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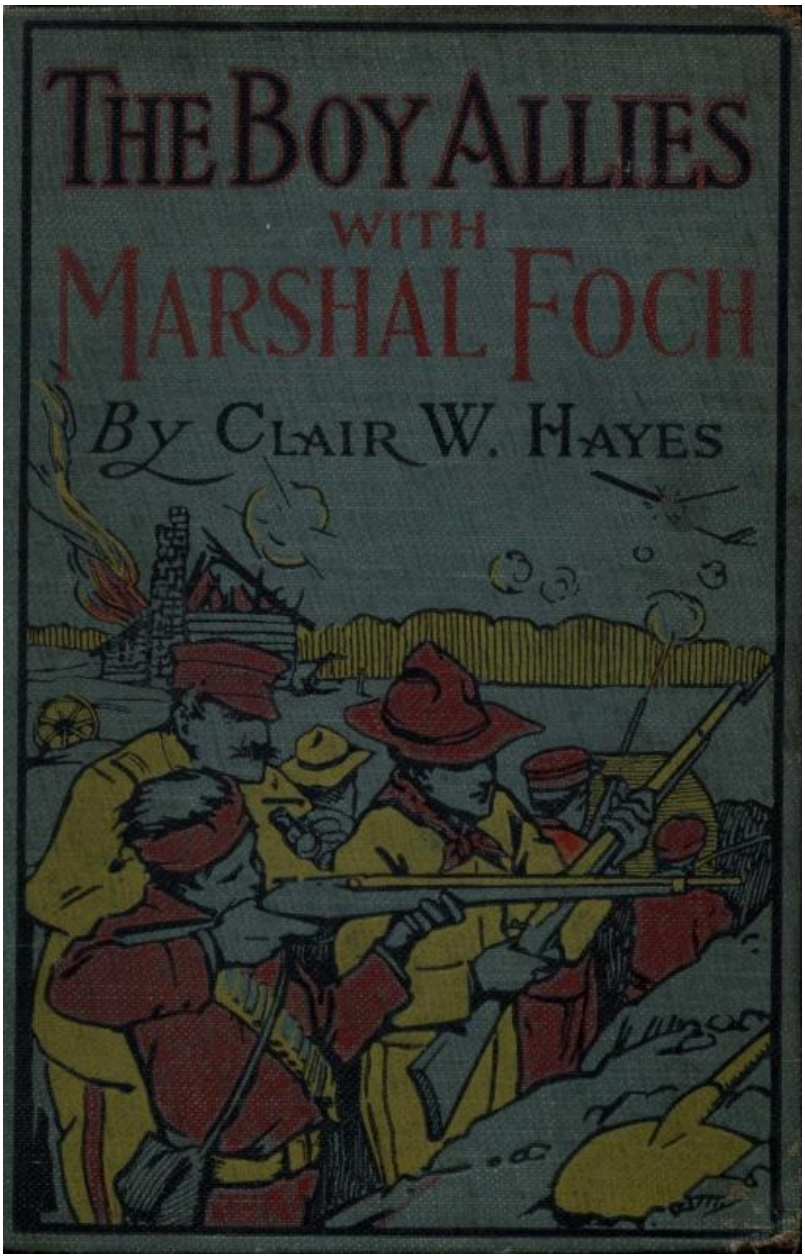

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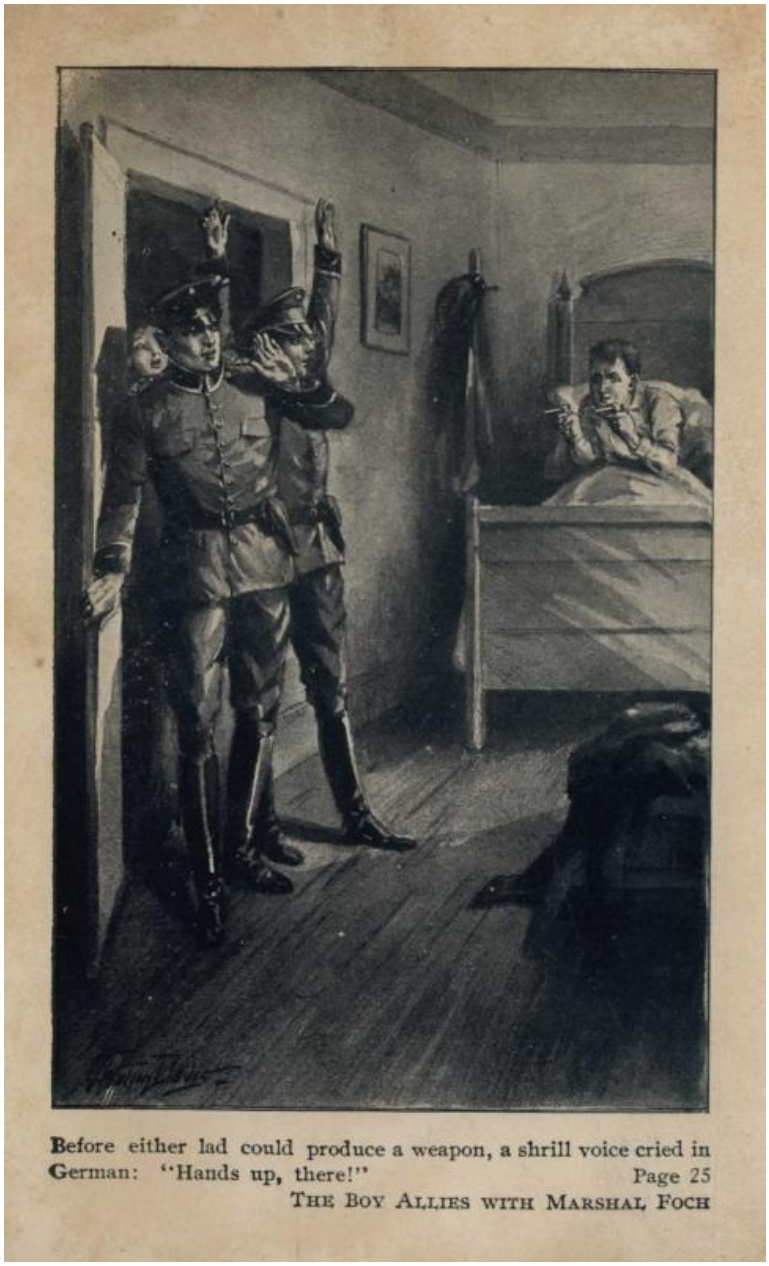

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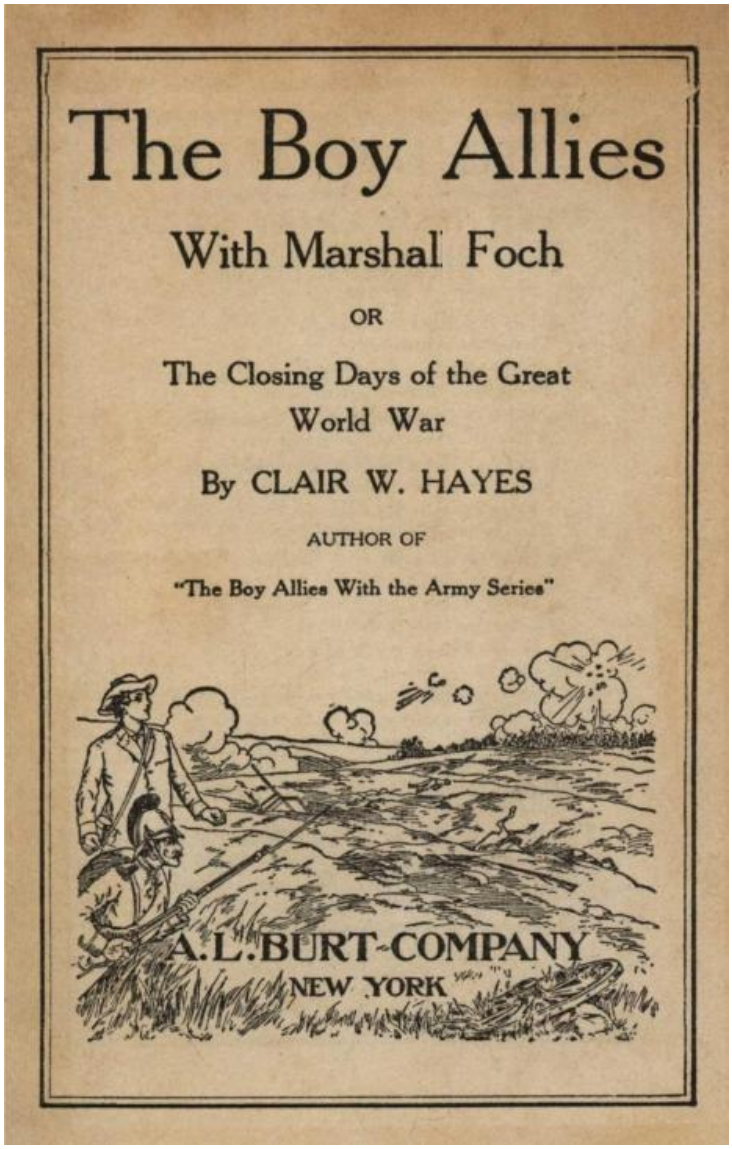

Title page

The Boy Allies

With Marshal Foch

OR

The Closing Days of the Great
World War

By CLAIR W. HAYES

AUTHOR OF

"The Boy Allies With the Army Series"

A. L. BURT COMPANY
NEW YORK

THE BOY ALLIES

(Registered in the United States Patent Office)

WITH THE ARMY SERIES

By Clair W. Hayes

The Boy Allies at Liege or, Through Lines of Steel

The Boy Allies on the Firing Line or, Twelve Days Battle along the Marne

The Boy Allies with the Cossacks or, A Wild Dash over the Carpathians

The Boy Allies in the Trenches or, Midst Shot and Shell along the Aisne

The Boy Allies in Great Peril or, With the Italian Army in the Alps

The Boy Allies in the Balkan Campaign or, The Struggle to Save a Nation

The Boy Allies on the Somme or, Courage and Bravery Rewarded

The Boy Allies at Verdun or, Saving France from the Enemy

The Boy Allies under the Stars and Stripes or, Leading the American Troops to the Firing Line

The Boy Allies with Haig in Flanders or, The Fighting Canadians of Vimy Ridge

The Boy Allies with Pershing in France or, Over the Top at Chateau-Thierry

The Boy Allies with the Great Advance or, Driving the Enemy through France and Belgium

The Boy Allies with Marshal Foch or, The Closing Days of The Great World War.

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THE BOY ALLIES WITH MARSHAL FOCH

CHAPTER I
GOOD NEWS

"Heard the news, Hal?" asked Chester excitedly as he dashed into the small but comfortable dugout where the two boys were quartered with the Thirty-second division of American troops a few miles to the east of Rheims.

"No," replied Hal Paine, "what news?"

"Austria has sued for peace; it's the beginning of the end."

"Rats!" said Frank. "I've heard that before. I guess you're a bit premature, Chester."

"Not a bit of it," declared Major Chester Crawford emphatically. "I had the news from Colonel O'Neil himself. He says Austria has made overtures for an armistice, looking toward a permanent peace."

"Oh, an armistice," said Major Paine. "That's a horse of another color."

"But it means peace soon," protested Chester.

"It might ordinarily," Hal agreed, "but you must remember that dealing with enemies such as we have now, there is no telling what may happen. I don't know so much about the Austrians, but the Germans are a treacherous lot, and I've no doubt that long association with men of that ilk has taught the Austrians a thing or two. No, Chester, take my word for it, there is nothing to your news. Even if the Austrians have made such overtures, you may be sure there is a trick in it some place."

"By Jove! You're an optimistic sort, aren't you?" said Chester.

"Well," said Hal. "I'm not quite as credulous as you seem to be. Besides, why should Austria sue for peace now? It's true that she is getting the worst of the argument, as is Germany; but to my mind she is a long way from being compelled to throw up the sponge. Then, too, she wouldn't have the nerve to leave Germany in the lurch."

"All the same, I'm taking the news for true," declared Chester.

Hal shrugged his shoulders.

"To whom were these overtures addressed?" he asked at length.

"To President Wilson."

"Is that so? Well, it would seem that the Austrians had looked to the proper place. It would seem they knew who, perhaps, would let them down the easiest."

"But they won't be let down easily," said Chester. "What's the matter with you anyhow? You know as well as I do that they must make full reparation for the ruin they have caused."

"Exactly," said Hal, "which is the reason I say that no such overtures have been made; or if they have, they were prompted by some hidden motive."

"Personally," said Chester, "I don't care what you think. You are so confounded wise it's a wonder General Pershing hasn't resigned in your favor."

"Come, now, Chester," replied Hal. "Don't get sore. Can't you take a little joke?"

"I don't call that much of a joke. I came with a piece of news I thought you would be anxious to hear, and all you've done is scoff."

"Never mind," said Hal. "Personally, as I have said, I am inclined to the belief that you are all wrong, but at the same time I hope you are right. However, time will tell."

Chester was about to reply, but the sound of hurried footsteps without restrained him. A moment later there was a knock at the door.

"Come in," called Hal.

A lieutenant, whom the lads recognized as attached to Colonel O'Neil's staff, entered and came to attention.

"What is it, lieutenant?" asked Chester.

"Colonel O'Neil desires your presence in his quarters at once, sir," replied the lieutenant; "and, Major Paine also."

"We shall follow you at once, lieutenant," said Hal, reaching for his helmet, which lay on his cot.

The lieutenant saluted again, turned on his heel and departed. Hal and Chester followed him a few moments later.

"I thought it was about time we had something to do," said Hal as they hurried along.

"Right," Chester agreed. "We've been pretty quiet for the last week. I shall be glad to get busy again."

"Here too."

Hal Paine and Chester Crawford, natives of a small Illinois town, had been chums from early childhood. Together they had gone to school, toured the lumber country of the northwest where Hal's father owned large tracts of land; travelled extensively, and fought and played. So close had they been in their school days that their companions had dubbed them "The Boy Allies." More than one lad of more mature years had found to his sorrow that when he "picked on" one of them he had two to contend with.

At the outbreak of the great European war Hal and Chester were in Berlin with the former's mother. They were caught there by the German mobilization, and in attempting to get out of the German capitol, were separated from Mrs. Paine. Thrown thus upon their own resources, the two lads gave the first evidence of that resourcefulness which later was to stand them in good stead.

They joined forces with a French and an English officer and, after considerable excitement and adventure, reached the Belgian frontier just in time to be with the forces of King Albert when they made their desperate but futile stand at Liege.

In an unofficial capacity, the boys were able to render some little assistance to the Belgian commander, and later, through the latter's efforts, were permitted to join the Belgian forces. Several months later they found themselves commissioned lieutenants.

Hal and Chester had seen active service in all the theaters of war. They were with the British in France and Flanders; they served under General Joffre and under General Petain, French commanders, at the first battle of Verdun, when the German advance was checked just as it seemed the enemy must break through to Paris. They fought with the Cossacks on the eastern front, with the Italians in the Alps and with the Serbians and Montenegrins in the Balkans.

At the time the United States declared war on Germany, Hal and Chester were captains in the service of King George of England, serving at the time under Field Marshal Haig. With other Americans in the allied army, however, they were selected to return to the United States, where for some months they lent invaluable service to Uncle Sam in drilling raw recruits at the army training camps.

Such excellent reputations had they won, however, that when the first American expeditionary force sailed for France, Hal and Chester found themselves among them. Since their return, they had taken active parts in the American advance. They had been with the Marines at Chateau-Thierry and Belleau Wood; they had been with the heroic Thirty-second division which had won undying fame in the Argonne forest, where the American forces had been all but annihilated under the German fire.

Now they had been resting for several days.

The turning point in the great war had come and gone. The full power of American might was making itself felt on the western battle front, where the Yankee troops time and again had proved themselves the masters of the best the German emperor had to offer. The tide had turned at Chateau-Thierry in the early summer, and from that time on the Americans, under the leadership of "Black Jack" Pershing, had pressed their advantage at every opportunity.

To the unprejudiced observer it was apparent that the Germans were already beaten. True, they might fight on for days, weeks or months, but their offensive power had been broken by the million and more Americans who had been hurled against them. There was nothing at the moment to indicate that the German emperor, his advisors, or the German people, were willing to cry for peace, but it was plain that the ultimate outcome was only a question of time.

