threateningly.

"Did you say your name was Blaise?" he asked Jimmy.

"Yes," was the quiet answer.

"And his name is Barlow?"

"That's me," admitted Roger cheerfully.

"Well, we heard what you were saying just now to Anson," went on Aleck Bixton. "Did you mean what you said, or was it just a stall? Did you two send our cousin Mike to jail?"

"If your cousin was Mike Bixton, of Camp Sterling, we certainly did!" said Jimmy calmly.

"Well I'll be—gassed!" ejaculated Wilbur Bixton. "Say, you fellows certainly have your nerve with you!"

"Here, let me settle with these dubs!" broke in Aleck, with a voice like the growl of an angry bear. "I'll just tell 'em where they get off."

He strode forward, his fists clenched, his under jaw shot out, his eyes half closed. He bore every mark of the bully and fighter. Thrusting his face almost into the countenance of Jimmy Blaise, Aleck Bixton snarled:

"Now look here, you fresh bloke, you're in for a fine time! My brother and I have been looking for a long while to find the fellows who played Mike that dirty trick. We began to think we wouldn't ever locate 'em; but we have! You're the two, so you say. Well, I want to tell you that you were fools to give yourselves away, though we're mighty glad you did. It saves us a lot of trouble trying to find you."

"Then are you glad you found us?" asked Jimmy.

"You said it! Now you're in for the finest licking you ever had. I'm going to give you one, and my

brother'll give you another. We're going to beat you up good and proper, and then we'll write back and tell Mike we met you. He gave us your names, but we didn't know where to look for you. Now we've found you, and, say, what we won't do to you won't be worth making a report on! Come on, Wilbur, take off your coat and start in on this other guy while I polish off this Blaise. I'll blaze his face for him!"

"Not here!" exclaimed Anson. "You can't fight here!"

"We can't? You just watch me!" snapped Aleck. "I'm going to——"

"No you're not!" broke in his brother, catching him by the arm and pulling him back. "We'll have to wait—here come the officers!"

As he spoke a group of brigade officers passed, and the two Bixtons, as well as Jimmy and Roger, saluted. The officers stood in a group not far away, discussing some matter. Obviously it was not the place for a fight. Even Aleck recognized that.

"All right!" he growled. "This'll have to wait. But don't get it in your head that we'll forget—you two!" he added. "I said we'd beat you up and we will—good and proper! Only we'll have to take another time. The next time we meet you there'll be something doing—don't forget that. There'll be something doing! We'll fix you yet, Blaise and Barlow!"

"That's what we will!" chimed in Wilbur. "We'll make you sorry you ever sent poor Mike to jail!"

"I doubt your last statement," said Jimmy, in an easy, though low voice, for none of the disputants cared to have the officers overhear them. "Mike deserved to go to jail, and there's where he is now, if he hasn't escaped. And we'll never be sorry we had a hand in sending him there. It's where he belongs!"

"Say, you—you——" spluttered Aleck.

"Cut it out—here comes our captain!" warned Wilbur in a low voice. "We'll settle with 'em later!"

"That's what we will!" snapped out Aleck, as he moved away with the signal corps. And, as they passed on, the two Bixtons cast angry looks at the Khaki Boys.

But if they imagined that these looks troubled Roger or Jimmy, the two who had uttered such dreadful threats were utterly mistaken. The Khaki Boys only smiled, though as Anson, who was a middle-aged man, marched on, he shook his head dubiously.

Jimmy and Roger stood for a moment looking after the departing signal corps members. The two Bixtons carried the black box, as on the occasion when Jimmy had seen them before.

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked Roger of his chum.

"I don't think much of them!" exclaimed Jimmy.

"Me either. Think they'll try any rough stuff? Not that I'm worrying," he went on. "I'm just wondering."

"Well, they may try to give us a nasty turn if they get us alone," admitted Jimmy. "But we'll take a chance. These fellows may be what Anson said they were—scrappers and fighters. And it may be that they are just bluffs—talkers, wind bags."

"They struck me a bit that way," admitted Roger. "But say, you know you spoke of their being in the dugout that time. Are you sure, now, that they were there?"

"Pretty certain," admitted Jimmy. "I don't know that I'm certain enough of it to report to the captain, but in my own mind I feel pretty sure. I'm going to keep my eyes open, however. If those fellows are up to any underhand work we'll find out about it."

"I wouldn't put it past them to try something like that," said Roger. "Now that we know they're of the same family of Bixtons as the fellow at Camp Sterling we know what to expect."

"You said it!" declared Jimmy earnestly. "Well, I guess here comes our reply message. We'll have to hit the back trail."

A little later they were on their way over the rough roads toward the trenches where their company was quartered, waiting again for the word to go over the top and attack the Huns.

As Roger and Jimmy reached their comrades they saw Bob and Iggy strolling along a camouflaged road that led to some of the dugouts and trenches.

"Any news from Franz?" asked Jimmy, as he slowed down the motorcycle.

Bob shook his head, and Iggy answered:

"No, not efen a letter!"

"Huh! Fat chance he has of sending a letter if he's in a German prison camp!" said Jimmy, a bit gloomily. "I don't wish him any bad luck," he went on, "but I'd rather know he was in a camp than—well than somewhere else, as long as he can't be with us," he finished, and his chums understood what he meant.

After Roger and Jimmy had delivered their answer and had reported back to their company, which was stationed in a fairly comfortable dugout, they told Bob and Iggy of their experience with the two Bixtons.

"Say, Franz ought to meet them!" declared Bob. "He could tell them something about Mike and the ground glass and poison list that would change their mind about the character of their sweet cousin."

"I don't believe anyone could change their minds," affirmed Jimmy. "They're too mean, themselves, for that. Well, Roger and I are not worrying. Now then, what's the news here since we went away? Any rumors of a fight?"

"Plenty of 'em!" said Bob. "The air is full of rumors, and I guess it will soon be full of bullets. We're going over the top again in the morning."

"Well, the sooner the better," said Jimmy. And though he spoke lightly there was an undercurrent of meaning in his words. Going over the top in the morning always meant many gaps in the ranks the following night. But it had to be done.

The Khaki Boys were sitting in their dugout awaiting their turn to go on duty, a turn which would come soon after mess, when they were startled by hearing out in the main trench excited cries of:

"No! No! It can't be done! It's agin th' regerlations!"

And then, as if in an answering chorus in a play, there sounded deep voices, saying:

"We want pie! We want pie!"

"Oh, fer th' love of spoons, let me alone, will you? Ain't it hard enough to give you reg'ler stuff without havin' you ask fer pie? Pie! Why, my great wash boiler, how'm I goin' to make pie? It can't be done, I tell you! It can't be done!"

And again came in solemn chorus.

"We want pie! We want pie!"

The Khaki Boys looked at one another wonderingly.

CHAPTER X DISQUIETING RUMORS

"Well," remarked Jimmy, as he finished the cleaning of his revolver and started toward the door of the dugout, "if those voices weren't in English I'd say the Germans had put one over on us and were raiding the trench for pie."

"Sounds something like that," admitted Bob. "What's it all about, anyhow?"

"Let's take a look," suggested Roger.

"And should it be dat some pies iss out there, maybe we could of take more as a look," put in Iggy. "Maybe a bite we could of took."

"You said something that time, Iggy!" laughed Bob.

The four Brothers stepped out into the trench. It was not one of the front line trenches, and was not in very great danger from a German bombardment.

What the Khaki Boys saw was a much perplexed company cook, a tall, lanky Western lad, trying to stand off the good-natured verbal attacks of a crowd of hungry doughboys who had just been relieved from a rather long tour in the front trenches.

"We want pie! We want pie!" they solemnly chanted, as though it were a dirge.

"An' by Gregory Josephus I tell you it's agin the regerlations!" declared Hiram Miller, the cook. "How'm I goin' to give you fellows pie, when I ain't got so much as a prune, now, to make it of? An' no flour—no nothin', in fact! You an' your pie! If you git canned Willie you ought to be thankful. Canned Willie an' beans is all the grub I've got."

At this mention of canned corned beef, generally dubbed "Willie," or "Bill," there was a groan from the lads who had just come off duty.

"Beans!" cried one. "I'm ashamed to look a bean in the eye."

"Beans don't have eyes—you're thinking of potatoes!" was a retort.

"Well, give us potatoes then, but not beans, O Cookie!"

"Make it a beef stew with plenty of gravy!" shouted a burly chap.

"Pie! Pie! We want pie!" came the grim chorus again.

"Say, you fellers'll drive me crazy!" stormed the cook, shaking his fists in the air. "There ain't no such animile as pie, gol ding it!"

"Give us pudding then!" someone suggested.

"Oh say! By Hezekiah Slifkins!" cried the cook. "If you fellers want puddin' make it yourselves! I'm through!"

Bob had a sudden inspiration. As he saw the tired, careworn faces of the lads who had just come in from a nerve-racking tour of duty, exposed to death and danger—faces which, in the ordinary course of events, were too young to have such strained looks, Bob wished he could do something to help relieve them. And, from his own experience, he knew that food would do this.

"And there is food—and food," he told himself.

The daily mess of the trench was not very elaborate—in the nature of things it could not be. And one of the great cravings of the fighters was for sweets. That is why there was such a lot of chocolate used.

"Pie! Pie! We want pie!" came the doleful chant again.

"By Theophilus Porkenheimer!" shouted the cook, "if I hear that there word agin, I'll——"

"Say," said Bob, sliding up to him, "have you any bread or crackers?"

"Yes, I've got lots of that, son. Fresh supply jest come in."

"Got any molasses and condensed milk?"

"Yep. But say, that ain't pie, nor yet puddin'."

"Maybe we can turn it into something like it," went on Bob, "if we've got any prunes in this dump ____"

"Prunes! By Hezekiah Albatross!" cried the cook, "there ain't a prune nigher'n ten mile!"

"Yes there is!" asserted one of the doughboys. "The supply company in the next trench has a lot of 'em, but they're short of condensed milk. If we could make a trade——"

"Go try it!" cried Bob. "If—well, we'll make some prune slump."

"Who's 'we,' an' what's 'prune slump'?" asked the cook. "Dunno's I ever hearn tell of it."

"By 'we' I mean Jimmy, Roger, Iggy and I can make prune slump," went on Bob. "I suppose you'd call it plum duff in the navy. But you take some prunes, stew 'em, make a sort of batter of crumbled-up bread or crackers, slap in some molasses and condensed milk, and bake it in a pan. We used to have it at Camp Sterling. 'Member, Jimmy?"

"I should say so! Go to it, kiddo!"

"Here are the prunes!" cried a lad, coming back with a big bag full. "They were crazy to trade 'em for condensed milk. Trot out your cans, Cookie."

"All right. By Chesapeake Bay, maybe there'll somethin' come of this after all! Prune slump! I'll try to make it, boys, but I ain't guaranteein' nothin'. 'Twon't be pie, but mebbly it'll take on a flavor of puddin'! I'll make it."

"Bully for you, Dalton, old scout, for thinking of it," said one of the lads who had demanded pie. "We're crazy for something like that. It'll be like a little bit of home."

"Or Ireland!" suggested a quiet looking lad.

Then someone started to sing a popular song. They all joined in, and the cook, with a look of relief on his face, hastened back to the rude shelter that served for a kitchen and began to prepare the prune slump.

It was a great success, and the name of Bob Dalton was long remembered among his associates who partook of the concoction, for it was just that, being, as one lad remarked, about as unknown a mixture as a beef stew. But it was good. They all voted that.

It was dark when Jimmy, Roger, Bob and Iggy went on duty up to one of the front trenches. They were on a sector where activity might break out at any moment, and there was need for great alertness.

Jimmy and Roger, assigned to one platoon, were to take turns doing sentry duty in one traverse, while Iggy and Bob were sent to another near by.

Jimmy took his place on the fire step, and there he would stand until relieved, never taking his eyes from that grim stretch of dark earth in front of him, called "No Man's Land." On the other side of it were the German trenches, and from them, at any moment, might issue the Boche fighters in a raid.

Roger crouched as comfortably as he could at Jimmy's feet, ready to transmit to the platoon officer any information which Jimmy might whisper to him, loud talking being forbidden.

The night, however, seemed destined to be quiet. Up and down, to Jimmy's right and left, stretched the narrow strip of No Man's Land. Directly in front of the American trenches was barbed wire, fantastically tangled on posts leaning every which way. In front of the German trenches was more wire, similarly twisted. This wire was to stop a sudden rush in either direction.

In the silence and darkness of the night the Khaki Boys kept watch and ward to guard against surprise. Doubtless, the same watch was kept on the German side.

Soon after going on duty Jimmy felt a fine drizzle of rain in his face. The fact was unpleasantly borne to the knowledge of the others, and there was whispered grumbling. But it had to be endured, and it was fortunate that the lads had on their trench coats.

"Pleasant—not!" said Roger in a low voice, as he sprawled in the mud at Jimmy's feet.

"Oh, it might be worse. I'm wondering what poor Schnitz is doing now." Jimmy never took his eyes off No Man's Land.

"That's so," went on Roger. "I wish we knew. Oh!" he suddenly exclaimed.

"What's the matter? See something?" asked Jimmy quickly, but not turning his head to observe the shadowy form of his chum.

"No. But I felt something! Rat as big as a fox terrier. Ugh! he nipped me on the shoe. Dirty brute!"

"Part of the gay and festive life we live," murmured Jimmy. "Well, it can't last forever, that's one consolation."

Then he became silent—he and Roger. They waited in the trench for something to happen. And it did happen, but not in their immediate neighborhood.

For suddenly, about half a mile down the trench to Jimmy's left, there was a brilliant burst of fire, and a moment later the sound of sharp firing from the German trenches was borne to the ears of the Khaki Boys.

Instantly the traverses on both sides, and far up and down the line, were in tense activity. The waiting Sammies sprang to the firing step alongside of Roger and Jimmy, and, doubtless, in the German trenches the same scenes were taking place. The din was terrific, even though, so early in the conflict, the artillery had not yet come into play.

But presently the big guns began to boom, and then it became evident that the attack of the Germans, for such it turned out to be, was against a sector some distance removed from where the Khaki Boys were on duty. They, with their companions, were held in reserve. They remained to guard the trench. After the exchange of a few shots with their unseen Hun adversaries, quiet once more settled down over that part of the lines. But a sharp engagement was going on to the left, and the next morning it was learned that the Boches had captured a number of Americans, having surprised them. It was not all clear gain, however, for several of the Huns were killed.

And when Jimmy and his chums went off duty they heard disquieting rumors to the effect that the Germans must have had information about the weakness of the line that they attacked. For it was weak, and that was the reason the raid was so successfully made.

"How did the Germans know it?" asked Roger.

"Someone on our side gave the information," said Jimmy. "At least, that's what I heard."

"You mean traitors?" gasped Bob.

"It amounts to that—yes," was Jimmy's reply.

CHAPTER XI

THE SIGNALS

"Say, where'd you hear all this?" demanded Roger. "Is it straight goods?"

"Sure it is," answered Jimmy. "Talk of it all over. I got it from one of the orderlies at brigade headquarters."

"Just what was it?" Bob asked.

"Iss der German brutes by us goin' to come again?" asked Iggy.

"If they do I hope they don't find us as unprepared as the bunch was last night," remarked Jimmy, gloomily enough. "It was a bad piece of business. But it wouldn't have happened if the Huns hadn't known some of the reserves had been pulled away from that sector."

"Were they?" was Bob's question.

"Yes," answered Jimmy, who had acquired considerable of this disquieting information. "Our side was planning a big raid, but not in this immediate neighborhood. On that account the headquarters staff sent for some of our reserves. They were taken off quietly enough, and it was thought the Germans wouldn't get wise to the fact. But they did, and they took a jump over, and got away with it, worse luck!"

"And you say it was because of treachery on the part of someone on our side?" asked Roger.

"That's the story," admitted his chum. "You'll hear the talk as soon as you circulate around a bit. It's a rotten shame, that's what it is!"

"But how did anyone from our side get over to the German lines without being shot—unless he took the part of a spy and put on a German uniform?" asked Bob.

"They didn't go over—they sent signals," went on Jimmy. "And those signals are what gave away the weak spot in our lines."

"Signals!" exclaimed his chums. "What kind?"

"Different kinds," replied the young sergeant. "Last night there were light signals, but, of course, signals could be sent by day also, using smoke balls. You know we have a new machine for that."

"I didn't know it," admitted Roger. "What is it?"

"Well, I saw one up at the signal corps headquarters the other day. It looked like a big soup kettle with a stove pipe sticking out the top, and there were levers on the sides. I asked one of the fellows how it worked, and he showed me.

"Of course it's easy enough to make different colored fire signals at night," went on Jimmy.

"You've all seen them, even on Fourth of July. But it isn't so easy to signal by smoke in the daytime—or, rather, it wasn't until this machine was invented. Before that they could send up puffs of white or dark smoke, just as the Indians used to signal from one mountain top to the other.