From time to time came rumors of internal disorders in Germany. These, however, could not be substantiated, and for that reason it was impossible to tell that Germany was on the eve of a revolution.

Gradually the allies and the American forces had pushed their battle lines toward the east. Much of France and of Belgium, for almost four years occupied by the Germans, had been

reclaimed. Everywhere, where there was fighting, the advantage rested with the allies. No longer did the Germans dash to the attack with the impetuosity that characterized their attacks in the early dawn of the war. Their morale had been broken.

Even the crack Prussian Guards, the flower of the German army, had been decisively beaten by the Americans at Chateau-Thierry. Hurled into the battle at the last moment in an attempt to stem the advance of American soldiers and marines, they had proved unequal to the task. The Yankees had proved their masters at every turn.

There was nothing for the Germans to do but retreat. This they did, slowly, contesting every inch of the ground. Gradually, however, their retreat became faster, and at some places it developed into utter rout.

Late in July of 1918 the enemy had been cleared from the greater part of France and Belgium. In fact, in Alsace-Lorraine, American troops were on German soil and threatening the strong fortresses of Metz and Strassburg. Germans had been cleared from the Argonne forest, which, in the enemy's possession, had proved one of the greatest menaces to the allied advance.

It appeared that the time was drawing near for a decisive blow by Marshal Foch.

The time was to come sooner than either Hal or Chester could possibly have conceived, and both boys were to bear a full burden of the fighting.

At the quarters of Colonel O'Neil, Hal and Chester waited a few moments before being ushered into the former's presence. But their time came eventually, and they hurried into Colonel O'Neil's office and stood at attention.

Colonel O'Neil looked up.

"Well, how do you feel, Major?" he asked of Hal.

"Pretty well, sir."

"Good. And you, Major Crawford?"

"Very well, sir."

"Good," said Colonel O'Neil again. "I'm glad to hear it, for I've an important piece of work that must be done at once and I wouldn't feel like calling upon you unless you are perfectly fit."

"We're perfectly fit, sir," declared Chester eagerly.

"Draw up chairs here, then," said the colonel.

The boys obeyed.

CHAPTER II
THROUGH THE LINES

"I suppose," said Colonel O'Neil, "you have both heard the rumor that Austria has sued for peace?"

"Yes, sir," replied Chester, "and I have tried to convince Hal of it, but he is inclined to be skeptical."

"And with good reason," declared Colonel O'Neil. "I don't place much confidence in the report myself. Nor, it seems, do my superiors. In fact, it is in regard to that report that I have summoned you here."

Hal smiled slightly.

"To me it seems the report is too good to be true," he volunteered.

"My sentiments exactly, Major," said Colonel O'Neil. "Nevertheless, it is, of course, possible that the report is true, and if it is true, it is the beginning of the end. However, before the general staff can take advantage of the report, it must be verified absolutely. With Austria suing for peace, and Bulgaria and Turkey virtually out of the war, we can strike such a blow at the Germans on the west front as will mean the end of the war before Christmas."

"I see," said Chester, "and it is to obtain confirmation of the report that you have summoned us?"

"Exactly," declared the colonel. "It stands to reason that if Austria has made peace overtures, the German general staff will know of it. Also, for that matter, will practically every man in the German army. It would appear that if we could place a man behind the enemy's lines, he could, with caution and discretion, learn the truth of the matter. I have called you here to offer you this opportunity."

"And we accept it, of course, sir," declared Hal.

"Of course," Chester repeated after his chum.

"Good!" exclaimed Colonel O'Neil. "I knew I could depend on you. General Rowan asked me to put the mission in the most capable hands I could find, and being familiar with your records, I know that my selection could not be better."

"Thank you, sir," said Hal and Chester in a single voice.

"Now," went on the colonel, "I don't want to hamper you with a lot of foolish and needless instructions, but I do want to impress upon you that the sooner the matter is cleared up the better. You will both be granted indefinite leave of absence, but I would ask that you return at the earliest possible moment."

"We shall, sir," said Chester quietly.

"Very well, then," replied Colonel O'Neil; "that is all."

The lads saluted and left the colonel's quarters.

"Well," said Hal, as they made their way back to their own quarters, "this is an expedition after my own heart."

"Right," Chester agreed. "I suppose that it's necessary to keep some of us sitting quietly around here, but at the same time I would rather it were someone besides me."

"Same here. But I'll bet some of the rest of the fellows would be tickled to death with our luck."

"Naturally; why shouldn't they be? Now the question before the house is the best method of crossing safely into the German lines."

"And of getting safely out again," said Hal dryly.

"That goes without saying. But we've got to get there first. The return trip will be considered later."

"There are ways enough of getting there," said Hal. "Automobile, airplane, afoot or a-horseback. Take your choice."

"Airship for me," said Chester; "its quicker and promises a greater degree of success."

"I'll make that unanimous," said Hal. "Airship is my vote, too."

"Guess we'd better wait until along toward midnight, though," Chester suggested.

"Why?"

"Well, chiefly because there is less likelihood of our being discovered at that hour. Guards will be posted, of course, but we've eluded them before and we can do it again. Also, arriving within the enemy's lines after midnight, will give us the chance of mingling with the German troops without so great a risk of discovery."

"Any way suits me," said Hal. "First thing to do, now that we have decided upon our means of locomotion, is to find a plane."

"I'll commandeer one from Captain Nicholas," said Chester.

"All right. Tell him to have it ready at midnight sharp."

"Right," said Chester and hastened away.

Hal meantime returned to their quarters and threw himself down upon his bunk. He was reclining at ease when Chester entered to report the airplane arranged for.

"Captain Nicholas said he would have it in flying trim exactly at midnight," said Chester. "Now, my advice is that we discard our uniforms and climb into German attire if we can round up the necessities."

"Guess that can be done, too, without any trouble," said Hal. "We've plenty of prisoners here. All we have to do is to change with them. I should say that Captain Nicholas could attend to that, too."

"I'll suggest it to him," said Chester, and took his departure.

The lad was back within the hour with two German uniforms, which had once adorned the forms of German captains of infantry.

"Seems we're losing rank here," commented Hal with a laugh. "You might at least have robbed a couple of generals or field marshals."

"Take what you can get these days and be thankful," grinned Chester. "Also, ask no questions. According to Captain Nicholas, even this pair of captains objected strenuously to being deprived of their uniforms. I imagine a general would have put up a terrible howl."

"You're probably right," Hal agreed. "Well, we'll be satisfied with what we have. If we're discovered it won't make much difference whether we're attired as privates or the kaiser himself."

"No, a firing squad could shoot through one as well as the other," Chester replied. "Now, all we have to do is wait until midnight."

"In which event," said Hal, "I shall woo sweet morpheus for two hours and fifteen minutes."

"Two hours and fifteen minutes is right," said Chester after a glance at his watch. "I'll follow suit."

Five minutes later both lads were stretched out in their bunks fast asleep. They slept soundly, but not so soundly, however, that they did not wake at the desired minute.

At fifteen minutes to twelve, Hal opened his eyes and sat up. Chester yawned, stretched and sat up a minute later.

"Time to be moving," he said, glancing at his watch again.

"Right," Hal agreed. "I'll be inside this German uniform in three minutes by the clock."

He was; and Chester found himself suitably attired a moment later.

"Now for the plane," said the latter.

He led the way to where a two-seated biplane was being guarded by several soldiers.

"All right, men," said Hal, "you can turn in now. We'll take charge of this craft."

The soldiers saluted and took their departure.

"Let's be moving," said Chester. "Into the pilot's seat with you, Hal."

"Thought maybe you wanted to do the driving this time, Chester," said Hal.

"That's a poor joke, Hal," declared Chester. "I don't want to die right this minute, and I guess you don't, either."

"Which is the reason I'm not going to argue with you who will do the piloting," Hal declared.

He clambered into the pilot's seat, and Chester took his place in the observer's compartment.

"All set?" called Hal.

"All set," was Chester's reply.

"Let her go, then," said Hal, and the single guard who had remained gave the machine momentum with a vigorous push.

The machine moved slowly across the ground at first, then, under Hal's guiding hand, dashed on swifter and swifter. Hal touched the elevating lever and the airplane soared into the air.

Now Chester had been aloft many times, but he had never reached a point where he was not affected by the sensation of the earth dropping away from him. For a moment he clung to the side of the car. His head cleared, in a twinkling, however, and he breathed a sigh of relief.

"All right, Chester," Hal called back, not taking the time to turn his head.

"All right," was Chester's reply. "Step on her, Hal."

Hal obeyed this injunction, and the plane darted in the direction of the distant enemy like a big bird.

There was no light aboard the craft that carried the two lads toward the German lines. On either side, above and below, however, Hal could see now. and then a faint twinkle, indicating that other American craft, bent upon no such dangerous mission as Hal and Chester, still were on the alert to prevent a possible surprise attack by the foe.

These lights were soon gone, however, and now all that Chester could see was the faint outline of Hal's head before him. He looked back, but the last of the American lights had been lost in the distance. Ahead, the German lines were still too far distant for a plane to be distinguishable should it be on guard aloft.

The night was very dark. For this Hal felt thankful, for it meant that, barring accidents and the rays of German searchlights, he had more opportunity of guiding his craft into the enemy lines, unobserved. Could he escape the prying eyes of the foe's sentinels of the sky, he felt that he had nothing to fear.

The distance between the German and allied lines at that point, Hal knew, was less than three-quarters of a mile. This distance was covered in a jiffy, but still Hal kept the nose of the craft pointed due east, for it was his intention to come down well within the foe's lines rather than to risk a landing near the front.

But at last he felt he had gone far enough. His hand tightened on the controls and gradually the speed of the plane slackened. Chester leaned forward, and putting his mouth close to Hal's ears, exclaimed:

"Going down here?"

"Yes," was Hal's reply. "May as well, I guess. It should be as safe as any place. Suit you?"

Chester shrugged in the darkness.

"I'm satisfied if you are," he replied. "Shoot!"

The plane began to descend.

CHAPTER III
AMONG THE ENEMY

The aircraft settled to earth in the darkness as gently as a huge bird and Hal and Chester stepped out silently. For a moment they stood trying to get their bearings.

"Where do you figure we are?" asked Chester in a low tone.

"We should be a mile due east of Sedan," was Hal's reply. "I saw the lights of the city below as we passed."

"Sedan, eh?" said Chester. "What memories of school days that name conjures up, Hal."

"So it does," was Hal's whispered response: "Of Bismarck, of Napoleon III and of the French defeat in the deciding battle of the Franco-Prussian war."

"What a glorious thing it would be if the French could strike a decisive blow at the Germans here now," muttered Chester. "It would be retribution."

"No less," Hal agreed; "and still, to my mind, it would be extremely better if the decisive blow were delivered by American troops, whether at Sedan or elsewhere."

"Right, as usual, Hal," was Chester's reply.

And although neither lad knew it then, it was to be the fortune of American troops to wrest Sedan from the hands of the invader and to be the first forces of democracy to tread the streets of the historic city.

"We've talked enough, Chester," Hal whispered. "It's time for action."

"Let's be on the move, then," Chester whispered back. "Which way?"

"Might as well head toward the city, I guess."

"How about the plane here?"

Hal shrugged in the darkness.

"We'll have to leave it, I guess. If we're not back by morning it will be discovered, of course, and a search instituted for its occupants."

"Which might lead to our discovery," said Chester.

Again Hal shrugged.

"It might, of course," he agreed.

"Then why not pull it in among the trees there?" Chester wanted to know, pointing to a clump of trees a short distance away.

"Not a bad idea," Hal declared. "I hadn't noticed the trees, myself."

"As Stubbs would say, you must be more observing," was Chester's response. "Lay hold here."

With some effort the boys wheeled the plane into the little clump of trees and then stepped forth again.

"It may do," said Hal, eyeing the hiding place carefully in the darkness. "It's invisible enough now, but I don't know how well the foliage will protect the plane in daylight."

"It's the best we can do, at all events," declared Chester. "Come, let's be on our way."

"May as well, I guess," said Hal, and led the way toward the distant city of Sedan.

From time to time the lads passed hurrying figures as they walked along, but they were not so much as accosted. In their German uniforms, they felt reasonably safe, particularly so as their features were concealed by the darkness. Once in the city, however, they knew they would have to exercise greater caution.

Nevertheless they entered the outskirts of the city with firm tread and headed directly toward the center of town. Neither had been in Sedan before and each was conscious of the utter foolishness of prowling around the edge of the city.

"We've got to get among the foe if we want to learn anything," Hal said.

A few lights still twinkled in the city, despite the lateness of the hour. On what appeared to be the main street, the lads made out a fairly large hotel.

"Guess that's our destination," said Chester, pointing.

Hal nodded.

"That's the place," he said, "though I don't know what we'll do when we get there."

"Events will shape themselves," said Chester.

"That's what worries me. If I could shape them according to my own needs and desires it would be much better."

"Don't croak, Hal."

"I'm not croaking. I'm merely remarking."

"You remark a whole lot on the style of Anthony Stubbs, if you ask me," declared Chester.

"Come on, let's go into the hotel."

Hal made sure that his revolvers were ready in his pockets before he followed Chester through the door. Both lads kept their caps well over their eyes, for while there was little danger of their being suspected, their countenances lacked the heavy sluggishness of the Germans—a fact which should it be noticed, might call for questions.

At one side of the small lobby was a desk. Chester approached it. A man rose to greet him.

"We want a room for the night," said Chester gruffly in German, using the commanding and ill-bred tone always affected by German officers in talking to inferiors in rank or civilians.

The man threw wide his arms.

"I'm sorry, Herr Captain," he said humbly, "but all the rooms are occupied."

"What!" said Chester angrily. "I said that my friend and I desire a room, and a room we will have if we have to trundle your guests out into the street."

"But——" protested the hotel clerk.

"Silence!" thundered Chester. "Now answer me. You have a room of your own, have you not?"

"Yes, Herr Captain, but——"

"Silence!" cried Chester again. "Your key, if you please."

Again the man seemed on the point of protesting, and Chester stepped quickly toward him.

"Your key," he said again, and extended his hand.

The clerk's hand reached to his pocket, and he extended a key to Chester.

"Yes, Herr Captain," he said humbly.

"Now lead the way to our room," commanded Chester, "and in future know that when an officer of the emperor commands, it is for you to obey."

"Yes, Herr Captain," said the man as he led the way toward the rear of the hotel.

There he preceded Hal and Chester up a flight of stairs and turned to the left. They walked down a long hall until they reached a door at the extreme end. Here the guide stopped, turned to Chester and opened his mouth to speak.

"Silence!" said Chester sharply. "Open the door."

The hotel clerk shrugged his shoulders in a manner that meant he washed his hands of the outcome and tried the knob of the door. The door swung inward and the clerk stood aside to allow Hal and Chester to pass.

It was dark in the room as the lads stepped across to the threshold. But hardly had they set foot in the room when a brilliant light shot forth.

For a moment the lads were blinded, but they were conscious of a startled ejaculation from the hotel clerk, who still stood without.

"Ha!" he exclaimed. "I thought so. Now for it, my dear Herr Captain."

When the lights flared up, Hal and Chester both dropped their hands to their revolvers. But before either could produce a weapon, a shrill voice cried in German:

"Hands up, there!"

There was nothing for the lads to do but obey. They still had not had time to accustom their eyes to the sudden light so were unable to distinguish the owner of the voice. But gradually their vision cleared.

Chester glanced sharply at the man who had stopped them. He sat up in bed and in both hands he held a revolver squarely levelled at the two lads.

Chester gave a sudden start. At the same moment the man in the bed gave vent to a queer sound and his revolvers wavered.

Chester leaped forward and possessed himself of the two revolvers with several quick movements. One of these he levelled at the man in the bed.

"Hands up!" he commanded sharply. The man in the bed opened his mouth to speak. "Silence!" cried Chester. "Not a word." He turned to Hal, who for the moment had been staring in open-mouthed wonder. "Explain to the clerk, Hal," said Chester, "that we will take possession of this room, also of its occupant. It might be well to tell him that he should have informed us his room was occupied. We will discuss that later."

"But I tried to tell you, Herr Captain," declared the frightened clerk. "You would not listen, Herr Captain!"