"But one of the signal corps men invented this 'smoke kettle,' as I'll call it. The smoke clouds can be made of almost any color—red, green or yellow. And there are white ones, too. It's all done by chemicals. When you pull one lever it sends a certain mixture of chemicals into the caldron. They form a ball of dense, colored smoke. A puff of compressed air sends the ball out up through the 'stove pipe,' as I'll call it, and it sails up into the air, keeping its round shape, like a cloud.

"I suppose they have some code, or combination, by which a certain number of smoke balls of a stated color sent up at definite intervals mean something to the man who sees 'em."

"Did the traitors send up signals that way?" asked Bob.

"I'm not certain of that. All I know is that the smoke balls by day and the colored fires by night are the means used by the regular signal corps. Whether the traitors took a leaf from their book, or stole one of the caldron machines and used it, I don't know. But it gave our weakness away all right, and we got in Dutch."

"Rotten work!" exclaimed Roger, and the others agreed with him.

"Dose craters should of be put in de smoke ball and dropped by a bomb yet!" declared Iggy.

"That's right, old scout!" exclaimed Jimmy. "Only don't call 'em 'craters,' Iggy, lad. You're thinking of a shell-hole. 'Traitors' is the word," and he spelled it.

"I of thankfulness to you am," said Iggy. "English, she is of mos' queer talk to learn, but I will on keep."

"Only way to do!" said Jimmy.

The information he had given his chums they soon verified by hearing the talk in and out of the trenches of the disaster of the previous night. That the American plans had been betrayed by someone within the Allied lines was evident. In no other way could the Germans have known that the supporting reserves had been withdrawn. And because of the demoralization caused by the success of the German raid it was impossible, for the time being, to go on with the plans of using the massed reserves, as had been hoped.

That afternoon, following mess, when Roger and Bob were on their way to the rear with a message to headquarters they met Captain Dickerson. He was in company with other officers attached to the secret service, and as the captain, who had once been suspected by the boys of being a spy, passed them he acknowledged their salute and paused to speak to them.

"I was wondering if we had any trace of them, sir?" said Bob, suggestively.

"Trace of whom?" inquired the captain with a good-natured smile.

"The fellows who sent signals from our lines and brought on the raid last night," said Roger.

"Oh, so you've heard that story, too?" asked the captain.

"Isn't it true?"

"Well, I'm not going to deny or affirm it," said Captain Dickerson, with a half smile. "But you boys seem to have luck in digging up mysterious matters, so if you hear of any bunch of fellows acting in a queer way or having certain chemicals in their possession you might let me know."

"We will, sir!" promised Bob, and Roger nodded his assent.

"I'll say this much," went on the captain. "The secret service department is working hard to locate the place where the signals came from, and trying to discover who sent them—if any were sent." The secret service official added this in order to be in conformity with his former statement of not admitting anything.

"We'll be on the watch as best we can," promised Roger.

Captain Dickerson walked on with other officers from the secret service department of the army, and Bob and Roger regarded each other with serious eyes.

"There's more to this than appears," declared Roger.

"I believe you," agreed his chum.

And in the days that followed they learned this more fully. For the location of a number of American batteries and machine gun nests was, in some manner, disclosed to the enemy. In consequence there was a shelling of these spots by the Germans, and considerable damage was done.

In one instance a battery had been carefully planted in a certain place and carefully camouflaged. It was hoped, after all the guns were in place, to open up a fusillade on a strong German position and carry it. This would have removed a menace from the American lines—a sort of small angle from which a raking fire was often sent.

But the night before the battery was to have opened it was almost completely destroyed by German shell fire. And the shells came with such accuracy, falling through the camouflaged screen, that it could not be doubted the exact location of the cannon was known to the Huns.

"But if the signals can be seen by the Germans, why can't they be seen by our men?" asked

Roger. "And if they are seen, the location ought to be easy to come at."

"I don't know what the reason is," replied Jimmy, "but I know they haven't discovered the traitors as yet. It's getting serious, let me tell you!"

"I should say so!" agreed Bob.

It was about a week after the discovery that secret signals were aiding the Germans that Jimmy, coming back from a visit to the hospital where he had called to see a wounded chum, startled his friends by saying:

"I've heard from Franz!"

"No!" cried Bob incredulously.

"Yes," asserted Jimmy emphatically. "Listen while I tell you!"

CHAPTER XII

NEWS FROM THE AIR

Now don't get all worked up with hope," went on Jimmy, as his chums gathered about him. "While I have news from poor old Schnitz, it isn't exactly good news."

"Is it bad?" demanded Bob.

"Is he deaded alretty yet?" came from Iggy.

"No. And I'm glad I can say that much," replied Jimmy. "He isn't dead, but he's in a German prison. You know we've sort of hoped that ever since he was missing. Rather have him there than dead or badly wounded, you know."

"Who told you he was in a prison camp?" asked Roger.

"One of the wounded boys in the hospital. You know I went to see Boswick, who used to be our top sergeant. Well, next to him was a fellow who was hurt on the head and who's been out of his mind since then. Day before yesterday he got his senses back again, and to-day he was quite a lot improved. He heard me telling Boswick that Franz was missing, and this fellow, whose name is Waydell, told me about Franz.

"It seems he was not very far away from old Schnitz when the thing happened. He saw Schnitz take some German prisoners from a machine gun nest and start to march them to the rear. Then this fellow saw our friend, who must have been tickled to death with his feat—He saw Schnitz run into a bunch of Huns. They took Schnitz's prisoners away from him, though he did some damage before they had things their own way. And then they just naturally copped Schnitz and hustled him off."

"Well, why in the world didn't this Waydell help Schnitz out?" demanded Bob.

"He had the wound that put him out of business and later sent him to dreamland for a long time. But I'm glad he came to. It gives us definite information about Franz, and that's what we want."

"We want him back, too!" exclaimed Roger.

"Oh, of course," agreed Jimmy. "But it's something to know where he is."

"We don't—that is, we don't know exactly," remarked Bob.

"No, only that he's in some German camp. But there's always a chance that he may get out," went on Jimmy. "We'll hope for that."

Iggy gave a heavy sigh.

"What's the matter?" asked Roger.

"I so sorry am for Franz," was the answer. "Besser as I was a prisoner myself than him."

"Why?" Jimmy queried.

"'Cause he iss of a Germans like. Hims name is Germans, and once anudder time, when he wass a prison camp in good treatment he got not."

"I should say he didn't!" declared Roger.

"Well, den I am 'fraid like he will of the same treatment gets now," proceeded Iggy. "Maybe he will not of stand it."

There was silence for a moment, and then Jimmy said softly:

"Well, we can only hope for the best."

The four Khaki Boys discussed over again the news Jimmy had brought from the hospital. Gloomy as it was in itself, it was more cheering than no news at all, and for many days they had had none to indicate what might have been the fate of their missing chum.

"We may be able to find out what prison camp he's in," suggested Roger.

"What good would that do?" questioned Bob.

"Well, we might raid it and set him free, as well as any other poor boys of ours and the Allies that

are held there."

"Fat chance!" murmured Jimmy.

"It could be done with aeroplanes, if we could get enough," declared Roger. "The next time I see the Twinkle Twins I'm going to ask them to keep a lookout for Franz at any of the German prison camps over which they fly."

"Your intentions are good, but it's a hopeless case that way," sighed Jimmy, and, after thinking it over, Roger said he thought he would have to agree to this. But still he kept on hoping, as did his chums, that some means would be found to rescue Franz.

"If he can stand the life long enough, we'll fight our way through Germany and raze every one of their horrible prison camps!" exclaimed Bob hotly.

"May that day come soon," murmured Roger.

And slowly, but surely, that day was coming. Hour by hour, almost, the great army of Americans was growing in France. Inch by inch the detested Huns were being pushed back, fighting stubbornly at every step. Skirmishes and small battles were frequent, and trench raids took place on both sides nearly every night.

It was one nasty, rainy night about a week after Jimmy had received the news that Franz was a prisoner that, as the four Khaki Boys were on duty in a firing trench, word was passed along to be more than usually on the alert.

"Why? Are we going to attack?" asked Bob of the platoon officer.

"We may, if things turn out a certain way," was the answer. "We have made certain plans which will be disclosed in due time. Just be on the alert."

And, taking their turns at being "observation sentinels," Jimmy and his chums strained their eyes as they looked across dark and rainy No Man's Land for the first sign of any activity on the part of the Germans.

There was a tense feeling in the air, as though something portended, and this feeling had a basis in fact, for shortly before dawn the German batteries suddenly opened fire on the line of trenches held by Jimmy, his chums, and others of the 509th.

"Are we going over the top?" cried Bob, as, by the distant flashes of fire from the German guns, he saw their platoon officer. It was safe to talk, or even shout, now, for there was no danger of giving an alarm to the Huns. "Are we going over the top?"

"Not in the face of that fire, at all events," was the grim answer. "The Boches have started the ball in earnest."

Every second the blasts from the German guns increased in intensity, and their effect was felt in the trench that sheltered the Khaki Boys.

"What's the matter with our artillery?" cried Jimmy. "Why don't they give Fritz some of his own medicine?"

And, as if in answer, a moment later came a thunderous response from the American lines.

"There they go!" cried Roger. "Now things will even up."

It was an awful artillery duel, and there were heavy casualties on both sides. While the artillery was firing from either side of No Man's Land there was little the Sammies could do save to shelter themselves as best they could behind the parados. These were sand bags, built up at intervals behind the parapet. They afforded as good protection against high explosive shell fire and shrapnel as could be obtained in trench warfare. And as they were practically impenetrable by machine gun bullets, if a soldier could get behind the heavy bags he was comparatively safe.

But many of them were burst apart or blown away by the missiles from the German guns, and it became necessary, if the boys in the trench were to have protection, to replace the bags.

Accordingly orders were given to do this, and details were told off, some to fill bags and others to put them in place. Roger and Bob were engaged in this last when Bob suddenly gave a cry and caught his left hand in his right.

"Hit?" cried Roger, for there was light enough, caused by the flashes from many guns, for him to see Bob start.

"Just a scratch," was the answer.

It was more than a scratch—being a rather deep flesh wound across the back of Bob's hand. But with the aid of Roger he quickly bound it up in a bandage, after applying an antiseptic, and then kept on with the vital work of making the trench safer.

Many were wounded and many killed on both sides by that night firing, and after an hour of bombardment on both sides there had come no order for the Sammies to go over the top.

"Don't we get the word?" asked Jimmy of Bob, as they had a moment's respite from building up the parados.

"It is queer," was the answer. "But if we have done anything like the damage to the Hun trenches that they have done to ours, it must be a bad place over there."

"I think we've paid 'em back with interest," declared Jimmy. "Our gun fire was twice as heavy as theirs."

And so it proved, for when dawn broke, gray and misty, it was seen that the line of German sand bags had been demolished for a long distance up and down the trench. And in the trench could be seen the German soldiers working frantically to repair the havoc. It was then that the Sammies could take revenge with rifle fire, and they did, in goodly measure.

But no word came to go over the top, and a little while after day broke the firing died down on both sides. Soon it was comparatively quiet, but there were sad scenes to follow.

The weather improved toward noon, and the sun came out to partially dry the muddy trenches and the rain-soaked garments of the soldiers. Bob's wound was dressed by a surgeon, and he was told to lay off duty for a day. Jimmy, too, had received a slight wound, and he had the same orders as had Bob. So the two of them went to the rear for a little rest.

It was while taking such ease as they could that they saw an aeroplane land near the camp to which they had come to get a little respite from the fighting, and when they saw two figures leap from the machine, Bob and Jimmy exclaimed:

"The Twinkle Twins!"

It was John and Gerald Twinkleton.

"Well, where'd you blow in from?" asked Jimmy.

"Had to come down to get some gas, or petrol, as they call it over here," explained John. "Been out doing scout work. Say, I hear you had a hot time last night."

"Sort of," admitted Bob. "Fritz tried to put one over on us."

"Yes, we heard about it," went on Gerald. "And it came near being a bigger thing than you fellows suspect. Did you hear about the smoke signals?"

"Smoke signals?" cried Jimmy. "Say, do you mean that there has been some more of that traitorous work going on?"

"It looks so," said John. "When we were out flying around yesterday we passed over a little valley. We were low enough down to see four men around a queer kind of machine. At first we thought it was a hidden mortar battery, but soon we saw some green and yellow puffs of smoke go up from it. We reported the matter to headquarters, and there was an investigation right off, but the four men had disappeared with their smoke apparatus when a squad of our lads got to the valley."

"Do you say there were four men around that smoke signaling apparatus?" asked Jimmy.

"Yes," answered Gerald.

"Could you tell who they were?"

"Well, no, not exactly. Except that two of them seemed to be men in American uniforms, and the other two were civilians."

"By Archibald Montmorency! as our cook would say," cried Jimmy, "I'll bet they're the same fellows we saw in the dugout. They are the traitors! This is great news you bring from the air, boys!" he said to the Twinkle Twins.

Wonderingly the four gazed at one another.

CHAPTER XIII

A FORWARD RUSH

"There's a lot more to this than any of us suspect, I guess," said Gerald Twinkleton, with a grave shake of his head. "Of course when Jack and I saw those men sending up smoke signals we didn't dream, at first, that anything was wrong. But when we noticed the two civilians with them we guessed there must be some queer deal on, and we decided to report matters. Then we learned that this wasn't the first time those signals had gone up, and each time, after they had shot up into the air, there was an enemy attack."

"Bad business," commented Jimmy.

"But if those fellows are spies, including the two in uniform, where would they get one of our smoke-making machines?" asked Bob.

"The signal corps has a number of them," explained Jimmy. "One might easily be stolen, together with the chemicals needed."

"The signal corps!" cried Roger. "And those Bixtons—who are off the same piece of goods as Mike, back at Camp Sterling—those Bixtons are in the signal corps!"

"That's what makes me say there's more to this than appears on the surface," commented Gerald. "Now let's hear again what it was you saw in the dugout, Jimmy boy."

Thereupon Jimmy related what they had seen as they were making their escape after the collapse of the shelter where they had been resting.

"Would you say for sure that the two you saw in uniform in the dugout were the two Bixtons you afterward noticed in the signal corps?" asked Jack of Jimmy.

"No, I couldn't be positive," was the answer. "You see we didn't have more than a hasty glimpse of them, and then only by the light of a candle. But from what you Twinkle Twins tell us, it's evident that the same four—two in uniform and two without—who were in the dugout were also sending up smoke signals."

"Well, it looks that way," admitted Gerald. "Of course, there's always a chance that things may take a different turn, but there's enough here for headquarters to get busy on."

"The main thing to do, in my opinion," declared Jimmy, "is to find out if the fellows we saw in uniform in the dugout and the two the Twinkle Twins saw sending up signals are the same, and then to learn if they're the Bixtons."

"That's the idea!" exclaimed Bob. "But it's easier said than done."

"We'll help all we can," said the Twinkleton Twins, as they started off again in their aeroplane, the tank having been filled with gasoline.

The secret service men at headquarters, including Captain Frank Dickerson, at once acted after the boys had given the additional information in their possession.

Jimmy and his chums had few opportunities to learn what was done by Captain Dickerson and his associates to get on the trail of the smoke signal traitors. All they heard was that an investigation was being made and that every effort was being bent toward learning whether or not the Bixtons were involved. It would not do to accuse these two wrongly, even though they were of a caliber not greatly desired in the army. They were entitled to be considered innocent until proved guilty, and the private quarrel they had with Jimmy and Roger, because of the instrumentality of the latter in sending Mike Bixton to prison, had nothing to do with the smoke signal issue.

As for that personal quarrel, the threats the Bixtons had made against Roger and Jimmy did not greatly worry the two. They felt that they could look out for themselves even against two such bullies and braggarts as were Aleck and Wilbur Bixton.

Indeed, there was a time when it seemed as if the paths of the two signal corps men would not again cross those of Roger and Jimmy. For the two latter, with their chums, were sent to a distant sector where the fighting was almost constant. And the chances were much against the four Brothers returning to the lines where the Bixtons were stationed.

There was hard fighting—so desperate, in fact, that Jimmy and his chums had little chance to think about anything except how to keep from being killed and how to inflict as heavy a punishment as possible on the enemy. The fighting was in a wooded country where advance was difficult, for the thick underbrush afforded shelter for many machine gun nests, and the Huns seemed to place more dependence on this style of fighting than on any other at this time and place.

Day after day the skirmishes, all part of one great battle, waged in and around the forest. The country was rough and hilly, with streams here and there, some of them large enough to be called rivers in the American sense, while others so dignified were but mere creeks.

There was not so much of the trench fighting here. The woods afforded almost as good shelter as did holes dug in the earth, but this was not saying much. At times, of course, it became necessary for the Khaki Boys to dig in, but they did not stay long enough in one place to make possible the digging of elaborate and well-protected trenches.

All sorts and styles of fighting went on during the week that Jimmy and his friends were in this sector. There was the duel of big guns, the exchange of shots from mortar batteries that fired wicked bombs; there was, of course, constant rifle fire, and many a man lost his life because of some hidden sniper. Aeroplanes were constantly flying to and fro, the Huns endeavoring to locate ammunition dumps or transport trains in the woods, that they might blow up either or both. And the Americans and Allied planes sought to so direct the advance of their fighters as to make it most effective.

There was an advance. That fact was clear, for the Americans were battling desperately—artillery, infantry and the ever-gallant marines. Inch by inch, almost, it seemed, the Huns were being pushed back. But they did not cease to struggle and give hard blows in return.

"Look!" exclaimed Jimmy to Roger one day, when a respite had come after a desperate and bloody conflict. "There go the signal men up to the front. Must be getting ready for an advance."

"Looks like it," assented Roger.

"And there are the Bixtons!" added Bob.

The two brothers, in whom so much interest centered for the four Khaki Boys, were hurrying along with their companions. And, as on the other occasion, Aleck and Wilbur Bixton carried the black electrical box.

"They didn't see us," commented Roger.

"Just as well," said Jimmy. "We don't want any family rows now. The one with Fritzie is enough."

Whether it was because of some information acquired by the signal corps men or in arrangement with a previous plan did not develop, but soon after the two Bixtons and their comrades had hastened up toward the front lines the order came for a general advance.

And then came a forward rush—a smashing through the German lines as they stretched through the woods. Strictly speaking, there was hardly a line, as one thinks of it as represented by trenches; but there were machine gun nests here and there—deadly nests they were, too—and

there were hiding places sheltering grim German fighters. Big guns there were—blasting guns that wrought fearful havoc. And for each shot the Boches fired the Sammies sent two in return, so that slowly but surely they advanced.

Then came a forward rush over a nasty bit of ground. There was a fusillade of rifle fire, as well as a hail of bullets from the machine guns.

"Come on! Come on!" cried Jimmy.

"I'm with you!" yelled Roger.

"Seen Iggy and Bob?" asked Jimmy, as his chum leaped over the dead body of a German to advance with the sergeant.

"Yes, they're coming. Look! There's a party of Huns trying to get that machine gun to play on us! Let's tackle 'em!"

"Go ahead!"

Almost before they knew it Jimmy and Roger had distanced their immediate companions, and together they rushed on six Germans who were working over two machine guns. Two of the Huns were shot and another was bayoneted. The rest turned and fled.

"So far, so good!" cried Jimmy, wiping off some blood that was running down his face. "But what's happened? We seem to have the whole place to ourselves."

CHAPTER XIV UNSEEN MARKSMEN

Roger Barlow, who had so nobly assisted Jimmy Blaise in wiping out this particular German machine gun nest, looked around after the struggle and on hearing his companion's remark.

"What's that?" he asked. "We have the place to ourselves? Well, why shouldn't we after we got rid of these fellows?"

"No, I didn't mean that exactly," went on Jimmy. "But take a look! None of our fellows is anywhere near here. The fighting seems to have been switched over to our right."

Roger, who had almost as much blood on him as had Jimmy, took an observation. He soon realized that what his fighting chum had said was true.

They were on a little wooded knoll, and the view was so obstructed by stunted trees and underbrush that they could not see very far in any direction. But they had a sufficient view to show that there was hard fighting going on about a quarter of a mile to their right, while all about them the place was still and deserted—that is, comparatively still, for the din of battle was carried to the Khaki Boys where they stood.

"I guess we rather overran our objective," observed Roger, as he gazed about for a puddle of water in which to cleanse himself of the blood that was not all his.

"If you mean this machine gun nest was the objective, we did," agreed Jimmy, as he looked at the dead Germans. "We ran right over them. But now we'd better get back to the rest of our own bunch, or they'll be listing us as missing or deserting."

"Yes, we'll get back," assented Roger. "But first let's clean up a bit. There's a puddle of water over by the gun."

It was water, of a sort. In northern France it seems to rain most of the time, or at least it did while our boys were there. There were many shell holes over the ground, and many of them became filled with and retained water for some time. The puddle Roger picked out was half full of—well, liquid would be a better word than water, but the army lads got over being fussy about a thing like that.

"It's good enough to wash in, but I'd hate to drink it," observed Jimmy, as he began to clean himself.

"You said something!" came from Roger. "And yet I've heard our boys say that they've drunk worse stuff than this and that it tasted good."

"Oh, I suppose so," agreed Jimmy. "But I'm going to look about a bit before I take any of this."

And he was glad he did, for some time later, in moving about in the little glade, they found a clear, sparkling spring, and there they drank their fill and finished up the "bath" they had started at the mud puddle.

"Well, I feel a hundred per cent. better," declared Roger. "And now let's hike back. The fighting is still going on, and we don't want to miss any of it."

Jimmy nodded, and the two Khaki Boys began to pick their way through the underbrush. It was rather rough going, for if there had ever been a path it was now obliterated by the bursting of shells amid the trees when the place was under fire, as it often had been.

Roger and Jimmy were near the edge of the little glade which, as has been said, was on the top of a hill, when suddenly, just as they were about to cross an open space, the vicious hum of an

unseen missile was heard over their heads.

"Duck!" yelled Jimmy, at the same time dropping flat and pulling his companion to a similar posture.

Of course it was too late to have "ducked" for that particular bullet, as it was over their heads and past them before the boys fell prone. But, as Jimmy said afterward, he thought more were coming.

"What's the big idea?" asked Roger, as he rubbed his elbow that had come in sharp contact with a stone when Jimmy dragged him down.

"Didn't you hear the shot?" demanded Jimmy.

"Yes. But the bullet you hear will never hurt you. It's the one you don't notice coming that does the trick."

"That's all right," asserted Jimmy calmly. "But there may be more coming. Lie low now, I'm going to try a little camouflage work."

Keeping prone on his face, and seeing that Roger did the same, Jimmy cautiously raised his "tin hat" above the earth, using a short stick he picked up as a support.

Almost instantly there came a "ping!" and a little hole appeared in the helmet.

"Firing at close range," observed Jimmy.

"I should say so!" exclaimed Roger. "And those aren't stray bullets, either. It was directed straight here."

"Right!" assented Jimmy. "But the thing of it is to decide whether it's our boys firing or some Germans who may have swept in from the left flank."

"How could it be our boys?" asked Roger. "Don't they know we're here?"

"How could they? We rushed over with a bunch of our boys to clean out this machine-gun nest. And we're the only ones left alive to get here, worse luck for those who started out with us. So there's not much chance that any fellows in our squad know we're here. At the same time, this place was known to be held by the Huns, and our boys, who don't know anything about our having taken the gun, may still think it's a machine gun nest and be peppering it whenever anything alive shows, as my helmet did. I'm glad my head wasn't in it," and Jimmy looked again at the bullet hole in the strong metal.

"And do you think it could be Germans shooting at us?" Roger inquired.

"Of course it could be Huns. A lot of 'em are probably over to the left of us where there isn't so much fighting going on. They may have seen us wipe out this bunch of their friends, and now they're going to turn the trick on us."

Roger agreed that this view of the matter was probable. Then he asked:

"What are we going to do about it?"

"Let's work our way back to the middle of the bunch of trees," suggested Jimmy. "We'll be somewhat protected there, and maybe if we try to get out in another direction than the one we just attempted, we'll have better luck."

"Wiggle back now, but don't raise your head. Can you make it going backward?"

"It's harder to crawl backward on your stomach than it is to go forward in the same way," said Roger; "but I'll try."

He did try, as, likewise, did Jimmy. But they found it almost impossible because of the nature of the ground, and Jimmy called a halt.

"Let's pivot around," he suggested, and head uphill. It'll be easier crawling then. But keep your head down."

Almost as Jimmy spoke there came another of the wicked hums of a singing bullet, and it "pinged" against a tree not far from the two Khaki Boys.

"They either see us or they guess we're still here," said Jimmy.

"I don't believe they see us," stated his chum. "More likely they're just taking a chance and firing at the location where they last saw your tin hat. We'd better hurry on."

Fear and desperation urged the boys forward, and they crawled rapidly, if painfully, up the hill, in and out of shell holes, over sticks, stones, and, in one case, a dead body. But eventually they reached the place where the machine gun had been planted. It was there still, with most of the crew dead around it.

"Wonder if we could turn it around and aim it at the fellows who fired on us?" suggested Roger.

He and Jimmy examined the gun, and though they were not familiar with this particular German weapon their general knowledge told them that it was so damaged as not to be fire-able.

"Well, we'll have to depend on what we have," said Jimmy, as he looked to his rifle and revolver. Fortunately, he and Roger had plenty of ammunition. They had with them all their possessions, including their emergency rations.

"We can stay here until dark, if we have to," said Jimmy. "But I don't want to. Let's make another attempt at it on the opposite side. But keep low."

They got a drink of water from the spring, and then lay down and began to crawl out of the woods. They did not stand upright except when behind the thick shelter of trees.

But no sooner had they begun to progress after the manner of a not very agile serpent than there was the sing of bullets over their heads, and some struck the ground near them.

"They see us!" cried Roger, and there was a catch in his voice.

"I don't believe they exactly see us," returned Jimmy. "But I think they see the bushes move as we crawl along, and they're firing into the underbrush."

"They'll get us just as surely that way as if they did see us, if they keep on firing long enough," went on Roger.

"Yes, I suppose they will," agreed his chum. "Well, we've tried the front and back doors out of this place. Now let's tackle one to the side."

"Right or left?" asked Roger.

"Right," decided Jimmy. "That's where our boys were fighting, and the Germans are less likely to be there. We'll try the right. But crawl, buddy, crawl!"

"Oh, I'm going to," declared Roger.

They had moved back when they found that they were fired upon the second time, and now they were in a position to crawl down off the summit of the little hill, going to the right.

Would they find the way clear? That was the question Roger and Jimmy asked themselves, and how much depended on the answer to it, they well realized. The unseen marksmen seemed fearfully alert.

CHAPTER XV OVER THE CLIFF

"Take it easy now," suggested Jimmy, as, after a moment's pause, he and his chum began again their crawling to get down and off the little knoll. "Go slow!"

"You needn't tell me that!" complained Roger. "I'm willing to go as slow as the next one, only I want to see who's shooting at us."

"They're not anxious to be seen," came from Jimmy, as he slowly progressed. "I've been looking for a chance to take a shot myself, but I haven't seen so much as a finger. Our turn'll come, though."

"It can't come any too soon for me," asserted Roger.

They had not crawled more than ten feet to the right when again came unmistakable evidence that their movements were watched, even though they themselves might not be observed.

"Zip! Just like that!" exclaimed Jimmy with grim humor, as he heard the singing of a bullet over his head. "A little lower, and that one would have nipped me."

"Shall we go back?" asked Roger.

"No, let's keep on a little farther. This is our best play. If we can't get out on this side there isn't much use of trying the left. Snipers are almost sure to be there."

So they crawled on for perhaps ten feet, and then again they were fired at.

"No use!" exclaimed Jimmy, and there was a rather despairing tone in his voice. "We've got to go back."

"And try the left?" asked Roger.

"Yes. It's our only chance. If they fire at us from that side——" He did not complete the sentence, but Roger well knew what his chum meant.

Back they crawled, being fired at again, and when they were comparatively safe, at least for the time being, in the clump of trees, the two Khaki Boys looked at each other.

"They're German snipers all right," declared Jimmy.

"Sure thing," asserted Roger. "Probably the fellows that yelled '*Kamerad!*' and beat it when we came up toward their machine gun have got a lot more Boches and are going to try to take us prisoners."

That view of it was also Jimmy's, and he said as much, adding, however:

"They don't make a prisoner of me as long as I've got a shot left!"

"What are you going to do now?" asked Roger, as he saw Sergeant Jimmy loosen his belt a couple of holes. "Going to leave some of your stuff here?"

"Indeed not!" Jimmy quickly answered. "We need every thing we have on, though it's a load to carry. Can't take a chance and leave off even the gas masks. There's no telling when the Huns may take a notion to drop a gas shell in these woods, and there's not enough wind to carry the fumes away. No, indeed, we can't take any chances. I'm just going to make myself a little more

comfortable. It's hard enough to carry all this outfit around when you're standing up, but it's worse when you're crawling. But perhaps a loose belt will help some."

"I'll try it, myself," returned Roger. "Well, if we don't get through this time what shall we do?" he asked.

Jimmy did not answer for a moment. He seemed to be considering some problem, and, indeed, the straits the two boys found themselves in was a problem that might well perplex older warriors.

"We'll try the left now," went on Jimmy, after a bit. "It would seem to be the least promising of all, but there's no telling. Come on, if you're ready."

"I'm as ready as I ever shall be," said Roger grimly. "Go ahead."

Once more they dropped prone and began to crawl along. This time they went more cautiously, making their way behind such shelter as was afforded by fallen trees, old stumps, and clumps of bushes. They also were careful not to move the foliage about them more than was absolutely necessary. For, in the opinion of Sergeant Jimmy, it was this movement, rather than direct views of themselves, which enabled the snipers to shoot at them.

"Guess maybe we'll make it this time," said Roger in a low voice, as he crawled along behind his chum. "What are you going to do when you get to the open place, Jimmy, old man?"

"Wait until we get there," advised Jimmy. "But I guess the only thing we can do is to run for it, and fight as we run. See that bunch of woods right ahead of us?"

"I see it," assented Roger.

"Well, let's make for that, and then, maybe, we can swing around and get back to our company. We can't stay very long in the open with all these snipers around us, and that bunch of trees is the nearest shelter. I don't know what they are, nor what they cover. They may be full of Huns, but we've got to do something, and we can't stay back here."

"I guess that's right," said Roger. "Keep on going. We haven't been fired at since we started on this path."

This was true, and the two young soldiers began to have hopes that they might get through.

"Though why it is I can't understand," said Jimmy. "I thought this section would be full of Huns, since we haven't done any fighting in this direction to drive 'em back."

Strange and hardly understandable as the situation was, still it remained as Roger and Jimmy noticed—that they were not fired upon during their painful progress to the left.

"Maybe they're saving it up for a grand bang-up," suggested Roger, when the twain had made their way perhaps fifty feet farther along.

"Don't be cracking jokes at a time like this!" half-growled Jimmy.

"It won't be a joke if it happens," snapped back Roger.

He and his chum went on a little farther. They were getting close to the edge of the woods now, and an open space lay before them. Across this, and it was rough ground marked by shell-holes, was another bunch of trees, the open place being perhaps five hundred feet in width.

"If we cross that and gain the woods, maybe we'll be safe, and—maybe not," murmured Jimmy. "Anyhow, we've got to make a try for it, Rodge. Are you ready?"

"Go ahead!" was the short answer.

"All right—come on. Jump up and run for it. But don't stand upright. Crouch as much as you can and run zigzag. And shoot—if you see anything to shoot at. Now come on!"

As Jimmy cried these words he leaped to his feet, an example followed by Roger. Then the two of them, crouching over and darting from side to side, ran into the open.

For a few moments they, thought they were going to have the way clear—that they would not be fired at. But this was not to be. Half way to the woods both boys saw off to their left several gray-uniformed figures leap up.

"There they are! Shoot!" cried Jimmy.

He fired from the hip, as did Roger. They were both pretty good shots, and they had practised this method, so they knew what they were doing. One of the Germans toppled over, though whether from the effect of Roger's fire or Jimmy's could not be told. But the others began firing in return, and the bullets sang about the heads of the Khaki Boys.

"Come on! Run faster!" yelled Jimmy, as he fired again.

"Say, there's a bunch of 'em!" cried Roger, as he saw more Huns springing up as if from holes in the earth where they had been hidden.

Jimmy did not answer. He was busy firing at the enemy, even as he was being shot at, and he had the satisfaction of seeing two more go down. One of these Roger got. Then Jimmy felt a sharp pain in one ear, and, clapping his hand to it, he saw his palm covered with blood.

"Hurt much?" cried Roger, as he dashed up beside his chum.

"No, just a graze, I guess. But keep away from me. The two of us together make a bigger target than one. Separate!"

He leaped to one side, and as he did so a bullet passed between him and Roger. They could hear it. Had they stood together one or both of them might have been hit.

On they staggered, firing as rapidly as they could under the circumstances. They crouched down, zigzagged from side to side, and hoped for the best. They were now within the fringe of the woods, and a few feet more would bring them within the shelter of trees.

But would they find more foes there? That was the question.

Suddenly there was a loud explosion, and, glancing back for an instant, Roger and Jimmy saw that a shell had torn a big hole in the earth at a spot where the German firing party had been massed. There was no firing party now.

"Was that one of our shells?" cried Roger.

"Hard to say," was Jimmy's reply. "It did the trick for us all right, though."

"If they don't come any nearer," added Roger grimly.