"Silence!" commanded Chester. "Leave the room, and not one word about this matter as you value your life. We shall take charge of your other guest here. I've no doubt we shall all be good friends in the morning."

Still the clerk hesitated, but Hal settled the argument. He stepped quickly toward the clerk.

"Get out!" he commanded sharply.

The hotel clerk vanished.

In the meantime the man in the bed had been gazing at the two lads in astonishment. With his captured revolvers still in his hands, Chester approached him.

"Well," he said, "and what are you doing here, if I may ask?"

"By George! I don't see that it is any business of yours what I am doing here," was the reply in English. "I might ask the same of you."

"And you might get the same answer, Mr. Stubbs," said Hal. "Threatened to shoot us when we came in, didn't you?"

"And why shouldn't I?" demanded Anthony Stubbs, war correspondent of the New York Gazette and companion of Hal and Chester on many a perilous venture. "When a man breaks into another man's room the first thing the man in the room naturally thinks about is something with which to protect himself. I had those guns under my pillow and when I heard you come in, I pressed the electric light button and grabbed the guns."

"Well, it's fortunate you didn't use 'em, Stubbs," said Hal. "If you had shot me and I had found it out, I'd have had to lay you across my knee."

"You would, eh?" grumbled Stubbs. "I guess you would find that quite a job."

"Come, come, Stubbs," said Chester: "and you, too, Hal. We're in a ticklish position and there is no time for foolishness. What are you doing here, Stubbs?"

"Well," said Stubbs, "I'll tell you; but as you'll have to spend the night here, make yourselves comfortable. Sit down."

CHAPTER IV
CHESTER IS INDISCREET

"First," Stubbs began, when the boys had pulled their chairs close to his bed and he had propped himself up with a pair of pillows, "first I want to know what you mean, Chester, by jumping me the way you did a few minutes ago?"

"Well," said Chester, "you had a pair of guns wabbling in your hands and I was afraid one might accidentally go off. Safety first, Mr. Stubbs."

"That sounds all right," was Stubbs' dry comment, "or rather, I should say, it would sound all right if I didn't know you so well. It's my candid opinion you just jumped me because a good opportunity presented itself."

"Come, Mr. Stubbs," said Chester, "you know I wouldn't——"

"Oh, I do, do I?" exclaimed Stubbs sarcastically. "I know all about you, Chester, you can bet on that."

"Then maybe you can tell me what Hal and I are doing here," replied Chester.

"No, I can't do that exactly, but its a safe assertion that you are up to your old snooping tricks again."

"Then why are you here, Mr. Stubbs?" Chester wanted to know.

Stubbs smiled wryly.

"I guess you have me there, my boy," he said good-naturedly. "I'm here to snoop a little myself."

"As I thought," Hal put in. "By any chance, Mr. Stubbs, have you heard rumors that Austria has or is about to sue for peace?"

Stubbs sat up straight in bed.

"Now where did you get that idea?" he demanded.

"Because we're here in an attempt to verify that rumor," was Hal's reply.

Stubbs sighed.

"Well, there is no use trying to conceal my mission," he said; "and yet I was in hopes I was the possessor of information that would give me a 'scoop' for my paper; or an exclusive 'beat,' if you like that better."

"But surely you didn't hope to have such information if it were not known to the military authorities," protested Chester.

"And why didn't I?" demanded Stubbs, with some heat. "Let me tell you something, my boy. It's no infrequent thing for a newspaper man to gain knowledge of a certain thing long before it comes to the ears of the proper authorities."

"Then it is up to you to acquaint the proper authorities with your information," said Hal.

"Not a bit of it. Not a bit of it. My duty is to get the facts to my paper ahead of the correspondents of the other papers. That's what I'm paid for; and you can bet I'll do it if I get a chance."

"That's all beside the question right now, Mr. Stubbs," said Chester. "It seems that you are here on a mission similar to ours. Now the question is, shall we join forces or shall we work separately?"

"I don't know," said Stubbs. "You see, I've been on the ground longer than you have and have already made considerable progress. Looks to me like I'd be giving you my information in return for nothing."

"Oh, of course if that's the way you feel about it," said Chester, considerably nettled.

"Hold on, now!" protested Stubbs. "Not so fast, if you please. I didn't say I wouldn't throw in with you, did I?"

"No, you didn't say it," returned Chester significantly.

"Then don't cry until you're hurt," enjoined Stubbs. "At the same time there is another reason that tells me to let you go at this thing in your own way."

"And that, Mr. Stubbs?" asked Hal.

"That," returned Stubbs, "is because every time I get mixed up with you fellows I get in trouble. Either I'm moving forward a couple of leaps ahead of a bayonet, or I'm all snarled up in a knot of struggling Germans; and I don't like that, I tell you. I'm a peaceable man."

Hal and Chester laughed.

"Oh, yes, we know how peaceable you are," said Hal. "We're perfectly willing to bank on your courage, Mr. Stubbs."

"Well, I'm not exactly willing to bank on it myself," replied Stubbs grumblingly, but he was plainly pleased.

"Whatever you think best, Mr. Stubbs," said Chester.

"Surely, Chester," said Stubbs, "you didn't take me seriously? Surely you knew that I am willing to do whatever I can to further the cause of America and her allies. I was simply joking."

"Maybe you were," returned Chester, not at all convinced, "but all I've got to say is that you have a mighty poor way of showing it."

"Then I'll do better," said Stubbs. "Listen." He proceeded in a low tone. "I've been here for two days. I heard rumors some time ago that Austria and Germany were at the breaking point. Bulgaria, out of the war, as she has been for several weeks, it became apparent that Germany's other two allies would soon leave her in the lurch. Now Turkey doesn't matter so much, although with the Ottomans out of the war the strain on the allies will be lessened considerably. But with Austria—the kaiser's most important and powerful ally, ready to quit—the moment seems auspicious. Now, I wanted to be on the ground floor when the news broke. That's why I took a chance and sneaked through the German lines; that's why I'm here.

"That's why we're here, too," said Hal quietly.

"Now, Mr. Stubbs," said Chester, "you inferred that you had already learned something. What is it, if I may ask?"

"I didn't exactly say that," protested Stubbs. "However, I have found what in the newspaper business is called a 'leak' and I have hopes it will produce some news before many hours have passed."

"And what is this leak, Mr. Stubbs?"

"Why," said Mr. Stubbs, "its none other than our friend the night clerk whom you so unceremoniously ordered from the room a few minutes ago. He thinks I'm a pretty regular fellow. The reason is plain enough. I've been supplying him with tobacco for the last two days."

Both lads smiled.

"It's no wonder then," said Chester. "Tobacco is one of the luxuries in Germany to-day. But who are you supposed to be, Mr. Stubbs?"

"Me?" said Stubbs, "why I'm nothing more than a German-American who was caught in Germany by the war, who is in sympathy with the German cause and not at all anxious to get back to the States. In fact, the clerk is positive I'd be wearing a German uniform if I were not above military age."

"But you're not above the German military age, Mr. Stubbs," Hal protested.

"Well, the clerk doesn't know that," said Stubbs significantly.

"You're a pretty shrewd customer, Mr. Stubbs," said Chester. "I guess if you've managed to fool the clerk this long you'll get by, all right."

"I will, unless you get me mixed up in some of your scrapes," declared Stubbs. "But you boys

must be tired. Ring the bell there for the clerk. I'll tell him that we have found we have mutual friends and that I will permit you to spend the night in my room."

The clerk returned in response to the summons and Stubbs outlined the situation. The clerk offered no protest; in fact, he offered to supply cots for Mr. Stubbs' visitors.

These arrived directly and as soon as the clerk withdrew, Hal and Chester tumbled into their beds. "There is nothing that may be done to-night," said Stubbs. "Get a good rest, boys."

In spite of the fact that it was late when they retired, all three were up bright and early in the morning and went to breakfast in the small dining room of the hotel.

As they were finishing their coffee—without sugar or cream, by the way, these being other verboten luxuries in Germany—Chester's attention was arrested by the entrance of a tall, stately German woman, accompanied by a girl of perhaps eighteen years. They sat down at a table but three removed from where the friends were seated.

Hal followed the direction of Chester's eyes and smiled.

"Don't play the gallant now," he whispered in a low voice.

Chester flushed.

"By Jove!" he said. "You're the limit. Can't a fellow look at a pretty girl without drawing some such remark from you?"

"But I know you so well," laughed Hal.

"Rats!" Chester ejaculated.

At that moment two young German officers entered the room and strode toward the table where mother and daughter—as Chester had surmised the two to be—sat. They stopped suddenly, noticing apparently for the first time that the table was occupied.

"Himmel!" one exclaimed. "Conditions are pretty bad when a man cannot find a seat at his own table."

The words were plainly audible to the mother, and daughter, and their faces turned red. The elder made as though to rise, but the girl restrained her.

"We have as much right here as they have, Mother," she said.

Chester grinned to himself. It did him good to hear the girl talk like that, for he had not been favorably impressed with the appearance of the officers—both in the uniform of captains—in the first place.

"We shall have to ask you to leave our table," said the German officer who had spoken before.

It was the girl who protested.

"We'll stay where we are," she said.

The German grew angry.

"Is this the manner in which to treat one of his majesty's officers?" he demanded.

The girl deigned no reply.

"Did you hear me?" demanded the German again.

Still no reply.

The German stepped quickly forward, and laying his hand on the back of the girl's chair, jerked it back from the table. As he did so, the girl leaped to her feet. Her hand shot out and the German staggered back, his face red where the girl's open palm had struck.

"Himmel!" he cried angrily.

He stepped forward and seized the girl by the wrist.

Now Chester had been watching these proceedings with rising indignation. When the man seized the girl's wrist, for the moment Chester lost all thought of his surroundings, threw caution to the winds and rose quickly. As quickly he stepped across the room.

"Let the girl alone," he growled angrily.

The German wheeled on him, and recognizing in the lad no superior officer, stood his ground.

"And who are you?" he demanded.

"I'll show you," said Chester angrily.

He struck out with his right fist. "Smack." The German staggered back.

CHAPTER V
AN ENEMY PLOT BARED

Hal and Stubbs were on their feet immediately. Both hurried to Chester's side. Seeing these reinforcements, the friend of the first German officer, who had advanced apparently to aid his

companion, stepped back. So did the man who had gripped the girl's wrist.

For a moment the latter glared angrily at Chester. Then his hand dropped to his holster. But before he could draw a weapon, Chester whipped out his own automatic and covered him.

"None of that," the lad said angrily.

Realizing that he had been caught in a position, not to his credit, the first German sought to temporize.

"I'm sorry if I was a bit hasty," he apologized to the German girl and her mother. "The truth is, I have had little rest lately, my nerves are bad and I am easily disturbed. I apologize."

The girl accepted the apology with a slight inclination of her head. Her mother said nothing.

The German turned to Chester.

"You struck me, sir," he said, "and under different conditions I would demand satisfaction. But in this case, you acted very properly. I would have done the same in your place."

He bowed to Chester, who lowered his revolver and slowly returned it to its holster.

This was the moment for which the treacherous German had been waiting. Suddenly he whipped out his own revolver.

But Hal, too, had been on the alert. A peculiar look in the German's eye had warned the lad that the man was bent on mischief. Therefore, Hal's revolver flashed forth a second sooner than that of Chester's enemy.

"Drop that!" called Hal sharply.

The German obeyed. There was nothing else for him to do. His head dropped, and a guilty flush crept over his face. Hal stepped forward and picked up the man's revolver, which he stowed safely in his own pocket.

"I thought you betrayed your true characteristics when you insulted these ladies," said Hal. "I am sure of it now. I shall make it my business to see that this matter is reported to the proper authorities. You may go now."

Without a word, and followed by his companion, the German turned and strode toward the door. As he would have passed out, he stopped suddenly and brought his heels together and saluted sharply. His companion did likewise.

A moment later a figure in the uniform of a German general of infantry stepped into the room. He halted just inside the door, as he took in the situation about him. The others still stood as they had when Chester's opponent had left them, and the general realized instantly that something was amiss. Hal and Chester saluted as the general strode across the room without so much as a glance at them, and addressed the mother.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

It was the girl again who replied.

"That man insulted me, father," she said, indicating Chester's erstwhile foe, and in a few brief words she told how Chester had come to her assistance.

The general saluted Chester, then Hal in turn.

"I will talk with you later, sirs," he said. "Right now I have other business."

He strode across the room to where the young German officers stood, awaiting permission to take their departure. Straight the general went to the man who had accosted his daughter, stopped close to him, raised his right arm and brought his open palm stingingly across the other's face.

"Let that teach you," he said, "that a German officer does not insult women of his own race."

The German captain staggered back, but said nothing.

"You may go now," said the general. "You will hear more from me later."

The young officers left the room hurriedly.

General Knoff, for as such the general now introduced himself to Hal, Chester and Stubbs, addressed Chester quietly.

"You have befriended my wife and my daughter," he said. "I thank you, sir."

Chester saluted again, but made no reply.

"It is my wish that you all join us at breakfast," continued the general.

"We should be pleased, your excellency," said Chester politely, "save for the fact that we have just breakfasted."

"Then you shall at least have another cup of coffee with us," said General Knoff.

Chester bowed his assent, for he realized there was nothing else to do. A mere German captain did not refuse an invitation from a general—not under the iron discipline that still ruled in the armies of the kaiser.

Accordingly, the three friends seated themselves at the table with the others. Coffee was

soon before them, and Chester presently found himself in animated conversation with the general's daughter, Kathryn. Stubbs conversed mostly to Frau Knoff, while the general kept Hal engaged.

For some time they talked on general topics, touching only briefly on the war. But as always with soldiers, the conversation at last turned into that channel.

Suddenly Hal's heart gave a quick thump. Here, the lad told himself, was an opportunity that was not to be overlooked. Undoubtedly, if he would, General Knoff could verify or set at naught the rumor that Austria had, or was about to, sue for peace. Hal drew a long breath, then said:

"I understand, your excellency, that our enemies are regaling themselves with a report that Austria is about to desert the emperor and sue for peace."

General Knoff set his cup down abruptly, and gazed closely at Hal.

"And do you believe that?" he asked at last.

Hal shook his head and smiled slightly.

"Why should Austria desert?" he asked. "We have the advantage at this moment, in spite of the fact that we have suffered some reverses lately. No; if the war were to end now, Germany is victorious."

"Good!" said General Knoff. "I like that talk, for it is becoming rare these days. These light reverses you speak of seem to have affected others more strongly—to have shaken their confidence. However, it is well that our foes think the slight difference of opinion between his majesty and the emperor of Austria may result in a complete breach; yes, it is well."

"You mean, your excellency," said Hal, taking another long chance, "that such rumors have been circulated intentionally—that the enemy may be taken off their guard?"

General Knoff glanced around cautiously. He waited a moment, then said:

"You will understand, of course, that it is impossible for me to answer yes to your question; at the same time, I cannot deny it."

"I understand, your excellency," replied Hal, "and you may be sure that I shall say nothing of what I know."

"You know nothing!" said the general sharply.

"Very well, your excellency," said Hal quietly. "I know nothing."

General Knoff turned the conversation into other channels. Directly he asked the name and position of Hal's and Chester's regiments. Fortunately, both lads had posted themselves in advance and their answers did not rouse the general's suspicions.

At last breakfast came to an end. The three friends made their adieus to their new friends, and retired at once to Stubbs' room.

"Well," said that worthy, when they were settled comfortably and secure against intrusion, "we've learned something, Hal. But I'll tell you, you took my breath away when you began to pump the general."

"And mine, agreed Chester.

"Well, it looked like the best way to me," declared Hal. "I figured it wasn't wise to pass up an opportunity like that."

"It worked, anyway," said Stubbs. "But the general must have been in a particularly good humor. Otherwise such a question might have meant prison, at least, for all of us."

"As it chanced," said Hal, "the general was in a particularly good humor. Chester had just put him there; and by the way, Chester, it's all right to be gallant and all that, but it strikes me you should have used a little more discretion."

"I didn't hurt anything," Chester grumbled. "On the contrary, if I hadn't interfered as I did we wouldn't know what we do now."

"That's true enough," Stubbs admitted. "But I stand with Hal. It's not wise to rush to the aid of every fair damsel in distress, especially when you're masquerading in the uniform of the enemy. It might bring a firing squad, and I have no particular fondness for firing squads."

"All the same," said Chester, "you couldn't stand by and see a boor of a Dutchman pick on a couple of helpless women."