Exhausted and weary, they reached the woods. They dodged in among the sheltering trees, fearing any moment that they would be fired upon by enemies who might be concealed in the copse.

"I—I'm about all in!" gasped Roger.

"Same here!" panted Jimmy. "We've got to rest and get some water after we make sure this place is comparatively safe."

On they staggered. They could hardly breathe now, so great had been the rush and burdened, as they were, with equipment. They saw before them a little grassy glade, and at one edge of it was a spring of water. The sight was a welcome one.

"Over there!" cried Roger, pointing to it to direct Jimmy's attention. "We'll flop down there and ___"

Roger's words ended in a mumble. Jimmy, thinking his companion had been shot, turned quickly in time to see a man standing behind Roger with an upraised club. He had struck Roger on the head, knocking him down.

Jimmy opened his mouth to utter a yell, though why he could hardly have told, and he was about to bring his rifle to bear on the assailant of his chum when Jimmy himself felt a stunning blow on his head just beneath his steel helmet. He went down limply, his eyes seeing nothing but blackness.

And as the two lads were struck down, their two assailants, who had leaped from behind concealing trees to take advantage of the panting, exhausted Khaki Boys, looked at one another with satisfaction.

"Now we've got 'em!" cried one.

"I should say so!" declared the other. "This'll end their tricks! Now, what'll we do with 'em?"

"Haul 'em up to the top of the hill and dump 'em over the cliff into the river. That'll get 'em out of the way and it won't be awkward for us. Come on, you drag one and I'll tackle the other!"

And suiting their action to these words, the two assailants hauled Roger and Jimmy to the edge of a cliff not far from where the two chums had been struck down. A moment later two limp bodies were pushed over the edge and there were two splashes in the foaming river that was studded by cruel rocks.

CHAPTER XVI

ONLY TWO LEFT

"Whew, that was some fight!"

"I say de same by you, Bobby!"

It was Iggy who made the last remark and Bob Dalton who spoke first. They had swept on with their companions in arms, crashing their way through the German lines, and now the order had come to cease firing. It would not do for too large a number of the cheering, victorious Americans to get beyond the protection of their big guns, and this was likely if they rushed on much farther.

"Got any water in your can, Iggy?" went on Bob, as they sat, or rather, "flopped," down on the ground, exhausted, as were their comrades. "If you haven't any, I have some I'll share with you."

"I have some quiteness of vodah—I mean wat-ter—left," said Iggy. "Und jolly much goot will she taste now."

"You said something, pal!" declared a wounded soldier near by. "Some Fritzie put a slug through my canteen, and there isn't a drop in it, and I'm as dry as a boneless herring."

"Here!" cried Bob, instantly offering his water flask. "Take as much as you want. I can get more."

"Don't be too positive of that, buddy," said the wounded man. "But I certainly do appreciate a swallow of this. Guess I'm booked to go back," he said, as he looked at his mangled hand. Poor

fellow! He never was to use it again.

The scenes all about Bob and Iggy were too filled with horror to bear repeating. Though the Americans had swept on victorious, driving the Huns before them and out of their trenches, yet it was at a price. Perhaps, from a military standpoint, not too heavy a price to pay for victory, but still a price.

There were dead, dying, and wounded men all about, and more back where the German resistance had been strongest. Bob and Iggy had come through the ordeal with nothing more than slight flesh wounds. They were sufficiently painful, but not serious enough to send them to the hospital. Iggy had been scratched on the arm by a ragged bit of shrapnel shell, and Bob had received a cut on the forehead by some flying missile.

And now came the blessed relief from the toil and the struggle, from the sweat and the blood of the battle.

"Cease firing!" had sounded, most welcome signal, and the men who were left alive, many of them wounded, began to think of other things than killing and trying to escape from being killed.

They sat or sprawled about, some panting to get back the breath that was so nearly spent. Others began to eat some of their emergency rations and to drink water from their canteens.

"Did you see anything of Roger and Jimmy?" asked Bob, when he had recovered something of his spent energies.

"Yes. I see them run like what you say—Old Harry—over by that way," and Iggy pointed to the left. "Then came a big shell and so much dust and smoke that I of see them no more."

"Say, I hope that shell didn't do for 'em!" exclaimed Bob. "Didn't you see anything of 'em after that?" he asked anxiously.

"Oh, that shell did not them keel," declared Iggy. "Oh, no! I see them when the smoke of it went up, and so sure I am that they was not keeled by these shell. But maybe they was keeled by some other."

"Yes, that's always the chance in this business," returned Bob gloomily. "Well, we'll soon know. If they're alive they'll join us, no doubt."

"De soonest de bester," declared Iggy.

Perhaps there is no more trying time to fighting men than just after a big battle. The excitement that forced them on against the odds of death in many forms has subsided, and there is the reaction. Perhaps this reaction is even greater after victory than after defeat. For in the latter case there is still the incentive of hurrying on, often to avoid capture, and this need of haste provides the excitement that prevents too much thinking.

But after a terrific and bloody engagement, such as that through which Bob and Iggy had just passed, and when victory has come, there often follows a reaction caused by the thought of the brave ones who, by their lives or by horrible wounds, have helped pay the price of the success of those who live and who come after.

And it was thoughts like these that filled the hearts and minds of the Khaki Boys and their comrades with gloom as they recovered themselves after the fighting.

"Say, when are we going to get some hot soup?" one lad asked.

"What flavor do you want?" shouted a companion.

"Oh, I'm not particular. Strawberry or vanilla—just so long as it's hot."

"Fat chance you have of getting soup!" declared a veteran. "Lucky, if you have a crust and some muddy water."

There was a laugh at the talk, and then some one produced a battered mouth organ. As if by magic, many who heard the not unmusical strains forgot their weariness and joined in a popular song. Some of the wounded even tried to sing, and it greatly raised the spirits of all within sound of the simple melody.

"Good work, boys! Keep it up!" cried a captain, as he hurried by on his way to dispatch messengers to the rear. "Sometimes a song's as good as a cup of coffee!"

Soon the stretcher bearers began their grisly tasks, and after the wounded had been cared for the work of burying the dead had to be begun. Many negroes were employed in this sad task, and be it said to the credit of these men and their brothers who took active parts in the fighting, that they proved themselves to be worthy of great praise and confidence.

Not much time could be spared for mere sitting around, or "loafing," on the part of the unwounded fighters. Even those, like Bob and Iggy, who had slight hurts, were expected to turn in and help now.

It was necessary to consolidate the positions gained after such severe fighting and such sacrifices, and while the German trenches were occupied by some of the American forces, it was needful to dig more, to plan dugouts, and to put up new barbed-wire entanglements.

For the Boches might be expected to make a counter-attack at any time, though it was believed they were so badly demoralized for the present that there would be no immediate resumption of hostilities on this particular sector.

And so, after a brief rest, Bob and Iggy, having partaken of some of their rations and some water,

began to dig with pick and shovel; a labor that was shared by many of their chums.

It was almost night when the needful precautions had been taken against a surprise, and then the men were delighted to hear that some kitchen outfits had come up and that hot food would shortly be served.

"And, oh boy, what won't I do to it!" cried Bob. "I've got an appetite like a house afire!"

"Me, I am of a hunger, too," said Iggy. "But wish you not, Bob, dat Roger and Jimmy might be with us?"

"Do I wish it? I say I do!" cried Bob. "However, they may blow in at any moment. Maybe they've taken a lot of prisoners and have to escort 'em to the rear."

"I hope so," murmured Iggy.

"Only, if that's the case," went on Bob, "I hope it doesn't turn out as it did with Franz. We don't want Rodge and Jimmy captured and taken to some prison camp."

"Not!" declared Iggy with emphasis. But, had they known it, the plight of Roger and Jimmy at that moment could not have been much worse had they been in some Hun stockade.

Night came and passed, and there was no sign of, nor word from, the two missing ones. Bob and Iggy looked at one another the next morning, and there was fear and worry in their eyes.

"Where you think they be?" asked Iggy.

"I don't know," confessed Bob. "It looks as bad for them as it has looked for some time for Schnitz. But we must keep on hoping. If they're dead we'll know that soon enough—worse luck. But if they are listed as missing—well, what's the use?"

Iggy slowly shook his head.

"We of first was five Brothers," he said. "Then Franz go, and we was four. Now two more iss go and we iss two. Two left, only. Py jolly, maybe soon we iss only one!"

CHAPTER XVII

BLOWN UP

Bob, who was cleaning some of the mud off his leggings, looked up and over at his Polish chum.

"Hey, you, come off that!" he exclaimed.

"Come off what?" asked Iggy in surprise. "I iss only sit on de ground, and unless I iss come off him—py jolly! where else could I go?" he asked.

"Oh, I didn't mean come off the earth!" exclaimed Bob, with a laugh. "I meant stop making such gloomy predictions."

"Who is he?" asked Iggy.

"Who's who?" countered Bob.

"Dat Mr. Dixon," responded Iggy. "Does you mean Captain Frank Dickerson?"

"Oh, no! No!" laughed Bob. "I mean you are not to be so gloomy-Gus like."

"Gus? Gus? Iss he a pasteboy—I mean a doughboy, too?"

"Say, if I've got to go back and explain everything I'll never get this mud off!" laughed Bob. "All I meant was don't look on the dark side of things. Be a little happier, and you'll make me happier. Don't think, just because Roger and Jimmy haven't showed up, that they are dead or prisoners. They may be all right."

"I have a hope so," said Iggy, but the gloomy way in which he shook his head did not indicate that he was very sincere.

However, there was nothing that could be done about it, and Bob and Iggy just had to wait. Time, however, did not hang heavily on their hands, for there was never a moment of the day and very few moments of the night when there was not something to do. If it was not standing guard, doing sentry duty, digging trenches, or helping fit up dugouts, there were barbed-wire parties to become active in, listening-post duty to go out on, and the thousand and one things that a fighting army can always find to do.

Iggy and Bob performed their full share of all these tasks, and it was perhaps well that they could be kept so occupied. For, in spite of Bob's seeming cheerfulness, dark forebodings as to the fate of Jimmy and Roger would come to him.

"And there's Franz, too," he told himself. "But he's been missing so long now that it's hardly possible he'll ever come back—at least, until after the war is over and prisoners are exchanged."

But Bob was to meet Franz Schnitzel sooner than he expected, and under strange circumstances.

"Well, I wonder what the next move will be," remarked Bob to a fellow soldier one day about a week after the big advance in which Roger and Jimmy had been lost sight of. Since that time there had been only slight engagements between patrols of the Americans and the Huns.

"Oh, there'll be more fighting," was the answer from a young soldier named Harry Blondell, with whom Bob had become friendly. "There's got to be more fighting. I guess our officers are laying pipes for another big scrap that'll carry us clear into Germany."

"That would be some advance!" laughed Bob. "But, at the same time, the Boches may be planning to come through our lines again."

"Well, we'll be ready for 'em," declared Harry. "I never felt better in all my life. This hard fighting and living in the mud and wet seems to agree with me."

"Glad you're fit!" declared Bob. "The Kaiser'll probably be worried when he hears you're ready to take the field again against his divisions."

"No doubt!" chuckled Harry.

The truth of the matter was that, aside from wounds, the health of the American soldiers was excellent in spite of adverse conditions due to the climate. They could be wet to the skin day after day, and yet few of them took colds, and many of them were delicate lads who, up to a few months before, would not have thought of going out in the rain without rubbers and an umbrella.

It was one evening when Bob and Iggy, together with many of their comrades, were preparing to go on duty for their night tricks that a rumor started somewhere in the trenches to the effect that a big battle impended on the morrow.

Just who was responsible for this no one seemed to know, but soon after the talk circulated it was noticed that there was great activity around the brigade headquarters. Messengers hurried to and fro, and several American aeroplanes were observed fluttering over the German lines.

"Well, fighting is what we're here for," said Bob to Iggy, as they started for the traverse where they were to be on duty about half the night—unless an attack should come.

"Yes, it is better to have a fight and get with it through than to be waiting all the times," said the Polish lad.

It was rather a nervous strain for many sentries that night as they stood on the firing step, gazing across No Man's Land toward the barbed-wire entanglements of the Germans. Would the Sammies get the order to charge across there, after a barrage had been laid down? Or would the gray hordes leap out and try to thrust back the soldiers of Uncle Sam who were slowly but surely smashing the Hun lines? This might be known to the staff officers in the headquarters back of the American lines, or the answer might be made by the Boche generals.

So it was nervous waiting, and Bob, in common with the others, felt it as they stood on duty through the long hours of the dark night.

It was nearing three o'clock, and it would be dawn in another hour, when platoon officers began moving along the trenches, and as they passed group after group of the Sammies the officers whispered:

"Be ready! We attack at four o'clock!"

Those who had wrist watches looked at them, the radium-illuminated dials showing the approximate time.

"An hour to wait!" mused Bob, as he answered the officer who notified him. "A lot will be happening an hour from now."

And the same thought was with all of them.

"How many would be alive at this same time to-morrow night?"

Slowly the seconds and minutes ticked themselves away. Silently the soldiers in the trenches made ready. And behind the lines preparations to support the advance, after the way was prepared for it by shells from the big guns, were going on.

Silently groups of alert men gathered behind their officers in the traverses. The sentinels stood on the firing step, ready and waiting. Short ladders were placed here and there to facilitate the fighters in getting out of the sunken protections.

Bob noted the illuminated minute hand of his watch creeping on toward the XII.

"Sixty seconds more," he murmured. He glanced over toward Iggy. In the faint dawn he could see his Polish chum standing with his rifle, ready to leap from the trench.

Then, suddenly, like a burst of thunder from a clear sky, the American barrage started, and after a sufficient time had elapsed the whistles sounded.

"Over the top!"

The old, familiar, but always thrilling call. "Over the top!"

Out of the trenches leaped Bob, Iggy and their comrades. On toward the German lines they rushed, the half-darkness of the dawn now illuminated with the flashes from the big guns.

The Germans were not long in replying. They were not taken by surprise, and soon a rain of H. E. shells, as well as shrapnel, began to deluge the American positions. But through this storm of missiles the gallant lads of the 509th Infantry leaped forward. They yelled and shouted, but they, each one, only heard his own voice, so great was the din of the guns.

"Come on! Come on!" cried Bob hoarsely.

But Iggy and his comrades needed no urging. They were rushing at the Germans like human

tigers. They had heard so much and seen so much of the cruelty of the Huns that each time the Sammies went into battle it was as though they were taking personal revenge on the Kaiser's troops.

Bob felt something, it was as if a great blast of air passed him. It lifted him from the earth and hurled him back, but he managed to regain his feet. Then came a terrible noise behind him—so far back that he was not harmed. But that could not be said for half a score of his comrades. A great shell exploded in their midst, and there were more than a score of casualties from it.

"Close call!" murmured Bob as he staggered on. He lost sight of Iggy in the rush, but hoped the Polish lad was following closely. Then Bob had his hands full, for he and his immediate companions encountered some German machine-gun crews, and there was hard fighting before the Boches were killed or thrown into complete disorder.

"Forward! Forward!" was the order, and well was it obeyed.

On over the German trenches went the Sammies. Now and again they were held up by the fierce firing of hidden weapons, and then squads would volunteer to clean out these frightful nests.

Bob volunteered for this perilous work more than once, and after one assault on a party of Huns entrenched in a ruined farmhouse Bob was slightly wounded. But he kept on fighting, and at last the Boches cried "*Kamerad!*" That is, those did who were able.

A party started back with the prisoners—about a dozen of them—while the rest of Bob's companions paused a moment to rest in the farmhouse, which was pretty well battered up.

"Well, we'd better get out of here—there's work ahead for us," said the second lieutenant who had led the assault on the machine-gun position. "Come along, boys!"

Just as they were leaving the house it seemed as if the very earth was disrupted. Bob felt himself being hurled through the air and he had a vision of the building being blown apart. The next thing he realized was that he was falling. Then came oblivion.

CHAPTER XVIII

A STRANGE MEETING

Bob Dalton slowly opened his eyes. The reason he did it slowly was because it seemed less painful that way. And the truth of the matter was that he ached all over. Later he said he felt as though some one had taken a club and pounded him from head to foot.

"I wonder what happened," mused Bob, and his brain seemed to work as slowly as did his eyes. Then came remembrance of the great blast, of the farmhouse blown into the air, and he himself being hurled along with at least part of it. Then came the fall and darkness. And it was from this darkness of unconsciousness that Bob was now gradually emerging.

He turned his head from side to side, and was glad to find that it was still attached to his body and that he could still move it.

Bob saw that he was lying in a field. Dirt was all about him, some scattered in such a way as to show that shells had landed there not very long before. Over his head Bob could see the sky and note that clouds were slowly floating along.

"Well, I'm out in the open, that's one sure thing," mused the Khaki Boy. "Now to see if I've got my legs and arms left. My head's as sore as a boil, though."