"Careful on that Dutchman stuff, Chester," Stubbs cautioned. "Remember the Hollander has no more use for a German than you have."

"Well, all right," returned Chester sulkily, "but Hal always starts picking on me if I look at a girl."

"It's no time to be looking at girls when you are on business," declared Hal grimly. "You're altogether too susceptible to the charms of the fairer sex, Chester."

"Rats!" said Chester. "You make me tired, both of you."

"Well, we'll pass all that up," said Anthony Stubbs. "The question to consider now is whether we shall take the general's statement as sufficient to brand the Austrian peace rumor as a German plot."

"It's enough for me," declared Hal.

"Same here," agreed Chester.

"I'm perfectly satisfied myself," said Stubbs. "I am afraid the New York Gazette will lose a good story as a result, but I can't help that. I'm not going to yell peace when there is no peace. Now the thing to do, to my mind, is to get back to our own lines."

"Right," said Hal briefly. "We'll make the attempt to-night, if you are both agreeable."

The others nodded their agreement. Hal told Stubbs of the hidden airplane, and it was decided to make the return trip in that craft if the Germans had not discovered it.

"In the meantime," said Stubbs, "we'll just stick close to this room; it's safer."

And so they spent the day in the quiet little hotel of historic Sedan.

CHAPTER VI
AN ENCOUNTER

It was after dark when Hal, Chester and Stubbs left the seclusion of the hotel and started toward the spot where the lads had hidden their airplane the morning before.

There were plenty of signs of military activity in Sedan as the three friends passed along the streets, but no one interfered with them. To all intents and purposes they were precisely what they seemed—two German army officers and a civilian above the military age. And at last they came to the outskirts of the town.

"How much farther, Hal?" Stubbs wanted to know.

"Not much," was Hal's reply. "Perhaps a mile, Mr. Stubbs."

"Not far, eh?" said Stubbs with some sarcasm. "I hope you don't call that close."

"It's likely to be a whole lot farther to our lines than we have figured, if the plane is gone," Chester put in.

"And I'm willing to bet it'll be gone," declared Stubbs.

"There you go, Mr. Stubbs," said Hal. "Nobody could ever truthfully call you an optimist."

"I've lived too long and seen too much to be an optimist," was the little man's response. "Now, who wants to bet we won't have to hoof it back to the American lines?"

"I'll take that bet, Mr. Stubbs," said Chester, "just to show you that it pays to be an optimist. What'll it be?"

"Anything you say," replied Stubbs. "Make it a new pipe for me and a hat for you—when the war's over."

"Suits me," said Chester. "It's a bet."

The three walked along the dark road in silence for some moments.

"By George! it can't be much farther," declared Stubbs at last. "We've covered a mile now. Must have lost your bearings, Hal."

"Just hold your horses, Mr. Stubbs," said Hal. "I'm not in the habit of making such mistakes. We'll be there presently."

Stubbs grumbled to himself but made no reply.

Five minutes later Hal slackened his pace and took Stubbs by the arm.

"There," he said, pointing to a clump of trees a short distance ahead, "there is the spot we hid the plane, unless I am greatly mistaken. It may be there yet."

"And it may not," growled Stubbs, although his voice indicated that he was pleased that the long walk was about over.

At the edge of the miniature forest, Hal paused and glanced up and down the road. So did Chester and Stubbs. There was no one in sight.

"We'll have a look," said Hal.

He stepped in among the trees. Then he gave an exclamation of relief.

"She's here," he said softly.

It was true. There was the plane right where the lads had left it in the early morning of the day before. Apparently there had been no one near it, for its position was the same as that in which the lads had left it.

"Well, don't let's fool around here," said Stubbs. "Let's be moving."

"Since when did you become so anxious to fly, Mr. Stubbs?" asked Chester.

"I'm not anxious to fly," retorted Stubbs. "I never did like to ride in one of these things and I never will; but I want to get out of this place, and I'm in favor of moving right away."

"We'll move then," said Hal briefly. "Chester, do you suppose you can make room back there?"

"By George!" said Stubbs. "He'll have to make room for me or there'll be a fight right here."

"I guess we can squeeze him in some way, Hal," replied Chester.

Hal and Chester turned the craft so that its nose pointed toward the open, then wheeled it from the woods.

"Climb in, Stubbs," said Hal.

The little war correspondent needed no further urging. Chester took his place beside him. It was a tight squeeze, for the machine had not been constructed to carry two in the rear seat, but Chester and Stubbs managed it. Hal climbed in the pilot's seat and adjusted the spark.

"All ready?" he called over his shoulder.

"Shoot," answered Stubbs, grasping the side of the plane firmly.

Almost at the same moment there came a sudden interruption to the flight of the three friends.

Half a dozen forms appeared from nowhere at all and quickly surrounded the plane. Half a dozen rifles were leveled at the craft and a harsh German voice exclaimed:

"Halt!"

Stubbs gave an exclamation of disgust.

"I knew it," he said, and that was all.

Hal muttered an imprecation beneath his breath. They had been so close to getting away safely, and now this interruption made him angry.

"Well," he told himself, "there is nothing to do but try and bluff it out. Fortunately, we have not discarded our German uniforms." He raised his voice and called: "What's the meaning of this?"

"Get out of that plane," said the German voice.

The muzzles of half a dozen rifles made Hal realize that discretion truly is the better part of valor.

"There's no help for it," he told himself.

He got out. Chester and Stubbs followed his example. Hal approached the man who had accosted them.

"What's the meaning of this?" he demanded again.

For the first time the German appeared to notice the German uniforms and the straps that proclaimed Hal and Chester captains in the emperor's service.

"Your pardon if I have made a mistake, captain," he said. "But how was I to know? Yesterday I found this plane—clearly an American craft—hidden here. I had it watched all to-day, but no one came near it. I saw no bodies near to indicate that the American pilot had been killed. Therefore I judged that there was a spy within our lines. That's why my men have stood guard here until now."

"You have done well, lieutenant," said Hal. "It's true that this is an American craft, but it has been used by our friend here," and he indicated Stubbs, "for purposes favorable to the German cause. Herr Schindler arrived early yesterday morning and reported to General Knoff in Sedan. Now Captain Diegle and myself are bound on a little expedition with him. Do I make myself clear, lieutenant?"

"Perfectly," and the lieutenant ordered his men to lower their rifles. "It is not for me to question the wisdom of my superiors."

"You are a good officer, lieutenant," said Hal. "I shall see that General Knoff hears of your vigilance."

"Thank you, captain. Is there anything I may do for you before you proceed on your journey?"

"Nothing, thanks. Then with your permission, lieutenant, we shall continue our interrupted journey."

Hal turned again toward the car. Chester and Stubbs followed him.

"Quickly, now," said Hal in a low voice. "His suspicions may be aroused again. We've no time to lose."

Again Chester and Stubbs clambered into the back seat.

"All right?" asked Hal, after he had taken his seat.

"All right," said Chester.

"Let her go, Hal," cried Stubbs in English.

And these words almost caused their undoing.

At the sound of the English phrase the German lieutenant, who had been watching the friends embark for their aerial trip, realized in a moment that he had been fooled.

The plane was gliding slowly across the ground when he called to his men:

"Spies! Shoot them!"

Instantly the soldiers threw their rifles to their shoulders and poured a volley after the plane. Then they started after the craft on a dead run.

The first volley did no damage beyond arousing Hal's anger. He berated Stubbs' carelessness roundly to himself, but not for a moment did he take his mind off the work in hand.

Chester and Stubbs ducked instinctively at the sound of the first volley. Then Chester raised his head, and drawing his revolvers, fired at the pursuing Germans.

The lad's efforts were rewarded with cries of anger, and there was one shrill scream. Chester smiled grimly to himself, for he knew that he had accounted for one of the foes.

Again and again the Germans fired, and Chester heard the balls glance off the side of the plane. Still the enemy fire had not reached a vital part of the craft and the occupants were untouched.

Now Hal touched the elevating lever gently and the plane soared in the air. One more volley the Germans fired after them. Then the three friends were safe.

"Stubbs," said Chester, as the plane sped through the air. "I ought to pitch you out of here, and you know it."

"By George! Why?" demanded Stubbs, puzzled.

"Why?" echoed Chester. "Wasn't it your fault that we almost got killed just now?"

"I don't see how you make that out," declared the little correspondent.

"Didn't you yell out in English just before we started?"

"By George! Did I? I didn't know it."

"You must be losing your mind, Stubbs," declared Chester. "You don't remember calling out in English, eh?"

"No, I don't," declared Stubbs, "and it's my opinion you're blaming me to cover up something you have done yourself."

"I've a good mind to reach over and pull your nose, Stubbs," said Chester.

"If you do you'll have your own pulled right back again," declared Stubbs angrily.

"Say! What's the matter with you fellows back there?" called Hal over his shoulder. "Don't you know we're in enemy territory and that there are thousands of German planes flying around here some place? If you have any arguing to do wait until we get back to our own lines. I'll be referee then and you can fight all week, if you want to."

"Make him let me alone, then," growled Stubbs to himself, but he became silent.

The journey was continued without incident. Only once was Hal's order for silence broken, and then by Chester who, nudging Stubbs, said:

"Don't forget our bet. You owe me a hat."

"All right," Stubbs whispered back; "and I'll pay it—when the war's over."

CHAPTER VII
THE ADVANCE

The month of October, 1918, was one of the most glorious in the pages of American history written by the world's war. From early in the month General Pershing's men struck along their wide front and everywhere the Germans gave ground. French and British troops also made progress daily along the great battle front.

On October 3 the Germans retreated on the Lenz front. The British advanced to within six miles of Lille. Belgian and French troops advanced in the region of Hooglede and Roulers. Two days later the German retreat began in the Champagne region. Continuing along the line to the south, the allies pressed their advantage at all points.

It was clear to all military experts that the beginning of the end was in sight. From Rheims, American troops, late in October, began the advance that was to carry them into Sedan and beyond. Germany's resistance was becoming more feeble daily.

The German emperor was never to recover from the moral effect of the desertion of Bulgaria

as German supremacy waned. With Bulgaria out of the war, German efforts were turned to keeping Turkey and Austria in line. But these, too, were to fail. Only a short time after Bulgaria laid down arms, Turkey signed a truce with England and France. The United States had no hand in the making of these two truces, because America, despite much urging, had never formally declared war on Turkey and Bulgaria.

With the fortunes of Germany at low ebb, it became apparent that Austria would eventually leave her more powerful ally in the lurch. Again and again reports filtering into the allied lines told of fast growing political disturbances in the dual monarchy. Several cabinets had fallen. The red flag of anarchy was flying in the streets of some of the smaller towns. The Hungarian parliament had broken with the cabinet at Vienna, and it seemed only a question of time until the Austrian revolt would make an end of Austria as a factor in the war.

Conditions were growing serious in Germany also, as reports reaching the American forces revealed. So far, however, disorder was not as rampant as in Austria-Hungary, but it was growing clear that the masses of the German people, long since tired of fighting a losing battle, were getting ready to take matters into their own hands.

In none of the allied capitals, however, was it believed that Germany was yet ready to consider a peace, which, everyone knew, must deprive Germany of her claim to being a world power. The world knew that when the allies imposed their terms, they would be such as would tie the hands of Germany for decades to come and would eventually prevent a repetition, by a blundering and crazy ruler, of a condition that had plunged the whole world into war.

So the daily advance of the allied armies meant one more day nearer to peace.

To the north, where the British under Field Marshal Haig were pressing their advantage, the German line held more firmly than to the south, where French and Americans were delivering their smashing blows. The entire sector south and east of the Argonne Forest was controlled by American forces under the personal direction of General Pershing. True, General Pershing was nominally under command of Field Marshal Foch, the French commander in chief, but so was Field Marshal Haig, the British commander, and General Diaz, the Italian commander in chief, for that matter. It was Marshal Foch who was the master mind of the whole allied offensive.

When the rumor was first circulated among the allied forces that Austria was about to sue for peace, there were few who placed credence in it, despite the fact that they knew such an appeal was sure to be made before long. Nevertheless, if it were true, it would be of advantage to the allies to know of the impending appeal at the earliest possible moment.

To General Pershing, Marshal Foch had entrusted the task of ascertaining the truth or falsity of the report. General Pershing, in turn, had passed the word along where he felt it would do the most good. This was how it happened that Hal and Chester found themselves so fortunate as to be ordered within the German lines at Sedan on the mission which opened this book.

That Germany would have profited greatly at that time could the Americans, French and British have been fooled by the false rumor goes without saying. And it is true, too, that the longer the rumor was permitted to live the greater became the danger of over-confidence in the ranks of the allies.

It is for this reason that General Pershing was immensely pleased to receive so soon a report from Colonel O'Neil, at Rheims that this first rumor of an impending appeal for peace by Austria was nothing more than a German plot. Immediately the word was passed along the whole battle front. The result was, that Germany, instead of having gained by this piece of duplicity, suffered. For when allied troops went into battle they struck that much harder. For a time they had believed that their efforts were to be crowned with immediate success, and now that they learned the Germans had been playing with them they fought with the desperate energy of the man who fears he has been made ridiculous.

It was learned later that this rumor of Austria's decision to break with Germany was started by the Germans themselves for the reason we have seen.

Austria was not so much as consulted in the matter, and it has been shown since that this very fact was responsible, in a measure, for Austria's decision some time later to sue for a separate peace. So the bomb launched by the kaiser and his advisers proved a veritable boomerang.

But President Wilson and his advisers had not been fooled by the German plot. President Wilson, some time before, had laid down conditions on which Germany and Austria might have peace, and to these he stuck. He had informed the German and Austrian people that they might have peace at any time by laying down their arms, provided they ousted the militarists who were responsible for the war. Several efforts had been made by German and Austrian officials to fool

America by changes of cabinets and other political tricks but President Wilson, with his allies, was adamant.

So the situation stood in the middle of October, when the allies girded themselves for what they felt sure would prove the deciding effort.

All along the great battle line, which stretched from the North Sea to the frontier of Switzerland, British, French, Belgians and Americans supported by their own allies, Portuguese, some few Brazilians and troops from British and French colonial possessions, gathered themselves for the final spring.

The last great offensive was begun by the British and Belgians to the north. Through Belgium and western France they plowed, pushing the enemy back on all sides. Brussels, the capital of Belgium, in German hands since early in the war, was recaptured. The Belgian government, which after the fall of Brussels had moved into France, returned to Brussels amid the cheering of thousands of Belgians.

As the Germans retreated, they followed their customary tactics of cruelty. Fire and sword were applied to the abandoned towns until a threat from France put a stop to it. France's threat was this: That for every town destroyed by the Germans in their retreat, retaliation would be made. For every town thus destroyed by the Germans, a German town would also be put to the torch.

This threat, carried by neutral envoys to the German high command, resulted in the abandonment of the German campaign of destruction, for the German high command was now more far-seeing than it had been a year before. The kaiser and his generals at last had been forced to the conclusion that they were waging a losing war. Also, they knew that the French troops had not forgotten the horrors of the early days of the war, and their hatred of everything Prussian dated farther back even than that—to the days of the Franco-Prussian war, when they had been able to gauge for the first time the workings of the Prussian mind.

To the south of the Belgian frontier, the French wrested St. Quentin, Lille and other important railroad towns from the enemy. No longer did the Germans offer the fierce resistance that had characterized their earlier activities. They withdrew now without the stubbornness of yore. Their morale had been shattered, and they were glad to retire.

All along the battle line the great field and siege guns of the Americans, French, Belgian and British played havoc in the enemy ranks. The German artillery replied, but it lacked the volume and the fierce challenge of old. Then, too, the Germans had lost thousands and thousands of their guns, field pieces and machine guns. Factories behind the German frontier had been depleted of workers to fill the gaps in the fighting front, with the result that guns and ammunitions were not being produced so fast as they had been the year before.

This meant that the Germans were compelled to conserve their ammunition. The high command had also found it necessary to be more sparing of its man-power and less prodigal with its food supplies. No longer could the enemy sacrifice a few thousand men and thousands and thousands of rounds of ammunition to gain a few feet of ground.

On the other hand, due to the activity of American factories, the allies were supplied with more ammunition, guns and food than ever before since the war began. Also, numerically, were superior to the foe.