The best way to discover this was to use his hands, and he found, to his delight, that they were both attached to his arms, and that his fingers were intact. They were a little numb, but he managed to move them, convincing himself that at least the upper part of his body was still intact.

"Hum! Lump about as big as a hen's egg," murmured Bob, as he discovered a protuberance on his head. It was the blow which caused this that had rendered him senseless.

"Now if I can wiggle my legs maybe I'll be able to get up and see what happened and what's going on," thought Bob. He lay still for a moment longer, however, moving his feet only slightly, and he was glad to find that his legs seemed to be normal.

There was borne to his ears the distant sounds of war—the rattle of rifles and machine guns, and the boom of artillery. But it was so distant that he decided the tide of battle had passed beyond him, wherever he was.

"And that's the thing to find out—where I am," murmured Bob. "I can get up, I guess."

He was about to do this when he heard voices talking, and it needed but a hearing of the first few words to tell Bob that the talk was in German.

Bob lay still and listened. He wanted to make sure of his position before he arose. The next few words apprised him of the plight into which he had fallen, or rather, been blown. Bob understood enough German to enable him to know what was being said. And the first expression was, when translated:

"There is another dead American pig over there."

"You're right," came in rejoinder. "The mine hidden in the house worked to perfection. If they killed our machine gunners, we killed twice as many of them."

"It was a beautiful explosion," went on the first speaker. "How the swine-hounds did sail up."

"Blown to bits!" laughed the other.

"All but this one. He doesn't seem to have been hurt at all."

"Maybe he was too far outside. But he is dead, there is no need to bayonet him."

"Say, can they be talking about me?" was the thought that flashed through Bob's mind.

There seemed to be no doubt of it a little later, for he heard one of the Germans say:

"Well, we may as well search him. The pigs sometimes have gold money. And, anyhow, his shoes are better than mine. I'll take them off. Dead men need no shoes!" and he laughed.

"He takes a whole lot for granted," thought Bob grimly. And then, as he sensed the import of this talk, his real situation became apparent.

"They had that farmhouse mined," mused Bob. "After we wiped out the machine gunners some one of the Boches must have sprung the mine. That did for our fellows and sent me sailing through the air. I got the bump on the head that put me to sleep, and now, as soon as I wake up, they think I'm dead. But I'll show 'em——"

He brought his musings to a sudden end, for at that instant he felt a violent pull on one leg. His foot was wrenched to one side. But Bob did not mind the pain much, for it told him his feet and legs were in good shape.

"Here! Quit that!" he yelled, as he raised his head and saw a burly German soldier trying to unlace the shoes that were on Bob's feet.

If a bomb had dropped between the two Huns they could not have been more greatly disturbed. They leaped back and stared with wide-open eyes at Bob, who sat up. The man who had had hold of his foot dropped it.

"He—he is not dead!" this fellow cried, in German.

"No. But let's finish him!" said the other.

For a moment Bob gave up hope. He was unarmed. His rifle had blown out of his hands and his revolver was missing. And he saw, not far off, a number of Germans. It was evident there had been a shift in the lines during the time Bob was unconscious, and the Boches again occupied the position around the demolished farmhouse.

The Hun who had proposed to bayonet Bob raised his weapon, but the other interposed.

"We were told to take prisoners if we could get them," he said in German. "And this is one of their under-officers. He may tell us something."

"You've got another guess coming, Fritzie!" said Bob, aloud.

"The pig-dog says something," remarked the soldier with the rifle. "Do you know what it is, comrade?"

"*Nein!* How should I speak the rotten talk? Well, we'll search him and take him along with us. The lieutenant will be glad of the prisoner."

Poor Bob was in dire straits, but, still, being taken prisoner was infinitely better than being bayoneted on the spot; and Bob realized this even though he had heard many stories of the German prison camps.

For one wild moment he had an idea of leaping up and giving the best battle possible to his two captors. There were only two immediately near him, and Bob had a sort of patriotic notion that one American was better than half a dozen Germans. But cold facts stared him in the face as he slowly rose to his feet. Among these facts was the realization that he was weak and trembling from the effects of his being so nearly blown to death in the explosion. Another fact was, that though there were only two of the Huns close at hand, there were many others within signaling distance.

"Well, I guess I'll have to give up," thought poor Bob.

And then the Germans closed in on him. Bob could not resist. His pockets were turned inside out, and they took everything he had. They even took his shoes, and tossed him a pair of old, half-rotten ones which the tallest German discarded.

"Go ahead!" ordered the man who had expressed the wish to bayonet Bob, and the prisoner had no choice but to obey. They marched behind him with rifles held in readiness for instant use, and soon Bob was in the midst of a company of Germans, the officer of which showed great delight at the sight of the American.

"I wonder how many of our poor fellows they have," mused Bob. "Gee, but this is tough luck!"

He felt like giving way to despair, but his pride and grit kept him from doing so before the leering, exultant Germans. So Bob shut his teeth tight and marched on. It was not until late that evening that he was allowed to rest in a German camp, and then he found what the officer had meant by "others." There were a number of Americans who had been captured and were being herded together to be sent into the interior of Germany or to some of the conquered parts of France, where many of the German prison camps were located.

The days that followed Bob's capture were full of misery. He was packed into a filthy railroad car with wounded and distressed men, and then, by slow and jerky stages, he was taken away.

On this terrible journey to the German prison camp the poor captives had scarcely anything to eat and almost no water to drink. Many were ill, and several wounded, but no attention was given them, and their wounds were not dressed.

At times Bob thought he would go mad at the sights he saw. His own personal sufferings, once the pain in his head ceased, were not great; but, in common with the others, he lacked food and water.

And finally, after many weary days they were taken from the train and marched amid jeering lines of Germans to a wired stockade.

Bob dragged his unwilling feet into the stockade. He saw gathered in the enclosure many sad-eyed and sorrowful American and Allied prisoners. And then, to the great astonishment of Bob, he heard his own name shouted.

Some one was running toward him—a ragged figure—and at first he did not recognize who it was. Then the voice spoke again:

"Bob! Bob Dalton! And so they got you, too! Oh, but I'm glad to see you—No, I'm not either—not here!"

Bob rubbed his eyes. For a moment he thought it was all a dream and that this was but a phase of the explosion. Then as the face before him became more plain through a mist that seemed to fill his eyes, Bob gasped:

"Schnitz! If it isn't Franz Schnitzel!"

The long-sought, missing Brother had been found, and now the two Khaki Boys had strangely met to be companions in misery.

CHAPTER XIX IN SWIRLING WATERS

False-hearted and desperate as had been the two men who struck down and rendered Roger and Jimmy senseless, their last inhuman act—the tossing of the unconscious Khaki Boys over the cliff—defeated their intentions. For as the Brothers fell into the deep water, the shock and contact of it brought back their senses.

Roger and Jimmy splashed into the water at the same time, and at first they sank deep into the swirling depths of the river, which ran at the foot of the cliff, dotted here and there on its surface with black rocks.

The blows that they had received on their heads had not, fortunately, been sufficiently hard to make them unconscious for more than a few minutes. It was as if a pugilist had received a "knockout" of a little more than the usual severity.

The shock and chill of the water brought back the senses of the two lads, and their first, natural instinct, in common with that of every swimmer, was to hold their breath when they felt their heads submerged.

And then the boys came to the surface and struck out. Again this was almost instinct. They were both good swimmers, and among the feats they had practised at various times in summer pleasure camps had been to swim across a lake fully clothed. This exploit stood the lads in good stead now, though the garments they wore and the accoutrements they had to carry very heavily handicapped them.

But they knew how to get rid of their gas masks, and as their steel helmets had fallen off during the attack, and as they had no weapons, they were not as heavily burdened as a soldier on the battle front would have been.

So they managed to get to the surface and strike out, though they did not know in which direction to swim, save toward the nearest shore. But to reach that was a task more easily thought of than carried out. The current was swift, and they could make little progress against it.

"Don't try to breast it!" cried Jimmy to Roger. "Let yourself float down, and work your way over to the nearest bank."

"All right! How are you?"

"Pretty rotten. I got a bad jolt on the head, but the water makes it feel better," said Jimmy.

"What happened to us, anyhow?" asked Roger, as he managed to get to his companion's side. "All I remember is being struck down. Did the Germans make a counter-attack?"

"It wasn't the Germans," declared Jimmy. "It was those two Bixton fellows from the signal corps. They attacked us!"

"What for?" cried Roger. "Are they German spies?"

"Well, they're as bad as that, if not worse," declared Jimmy. "They're traitors, I believe. They must have attacked us, as they threatened to do, because they found out that we, in a way, were

responsible for Mike Bixton's being sent to jail. They threatened to do us up, and they did it."

"They surely did!" assented Roger. "Why, they might have killed us."

"They tried to, hard enough," declared Jimmy.

"Do you really think so?" cried his companion.

"I'm sure of it! Why, they struck hard enough to kill. Only that we had on our tin hats, they'd have ended us. And then dumping us into this river—that was to be the end, they thought."

"And I'm not sure but what it will be yet," said Roger, as his swimming strokes seemed to lose power.

"What's the matter?" asked Jimmy anxiously. "Can't you keep it up?"

"Not much longer. I'm about all in. My head feels queer!"

Jimmy looked about him. They were in the midst of swirling waters that rushed in and out among the rocks. The two lads had a hard struggle not to be dashed against these.

"Do you see that flat rock over there?" cried Jimmy to his chum, pointing to one about a hundred feet down stream and nearer to the western bank than the boys then were.

"Yes, I see it," was the answer.

"Do you think you can reach it?"

"Maybe. But why?"

"Because it's a flat rock, and it stands well up out of the water. If we climb out on it we can take a rest and catch our breath. Then, maybe, we can get across to the shore."

"Go ahead!" said Roger desperately. "I'll follow you."

They had momentarily caught hold of a small projecting rock in the stream, but it was not large enough to afford a foothold. Jimmy now let go of this and struck out for the flat rock of which he had spoken. Roger followed as best he could.

It was no easy matter for the half-exhausted lads to scramble up the sides of the slippery rock. But their desperate situation seemed to give them additional strength, and at last they were out of the water. They sat down, little streams running from their clothes over the slanting rock, whence they dribbled into the river that flowed on either side of the boulder.

"Well, we're alive, anyhow," remarked Jimmy, as his breathing came back to somewhere about normal.

"That's about all we can say," rejoined his chum. "We'll never be able to swim to shore. The current is too swift," and he pressed his hands to his aching head.

"Oh, don't give up so easily!" exclaimed Jimmy. "We'll get to shore all right. What we are going to do when we get there is the only thing that's worrying me."

"Get back to our company as soon as we can," advised Roger. "The others can't be so very far away."

"They may be ten miles, as far as I can tell," went on Sergeant Jimmy. "I don't know a thing that happened after the Bixtons struck us until I woke up in the water. They certainly are scoundrels!" he declared bitterly.

"That's right," assented his chum. "You'd think, if they thought they had a real quarrel with us, that they'd have waited until the battle was over to attack us. I can't understand it all."

"Nor I," admitted Jimmy. "Unless they are afraid of us, as well as bearing us a grudge because of what we did to Mike. And I'm inclined to think they are afraid."

"What of?" asked Roger.

"That we'll tell on 'em. I believe the two Bixtons are the same fellows we saw in the dugout and who were seen later by the Twinkle Twins sending up smoke signals. The fact that the Bixtons belong to the signal corps makes it all the more suspicious."

"Yes, I guess it does," said Roger wearily. "Well, if we ever get out of this we'll have something against 'em all right. But how are we going to get across?"

"We'll have to swim for it," declared Jimmy. "Come on. No telling when we'll be under fire. I say, Roger, look at that!" he suddenly cried, pointing up stream.

Roger looked, and saw a raft made of tree trunks lashed together coming down the swift river, and on the raft were a number of German soldiers.

"That raft is going to come right close to this rock!" cried Jimmy, and Roger also decided that this would be the case.

"Are they coming after us?" he asked.

"No, I don't believe so," was Jimmy's rejoinder. "I guess they've been in a fight themselves. There are two or three lying down on the raft who look as if they were wounded."

On came the raft, urged by the swift current. The Germans aboard it saw the two lads on the rock in the middle of the river, and they seemed to be taking counsel among themselves.

"If we could get on that log outfit we could float down stream in safety until we came to a landing

place, or to a better place to cross," suggested Jimmy.

"But we can't get on!" exclaimed Roger. "Those Germans don't seem to have any guns, but they're two to our one, not counting those lying down. We can't get on the raft, Jimmy."

"We've got to!" was the desperate answer. "We'll fight 'em with bare knuckles for a place there. It's our lives or theirs! Roger, we've got to fight!" and Jimmy rolled up his sleeves while the raft with the four live Germans and three dead ones swept nearer and nearer to the rock that formed a refuge for the two Khaki Boys.

CHAPTER XX

THE CAVE FIGHT

Perilous in the extreme was the strait in which Jimmy and Roger found themselves. They realized that they could not remain very long on the rock in mid-stream in their present weakened and drenched condition. It was barely large enough for them, and just as the raft came in sight a new peril became manifest. This was the fact that the river was rising.

Roger had noticed it and called Jimmy's attention to it just as the Germans came around a bend in the stream. There had been considerable rain, and more was in prospect. The stream would probably rise suddenly, and then it would be impossible for the Khaki Boys to maintain their position on the rock. The torrent would sweep over it.

But a more immediate need confronted them. They felt that they must take refuge on the raft as the only means of getting out of the desperate situation where fate had swept them.

"Get ready!" called Jimmy to his chum, as a swirl of the current brought the raft nearer the rock.

"What's the game to be?" asked Roger.

"We'll leap on the raft as it floats past. If the Germans will let us share it with them, well and good. If not—well, we'll just have to fight them, that's all. As I said, it's our lives or theirs."

"If they haven't any arms we stand a chance," returned Roger. "But if they try any shooting——"

"I don't believe they have a gun or a revolver," interrupted Jimmy. "If they had, they'd have begun shooting before this. Come on now, get ready!"

The attitude of the Germans on the raft, at least those who by their attitude showed themselves to be unwounded, or at best but slightly wounded, was strange. They seemed stunned, as if they had passed through some terrible experience. And, as Roger and Jimmy learned later, the men had taken part in a desperate engagement, and their whole command had been practically wiped out. These few had managed to escape to the raft, but the horror of what they had gone through seemed to make them temporarily incapable of using all their faculties.

It was due to this, perhaps, that Roger and Jimmy were able to accomplish what they did. For as they leaped aboard the raft, there was only slight resistance at first. One or two of the Germans tried to push the lads off, and they would have succeeded had they used their strength to its best advantage.

But they did not seem to know what to do. As a matter of fact they lacked a leader, and a quick glance directed to the prostrate figures on the raft showed that one was an under officer. But he seemed to be dying.

And so, leaping from their rock, the two Americans landed on the raft. One German tried to push Jimmy off, but was sent staggering back with a blow in the face, and he fell over one of the prostrate figures. Then Roger overcame the man who rushed at him, and for the time being the Khaki Boys were victorious.

But the situation was almost changed for the worse a moment later. The under-officer, corresponding probably to an American second lieutenant, raised his head from a pool of blood and cried, in German, of course:

"Throw off the American pigs!"

It was just this command that the German privates needed, and it seemed to galvanize them into action. The four, who of those on the raft alone seemed to be unwounded, sprang at Jimmy and Roger. But one missed his footing and fell heavily. This left only three, and two of them sprang at Jimmy.

But once more luck was with the Khaki Boys. With a flash of inspiration, Roger, as he saw his antagonist coming at him, reached in his back trousers pocket and pulled out a small nickle oil-can that he used on his rifle. Holding it out, as though it were a revolver, Roger pointed it at the German's head. In an instant the man's hands went up, and he cried:

"*Kamerad!*"

Pausing not an instant in his actions, Roger dashed his fist, oil can and all straight into the man's face, knocking him off the raft and into the river.

"Now I can help you, Jimmy!" cried Roger, and he sprang to the assistance of his chum. And sorely did Jimmy need help, for the two Germans had almost overpowered him in their endeavor

to thrust him off the raft.

With desperate energy Roger and Jimmy fought the two, and for a few seconds hard blows were given and taken on both sides. The wounded officer shouted encouragement to his men, but the desperate plight of Roger and Jimmy made them fight to such good end that in a few minutes they had forced their assailants overboard.

The man who had fallen seemed to have either broken or badly strained his leg. He was groaning and unable to rise, and this left no able-bodied Germans to attack Jimmy and Roger. They were satisfied that none in the party of Huns was armed, and so they had the situation well in hand.

"Well, this is a little better than being on the rock—after we've got things our own way," declared Jimmy, as he began to get his breath back.

"What's to be done now?" asked Roger, while the wounded officer glared at them.

Jimmy looked down the foaming river. They were in a wider and deeper part now, and the raft was swinging in toward shore.

"We'll land at that point below," said Jimmy, indicating the spot meant. "We can leap ashore, and—well, we'll have to trust to luck."