With these facts in mind, Field Marshal Foch ordered the advance all along the front that was to prove the end of Germany as a military power; that was to result in the abdication of the German emperor and the crown prince; and that was to mean revolution throughout the German empire until such time as a stable government could raise its head and the common people could come into their own.

And so it was a great day for the German people when Marshal Foch gave the word that set his millions of men in motion from the North Sea hundreds of miles south to the frontier of Switzerland. It was a move that meant that the German people would do away with masters and would set up a government of their own—a government which was to be patterned after that of the United States of America—a "government of the people, for the people and by the people."

In this last great mission, Hal and Chester were to perform their full duties, and they were to have greater fortune than ever before, for they were to be "in at the death," as Hal put it, with Marshal Foch when the great French military leader gave to the enemy terms that resulted in the ending of the war.

In the meantime, all unconscious of what was in store for them, the two lads, after returning from their mission within the German lines, were taking a well deserved rest in their temporary quarters in the French city of Rheims.

CHAPTER VIII
TOWARD SEDAN

The American army was moving toward Sedan. Already the Yankee forces advancing from the south and west had occupied St. Aigan and invested Maisoncelle, Stonne and Sommauthe. The enemy had contested every inch of the ground, but the Americans were not to be denied. The Forty-second division, better known as the Rainbow Division, under command of Major-General Charles D. Rhodes, and the Second division, regular army troops, commanded by Major-General John A. Lejeune, were showing the way.

On either side of these forces were the Seventy-seventh and the Eighty-second divisions, commanded respectively by Major-General Robert Alexander and Major-General George P. Duncan.

In these American units advancing upon Sedan were represented fighting men from all sections of the United States.

The Forty-second was composed of former National Guardsmen from the various states, the Seventy-seventh recruited chiefly from New York City, and the Eighty-second, composed of Georgians, Tennesseeans and Alabamans. The Second division, as has been said, was a regular army unit.

It was with the Forty-second division that Hal and Chester found themselves when the advance began. Attached to the staff of Colonel O'Neil of the third regiment, Thirty-second division, commanded by Major-General William C. Haan, they had been sent to General Rhodes with dispatches just before the advance began.

It was the night of the second of November, 1918, and the Americans were forging ahead in spite of the lateness of the hour—midnight. This was one feature of Yankee fighting that the Germans were never able to understand. The German is a methodical man. Even in the art of war he is governed to no small degree by habit. Ordinarily the Germans did not fight at night. With the coming of darkness, as a rule, it had been their custom to postpone further actions till the morrow.

Now, however, they were forced to give up some of these customs. When American forces advanced they continued their work whether it was night or day. Consequently, the Germans had found themselves forced either to fight or run.

The Germans were fighting tonight. All day they had been retreating, but now, less than a dozen miles from the city of Sedan, they were making a desperate stand.

The voices of the great guns shattered the night; huge rockets and other signal flares lighted up the darkness. Dimly could be heard the crash of machine gun fire and the rattle of the rifles at points where the fighting was close.

All day Hal and Chester had been kept on the jump, carrying dispatches to the various regimental commanders. At midnight, there appeared little likelihood they would gain a much needed rest before morning. General Rhodes, realizing the advantage won earlier in the day, was determined to press it to the utmost. Over his field telephone he kept in touch with developments in other parts of the field. There, he learned, the Germans also were giving ground.

The advance guard of the Forty-second was now a few miles to the north of Maisoncelle, which had been captured late in the evening. General Rhodes determined upon a bold stroke.

He summoned Hal, who stood at attention beside Chester, in the general's quarters.

"Major Paine!" he called.

Hal approached and saluted.

"My compliments to Colonel English," continued General Rhodes, "and order him to assume command of the First, Second, Third and Tenth regiments and make a detour toward Pouilly. Inform him that I will make a greater show of force to the south, and have him close in on the enemy from the east. I am informed that the German positions there have been weakened. We may catch the enemy in a trap. That is all."

Hal saluted, swung on his heel and departed hastily. Outside, he sprang into a small army automobile, which was among a number of other cars standing idle pending necessity of use by dispatch bearers, and soon was speeding through the darkness.

Half an hour later he was received by Colonel English, who heard his orders in silence.

"Inform the general that I shall move at once," said the colonel.

Hal saluted and returned to headquarters.

Already, without waiting to hear the result of Hal's mission, General Rhodes had given orders for a more rapid advance all along the line.

The clear notes of many bugles sounded from various parts of the field. Regimental commanders gave necessary instructions to their subordinates and the advance of the American forces gained in momentum.

Half an hour later Hal found himself on the road again bearing instructions to Colonel English. He overtook the colonel two miles from where he had found him last. The colonel was riding along in the midst of his men, in a large army automobile. He motioned Hal to a seat beside him.

"I am instructed to go with you, sir," said Hal, "and carry back word of any imminent danger."

"Very well," said the colonel. "Make yourself at home."

From time to time Colonel English summoned aides whom he dispatched to other parts of the field with instructions. Suddenly he turned to Hal.

"It strikes me," he said, "that the general is risking a whole lot on this move. If the enemy is in greater strength at Pouilly than we suppose, our position will be critical."

"I would imagine that the general's information is authentic," returned Hal. "Otherwise he would not have ordered you to Pouilly."

"You are probably right," said Colonel English; "but at the same time I have a feeling that all is not well."

Hal shrugged his shoulders, a movement that was not discernable to Colonel English in the darkness.

"Well," the lad said, "we'll let the boches know we are there at all events."

"Right," agreed Colonel English.

There was silence after that except for the plodding feet of the infantry and the noise of the horses that composed the single troop of cavalry with the expedition. Also, the sharp crack of machine guns in other parts of the field and the voices of the distant big guns could be heard.

"According to my calculations," said Colonel English to Hal an hour later, "we should now be within three miles of Pouilly. I shall order a halt here and make a reconnaisance."

He did so; and the troops sat there in the darkness for perhaps an hour while a young lieutenant and ten men went ahead to get the lay of the land.

"All quiet ahead, sir," the lieutenant reported on his return. "I went as close to the enemy as I dared. He apparently is expecting no attack from this direction. The village should be captured with ease by a surprise assault."

"You were not, of course, able to ascertain the approximate strength of the enemy, lieutenant?"

"No, sir; I dared not approach too close."

"Very good, lieutenant."

The young officer saluted and returned to his station.

"Well," said Colonel English to Hal, "it seems that my fears were groundless. We'll go forward."

Silently the Americans crept along the dark road—or as silently as it is possible for a mass of men and horses to creep. Machine guns were dragged along as silently as possible, and the few field pieces that were the main reliance of the little force also were hauled with extreme caution.

Less than a half a mile from the village itself, Colonel English swung his field pieces into position to cover the advance of his men. It was not his intention to alarm the enemy by opening a bombardment of the village, but he overlooked nothing that would protect his men.

Under cover of the silent guns, which were ready for action at a moment's notice, the Americans crept forward. A short distance ahead Hal could see here and there a faint light, which indicated that the whole village was not asleep. Also, the lad knew, German sentinels were on guard; and there was little possibility that the Americans could enter the town without discovery.

"By Jove!" the lad muttered to himself. "I don't like to sit back here while all this is going on."

He turned to Colonel English.

"Colonel," he said, "I wonder if you will permit me to take a hand in the attack? I assure you that I am no novice at the game."

The colonel considered the point a moment.

"All right," he said at last, "but mind that you do not expose yourself needlessly. You must remember that General Rhodes looks to you for a report on the pending engagement. Here, I'll

give you instructions for Lieutenant Colonel Johnson, of the Fourth regiment. That will enable you to get into the midst of things. You may remain with the regiment as long as you see fit, remembering only that I wish you to report to me an hour after daylight."

"Very well, sir," said Hal.

He leaped lightly from the colonel's automobile, appropriated a horse from a trooper who stood near and dashed forward in the darkness.

Colonel Johnson's force was some distance ahead, and it was perhaps fifteen minutes later that Hal came up with him. He gave the instructions that Colonel English had confided in him, and then said:

"Colonel, if you don't mind I'll stay with you through this battle."

Colonel Johnson would have protested, but Hal continued with a smile:

"I have the permission of Colonel English, sir. I hope that I may be of some assistance to you. Do not hesitate to call upon me for any piece of work that you may wish accomplished."

Colonel Johnson shrugged.

"Help yourself," he said, "and don't worry. If I've need of your services you may be sure I won't hesitate to ask for them."

The march continued in silence.

Suddenly the sound that Hal had been expecting came. It was the blast of a great gun, close at hand. The advance of the Americans had been discovered. Colonel English took his decision instantly.

"Charge!" he cried.

The Americans went forward with a wild yell.

CHAPTER IX
THE BATTLE

A volley of rifle fire met the first rush of the Americans. Sleepy-eyed Germans, aroused from their slumber by the sound of the warning gun, poured from their shelter and rushed forward through the streets of the village. Hastily machine guns were wheeled into position, and a veritable rain of bullets swept the ranks of the charging columns in khaki.

But the Americans did not falter. These men of the Forty-second division upheld the traditions of the American army. True, they had been under fire before and it was not to be expected that they would falter; but well might a man have faltered in the face of the terrible fire poured in upon them. Each man bent to his work with a determination that boded ill for the foe. Some dashed forward with wild yells, others smiled quietly to themselves, while still others joked with their nearest neighbors. Here and there men dropped in their tracks, to rise no more, but others leaped over the bodies and dashed ahead.

So close had the Americans approached the village before being discovered, that the enemy ranks had not time to form. What machine guns had been brought into play by the Germans were widely scattered and did not have the effect that would have been possible had the Americans given the enemy more time.

American machine guns also began to rattle and Germans began to fall. The opposing forces were too close for the enemy to use his heavy artillery, nor could Colonel Johnson use his own field pieces for the same reason.

Undismayed by the withering enemy fire, the Americans continued their charge and soon the fighting became hand-to-hand. Wild cries and imprecations arose above the sounds of firing, and the clash of cold steel became audible in all sections of the field.

The Germans withstood the first shock of the American charge, but they could not withstand the second. They faltered momentarily, but under the commands of their officers for a moment braced again. But when the Yankees hurled themselves upon the wall of human flesh the third time, the German line wavered along its entire length, then broke.

Groups of the enemy threw down their arms and raised their hands in token of surrender. These were quickly passed to the rear, for the men in front were too busy to be occupied with prisoners. Others of the enemy turned and ran. Here and there, however, groups of the foe gathered, determined to resist the Americans to the last.

Against these small batches of the enemy, groups of American soldiers dashed. Again the fighting became fast and furious, and in this fighting the Americans sustained their heaviest

losses.

Hal found himself close to Colonel Johnson, who had advanced in the midst of his men. A German officer raised his revolver and aimed at Colonel Johnson. Hal, who had been about to discharge his own revolver at a big German soldier who was pressing him closely, turned his weapon and fired in time to drop the man who otherwise must surely have killed the American colonel.

Colonel Johnson at the same moment had perceived his danger and he realized instantly that Hal had saved his life at the imminent risk of losing his own. Colonel Johnson was a brave man, and he recognized bravery in another. He sprang to Hal's side and with his sword laid low the man who then held Hal at his mercy.

Hal acknowledged this assistance with a smile; he had no time for more. The Germans were pressing too close for that.

Colonel Johnson cleared a space about him with his flashing sword. Hal emptied his revolver into the ranks of the enemy, then drew his own sword. Standing side by side, Hal and Colonel Johnson beat off the Germans who tried to pierce their guards. Nevertheless, their predicament was extremely critical, and it is doubtless if they would have come through alive had not half a dozen soldiers, seeing their peril, dashed forward and scattered the Germans who surrounded them.

This gave the two a breathing space, of which they took advantage.

But the fighting was far from ended yet—the Germans were far from beaten. In the rear of the line which had broken and fled under the American attack, other lines had formed and now dashed forward. Colonel English, taking in the situation at a glance, ordered support to the assistance of the hard-pressed men under Colonel Johnson.

The reinforcements came forward with a rush and met the new German line with a crash. The hand-to-hand fighting that ensued was terrific, but after five minutes of give and take, the Germans again retired.

American machine guns were swung about hastily to cover the retreating foe and wreaked terrific havoc among the enemy. The retreat became a rout. The Germans turned and fled.

Victory, it appeared, was with the Americans.

But Colonel English had no mind to allow the enemy to rest. His instructions had been to capture the village of Pouilly, and he would not rest content until he had accomplished that feat. Accordingly, he ordered another advance.

The Americans dashed forward with the same recklessness that has always characterized the charge of the American fighting man. In vain German officers sought to bring some semblance of order out of the confusion that reigned in the enemy ranks. The effort was vain. Young lieutenants stood in the path of the retreating men and beat them with the flat of their swords, but they could not stay the rout. Others fired their revolvers point-blank into the faces of their own men, but even these heroic measures failed to have the desired result.

The Germans were beaten and they knew it.

So it was just as the first faint streak of dawn appeared in the eastern sky that the Americans set foot in the village of Pouilly.

And still the fighting was not ended.

Scores of German soldiers, under command of subordinate officers, barricaded themselves in the houses that lined the streets and poured a hail of bullets upon the Americans as they passed. The Yankees suffered severely under this fire.

"We can't stand for this," said Colonel Johnson suddenly to Hal. "The enemy is doing too much damage."

"Drag up a couple of big guns and destroy the houses," said Hal briefly.

"Good!" said Colonel Johnson. "Lieutenant Bennings!"

A young officer approached and saluted.

"Take twenty men and enough guns to destroy the houses that line this street," said the colonel. "Also, you will report while the battle lasts to Major Paine, here."

The lieutenant saluted and hurried away.

"Major," said Colonel Johnson to Hal, "I will detail you to see that the sniping from the houses is stopped."

Hal saluted.

"I'll stop it, sir," he promised.

"Very well. Don't let me detain you longer."

Hal strode away to where the young lieutenant and a score of men were wheeling two big

field pieces into position.

"Hurry, men," he cried. "We've no time to lose."

Meantime, because of the heavy execution by the enemy from inside the houses, the Americans had sought what shelter they could find in doorways and around corners. This situation, Hal knew, could not be allowed to exist, for it would give the demoralized enemy time to recover their scattered wits and to reform. Therefore, the houses must be cleared of snipers immediately.

From the first house in the block where Hal found himself, the snipers seemed to be more active than in any other. Hal determined to give this house his attention first.

He sighted the gun himself, then gave the command to fire.

"Boom!"

The voice of the big gun rose high above the rattle of machine gun and rifle fire.

"Crash!"

Almost simultaneously with the sound of the gun the heavy explosive missile reached its mark.

There was another resounding crash as the missile exploded after reaching its mark. Bricks, timber and other debris flew high in the air and descended in a shower.

The sniping from the first house ceased, for the simple reason that there was no first house any longer. It had been destroyed.

"I hope that will be enough," Hal muttered. "I don't like this wanton destruction of property. It reminds me too much of the Germans themselves. If those fellows in the other houses are wise they'll cease firing now."

But in this Hal was doomed to disappointment. Snipers in the other houses continued as active as before, apparently unimpressed by the fate that had befallen their comrades.

"Well, if you must have it you must," Hal muttered.

Quickly he gave the necessary orders and the guns were wheeled into position. This time, however, they were not aimed at a single house, for Hal decided that it was unwise to waste more time. He determined to give the enemy a lesson they would not forget.

Accordingly, two houses were covered at once.

"Boom! Boom!"

"Crash! Crash!"

So closely together that they sounded almost as one were the detonations of the guns and the effect as they found their marks.

Again there was a shower of debris.

Without waiting to see what effect this destruction would have upon the Germans who occupied the houses, Hal ordered the guns turned on other homes.

Again the big guns spoke, and again the mass of bricks, mortar and wood descended and covered the streets.

"I guess that will do 'em," muttered Hal, as he waited for the smoke to clear away.

The lad was right.

No longer did the snipers fire from the windows and the American troops, which had temporarily sought shelter in doorways and around corners, poured out again, their advance, thanks to Hal and his men, thus being made more simple.

A few moments later Colonel Johnson came up to Hal.

"You did a good job, Major," he said quietly. "I guess we'll have no more trouble with them."

"Then the town is ours?" asked Hal eagerly.

"It is indeed," replied Colonel Johnson.

"Then I'll have to leave you, sir," said Hal. "Colonel English ordered me to report to him immediately after daylight."