"Yes, I'll feel better once we get ashore," said Roger.

They looked at the figures on the raft. Some of the Germans were dead, and others, apparently, dying. There was nothing Roger and Jimmy could do, and, watching their chance, when the raft was within a few feet of the shore they jumped off.

There was a rope fastened to one end of the crude craft, and, catching hold of it as he leaped ashore, Jimmy cried to the officer:

"Do you want to be made fast here?"

The man muttered something in his own tongue, but as it did not seem to be an answer in the affirmative to Jimmy's question, the lad tossed his end of the rope on the raft and let the structure go floating on down stream.

"They'll have to take their chance, same as we did," remarked Jimmy. "Though I'd have anchored them if they'd said the word."

"They may be rescued by friends below here," suggested Roger. "And now what are we going to do? It's going to be dark soon, and we don't know which way to go to get back to our lines."

"You said something then!" declared Jimmy. "It's going to rain, too. I felt a few drops. Say, this is about the worst plight we've been in since we left Camp Sterling."

"Oh, it might be worse!" declared Roger, with as much optimism as he could muster. "Let's hike along until we get somewhere and find something to eat."

"Say, don't get sarcastic!" begged Jimmy.

They walked up the river bank and saw a lonely bit of country stretching before them. There did not appear to be a house on it, but that war had passed that way was made evident by many signs, few of them pleasant.

"Let's see where this road leads to," suggested Jimmy, pointing to one that did not appear to have been used recently.

"Might as well take it as any," agreed Roger. "I wish it led to a can of beans and a ham sandwich."

"Don't rub it in," groaned Jimmy.

They were tired, wet, and hungry. They were exhausted from the battle in which they had taken part, they were sore from the treatment accorded them by the Bixtons, and they had hardly recovered from the strenuous battle on the raft. Still they did not give up, but tramped on.

They passed a field in which a few miserable turnips were growing, and, digging out some, they ate them. Poor as this food was, it served to put a little more life into them.

It was getting dusk when, as they were going down the road, they heard voices ahead of them, around a turn. Jimmy and Roger looked at one another. The same thought was in the minds of both.

Were these friends or foes?

"Let's hide until we take a look," suggested Jimmy.

"Hide where?" Roger demanded.

"Up in that hole, or cave," went on Jimmy, pointing to one that showed through a fringe of bushes in the face of a hill which was bordered by the road. "We can stay there until we see who is here."

In the fast-falling darkness they scrambled up the hill and dodged into the cave. As far as they could tell it seemed to be a fairly large one.

"Look down and see if you can make out who was doing that talking, Roger," Jimmy directed. "I have a flashlight in my pocket, but I guess the water's put it out of business. Otherwise, we could see what sort of place we're in."

Jimmy's fears regarding the light were only too true. It was useless without a new battery. Roger looked down toward the road, but could see nothing, nor did they hear any more talk.

They were debating with themselves what was best to do when it began to rain hard, and Jimmy said:

"Well, we can keep dry in here, or, at least, we won't get any wetter. Good thing we found this cave when we did. But I'd like to have a light so we could see what it is. Might be a whole squad of Huns in here for all we know."

"Not very likely," decided Roger. "If there were any here they'd have tackled us before this. Say, this is some storm!"

"I'd like to know who it was we heard," continued Roger, when he and his chum had been in the cave perhaps half an hour.

"So would I," assented Jimmy. "Well, if it stops raining we can——"

He came to a sudden pause, and Roger understood why, for there was a noise in the rear of the cave. It was the sound of two persons talking. And the Khaki Boys, looking into the blackness back of them, saw the glimmer of a light.

"Look! There is someone in here!" whispered Jimmy.

"Let's creep back and see who it is," advised Roger.

Cautiously they made their way back toward the faint light. It increased in brightness as they neared it, and then, to their great astonishment, they saw a sort of room fitted up in the cave. It was like one of the trench dugouts, and there were some rude chairs and a table in the center of the underground apartment. On the table stood a lantern, but it was the sight of the two figures standing beside the table that gave Roger and Jimmy their biggest surprise.

For the figures were none other than those of Wilbur and Aleck Bixton!

The two scoundrels had set their rifles in a corner of the cave room and were looking at some papers they had spread out on the table. They did not seem to feel the need of caution, and spoke aloud.

"Well," remarked Aleck, "I guess by this time those two fellows wish they hadn't been so active in making trouble for poor Mike."

Wilbur Bixton nodded.

"I think we did for them all right," went on Aleck. "They'll never trouble us again. But I don't see what's keeping Carl Anker. He said he'd be here at nine, and it's long past that now."

"Oh, he and Fritz Ammann never did show up on time," remarked Wilbur. "I guess we'll have to wait for 'em. We ought to make 'em pay big for this information. It's the most important we've handed over yet."

"That's right," agreed his brother. "And look at the risk we run. They've got to come across with more money!"

Roger nudged Jimmy as they hid in a dark corner, and Jimmy signaled back that he recognized the import of the talk.

Then as the two scoundrels bent lower over the table, handling a number of papers, Jimmy put his lips to Roger's ear and whispered:

"If we could sneak around and get their guns, we could make prisoners of 'em!"

"That's right!" agreed his chum. "There's some black work going on here. They must have come to this cave to meet two men, who, from their names, are Germans."

"Not so loud!" whispered Jimmy. "Come on now! We've got to work fast. You take one gun and I'll get the other. Their backs are toward us, and if they don't hear us they can't see us. Once we have the guns, the jig is up for them."

Slowly and cautiously, in the semi-darkness, Roger and Jimmy crept forward. They were almost at the weapons, standing in a corner behind the two men who were bending over the table, when suddenly Roger's foot struck against what seemed to be a tin can lying on the floor of the cave. There was a loud, metallic rattle.

"Who's there?" cried Aleck, springing up and wheeling around.

"Come on! Rush for it!" yelled Jimmy, all need of silence now being gone. He and his chum made a leap for the guns, but Jimmy's foot slipped and he went down.

Wilbur Bixton turned higher the flame of the lamp, and in the sudden illumination the two brothers saw the boys they had, some hours before, dropped over the cliff.

For an instant deadly fear showed on the faces of the two plotters. But as they realized that Jimmy and Roger were not ghosts, the Bixtons sprang at them with yells of rage.

Then in the cave began a desperate hand-to-hand fight!

CHAPTER XXI

A DESPERATE RESOLVE

Forgetting for the moment the fact that he was a German prisoner, Bob Dalton, at the sight of the long-lost Franz Schnitzel, rushed forward to greet his Brother. The two clasped hands warmly.

"Oh, but it's good to see you!" cried Franz.

"And it's good to know that you are—alive!" Bob hesitated over the word. For poor Franz did not seem much more than alive. He was wasted away, as were all in that horrible camp.

In the American army they had been well fed, and their condition showed accordingly. For some time Franz, and for a shorter time, Bob, had been fed in the German way—underfed, and that on the most miserable of food.

"How did it happen that you were captured?" asked Franz, as he and Bob walked off a little by themselves. "I suppose you heard all about me."

"Well, not exactly," Bob answered. "We heard part of the story about your capturing some Germans, and then either being captured yourself, or else disappearing—we couldn't be quite sure what it was. We hoped you were alive, even if you were a prisoner, but we couldn't be sure."

"Oh, I'm a prisoner all right," replied Franz. "There's no question about that. And it happened just like that! I did capture some Huns, but another party came along, rescued those I had, and copped me. Then I was brought here, after a fearful journey. But tell me about yourself. How did they get you?"

Bob told of the blowing up of the farmhouse, his unconsciousness and subsequent capture.

"Well, I guess Roger, Jimmy and Iggy are the only ones left to fight the Germans," sighed Franz.

"I don't know about Iggy," replied Bob. "I hope he's left."

"Why, what do you mean? Are Rodge and Jimmy——"

Franz hesitated to put his terrible thought into words.

"We don't know what happened to them," said Bob. "They weren't to be found after one of the big fights we had. Whether they are killed or captured we don't know. For a time Iggy and I were the only two left of the original five. Now I'm gone, and poor Iggy may be all alone. But what sort of camp is this?"

"About as bad as it well can be," said Franz gloomily. "They starve us, beat us, make us work, and do everything mean."

"Any chance of breaking out?" asked Bob. And then as he looked at the heavy stockade and the bare, electrically charged wires, he added: "I guess there isn't, or you'd have tried it long ago."

"Some have tried it," said Franz in a low voice, as he looked around to make sure of the persons in the immediate neighborhood of himself and Bob. "Some got away—at least, they didn't come back here. Others who tried to get away have been shot, and some poor fellows were killed on the electric wires."

"Well, I guess we're doomed to stay here then," and Bob sighed. "But it's tough luck!"

Once more Franz looked around. And then, to Bob's surprise, his companion in misery leaned over and whispered:

"There's a chance! Just a bare chance! I can't tell you any more now. One of the guards is looking at us. Lean over and pretend to be tying your shoe!"

Bob did so, his heart thumping hard with the sudden rush of hope. He tried to act naturally.

"Look at these shoes!" he exclaimed, extending his foot as if he were tying a loose lace. "The fellows who caught me took my good ones and left me with these paper things. They're nearly half 'melted' now."

"I had the same luck," said Franz, exhibiting his footwear, which was in the same condition as was Bob's. "But it's all part of the fearful game. Are you hungry?"

"Hungry? Say, that word doesn't fit at all! I'm starved!"

Once more Franz looked cautiously about. The guard's gaze seemed to be removed now, and the young prisoner spoke more freely.

"Come along," he said to Bob. "There's a vacant bunk next to mine. You want to cop it while you have the chance, then we can be together. And don't breathe a word of this to anyone, but I've a couple of chocolate cakes hidden away. They're great for staving off that starved feeling."

"Chocolate!" ejaculated Bob. "For the love of——"

"Hush!" cried Franz. "Do you want me to be robbed of it? I got it off an Englishman who died," he went on. "You see the Red Cross sends packages of food and things like chocolate to the Allied prisoners. Sometimes we get 'em, and, more often, we don't. The Huns know a good thing when they see it. But this Englishman got a package just before he died, and when he found he was going West he divided it out among some of us. I've kept my chocolate ever since, though many a day I've been almost wild to eat it."

"What'd you save it for?" asked Bob. "You didn't know I was coming."

"No, but"—again Franz whispered—"I would need it if I escaped. I was saving it for that."

"And you think there isn't a chance to get away now?"

Franz looked around and cautiously replied: "I think there's a chance, but there's no use dying of

starvation waiting for it. I heard that there is to be another distribution of food packets from the Red Cross soon. We can save some of that, if we get anything, and take it with us if we're lucky enough to break out. Come on, I'll get the chocolate."

Franz led the way to one of the barracks where he and his fellow prisoners were herded. Herded is the right word, too. It was a miserable place. Franz went to his "bunk," which, was a mere apology for a bed. Looking about, to make sure he was not observed, he removed a loose board in the floor and took out a package wrapped in some old rags. In the package were two cakes of sweet chocolate.

"We'll divide one now, and save the other," whispered Franz. "No telling when we'll get more."

Bob never would have believed that chocolate could taste so good. It was nourishing, and small as was his portion and that of Franz, they both felt better after munching the confection and drinking some water.

Miserable days followed Bob's arrival at the prison where Franz was held. In common with other unfortunates, the Khaki Boys were starved, beaten at times, and driven forth to labor for their captors. At night they were herded back to the barracks.

"I don't see how we're ever going to escape," sighed Bob one night after a wearying day. "I'm willing to give up!"

"Don't say that!" urged Franz. "This very night some of us are going to get together in the dark and talk matters over. I have a plan. It may fail, but we might as well be shot while trying to escape as to lead the life we do."

This information seemed to bring new life to Bob.

And that night, between inspections of the guards, a silent band of prison conspirators met in a dark corner of the barracks. Franz whispered to them his plan of escape.

"What do you think of it?" he asked.

"It's desperate," said an Englishman.

"But let's try it!" suggested another. "Otherwise I shall go mad!"

And so the daring resolve was taken.

CHAPTER XXII

THE ESCAPE

Silently, the desperate prisoners crouched in the dark corner of the miserable German camp. Their hearts that had been so deep in despair now beat with new hope.

"Now this is the plan in detail," announced Franz. "We must get it all straight, as the least slip means failure. It's lucky I can speak German like a native. I always despised the language, and when this war broke out and I heard the terrible things the Boches were doing I was ashamed to twist my tongue to the language. But now it comes in mighty handy. I think I can fool the guard at the barracks where they repair the uniforms. Once I get him out of the way it'll be fairly clear sailing. We can pass out in the dark, and, once we get beyond these hateful wires, it'll be the best chance we could hope for. Then it'll be every man for himself, for it won't be safe for so many of us to stick together, even if we are in German uniforms. Now does everyone understand it?"

They all said they did, and then, as it was risky to remain any longer away from their sleeping quarters, they silently stole back to their miserable pallets. But there was hope now, where they had had only despair before.

In brief, the plan made by Franz and some of his companions was this. Not all in the prison pen could be included, as there were too many of them. Some refused to take the chance, and others had plans of their own for getting away.

Franz could, as he said, speak German like a native. He had formed a plot to overpower the officer on guard at the shop where German uniforms were repaired. Then Franz hoped to be able to get inside the shop, pass out a number of German suits to his companions, don one himself, and, under some pretense, lead the daring band out of the pen under cover of darkness.

Such was the bare outline of the plot, but there were many side issues which rendered it much more hazardous than it sounds.

Among the many tasks the Allied prisoners were set at in the German detention camps was the repairing of German uniforms. The Huns were hard put, after the first two years of war, to provide clothing for their troops. And, as the Allies did later, the Boches formulated a salvage plan. That is, the uniforms, when not too badly damaged, were taken from the dead bodies of their soldiers and sent to the rear to be cleaned, mended, and put in shape, to be issued to men whose clothing had worn out in service.

Franz, Bob, and some of the others worked day after day remaking these uniforms, and they knew the inside and outside of the barracks shop where the uniforms were revamped and stored against the time of need.

After dark the uniform shop was deserted, but it was guarded generally by but one officer, as it was somewhat removed from the prisoners' sleeping places.

Franz planned to steal up on this officer as he was on duty in front of the uniform building, overpower him in the most silent way possible, and then don his uniform. He would hide his own miserable suit some place, and also drag the body of the officer out of sight.

Once attired as a German officer and with his knowledge of the language, Franz could move about the prison yard freely. He hoped he would not have to do much talking, however, as he did not know what orders the uniform guard might be under.

However, Franz intended to work quickly. Once he was attired as a Hun, though he hated the uniform, it was his idea to slip into the shop and bring out two other uniforms. Bob would put on one, and one of the other conspirators the remaining suit. Then the trio could move about with but little danger of detection.

Franz then proposed that he, Bob, and their companion should bring from the shop enough German uniforms to fit all who were going to try to escape in this way. They would don them in their sleeping quarters, and then, under cover of darkness, would be led boldly to the main entrance of the prison pen by Franz.

Here was the weakest and most dangerous part of the plot. If for any reason the guard at the gate suspected anything they would all be shot down without mercy.

But here again Franz counted on his knowledge of German. It was often the practice for squads of German soldiers to march into and out of the yard under the guidance of an officer, and Franz hoped he and his friends would be taken for one of these parties. He could give the guard at the gate any reason that seemed feasible for taking the men out at night. All the prisoners were soldiers. They could march in a squad like the Germans, and, though they might not be able to do the "goose step," there would be no need for that.

"Well, we've got to take the chance," said Franz, as he and Bob turned in on their pallets.

"Yes, it's worth taking a lot of chances to get out of this hole," was the answer.

How they lived through the next day Bob, Franz, and the others in the plot hardly recalled afterward. They were wistfully anxious for night to come, and terribly worried lest by some chance the plan might be spoiled.

But fate seemed to favor them. None of them was sent, as sometimes was the case, to labor in distant mines. They were all kept at tasks within or near the prison enclosure, and, to their delight, Bob and Franz were put at work sewing buttons on revamped uniforms.

This gave them a chance to note that an unusual number of repaired suits were ready to be issued. This was another matter that had worried Franz. Sometimes the stock of available uniforms in the shop was exhausted. If that had occurred at this time there would have been none for the escaping prisoners.

"There's enough here for all of us," Franz remarked to Bob, as they stopped work that night.

They filed in to their meagre supper, as did all the prisoners, and, hungry as they all were, each one managed to smuggle away a small piece of bread, or what passed for it, and some other food. For some days past they had been hoarding such victuals as they could, for, once escaped, they must hide in holes, live the best way they could, and subsist on what they found until they could reach Holland or get back to the American lines. And they all hoped to be able to do this, rather than reach the neutral Netherlands, where they would be interned.

It may well be imagined that none of those in the plot to escape slept that night. The hour for the trial was set at two o'clock in the morning, that being the time when the guards would be least on the alert.