CHAPTER X
THE ADVANCE CONTINUES

Hal found Colonel English just beyond the town, receiving the reports of his subordinates. He greeted Hal with a nod, and asked:

"What is the latest news, Major?"

"The town is ours, sir," replied Hal quietly. "Colonel Johnson has just informed me of the

fact."

Colonel English got to his feet.

"Good," he exclaimed. "I was certain Colonel Johnson was the man for the job. Now if you will wait half an hour, Major, until I have talked with Colonel Johnson, I will ask you to carry my report back to General Rhodes."

"Very well, sir," replied Hal.

Colonel English got into his automobile and was whirled away to the village, where he consulted for perhaps ten minutes with Colonel Johnson. Then he returned to where he had left Hal, and still sitting in his car, wrote his report briefly. This he passed to Hal.

"I want to say," he said, "that Colonel Johnson has informed me that it was really you who made possible the capture of the village; also that you saved his life in the midst of battle earlier in the day."

"Well, he saved mine, too, sir," muttered Hal, flushing slightly.

"It's all in a day's work, Major, I know that," said Colonel English. "At the same time, I have seen fit to mention your name in my report to General Rhodes."

"Thank you, sir," said Hal.

"And I hope," Colonel English continued, "that I may have the pleasure of being associated with you further before this war has come to an end."

"Thank you, sir," said Hal again.

Colonel English extended a hand, which Hal grasped.

"Good luck," said the colonel.

"The same to you, sir. By the way, sir, may I have a car in which to make my return trip?"

"Of course," exclaimed the colonel. "I was thoughtless not to have provided it before now. Lieutenant Smith!"

A young officer approached.

"A car for Major Paine, Lieutenant, at once."

Ten minutes later the machine was at Hal's disposal.

"Do you want a driver?" asked Colonel English.

"Guess I can handle it myself, sir," replied Hal, taking the wheel. "Good-bye, sir."

A moment later he was speeding along the road which he had covered the night before.

Less than two hours later, Hal reported to General Rhodes in the latter's quarters, which had been established a mile closer to Sedan than when Hal had left his general the night before.

"You have done well," said General Rhodes, after reading Colonel English's report. "Colonel English speaks well of you here. It shall be my pleasure to include your name in my next report to the commander-in-chief."

And all that Hal could say was:

"Thank you, sir."

"Now," said General Rhodes, "you shall be free for the remainder of the day. Your friend, Major Crawford, is at this minute with General Duncan, but he should be back within a few hours. I shall have quarters placed at your disposal immediately and my advice is that you turn in for the day."

"I believe I could stand a little sleep, thank you, sir," said Hal with a grin. "I shall follow your advice at once."

"Very well. And report to me this evening at 6 o'clock."

"Yes, sir."

General Rhodes summoned an orderly, whom he directed to find quarters for Hal and to show Chester to them when the latter returned from his mission. Then Hal saluted the general and followed the orderly.

Fifteen minutes later he was fast asleep.

Hal did not know when Chester returned, but when the lad opened his eyes he saw Chester sleeping on a cot across the room. Hal dressed quickly, then aroused his chum.

"Hello," said Chester.

"Why didn't you wake me when you came in?" demanded Hal.

"Because I thought you were entitled to a little rest," replied Chester. "The same as I am now, although I notice you were not as considerate as I was."

"The only reason I aroused you," said Hal, "was because I thought you might possibly have been ordered to report to the general this evening.

"And so I have," returned Chester. "What time is it?"

"Five o'clock."

"Whew! Then I'll have to hurry. I had no idea it was so late. I'm to report at 6 o'clock."

"Same here," said Hal. "But where have you been, Chester?"

"Carried dispatches to General Duncan. Seems that there is some fresh plan afoot that General Rhodes expects will take us into Sedan within a few days. I don't know what it is, though. Now, where have you been and what have you been doing?"

Hal explained as briefly as possible while Chester hurried into his clothes.

"So you have been fighting again, eh?" said Chester when Hal had concluded. "What would your mother say?"

Hal grinned.

"About the same that yours would, I guess," he replied. "But hurry, I feel like a bite to eat before I report to the general."

"Same here. I'll be with you in a jiffy."

Chester was true to his word, and the two sauntered forth five minutes later. After they had rounded up what Chester called a feast at one of the mess tents, they strolled toward the general's quarters.

As they walked along, they saw a familiar figure come dashing toward them.

"By George!" said Hal, "it's Stubbs. Now I wonder what he can be in such an all-fired hurry; about."

"We'll stop him and see," said Chester briefly.

The lads stepped forward and accosted Stubbs, who seemed to have no idea of stopping for a word with them.

"What's the hurry, Mr. Stubbs?" asked Chester.

Stubbs waved them away.

"Don't bother me," he explained, "I'm busy."

"But—" began Hal.

"I said I'm busy," declared Stubbs. "Can't you see I'm in a hurry?"

"Well, all right, if that's the way you feel about it," said Chester.

Stubbs seemed as if about to pass on, then hesitated.

"I'll tell you," he said. "I am in an awful hurry, but I've time to tell you the news if you promise to keep it to yourself."

"I promise," said Chester. "Let's have it, Mr. Stubbs."

"Austria has sued for peace," said Stubbs briefly.

"What!" said Hal. "Again?"

Stubbs glared at the lad.

"I tell you Austria has sued for peace," he said, emphasizing each word. "This time there is no doubt about it. I have it straight."

Chester's heart beat high.

"By Jove! I hope you're right, Mr. Stubbs," he exclaimed, "but I'm afraid to believe it."

"You needn't be," declared Stubbs. "It's perfectly true, this time."

"And I suppose you're hurrying off to flash the news to The New York Gazette?" asked Hal.

"Exactly," said Stubbs.

"Don't let us detain you, then," said Hal. "But if I were you, Mr. Stubbs, I'd go rather easy on that stuff. You know if you flashed a report like that and it wasn't true, you'd probably have to hunt a new job."

"I don't flash reports I know are not true," said Stubbs.

"Well," said Hal, "what I'd like to know is how you have gained your information when no one else seems to know anything about it?"

"In the newspaper game," said Stubbs, "a man learns to provide his news sources. I provided mine for this very thing some time ago. Now I have been justified."

"All right," said Hal. "I don't want to argue with you about it, but all the same I'd go easy."

"I tell you I've got the dope," declared Stubbs.

"Then you'd better hurry along and file it to The Gazette," Chester put in.

"By Jove, I will!" said Stubbs. "And after this, you'll get no more information from me. But remember your promises. Not a word about this."

"Don't worry, Mr. Stubbs," said Chester. "We're as mum as a couple of oysters."

"Then me for the cable wire," said Stubbs. He turned and hurried off.

"You know, Hal," said Chester, "it would be quite a feather in the little man's cap if he could get something like that ahead of every other newspaper in America."

"I should imagine it would," Hal agreed, "but I'm afraid he's all wrong. At the same time,

however, I hope he's right."

"Same here. And by the way, speaking of Stubbs and his efforts, there is only one other thing, to my mind, that would be greater luck for him."

"And that?" asked Hal.

"That would be to get first word to his paper of the ending of war."

"By Jove! That would be something to talk about," Hal agreed.

"I should say so. But come, we have delayed long enough. It lacks only a few minutes of six o'clock, and we're due in General Rhodes' quarters at that hour, you know."

"Didn't think I had forgotten it, did you?" demanded Hal.

"Well, I didn't know. Your memory isn't as good as it used to be."

"Is that so? Why isn't it?"

"Well, I don't know why," said Chester, "but it's a fact."

Hal was about to make a warm retort, but at that moment they came to the entrance to General Rhodes' quarters.

"Here we are," said Chester. "I hope he has something worth while for us to do."

"Same here," agreed Hal.

They went in.

CHAPTER XI
A NEW MISSION

"Sit down, gentlemen," said General Rhodes as Hal and Chester entered his quarters. "I'll be ready for you in a moment."

The lads obeyed.

For perhaps half an hour they sat quietly while their commander gave dozens of orders to others of his staff who appeared hurriedly every moment or so and disappeared again just as hurriedly.

At last the room was cleared with the exception of General Rhodes, Hal, Chester and the general's private orderly. General Rhodes motioned the lads to approach.

"Before I ask if you are willing to undertake rather a dangerous mission," he said, "I must explain a few points to you."

The lads stood at attention, but said nothing.

"As you know," said General Rhodes, "we are not more than a dozen miles from Sedan, which is our immediate objective. To the north, General Lejeune has advanced practically to within the same distance of the town. When the time comes for the deciding blow, we plan to strike simultaneously, General Duncan at the same time to hurl the Eighty-second division upon the city from the north and west. Also, as you know, a part of our division, under Colonel English, has wormed its way to the east of the town and will strike from that direction. Do you follow me?"

"Yes, sir," said Hal.

"Very well. Now an unforseen obstacle has arisen. The enemy, apparently forseeing our plans, by a sudden counter attack has driven a wedge between General Lejeune's division and my own. Telephone communication has been cut. For more than twenty-four hours I have been unable to get in touch with General Lejeune, and yet it is imperative if the final attack is to be successful that I communicate with General Lejeune."

"I understand, sir," said Chester. "You wish us to make an effort to get through."

General Rhodes nodded.

"That is it exactly," he replied. "But I must tell you a little more. The wedge driven by the enemy is less than a mile wide. If a man got through, he should be able to carry word to General Lejeune and return within six hours. Yet I have already dispatched three messengers and none has returned."

"You mean that they have failed, sir?" asked Hal.

"So it would seem. In each case I emphasized the necessity of haste. Had one of my previous messengers got through safely, he should have reported to me ere this. I fear they have been either killed or fallen into the hands of the enemy."

"In which event the enemy may have become familiar with your plans, sir," said Chester.

"No," returned General Rhodes, "they carried no written dispatches. The word that I sent to General Lejeune was verbal. Now my idea is this. If you, Major Paine, and you, Major Crawford,

are willing to volunteer for this hazardous duty, I shall repeat the message to you. I have called you both because the matter is urgent. One of you may get through where the other fails. Do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly, sir," said Hal quietly, "and I am sure I speak for my friend as well as myself when I say we are not only willing, but anxious, to volunteer for the task."

"Indeed we are, sir," Chester agreed.

"Very well, then," said General Rhodes. "The message I would have you carry to General Lejeune is this: Attack in full force at 6 o'clock on the evening of November 6, which is day after tomorrow. I shall lay my plans accordingly, going upon the supposition that one of you will get the message through."

"We shall do the best we can, sir," said Hal quietly.

"And that is the best any man can do," said General Rhodes. "As I say, I shall act upon the supposition that one of you will get through and I shall attack at that time whether I hear from you again or not. If you can, come back, but if you deem it more prudent, remain with General Lejeune's division until after the battle. That is all, gentlemen."

Hal and Chester saluted and took their departure.

"Rather a ticklish piece of work, if you ask me," was Chester's comment as they made their way back to their own quarters.

"Right you are," Hal agreed, "but the harder the job the more satisfaction when you have accomplished it successfully."

"What would you suggest?" asked Chester. "Shall we keep on our own uniforms or shall we disguise ourselves as Germans?"

"We'll keep our own," said Hal. "There is no use risking being caught as a spy unless absolutely necessary. If we're captured in American uniforms they'll make us prisoners of war. In German clothes, we would probably be shot. I'm against the German uniform this trip."

"I guess you're right. Besides, according to General Rhodes, we shall have to pass through less than half a mile of German territory. Now I'll make another suggestion."

"What is it?"

"My idea is that it will be better if we do not go together. I'll start an hour ahead of you, or you can start an hour ahead of me. We'll lay out our route in advance so the one who goes last will know about how far ahead the other should be. He might even be able to lend a helping hand should whoever goes first get into trouble."

"Not a bad idea," Hal agreed. "Then I elect to go first."

Chester shrugged.

"Any way suits me," he said. "And when will you start?"

Hal glanced at his watch.

"Eight o'clock now," he said. "I'll start at nine."

"Then I shall start at ten," said Chester.

"Right," said Hal. "Now, as we have nothing to do in the meantime, suppose we take a walk about the camp."

"I'm agreeable," said Chester. "Come on."

For perhaps an hour they strolled about, looking over the huge encampment with critical eyes. Men slept on their arms that night, had been sleeping on them for a week, for there was no telling at what hour might come the order to advance.

Cavalry horses pawed the ground restlessly in that part of the field where they were picketed. The troopers slept or sprawled on the hard ground nearby. To the south were parked the American batteries, while on all sides infantrymen were to be seen by the thousands.

Suddenly, from the direction of General Rhodes' quarters, came a loud hurrah. It was taken up on all sides, and directly the camp became a pandemonium.

"Wonder what's going on?" said Hal.

"Don't know," replied Chester. "We'll find out."

The lads hurried toward the general's quarters. Toward them came a crowd of shouting men, throwing their hats in the air and cheering wildly. Hal stopped one of them.

"What's all the excitement?" he asked.

"Haven't you heard the news, sir?" he asked.

"No," said Hal. "What is it?"

"A truce has been signed with Austria," replied the soldier. "Hurrah!"

"Hurrah indeed," said Hal fervently. "And have you heard the nature of the truce?"

"Yes, sir. An armistice has been signed to become effective to-morrow morning at 9 o'clock.

The armistice extends for thirty days in which time the allies will draw up terms of peace to be presented to Austria, sir."

"That is good news indeed, my man," said Hal. "I am obliged to you."

The soldier saluted and rejoined his companions. Together they continued their parade of the camp; spreading the glad tidings as they went from place to place.

"So Stubbs was right after all," Hal mused.

"It seems so," said Chester, "but I wonder where he got his information?"

"It's too deep for me," declared Hal, "but he got it all right. I hope he lands his scoop, as he calls it."

"So do I. He deserves it."

Hal glanced at his watch.

"Well," he said, "you can stay here awhile and help the others celebrate. I've work to do and it's time to be moving."

"Wish I were going with you," said Chester, "but I am convinced we have agreed on the best plan."

Hal nodded.

"It seems best to me."

"Then I shall follow the directions we agreed upon," said Chester. "I'll start in exactly an hour."

"And remember," said Hal, "that one of us must get through, no matter what happens."

"Right," Chester agreed. "Should you get into trouble, I'll lend a helping hand should I come across you and find that it is possible without endangering my own chances of getting through. Otherwise, you will have to shift for yourself."

"That's the spirit," declared Hal. "Help if you can without compromising yourself, but always remember that one of us must get through. Now I'm off."

He held out his hand, which Chester grasped warmly.

"I'm hoping nothing happens," said the latter quietly. "But you never can tell. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Hal.

He gave Chester's hand a parting grip, turned on his heel and strode away. Chester stood looking after him for some moments. Then he moved on slowly.

"By Jove! I hope nothing happens to Hal," he muttered.

It seemed to Chester that the next hour would never pass, but at last the hands of his watch showed 10 o'clock.

"Time to be moving," the lad told himself.

He produced his pair of revolvers and examined them carefully.

"All fine and dandy," he muttered. "Well, I guess there is no reason for waiting longer."

He turned and strode off in the direction Hal had gone just a short hour before.

CHAPTER XII
HAL MEETS AN OBSTACLE

Hal made rapid progress through the American lines. It was almost an hour after he left Chester that he reached the most advanced American outposts toward the north. He was challenged there, but after confiding to the officer in charge of operations there that he was on a mission for General Rhodes, he was allowed to pass.

The German lines, Hal learned, were perhaps two hundred yards ahead. There the enemy had hurriedly dug a temporary line of shallow trenches and settled down to hold them. It was Hal's business to get into and to pass through them.

Fortunately, the night was very dark so the lad had no hesitancy in stepping from the protection of the American lines. The officer in command at that point walked with him as far as he felt prudent. To him Hal confided the fact that Chester would be along presently, and the officer volunteered to speed the latter's progress in any way he could.

"Good luck," he called, as Hal disappeared in the darkness.

Hal made no response, but moved slowly and silently off through the night.

The first hundred yards he covered standing and without fear of detection. It was so dark that he knew his presence in No Man's Land would not be noticed unless the enemy chanced to turn one of their powerful searchlights in that direction. In that event, too, the lad knew it would make

little difference whether he was standing or crawling across the open.

After covering what he judged was a hundred yards, Hal dropped to his hands and knees and proceeded more cautiously. Voices in the German lines became audible now and Hal was perfectly well aware that a pair of German eyes might discover him. However, there was no help for it. It was his business to take such chances.