And, much as rain was hated, everyone was glad when it began to drizzle shortly after midnight. This meant that the guards would seek such shelter as was available on their posts, and not be quite so alert as they would be were the night fine.

"So far so good!" whispered Franz to Bob, as the time drew near. "I'm going to start now."

He slipped from his hard bed and silently made his way to the door. Franz knew the habits of the guard there. He generally was dozing off at this hour, though it was against the rules. But as no escape had been attempted in a long time, a little carelessness had crept into the iron discipline.

As silently as a cat Franz crept up on this guard. In his hand the Khaki Boy carried a file that had been worn down to what constituted a dagger with a needle point. There was so slight a struggle and commotion at the entrance of the barracks that Bob and the others, breathlessly waiting, hardly heard it. Franz shuddered at the deed he had been obliged to commit, but it was either his life or the guard's.

The lifeless body was dragged out of the way, and then Franz crawled from the building. It was raining harder than ever now, and he was glad of it. Quickly he made his way through the darkness to the clothing shop. He was not stopped, and for this he was also glad. For though he might have got past a sentry in the blackness by giving some excuse, in German, for walking around, there would have been grave danger of discovery. But, as it was, Franz found himself at the clothing depot, and then he began to look for the guard.

"The most likely place he'll be will be in the shelter of the doorway, out of the wet as much as possible," mused Franz. "I'll tackle him there."

As he approached the door to the shop a figure stepped from the doorway, just as he expected.

"Halt! Who comes?" demanded the under-officer in German, as he brought his rifle around ready for instant use.

"I have some important information for you," said Franz, speaking in the tongue he hated. "Hush! do not make an alarm."

As he spoke he drew near to the officer with the sharp-pointed file in readiness.

"What is the information, and who are you?" asked the officer, who was a corporal.

"This!" exclaimed Franz, and he struck true and hard.

There was a gasping, choking cry, hardly audible above the sighing of the wind and the patter of the rain.

"I—I hope I don't have to do this again," thought Franz with a shudder. "It isn't like killing men in battle. But it has to be!"

The way was now clear for him. As quickly as he could he stripped off the corporal's uniform and donned it in place of his own rags. These latter he tossed under the building, where he also hid the body.

Possessing himself of the officer's keys Franz hurried into the shop. Fortunately he knew his way about even in the dark, and he caught up two complete uniforms and two long coats from a pile he had noticed that afternoon near the door, where they were stacked ready to be shipped out in the morning.

Hurrying back to the sleeping shack, clad in the dead officer's uniform, Franz carried with him the two other outfits he had picked up. Quickly Bob and a man named Rayburn donned these suits, and then, in the darkness and rain, they carried away enough uniforms to fit out the entire escaping party.

Feverishly the men worked to get into them, and at last they were outfitted. They were ready to be led to freedom by Franz now, if only fate were kind to them.

"All here?" asked Franz in a whisper.

"All here," answered Bob, who had kept count. Some of the other prisoners awoke, but none would join the escaping party. They regarded the chances as too slim, and they knew what the result would be if they were caught.

Out into the rain and darkness Franz led his squad of "German" soldiers. Boldly they approached the gate. It was the crucial moment. Would they be stopped?

The sentry came out of his little box as Franz led his men up in double file.

"Halt!" came the command, and Franz repeated it.

"Who goes?" demanded the sentry.

"A party from the prison commandant's quarters to bring in a squad of American prisoners," answered Franz. "Our brave fellows have captured some more of the swine."

"Good!" grunted the sentry. "They ought all be shot. You have an order, of course?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Franz, and for a moment his heart went cold. He had not thought of this. In desperation he put his hand in the pocket of the overcoat he had taken from the dead officer.

Franz was about to take out the deadly file, and use it for the third time, but as he felt for it his fingers encountered a paper. He did not know what it was, but he would take a chance. At any rate it would be something in German.

Boldly he took it out and offered it to the guard at the gate. Had there been any slip here Franz was ready to kill the sentry at once. But the latter was intent on getting what he supposed was an order permitting a squad of German soldiers to pass out. He took the document from Franz's shaking hand.

"It is too dark to read," spluttered the guard. "And my flashlight is broken. Pass on!"

"Forward, march!" ordered Franz, in German. And how those words thrilled the prisoners! They filed past the sentry who had turned to go back into his little box. Then, as Bob, who brought up the rear, was about to go through the gate which the sentry had unlocked, something seemed to strike the guard as wrong.

"Your men have no guns, corporal," he said. "And to bring in prisoners——"

"Bah! An unarmed German is a match for any number of the swine-dogs!" returned Franz.

"Right! Pass on!" chuckled the guard.

And the prisoners were outside the gate!

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SECRET PACT

Jimmy and Roger, fighting in the cave with the Bixtons, never afterward could tell exactly how it happened. Certainly by all rules and regulations of personal encounters it ought to have been easy for the two scoundrels, physically comparatively fresh, as they were, to have overcome the Khaki Boys, who were well-nigh exhausted.

But if it is true that fear lends strength, so does righteous rage, and the Khaki Boys possessed this in full measure as they thought of not only what the two brothers had done to them personally, but their traitorous conduct toward their country.

"Hit, and hit hard!" cried Jimmy, as he sprang at Aleck.

"I'm with you!" sang out Roger.

Fists crashed to faces, there were body blows, figures leaped back and forth, casting fantastic shadows in the gleam of the lantern. There were cries of rage and grunts of pain. But, once started, the fight never slackened.

"We've got to down 'em this time, sure!" panted Wilbur, as Roger sent him back against the cave wall with a staggering blow.

"Oh, we'll down 'em!" gasped Aleck, but in his heart he knew the fight was going against him.

Once more the four met in the middle of the cave. Jimmy saw his chance when Aleck lowered his guard for an instant, and then the fist of the Khaki Boy went full and fair to the chin of the plotter.

For an instant Aleck seemed to stand motionless, and then, with a dazed look on his face, he sank to the floor, murmuring:

"I'm out!"

And out he was. No counting off of the ten seconds by a referee was necessary. Jimmy had delivered a knockout blow to his antagonist. At first the sergeant thought his enemy might be dissembling, but a glance at the prostrate figure showed that Aleck was not feigning. He was unconscious.

"I'll do for you now!" fairly roared Wilbur, as he came back with a rush at Roger. The latter was in a bad way, for he had slipped and had sustained a terrific blow from Wilbur's fist. But the remaining Bixton had not counted on Jimmy, and now Roger's chum could come to his aid. And this Jimmy did.

As Wilbur swung past him, to deliver what he hoped would be a finishing blow to Roger, Jimmy put out his foot and tripped the scoundrel.

Wilbur went down heavily, the breath being driven from his body. His head struck against a table leg, so stunning him that it was an easy matter for Roger and Jimmy to leap on him and secure him. Roger, greatly exhausted, sat on Bixton's chest.

"I—I'm all in! I quit!" the signal corps man gasped. "Let me get up!"

"Not much!" panted Jimmy. "We've got you where we want you now. Lively, Roger. We've got to bind and gag these fellows."

"What's the idea of gagging them?"

"So they won't tell we're here."

"Tell who we're here?" asked Roger, who did not get his chum's meaning.

"The Germans who are coming here to carry out some secret pact. You know what we overheard these fellows saying. Well, now I'm going to hide here and see the show out when the Heinies arrive. We'll bind these fellows and hide 'em. Then we'll wait for Mr. Carl Anker and Mr. Fritz Ammann, whoever they may be."

At the mention of these names Wilbur Bixton squirmed, and tried to shake off Roger.

"That'll be about all from you!" cried Jimmy in anger. "Either you'll lie still, you dirty traitor, or we'll put an end to this right now! You tried to kill Roger and me, and we won't show you any more mercy than we would a wild beast. Now lie still!"

He sprang up and took one of the two rifles.

"It's all up!" said Wilbur, and his voice was hopeless. "You fellows win."

"We haven't taken all the tricks yet," observed Jimmy grimly. "The game has only just started. Now, Roger, as soon as you get your breath, take off his uniform and slip it on yourself. I'll do the same for the other—dog!" he added contemptuously.

"What's the idea of changing clothes?" asked Roger.

"There are two ideas in this," answered Jimmy. "One is that our uniforms are wet and theirs are dry. Since they are to blame for the wet suits, it's only fair that they should wear 'em. But we won't take the trouble to re-dress 'em. Let 'em lie in their underclothes. It isn't cold in here."

There was a sound from Aleck, which seemed to indicate that he was regaining consciousness. Jimmy quickly secured the other rifle, and then, having made sure that the Bixtons were unarmed, the work of changing uniforms was begun.

While Jimmy stood on the alert with the rifle, Roger stripped off Wilbur's signal corps uniform. Then Roger changed down to his skin, wringing out his wet underwear and hanging it over a chair to dry. Next he donned the signal corps man's uniform without taking time to first clothe

himself in undergarments.

Wilbur was bound and gagged, being dragged to a dark corner of the cave. Then the same treatment was given Aleck, who came to his senses as he was being bound, and murmured:

"Did we do 'em, Will?"

"I'll answer for your brother," said Jimmy. "He's sort of incapacitated just now, as you'll be a little later. No, you didn't do for us, and you can't now. The jig is up for you fellows."

Aleck did not answer, and soon he was lying beside his rascally brother, incapable of movement or speech. Roger and Jimmy now wore dry uniforms, and the change was grateful.

"Well, so far so good," murmured Roger, as he and his chum found time to rest themselves and catch their breath. "Hello, chocolate in this pocket!" he cried, as he felt a cake in the pocket of the uniform Wilbur had worn.

"Hope I have the same luck," said Jimmy. "Yes," he added a moment later, "I've got some, too. Say, this will come in mighty fine!"

"Well, now what's the game?" asked Roger, as he glanced at his chum. "How much longer are we going to stay here?"

"Until the two men, probably Germans, whom the Bixtons were to meet here, show up," was the answer.

"And then what?"

"Well, as soon as we hear them coming in we'll douse the glim."

"What's the idea? Think we can fight 'em better in the dark?"

"No, but they won't be so apt to notice that we aren't the same signal corps fellows they expected to meet. It's possible one of the Huns may have a pocket flashlight—very probable, in fact. But that won't be very likely to give the game away. They'll see two signal corps uniforms, and they'll take us for the Bixtons, I hope."

"I hate to be taken for such mean skunks!"

"It's in a good cause," replied his chum. "That's the only way we can get to the bottom of this game—and there's some rotten game going on, I'm satisfied of that."

"I guess you're right," agreed Roger. "So you plan to let the two men come in here, thinking we're the Bixtons they're to meet, and get their secret out of 'em that way?"

"If they'll talk, and don't get suspicious, yes."

"There must be two entrances to this cave," said Roger.

"Yes, and maybe more," agreed his companion. "We came in by one—the one nearest the river. The Bixtons came in by a second, and the Germans may come in by a third. All we have to do is wait."

And Jimmy and Roger were glad enough to do this, for they had been through some strenuous times in the last few hours. But the dry clothing, though it was exceedingly rough without underwear, gave warmth to their chilled bodies, and the chocolate had bolstered up their fagging energies.

Together they sat and waited in the cave, wondering when the two expected men would come and what would happen after they arrived. They talked in low voices, and speculated as to the fate of their comrades.

And much the same sort of speculation was going on in the minds of Bob and Franz and also poor Iggy, who alone of the five Brothers, was left with his command.

"First we are of a five, like a hand," mused the Polish lad. "Then we iss of a four when Franz goes away. And den we is of a two when Jimmy and Roger no more comes back. And den Bob, he goes away, and I iss alone. Py jolly, maybe it iss my turns next!"

Roger and Jimmy, sitting in the cave with the light turned low, presently heard a slight noise. At first they imagined it was made by one of their prisoners, but a moment of listening told them it was from another source.

"The Fritzie's are coming!" whispered Roger.

"Be ready," advised his chum. "Have you the rifle?"

"Yes; and Wilbur's revolver, too."

"Good! Here they are, and out goes the glim!"

As he spoke Jimmy turned down the lantern completely, and there followed a guttural exclamation.

"Why is the darkness?" asked a voice in English. "Are you there Herren Bixtons?"

"Um," murmured Jimmy, nudging Roger.

"What is the matter?" asked the voice of the unseen one again. "You tell us to meet you here, and yet you have no light."

"Out of oil," growled Jimmy. "Maybe you have a flashlight. "

"It is out of oil, too!" laughed a second man, and both voices had an unmistakable German accent, though English was spoken fluently enough. "It gives but a little glow. But we have matches, and if there is a bit of a candle—"

"No candle!" returned Jimmy, trying to disguise his voice. "Nothing seems to burn in this rotten hole of a cave," he went on. "It's as damp as a swamp. I've caught such a cold I can hardly speak."

"I was wondering what was the matter with your voice, Herr Wilbur," went on the voice. "Well, we are here, and we do not need to stay long, I suppose. It is not a nice place. As you say it is damp, and, too, there is always danger of discovery. You have brought the information we want, I dare say?" was the question.

"Did you bring more money?" demanded Jimmy, making his tones hoarse. "We've got to have more money, Mr.—er—Ammann."

To his surprise the man laughed. What could occasion mirth at a time like this? Was the trick of Roger and Jimmy discovered?

The next moment he felt a wave of relief as the man said:

"*Ach!* that's what you always do, even in daylight—mistake me, Herr Anker, for Herr Ammann. You Americans are not so smart as you all think, not to know us apart."

Then Jimmy knew he had played to pure luck, and he was filled with delight.

"Well, did you bring the money?" asked Jimmy, following a lead given him by the two prisoners now bound and gagged.

"Yes, we have a little more," answered the other German. "But it is hard to get now. Here it is—in gold. Now you have the plans all made for sending up the smoke signals, yes?"

"We have plans, yes," answered Jimmy. But he did not say what plans they were. Incidentally, they involved the capture of Herr Anker and Herr Ammann.

"Ah! Good!" murmured the one who had described himself as Anker. "You are doing a good deed," he went on as he came up to the table where Jimmy and Bob were seated and sat down. He had drawn from his pocket a flashlamp, but the battery was so nearly exhausted that it gave scarcely more light than a firefly. Jimmy was not afraid of detection in that illumination. "Yes, it is a good deed," the German repeated. "For, by enabling our troops to the more quickly gain a victory, you are bringing peace nearer, and you will thus save many lives."

"Um!" grunted Jimmy. He saw now how the Germans, by this sort of flattery and reasoning, had led on the Bixtons. But, indeed, it required little to corrupt those already evil.

"Now let us make sure all is right," went on one of the Germans, as they sat across the table from Roger and Jimmy in what was almost total darkness. "We bring you the money for the plans of the smoke signals. They are here—you have them?" he asked.

Jimmy had discovered a bundle of papers in the coat he had taken from Aleck, and, guessing them to be what was wanted, drew them out and laid them on the table. But if they should be plans that ought not to fall into the hands of the Huns, Jimmy had no intention of letting Anker and Ammann get away with them.

"If you will repeat the plans, then we will be sure we understand, my friends," suggested Ammann. "Sometimes in translating there is a mix-up. Now you will send up the balls of smoke, as you agreed, to let our gunners know where the American batteries and ammunition dumps are, is it not so? A green ball for an ammunition dump, and a red ball to tell where there is a battery. Two white balls will mean that the previous signals are to be disregarded, and we start afresh. That is what you said, last time. There has been no change?"

"Um—er—no change," said Jimmy grimly, but, he reflected, there was about to be a great change.

"Well, if that is all, we shall take the papers and give you the money we have brought," said Ammann. "Then we shall go. And next we will meet a week from to-night, but in a new place. This is getting unsafe. We had hard work to get here. Your lines are too close. But they will soon be loosed, when we shell the batteries as your smoke signals tell us the location. Ah, it is the only way to end the war and make friends of enemies! The more we kill the sooner the battles will end."

As he spoke he shoved forward a bag that clinked metallically. Jimmy held out the bundle of papers, dimly visible in the faint light.

Jimmy trod on Roger's foot under the table. They had learned all they needed to know. It was now very plain.

For German gold the Bixtons had betrayed their country, they had indicated the secret location of batteries and other engines of war, enabling the Huns to land their destroying shells accurately. The Bixtons, by means of the smoke signals to which they had access and which they could send up secretly, had given the Germans the exact information they wanted. And Ammann and Anker were German spies—the go-betweens.

"*Ach!* For the Fatherland!" exclaimed Anker, as he extended his hand for the bundle of papers Jimmy held out. "I do this for the Fatherland!"

"And I do this for the good old U. S. A.!" cried Jimmy in ringing tones as he leaped to his feet and brought the butt of the rifle down on the head of Anker. At the same time Jimmy yelled: "Let him

have it, Roger!"

And Roger dealt Ammann a smashing blow, so that the two German spies slipped from their chairs together to the floor of the cave. They were now as helpless as were the Bixtons.