He wormed his way along slowly.

In this manner he came at last to the edge of the German trenches. There he paused a moment, listening intently. He heard voices. They seemed directly ahead of him. The lad crawled to his left. After progressing in this manner for perhaps a hundred yards he paused and listened again. He could still hear voices, but they were some distance to his right. There was no sound directly ahead of him.

Silently the lad got to his feet. His head came just above the top of the trench. He peered around quickly. Some distance to the right he perceived a little knot of men apparently engaged in heated argument. It was apparent that they were so busy with their dispute that they would not notice the alien figure in their midst. To the lad's left, too, perhaps fifty yards away, were half a dozen German soldiers. But they were not looking in Hal's direction.

Slowly the lad drew himself to the top of the trench, then dropped quietly inside. There he crouched for a moment, his hands on his revolvers, ready to fight or run as occasion should demand.

But his presence was unnoticed and Hal drew a breath of relief.

"Safe for a minute, at least," he told himself.

But Hal knew that he could not hope to escape discovery long in this exposed position. Besides, he had no time to spare. It was his business to pass through the German Lines as quickly as possible.

Little light showed in the German trenches. Here and there a lantern flickered as a sentinel passed along his post. Also candles, sheltered from the breeze by improvised shades, showed where little groups of Germans had gathered to chat before turning in for the night.

Hal perceived that his best hope of avoiding discovery lay straight ahead, toward the center of the German camp. The enemy would be looking for no enemies there. Besides, Hal's destination lay in that direction.

Leaving the shelter of the trench, he crawled forward. He stopped once or twice and flattened himself into the ground, as footsteps approached. But the footsteps turned off each time without coming close to him, and Hal proceeded.

Tents had been pitched in improvised streets and Hal heard the sound of deep snores from within. The German camp, except for sentries and some few others, was asleep.

It was very dark. Hal rose to his feet and proceeded more swiftly. He felt confident now that he would be able to pass through the camp without discovery, but he realized that the hardest work cut out for him would be to leave the German lines on the other side.

Nevertheless, it had to be done, so the lad pressed on.

Walking boldly along the little camp street, he at last passed beyond the long row of tents. Not more than a hundred yards ahead now, he knew, he would come upon more trenches thrown up as a protection to the enemy against the forces of General Lejeune of the Second division.

Now the lad went more cautiously, and at last he came within view of the trenches. Here and there a sentinel flitted by in the darkness. In the trenches, Hal saw several groups of the enemy gathered in circles within the glow of light cast by lanterns and candles. He approached very cautiously.

The lad no longer stood erect. He was crawling on his hands and knees. With each inch advanced he knew his danger increased; but he knew, too, that every foot of ground he covered brought him that much closer to success.

"I'll get through quietly if I can," he told himself, "but if I'm discovered I'll make a run and a fight for it. Once in the darkness of No Man's Land beyond I've as much chance of getting away as the boches have of catching me."

The lad halted suddenly. Footsteps were coming toward him, and a moment later Hal made out the figure of a German sentry approaching. The lad squirmed quickly but silently to one side and the German passed without seeing him.

"Close shave," the lad muttered to himself.

He moved forward again.

Other footsteps now approached and Hal made himself as small as possible on the ground. Looking up, he perceived the figures of half a dozen men only a few feet away. They were coming

directly toward him. Hal realized that if he didn't act promptly, he would probably be stepped on.

He tried to squirm out of the way silently, but haste was too urgent for extreme caution and the sound of the lad's body gliding over the ground carried to the ears of the enemy.

"What's that?" demanded one of them, and all halted.

"What's what, Hans?" asked a second voice.

"I heard something moving there," said the man called Hans.

"And what of it?" demanded the second voice. "Probably a rat."

"Made too much noise for a rat," was the response. "Sounded more like a man."

"Ha!" said another voice. "You talk as if you feared enemies right in the heart of our own camp, Hans."

"Can't trust these Americans," was the reply. "They're not afraid of anything. One of them is as likely to be here as any place else."

"Some truth in that, Hans," said another voice. "We'll have a look."

The Germans spread out fanwise and moved forward again. This was what Hal had been afraid of, and he knew now that concealment was no longer possible.

"I'll have to make a dash for it," he told himself grimly.

Still stooping, he produced his pair of automatics and paused, ready for action as soon as he should be discovered. And as he had feared, discovery was not long coming.

"Hello! What's that?" said a German voice.

"What's wh—" began a second voice.

Hal waited to hear no more. He knew he had been discovered, and he decided to act before the Germans completely recovered from their surprise.

Springing to his feet, the lad dashed forward with a cry.

"Out of my way!" he shouted in German.

For a moment it seemed that the Germans would obey this command, so startled were they by its suddenness and Hal's appearance from out of the ground, apparently.

But they recovered their wits in a moment and closed in on the lad with guttural cries of anger.

Hal raised both revolvers.

"Crack! Crack!"

Two Germans reeled back and the others gave ground. Before they had time to recover from this unexpected attack, Hal was among them. Twice more his revolvers spoke. The targets were so close that a miss was impossible and two more Germans crumpled up on the ground. The remaining two skipped promptly out of harm's way.

Hal leaped for the trenches, revolvers still in hand. Once beyond the enemy's lines he felt he would be comparatively safe.

But the sounds of the revolver shots had aroused the camp. Men streamed forth from all directions.

Hal found his progress barred by a dozen men who seemed to appear from out of the ground. The lad raised his revolvers again and emptied them into his foes, then sprang in among them, his revolvers clubbed.

With both hands he laid about him lustily, the while endeavoring to push through the enemy and reach the trench beyond. But the weight of numbers was too great and directly Hal went to the ground under a blow from a rifle butt.

He dragged himself to his feet and again mixed in with his foes. For a moment it seemed that he might fight his way clear, so desperate were his efforts. Reinforcements continued to arrive, however, and at last the lad was overpowered.

Strong hands seized him from behind, rendering further struggling futile. Hal relaxed his efforts and grew quiet.

"You've got me," he said quietly, "but I'd have got away if there hadn't been half a hundred of you."

"Tie him up," said a German voice.

No sooner said than done. A moment later Hal's arms were bound securely.

"Bring him up to the light," said another voice. "The colonel wants a look at him."

Hal felt himself propelled toward the trench. There a lantern was thrust in his face and a man attired as a German colonel of infantry surveyed the lad.

"So we've caught you, you American pig!" he exclaimed.

"So it seems," returned Hal quietly. "What are you going to do with me? That's the next question?"

"Brave man, aren't you," sneered the German. "Well, you won't be so brave when I get through with you. Lieutenant Steinz!" he called.

"Now what's up, I wonder?" Hal muttered to himself.

CHAPTER XIII
CHESTER TO THE RESCUE

Chester, after leaving the American lines, proceeded with the same caution that had characterized Hal's movements. He made no better time creeping across No Man's Land than had Hal. However, he was just as fortunate as his chum in penetrating the German trench. He reached them an hour later than had Hal and for this reason he did not see as many figures. Most of the enemy in the trenches facing the Americans on the south had turned in for the night.

Chester's passage through the German camp was considerably quicker than Hal had been able to proceed. Nearing the German outposts toward the north, however, he found it necessary to advance with greater caution.

Suddenly he came to a stop and threw himself flat on the ground. A short distance away he saw a faint light, cast by several lanterns, and he heard German voices.

"They're not all asleep here, at all events," the lad told himself. "I'll have to be careful."

He wormed his way toward the light and when he came close enough to ascertain what was going on, he gave an exclamation of pure alarm.

"Great Scott! They've nabbed Hal," he muttered.

Unmindful of danger now, he crept forward more swiftly and at last drew close enough to distinguish what was said.

"So you won't tell what you are doing here?" came a coarse voice in German.

"I will not," was the reply in a voice that Chester recognized as Hal's.

"Then I'll have to find a way to loosen your tongue," said the German voice. "Lieutenant Steinz, do your duty again."

Chester strained his eyes to see. He made out the form of a big man who stepped toward a figure that Chester made out as Hal. The man's arm drew back and flashed forth. Chester saw Hal stagger back, but the lad made no outcry.

Chester's blood boiled.

"So that's the kind of men we have to deal with, eh?" he muttered. "Well, I guess I'll have to take a hand in this game."

With Chester to think was to act. Nevertheless, he realized the need of caution if he were to extricate Hal from his present difficulty.

"I'll have to be pretty careful," he told himself; "otherwise, they'll snare me, too."

Chester's first impulse, of course, had been to dash forward, guns in hand, and wreak what damage he could among his enemies. He thought better of this, however, and continued to creep forward carefully and silently.

"If he hits you again," he said, speaking to Hal but muttering the words to himself, "it can't be helped; but we'll repay those blows with interest."

Hal, standing erect before his captors, did not flinch as Lieutenant Steinz drew back his arm for another blow. But his eyes flashed dangerously.

"You'll be sorry for this, my friends," he said quietly.

"Threats, eh?" sneered the German. "You're in no position to threaten, pig."

"Perhaps not," admitted Hal, "but just the same I am warning you."

There was something so menacing in the lad's voice, that for a moment the German hesitated; but for a moment only, then he drew back his arm and struck.

Once more Hal staggered under the blow, but he did not flinch.

The German raised his arm and would have struck again but for a sudden interruption.

When Chester saw the German strike Hal a second time, it was more than his blood could stand. He forgot, for the moment, his mission, that his first duty was to pass beyond the German camp. He threw caution to the winds.

With a wild cry he leaped to his feet and dashed forward, a revolver levelled in each hand.

Startled, the Germans turned to face their new foe. One look at Chester's angry features and they recoiled involuntarily.

At the same moment Chester fired—both weapons at once. Two of the enemy toppled over in

their tracks.

Now Hal had a quick mind. At Chester's first cry he knew what was up and he grew instantly alert, ready to take advantage of the first opportunity that presented itself.

The opportunity was not long coming.

Lieutenant Steinz, turning to get a view of Chester, for a moment left Hal unguarded. In that instant Hal sprang. Both hands he locked about the German's throat, and squeezed with all his strength. In vain the Teuton squirmed, struck and kicked.

Suddenly Hal released his right hand and drove it into the man's face. At the same moment his left hand shot out and seized the German's revolver. Then he stepped quickly back, levelled the weapon and fired.

"Come on, Chester!" he shouted.

Chester needed no urging.

In a few quick strides he was at Hal's side.

"Let's get out of here," he cried. "It's getting too warm."

Together the lads dashed toward the trench.

A cry of alarm went up from the Germans behind.

"Shoot them!" cried a voice that Hal recognized as that of the German colonel.

"Zig-zag, Chester!" cried Hal, and suited the action to the word.

Chester followed his chum's example and the first volley from behind failed to find a mark.

By this time the lads were at the edge of the trench.

"Up and over with you, quick!" cried Chester.

Hal leaped to the top of the trench and toppled to the ground beyond even as half a score of bullets sang across the spot where his head had been a moment before.

Chester also sprang for the top of the trench. But he had leaped too soon, and instead of reaching the top he fell short, and dropped down inside the trench again.

Germans were almost upon him when he regained his feet.

Chester realized that a second leap was out of the question at the minute, so guns in hand he turned and faced his foes.

"Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack!"

His automatics spoke angrily and all four bullets found human targets.

Hal, meanwhile, safely over the trench, looked around for Chester. When he failed to see him he realized on the instant what had happened.

"What shall I do?" he asked himself. "Duty says to hurry to a place of safety, but friendship says help Chester."

He wasted little time in thought.

He scrambled back to the top of the earthen embankment and took in the sight about him.

There Chester stood at bay, his automatics held in steady hands. Hal drew his own weapons.

"Jump up here quick, Chester!" he called. "I'll cover you."

"Don't bother about me," Chester called back. "Get away from here. Remember you must get through. I'll hold 'em off."

"Don't be a fool," shouted Hal, discharging his revolver at a big German who was about to shoot Chester down with his rifle. "Come up here."

Chester paid no further heed to his chum.

Hal gritted his teeth, dropped one revolver in his pocket, and reaching down grasped Chester by the shoulder.

"Come on," he called.

Chester shook off his chum's hand.

"Let me alone." he shouted angrily. "I'll get a few of these boches before they down me."

His revolvers spoke as he talked, and two Germans dropped.

Meanwhile bullets were striking on all sides of the two lads, and it seemed a miracle that they were not touched.

Hal considered the situation in a flash.

"There's one chance," he said.

Deliberately he sheathed his other revolver, thus leaving himself unarmed in the face of his foes. Then, bracing himself as best he could on the embankment, he reached down and seized Chester by both shoulders.

Putting forth all his strength, Hal heaved mightily, and drew his chum to the top of the embankment with him. There he released him and drew his revolvers again.

Came a cry of rage from inside the trench as the Germans saw their prey about to escape.

Two men dropped on their knees and sighted their rifles carefully.

But before they could fire Hal had accounted for one and Chester for the other.

Again a howl of rage went up from the German trench.

"Kill them! Kill them!" screamed the German colonel. "What a lot of dunderheads! Can't you shoot?"

He seized a revolver from a young officer close by and dashed forward himself.

Hal, in the act of tumbling from the embankment, smiled slightly and faced the colonel, unmindful of all other dangers.

"So you're the man responsible for those blows a moment ago, eh?" he muttered. "Well, you'll never do it again. Take that!"

He sighted carefully and fired.

The German colonel staggered in his onward rush, reeled crazily, threw up his arms, casting his revolver a dozen paces away, then fell to the ground.

"So much for you," Hal muttered. "You won't bully another American, I'll bet on that."

"Come on," said Chester, who had stuck close to his chum all the time. "It's too warm here. Let's move."

"Right. Suits me," said Hal quietly.

"Down we go, then," said Chester.

He rolled rather than leaped to the ground on the outside of the trench. Hal did likewise.

Both lads were slightly bruised by this method of descent, but they were not injured seriously. They scrambled to their feet.

"Now, let's see you run!" shouted Hal to Chester.

They ran.

CHAPTER XIV
THE CLOSING OF THE NET

Bullets flew thick and fast after the two lads as they clashed for the shelter of the American lines beyond. Fortunately, however, none touched them.

The Germans, it appeared, were so bewildered by the suddenness of Chester's appearance, single-handed attack and the flight of the two chums that followed, that they forgot all about their searchlights, which would have made it possible for them to have picked off fugitives at will; or else they had no searchlights in that section of the field.

Zig-zagging from right to left, the lads ran at top speed. For a time bullets whistled unpleasantly close, but soon they became few and far between.

Hal slowed down. Chester followed his example.

"Whew!" said Chester. "Pretty close, but we're safe enough now, I guess."

"By George! I hope so," declared Hal. "But there is just one job that I would have liked to complete before getting away from there."

"What's that?" demanded Chester.

"I would like to have let a little lead into that big German lieutenant who battered me up with his fist."

"Don't blame you," said Chester. "I'd like a shot at him myself."

"Well," said Hal, "I left my mark on his throat, and that's some satisfaction. Also, I disposed of the colonel who was responsible, and there's more satisfaction there, too."

"I saw you," replied Chester. "It was a neat shot."

"Well," said Hal, "we've done something that a couple of other couriers sent out by General Rhodes failed to accomplish—we have passed through the German lines. The general's plans will not go wrong if we can help it."

"Right," agreed Chester. "And I figure that the sooner we report to General Lejeune the better."

"Correct as usual. But I don't know that I care to try and repeat the feat of getting through. Besides, we have General Rhodes' permission to stay here until after the big battle if we like."

"And I vote that we stay," said Chester.

"Think I'll cast my own ballot that way," declared Hal. "We'll stick, unless something turns up to change our minds."

"Now for the American lines, then," said Chester.

They hurried on through the darkness and directly the dim outline of the American trenches loomed up ahead.

"Here we are," said Hal. "Now to get over."

As they would have climbed up, however, the figure of a soldier appeared above them. He saw them instantly and levelling his rifle cried:

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"Friends," said Hal briefly.

"Advance, friends, and be recognized," said the sentinel.

Hal and Chester obeyed and the sentinel scanned them closely.

"You look all right," he growled at last, "but I'm not sure of you."

"Do you think we'd be coming in here if we didn't belong?" demanded Chester.

"I don't know about that; but I can't see any good reason why you should be prowling around out in No Man's Land if you are not bent on mischief."