CHAPTER XXIV THROUGH THE LINES

"Great work!" cried Roger, as he and Jimmy, lighting the lamp again, made sure that the two Germans, as well as the American traitors, were unable to give further trouble.

"Yes, luck was with us all right," assented Jimmy. "But, oh boy, what a lot this amounts to!"

"You mean finding out about the smoke signals plot?"

"Yes, and all that it takes in. You wouldn't think there could be such skunks on earth as those Bixtons, would you?"

"I should say not!" agreed Roger. Though the traitors were gagged their ears were open, and if they had a spark of manhood left they must have squirmed.

"You can't blame the Germans so much," went on Jimmy. "They were working for their country, not against it, and they probably thought what they did was all right. But it was up to us to put 'em out of business."

"And I guess you did to the one you hit all right," said Roger. "Looks as if he was done for."

"Couldn't be helped," was Jimmy's grim reply. "It was the spies or us. How's your man?"

"Well, I hit him pretty hard."

This was evident. Spurred by the necessity for acting with vigor and promptness, the Khaki Boys had struck hard. Both the Germans were unconscious, and, as developed later, one was so badly hurt that he died.

"Well, what's the next move?" asked Roger, as they sat down and looked at one another. Their nerves were a bit unsteady, and no wonder. They had passed through a strenuous time in the last fifteen hours.

"We've either got to take these fellows somewhere to give them up to the army authorities, or get word to our boys that the scoundrels are here," Jimmy said. "There may be more of the signal corps men involved in this spy work, and it ought to be known. But I don't see how we can very well take all four to our lines, provided we can find the lines. This fellow," and he pointed to the badly injured spy, "can't walk."

"Why not leave these two here in the cave, tied as tightly as we can manage?" suggested Roger.

"What about the Bixtons?" Jimmy asked.

"I fancy if we march behind them with their own loaded rifles we can induce them to go ahead of us to our lines," remarked Roger. "Later on the Germans can be attended to. They won't be very likely to run away."

"Say, I guess you've got the right dope!" Jimmy exclaimed. "We'll do just that. But it's late now, and probably as dark as a pocket outside. We can't find our way to the American lines now. Better stay here in the cave until morning."

"That's the best thing to do," decided Roger. "If any more spies show up we'll be ready for 'em, though I'm sick of this kind of fighting."

"So'm I," agreed Jimmy.

They cut into strips some of the German civilians' own garments, and with these bound the two spies. There was no need to gag them, since all danger of any of the plotters giving premature warning was passed. Indeed there seemed to be no need of binding the badly wounded Hun, but Jimmy and Roger were taking no chances.

During this process, by the light of the lantern the Khaki Boys made sure of the identity of the Germans. They were the same men who had been seen in the dugout, and there was no question now but what the Bixtons had been the two soldiers seen.

Having the instincts of humanity, Roger and Jimmy made their prisoners as comfortable as the circumstances would allow. They took the gags from the mouths of the Bixton brothers and gave them water. But the traitors spoke no word. The lesser wounded German begged for a drink, and it was given to him. The other remained in a stupor, though the Khaki Boys washed the wound on his head and bound it up.

Then passed the long night.

In the morning, not very much refreshed, as may be imagined, by the weary, hungry hours spent in the cave, Jimmy and Roger ventured forth. They found the entrance by which the Bixtons and the spies had come in, and from this point, which was on a hill, they were afforded a good view of the surrounding country.

"There's smoke over there," said Jimmy, pointing to what, at first, seemed to be a fog.

"Yes," agreed his companion. "Maybe it's smoke of battle or some burning village. But it means there have been men there, and that's more than can be said of this vicinity. It's deserted."

This was true enough. Though there were evidences all about that fighting had gone on in the neighborhood, there was no sign of habitation near the cave, and no inhabitants.

"Let's start for that smoke," said Jimmy. "It's an even break that we meet our lines somewhere over that way. That's the logical place for them to be, considering the fighting of yesterday. Let's hike for there, and drive the Bixtons ahead of us."

"I'm with you!" cried Roger.

There was no necessity of waiting for breakfast—there was no breakfast to be had. Jimmy and Roger donned their underwear, which had dried by this time, and then, again putting on the Bixton's uniforms, the two lads gave their orders.

"We're going to let you wear our uniforms," said Jimmy, "because they're still wet and, as it was your doing that made them so, it's up to you to stand the dampness."

The Bixtons said nothing. There was nothing they could say. Their bonds were loosed and, having seen that the Germans were still securely tied, Jimmy and Roger, taking their foes' guns, made the plotters march out of the cave.

"What are you going to do with us?" growled Aleck, as they were told to hike down the hill in the direction of the distant smoke.

"March you back to your company where you belong. They'll know what to do with you," said Jimmy.

"Look here!" begged Wilbur. "You've got us right, boys. We ain't going to crawl. But do you know what it means if we have to go back?"

"Yes, I know," said Jimmy soberly.

"Then turn us loose. Give us a chance, anyhow!"

"A chance to help kill some more of our boys?" cried Roger. "I guess not! You had your chance, and you didn't take it. You preferred to sell it to the Huns. Move along!" he cried.

The Bixtons saw that pleadings were useless, but later on they made one more attempt to free themselves. As they drew nearer the smoke it was seen that it came from a burning village, and a little later, as they entered the outskirts of the desolate and smoking town they saw signs which indicated that it had been recently occupied and deserted by Germans.

"They must be in retreat!" cried Jimmy. "Our boys can't be far away."

"You're right!" assented Roger. "If we go this way," and he pointed to the west, "we ought to come to our lines."

"You're wrong!" said Wilbur quickly. "Our lines lie over that way. I ought to know, for we came from there last night. Our lines are there," and he pointed to the east.

"You've got nerve—calling 'em 'our' lines!" declared Jimmy. "You don't belong to the American army any more."

"Do you suppose he can be right?" asked Roger in a low voice of his chum. "Maybe our lines are in that direction."

"It only needs their telling me to go east to make me go west!" exclaimed Jimmy. "Naturally they don't want to be taken back to the company they dishonored. They want to escape to the Germans they served. No, sir! We march west!"

And west they went.

It was about half an hour after this that Roger and Jimmy, driving the Bixtons before them, saw a group of American soldiers coming toward them over a shell-torn field.

"Home again!" cried Jimmy.

At the sight of Jimmy and Roger, with guns held in readiness, marching two other Americans soldiers ahead of them the party of Sammies, under the leadership of a sergeant, broke into a double quick, and soon reached the Khaki Boys.

"What's all this?" demanded the sergeant. "Who are you two with the guns, and what are these? Deserters?" he asked, pointing to the Bixtons.

"Worse than deserters! They're traitors!" said Jimmy. "And we left two German spies back in the cave. We've found out the secret of the smoke signals. We'd like to report to the officer commanding this sector, and deliver our prisoners."

"Smoke signals, eh?" exclaimed Sergeant Walton, who had charge of a party out in search of possibly forgotten wounded men. "That's queer. A squad of our boys, several squads, in fact, are out looking for two of the smoke signal machines which the signal corps reports missing since last night."

All eyes were turned toward the Bixtons. But they maintained their policy of silence.

"Come on, I'll take you to the K. O.," offered the sergeant.

This was done, and Roger and Jimmy soon turned over their prisoners and gave an account of the whole proceeding from the time they were knocked senseless until they attacked and caught the

German spies. Then, after the boys had accurately described the location of the cave, a party was sent there to bring back the two Huns. The one had considerably improved, being but stunned, but the other never regained consciousness, and died that night.

But with the capture of the Bixtons and the finding of the papers which they had prepared to give the Germans in exchange for gold, the whole secret plot was exposed.

The two scoundrels had, more than once, sent up the smoke signals which enabled the Boches to locate hidden batteries or machine-gun emplacements. And to work their latest plot the brothers had taken into the woods one of the new smoke caldrons. They had sold their honor—and had brought death to many of their companions through greed for gold. It was during one of their secret conferences with the spies that the Khaki Boys had seen the Bixtons in the dugout. And only for their capture in the cave a grave disaster might have befallen the American army through the traitorous conduct of the Bixtons.

For they had planned, by sending up more smoke signals from another machine which they had taken to the woods, to disclose the location of a great battery of new, big naval guns, designed to smash the German lines.

The successful attack of Roger and Jimmy came at just the right time. The plot was foiled and the plotters caught. And, to end an unpleasant subject, it might be said here that the Bixtons were tried by court martial shortly afterward, found guilty, and executed, as was the remaining German spy.

"Well, that's over," said Roger, a week after their strenuous time in the cave and on the day of the traitors' execution. "It was tough, but it had to be done. And now I hope they'll let us get back to our old Five Hundred and Ninth."

"I'm with you there!" cried Jimmy. "I want to see Bob and Iggy. I don't suppose there's any news of Franz yet."

"Maybe not, but I hope there is," sighed Roger.

In due time they were sent back to their command, bearing with them the highest praise from the army authorities for their success in frustrating the smoke plot. And something more substantial than thanks was to follow.

"Iggy! Old scout Iggy!" cried Roger and Jimmy, as they greeted the Polish lad in a dugout where they found him, not far from the front lines now occupied by the Five Hundred and Ninth. "How are you, Iggy, and where's Bob?"

Ignace Pulinski rubbed his eyes, and shook his head.

"How can I dream when I awake am?" he said. "Py jolly, it seems real like!"

"What's real like, you old chunk?" demanded Roger.

"Seeing you and Jimmy Blazes," was the answer. "Of a dream I know it iss! Yet I am not asleep! Of a queerness it is!"

"Of course it isn't a dream! We're as real as yourself!" laughed Jimmy. "Come out of the gas and tell us where Bob is!"

It took some little time to convince Iggy that it was not all a dream, but when he had shaken hands with them and they had clapped him most heartily on the back, he exclaimed:

"Oh, of such gladness am I! If only Bob was here now—and Franz, too, then would be the five Brudders ag'in!"

"What! isn't Bob here?" cried Jimmy.

Iggy shook his head.

"I see him not when we a big fight had," he explained. "Dot was after you two go away. First we was of a five, den it was of a fourness we was. You go and it was of a twoness—Bob and me. And den of Bob, he go away some place I know not. I am of a oneness, and what you call—er—by myselfness—"

"You mean lonesomeness," suggested Roger.

"Him it is!" cried Iggy. "I was such a lonesomeness, but now I am of a gladness. Only if we could find Bob and Franz!"

"It would be great!" sighed Jimmy. "Well, we'll keep on hoping."

They spent the rest of that day exchanging experiences—Roger, Jimmy and Iggy. Toward the close of the afternoon the three Brothers were ordered to the front lines. It was rumored that a big attack impended, though whether it would be made by the Americans or the Germans was not certain.

And shortly after Roger, Jimmy, and Iggy had taken their places in the traverse, with No Man's Land in front of them, the whole section of the line near them was thrown into a panic by the discharge of a rifle. It was but a single shot, and so quickly was a whistle command shrilled forth that there was to be no more firing, that there was no general fusillade, such as often follows a case of this kind. Even the Germans did not fire in a panic, as sometimes happened. Perhaps the reason for that was because of the distance of the two lines of trenches at this point, the wire entanglements being half a mile apart.

"Wonder what that means?" asked Roger, as he and his two chums got down off the firing step, it

being evident that there was to be no engagement for the present.

"A couple of Germans caught out in No Man's Land," was the answer of a messenger who came through the trench just then. "Guess they'll wish they'd stayed at home."

"Germans!" exclaimed Jimmy. "They truly had nerve to come out in the open."

He and his chums were discussing the strange incident when a messenger hurried up.

"Sergeants Blaise and Barlow and Corporal Pulinski ordered to report to the captain," was the crisp message.

In surprise Roger, Jimmy, and Iggy looked at one another.

"Wonder if this has anything to do with the capture of the two Germans," said Roger.

"How could that be?" asked Iggy.

"Maybe there's some connection between them and the two spies we found in the cave," suggested Jimmy.

"Maybe," agreed Roger. "Well, we'll go see what's wanted, anyhow."

The messenger escorted them to a dugout where the captain of their company was stationed. He smiled as he saw the three, and then it dawned on the Khaki Boys that the matter could not be very serious.

"I sent for you to see if you could identify these two prisoners caught wearing German uniforms between our lines and the enemy's just now," said the captain. "They claim to know you."

He indicated two ragged, dirty youths in the characteristic uniform of the Kaiser's soldiers. They stood with their backs to Roger, Jimmy, and Iggy.

"Claim to know us!" exclaimed Jimmy. "I don't see how that can be."

"You don't!" cried one of the "Germans," as he wheeled about.

"Going back on us, are you?" yelled the other.

For an instant Roger, Jimmy, and Iggy stood with dropped jaws and widely opened eyes. And then, simultaneously, there burst from the trio the shout:

"Bob! Franz!"

A moment later the five reunited Brothers were clasped in each others' arms—yes, they fairly hugged one another, straining breast to breast, and they were not ashamed of the tears in their eyes.

"Do you recognize the prisoners?" asked the captain, with a laugh.

"Do we! Say, Captain, how soon before we're going to fight?" cried Jimmy.

"Oh, I guess I can let you have a few hours off to celebrate," came the answer. "Is that what you wanted me to say?"

"That's it, sir!" answered Jimmy with a snappy salute, in which the other Khaki Boys joined.

"And now for a talk!" cried Bob, as they marched back to a dugout behind the front lines.

As the readers are well acquainted with all that happened to Roger and Jimmy, details of the story they told to Bob and Franz need not be gone into. Similarly, they are acquainted with what happened to Franz and Bob up to the point when they, with their comrades in the liberation plot, escaped from the German prison camp, wearing Hun uniforms.

"And we have had one whale of a time since then!" said Bob, in telling the story of their journey back to the American lines.

He and Franz had suffered unimaginable hardships. They separated from the others, as it seemed safest not to travel in a large party. What happened to their fellow prisoners Bob and Franz did not hear until long afterward. Some reached safety, but many were recaptured or were killed.

Bob and Franz traveled mostly at night, and the knowledge Schnitzel had of German saved them more than once. Eventually, when almost ready to give up, they reached a place where the 509th and brigaded regiments opposed a strong German division.

And then, more by good luck than anything else, Bob and Franz, still wearing the ragged German uniforms, found a gap in the Hun lines and got through it to No Man's Land. Then they headed for the American trenches.

As they were in uniform, it was seen at once that they were not spies, though one over-zealous Sammie fired on them. At first the Americans thought they were about to receive two German deserters, as frequently happened. But once in custody Bob and Franz disclosed their identity, and, learning that Roger, Jimmy, and Iggy were in the neighborhood, asked that they be sent for.

The rest has already been told.

"Every man ready!"

"Every man ready, sir!"

This was the report that went up and down the trenches. The five Brothers, reunited after such stirring experiences, heard it as they stood together ready to leap up on the firing step and go over the top.

Behind them big cannon waited but a signal to the gunners to belch forth flame and destruction. Every one was on the alert.

It was a day following a tremendous battle, when the German lines had been smashed, torn apart and thrown into confusion, and when the fleeing Huns, driven from their stronghold by the masterful work of Foch and Pershing with the other Allied commanders, were endeavoring to save themselves from disaster.

"A little bit more of this, and we'll finish the job," remarked Jimmy, as he looked at his wrist watch.

"What time is it?" asked Bob.

"Nearly eleven. Why?"

"Well, I heard a rumor that the Germans had asked for a cessation of hostilities, to begin about noon, in order to get ready to sign an armistice."

"Don't you believe it!" exclaimed Franz. "The Huns won't know they're beaten until we grind their faces down in the mud! Listen to that! Talk about ceasing hostilities!"

It was the sound of heavy artillery on the American side, and the sound came nearer, like rolling thunder over the distant hills.

"Guess we're going in all right," said Jimmy, and there was a grim look on his face. "Fellows, we've had some hard fighting these last few days. A little bit more of it, and we may finish up. But ——Oh, well, what's the use talking? If we live through it, we live—that's all. I wonder——"

His words were smothered in a terrific burst of fire from the guns back of them.

"Laying down a barrage!" shrilled Bob in Roger's ear. "Here's where we go over the top!"

Tensely they stood waiting for the order. It never came.

Suddenly, as if by magic, the terrific noise ceased. Where a moment before there had been a crashing as if of whole worlds smashing into collision in vast space, now there was a quietness that was startling.

"Cease firing!"

The order came just as the hands on Jimmy's watch pointed to eleven o'clock.

What did it mean? And then, faintly at first, but gathering momentum like a mighty wind, the word went up and down the trenches.

"The armistice is signed!"

"That means the war is practically over," said Bob.

"Maybe not," returned Jimmy. "There may still be much for us to do."

And that he was right will be learned by reading the next volume of this series, to be called, "The Khaki Boys Along the Rhine; or, Winning the Honors of War."

THE END

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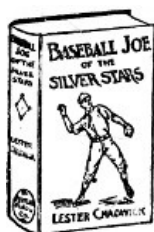
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