"Don't be absurd, man," said Hal. "We come from General Rhodes with a message for General Lejeune."

"A likely story," said the sentry. "How'd you get through the Germans?"

"Walking and running," said Chester. "But are you going to keep us standing here all night? I tell you we bear an important message from General Rhodes."

"What'd you both come for?" the sentry wanted to know.

"That," said Chester, thoroughly exasperated, "is none of your business, my man! Will you call the sergeant of the guard, or shall I?"

"Oh, I'll call him," said the sentry, "but I'll tell you right now I don't think it will do you any good. Kindly step up here, will you?"

Hal and Chester did so. Then, for the first time, the sentry saw that they were officers in the American army. He looked flabbergasted.

"I—I—I beg pardon, gentlemen," he said. "I didn't know you were officers. Why didn't you tell me?"

"You didn't give us a chance," said Hal shortly. "Kindly summon the sergeant of the guard."

The sentry argued no longer. He raised his voice in a shout that brought the sergeant of the guard on the dead run.

"What's the matter with you, you bonehead?" demanded the sergeant as he came lumbering forward. "Want to arouse the whole camp?"

"It's all right, sergeant," said Hal. "He only did as ordered. We have come from General Rhodes with an important message for General Lejeune. Will you direct us to his quarters?"

The sergeant saluted stiffly.

"Follow me, sirs," he said briefly.

Five minutes walk brought the three to the headquarters of the commander of the Second American division. There the lads were accosted by a member of the general's staff, Colonel O'Shea.

"We desire to see the general at once on a very urgent matter," said Hal.

Colonel O'Shea scowled.

"The general left orders that he was not to be disturbed unless upon a very important matter," he replied.

"But this is urgent," said Chester. "We are instructed by General Rhodes to deliver the message at once."

"But how am I to know the matter is so urgent?" asked the colonel.

"Because I say so, sir," said Hal quietly. "I am not in the habit of lying, nor of having my word doubted."

"Oh, is that so," said the colonel, though somewhat taken aback. "Well, I'm not sure the general will care to be disturbed. You may deliver your message, and then I shall consider whether your business is of such importance as to justify waking the general."

"We were not instructed to deliver our message to you, sir," said Hal simply. "I have to request again that we be given immediate audience of General Lejeune."

The colonel hesitated. Apparently he was on the point of refusing to arouse the general, but he thought better of it, shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

"One moment," he said brusquely.

He returned a moment later, however, followed by a second figure, attired in a suit of pajamas and rubbing sleepy eyes.

"General Lejeune?" asked Hal.

"Yes," was the sharp reply. "What is it?"

"We bear a message from General Rhodes, sir," said Hal.

"Well, let's have it, let's have it," exclaimed the general. "I've got to get back to bed and get some sleep."

"First, sir," said Hal, "I must explain that we came through the German lines where two or three other couriers lost their lives. General Rhodes wishes you to understand, sir, that the success of the campaign depends upon your acting in accordance with his message."

"I have no doubt of it," said General Lejeune. "I have been unable, since the German wedge was driven between our forces, to get into communication with General Rhodes or other divisional commanders. I am isolated here, but at the same time I consider my position impregnable, so I am standing pat."

Hal and Chester bowed in understanding of the general's explanation, and the commander of the Second division added:

"Come, sirs, what is the message you bring?"

"General Rhodes' message, sir," said Hal, "is that he requests you to attack the enemy before Sedan in full force on the evening of November 6, the attack to begin precisely at 6 o'clock."

"Very well," said General Lejeune, "and just what is at the bottom of this plan—what is to be gained by it?"

"That I do not know, sir," said Hal. "General Rhodes simply asked us to carry that message. He said that the success of the campaign against Sedan depended upon you doing your part."

"Well, I'll do it, never fear," said General Lejeune. "I've got one of the best fighting units in France, and there's not a man in it who's not dead anxious to get another chance at the Huns. You may take back word to General Rhodes for me, that I shall act in accordance with his wishes."

"If it is all the same to you, sir," said Chester with a slight smile, "we're not going back—not, at least, until the battle of Sedan is over."

"How's that? How's that?" asked the general in some surprise.

"Why, sir," said Chester, "General Rhodes gave us permission to stay with you if we deemed it imprudent to try and pierce the enemy's lines again."

"And you think it would be imprudent?" asked General Lejeune with a slight smile.

"In view of the trouble we had getting here, yes, sir," replied Chester.

"Very well, then," said the general, "you may remain with us. Colonel O'Shea, will you find quarters for these gentlemen? By the way, I did not catch your names."

"Crawford, sir," said Chester.

"Paine, sir," said Hal.

"Very well," General Lejeune continued, "Colonel O'Shea, will you please see that Major Paine and Major Crawford are provided with suitable quarters? And will you both report to me at 8 o'clock in the morning, gentlemen? I may have need of you. The Second division is an hospitable unit, but you'll find that guests are required to work as well as home folks."

"We shall be more than glad to do our parts, sir," said Hal.

"Very well. Now you have kept me out of bed long enough. I'll leave you both to the good graces of Colonel O'Shea, and if he doesn't find suitable quarters for you, you let me know and I'll have him court-martialed."

With this, and a smile on his face, the good-natured commander took his leave.

"By George!" said Hal, as the lads followed Colonel O'Shea from the general's quarters, "he's the most lively commander I ever did see."

"Full of 'pep' eh?" said Chester with a laugh.

"Yes," Hal agreed, "and I'll bet he's full of the same old 'pep' when it comes down to business."

And Hal was right.

CHAPTER XV

THE CAPTURE OF SEDAN

The American advance against Sedan was in full blast. All night the fighting had raged. Promptly at 6 o'clock on the evening of November 6 General Lejeune had hurled the Second division forward in accordance with the plans outlined by General Rhodes of the Forty-second.

Apparently the Germans had anticipated the attack, for they were braced to receive it when the first Yankee troops began to move. The enemy stood firm—and was continuing to stand firm almost twelve hours after the assault was launched.

There was a slight chill in the early November air as it grew light. The air was filled with shrieking shells and shrapnel. Rifle and machine-gun fire rose even above the noise of the field and siege guns. Shrill whistles punctuated intervals of seeming silence as American officers gave orders to their men. In the midst of battle, whistles are depended upon mainly for signals—also there are signals given with the hands. The confusion is usually too great to permit verbal orders being understood.

At the same time that General Lejeune attacked the enemy, General Rhodes, to the south, also had advanced. But the enemy was holding stubbornly in that section of the field also, and at 6 o'clock on the morning of November 7 the American forces had made only slight progress. However, they were still hammering hard at the German lines.

With a gallantry not exceeded in the annals of the war, the Second division kept at its task. When one enemy machine-gun nest was captured, they found themselves targets for others, whose gunners, discovered, had withheld their fire until the moment when it would be the most effective.

Another grand assault was ordered by General Lejeune.

The Germans made a determined resistance. They put in fresh troops and subjected the American lines to a terrific artillery bombardment of high explosives and gas shells. Directly in the path of the advancing Americans was a large wood. Although the wood was not yet cleared of the enemy, the American line here was farther advanced. Many prisoners had been taken.

A third attack resulted in the capture of still more prisoners and many machine-guns. In the meantime the Ninth infantry, on the right of that part of the field where Hal and Chester found themselves, had advanced its position to the northern edge of the Bois de la Jardin and was digging in to beat off a possible counter-attack. In fact, the entire Third brigade, assisted by a battalion of the Second engineers, was strengthening its lines as well as possible under heavy enemy machine-gun and artillery fire.

The defensive part played by this brigade was very difficult. Its losses were heavy as a result of enemy shell fire and gas bombardments, to which the Third brigade could not at the moment reply. Its duty now was to hold its lines. Its present action was confined to a rifle and machine-gun duel with the enemy.

To the south, the First brigade also was hotly engaged. It had advanced in the face of a terrible artillery and machine-gun fire until at hand grips with the foe. Then ensued one of the fiercest struggles of the war.

As in other encounters, the Germans proved no match for the Yankees at hand-to-hand fighting. They resisted desperately, but gradually were driven back. The Americans, with wild cheers, pursued them closely.

General Lejeune's center, composed of the Second brigade, with an additional battalion or two of artillery, also was meeting with greater success than the Third brigade, which, for the moment, had been checked.

The advance was pushed with desperate energy, and the Germans could not hold their ground in the face of the withering American fire. The German center faltered, then broke.

Taking advantage of this success, General Lejeune pushed Brigadier General Abernathy's Second division into the breach. Immediately, also, he ordered the First brigade forward in an effort to break through to the south, while orders were rushed to the hard-pressed Third brigade to make a final effort.

The task of the Third brigade was easier now. Bereft of its supports, the German center was obliged to yield ground to the Third brigade or risk being cut off and surrounded.

The Germans gave ground slowly.

To the south, the First brigade also began to drive the foe more swiftly. It appeared for a moment that the Germans would suffer a rout. Under the direction of their officers, however, they braced perhaps half a mile farther back, and again showed a determined front.

Trenches dug by the Americans were abandoned now as the Yankees poured forth in pursuit of the enemy. Not a man in the whole Second division who was not sure that the trenches would never be needed for defensive purposes. No one knew better the morale of the American troops than did the men themselves.

Nevertheless, the advance slowed down in the face of the resistance being offered by the enemy. For a time it appeared that the fighting had reached a deadlock.

The deciding touch to the battle was furnished by General Rhodes.

Sweeping up from the south, the Fifth, Sixth and Seventh brigades of the Forty-second division bore off a trifle to the east and then turned north again, thus catching the enemy on the left flank.

This maneuver, apparently, had not been anticipated by the enemy's general staff, for it took the Germans by surprise. True, they received warning in time to wheel machine-guns into position and to place big guns to rake the Americans as they dashed forward. But the warning had not been received in time to permit the general staff to alter its plan of defense, and for this reason proved the blow that broke the backbone of the enemy's resistance.

The enemy, closely pressed by General Lejeune, had no time to make changes in his defensive plan necessitated by General Rhodes' sudden attack. Reinforcements could not be sent to check General Rhodes without weakening the front opposed to General Lejeune.

General Schindler, after a hasty conference with his staff, ordered a retreat to the lines just before Sedan. The Germans fell back rapidly.

Neither General Rhodes nor General Lejeune was content to rest with this advantage, but each decided to push on.

During all this time, the enemy had been successful in keeping a wedge between the Second and Forty-second American divisions. General Schindler realized that if he hoped to extricate his men from the trap sprung by the Americans he must prevent a juncture of the Second and Forty-second at all hazards.

Now, however, as the attack seemed on the verge of success, General Lejeune decided that the German wedge separating him from General Rhodes must be pierced.

Accordingly, without permitting the advance to slacken elsewhere, he threw the First brigade against it.

For perhaps fifteen minutes the fighting was fast and furious. In vain the Germans tried to stem the tide in khaki that rushed forward against them. General Schindler further weakened his center to rush reinforcements in order to retain the wedge intact.

But it was no use. The Americans were not to be denied. They fought with the courage and desperation of lions. Little heed did they pay to the hail of machine-gun bullets that swept them as they advanced. Artillery and explosive shells failed to stop them. Rifle fire was no more effective.

Suddenly from the German lines sallied a regiment of cavalry. The American infantry braced to receive the charge.

At the same time Hal found himself before Colonel Taylor of the First brigade with dispatches from General Lejeune. He had just delivered them as the German cavalry sallied forth.

"Great Scott! What a chance to take!" the lad muttered under his breath. "The Germans must be licked. This move can be for no other purpose than to give infantry time to withdraw."

The American infantry stood firm as the German cavalry hurled itself upon them. Not an inch of ground did they give. Horses and men fell in heaps. Other chargers reeled back, throwing their riders beneath their hoofs. At the same time the Yankee infantry poured in a hail of rifle fire.

The Germans retired a pace, reformed and charged again. The result was the same. Not an inch did the Americans give, and the execution in the enemy's ranks was fearful to behold.

"I guess that will stop that," Hal told himself.

He was right.

When the enemy's cavalry withdrew a second time it did not reform for a third charge. Instead, it fell back upon its infantry and artillery supports, apparently fearing that the American infantry would pursue and annihilate it.

"I thought so," said Hal.

In the meantime, the German retirement in other parts of the field had become more rapid. The lines before Sedan were abandoned gradually and at last there was nothing to keep the Americans from entering the city save the cannonading of the German artillery from far to the rear of the town.

But although the bulk of the German army had retired safely to the east of Sedan, fortune had not been so kind to the two brigades which had formed the wedge between the Second and Forty-second American divisions.

When General Lejeune's men had pushed back the cavalry attack, General Rhodes, to the south, had gained an inkling of what was going on. Accordingly he had ordered an attack upon the hard-pressed foes.

Caught thus between two fires, the Germans tried first to hold their ground, and, finding this

could not be done, to retreat orderly.

But they had delayed too long.

Three regiments of the First brigade of General Lejeune's division had been hurried forward to cut off a movement, and the Germans, when they found flight blocked, became disheartened. In spite of the fact that they outnumbered the little force between them and the bulk of their army, thousands of men threw down their arms and surrendered. This forced the others to follow suit or be annihilated.

Less than two hours later, with German shells still falling among them, American troops entered Sedan.

And the French population, virtual prisoners for many months, received them with wild acclaim. It was a joyous day for the citizens, indeed.

CHAPTER XVI
AN UNEXPECTED HONOR

"Sedan at last! This settles the war."

It was Chester who spoke.

"Right you are," replied Hal. "The poor old kaiser's goose is cooked. Even the most sanguine German can no longer hope for victory."

"I think the kaiser gave up hope a long while ago," said Chester. "He—Hello, what's up now, I wonder?"

He broke off suddenly and pointed to a horseman who came galloping into the town from the east, gesticulating excitedly as he rode along. Words that he shouted as he dashed forward seemed to create great excitement among the villagers, who, all day, had been parading the streets in celebration of the American occupation of the city.

"Don't know," said Hal. "We'll try and get close enough to hear what he says."

As the man drew close, the lads saw that he was a German cavalryman. It appeared strange to both boys that he was thus permitted to ride free, as the feelings of the villagers were very strong against the Germans. But it soon became apparent that the message he brought secured him immunity.

"What's that he said?" asked Chester, with hand to his ear.

"I didn't catch it," said Hal. "Here, get in front of him. We'll stop his wild ride."

Chester needed no urging. The lads stepped directly in front of the galloping horse. Hal produced his revolvers.

The rider checked his steed. Hal approached him.

"Dismount," said the lad in German.

The rider did so.

"Now," said Hal, "what's all the excitement? You seem to have something on your mind. What is it?"

"Haven't you heard the news?" demanded the rider.

"I wouldn't be asking you if I had," said Hal. "What is it?"

"The kaiser has abdicated!"

Hal and Chester started back in pure amazement.

"What!" they exclaimed in a single voice.

"So I am informed," declared the German. "It is true that my information has not been substantiated, but I know enough of conditions in Germany to credit the report."

"Well, you come with me," said Hal. "We'll take this matter to General Lejeune."

The German accompanied them without objection.

General Lejeune received the report with skepticism.

"Nothing to it, in my opinion," he said. "It is true that conditions in Germany are fast approaching a crisis, but I believe this report is premature. However, I have no doubt that something like that will happen within the next thirty days. But what are you doing in our lines, man?"

This last to the German soldier.

"Well, I'm tired of fighting," was the soldier's reply. "I want to live to go home again some day. I've a family in Hamburg that will need me. I am content to remain a prisoner until the war is over."

"And so you shall," said General Lejeune. "Whether your report is true or not, it has given me an interesting moment. Colonel O'Shea, will you turn this man over to the corporal of the guard?"

The prisoner was led away. General Lejeune turned to Hal and Chester.

"I am sorry to lose your services, gentlemen," he said, "but I have just been in communication with General Rhodes, and he wishes you to report to him at once."

The lads saluted the commander of the Second division and left his quarters.

Half an hour later they reported to General Rhodes as he rode into Sedan to establish his own quarters, as the Second division was soon to advance again. General Rhodes greeted the lads warmly.

"I am certainly glad that you both came through safely," he said, after returning their salutes, "and I must say that I didn't expect it. You have been in luck. Now I have another important matter in hand."

"We shall be glad to offer our services, sir," said Hal.

General Rhodes smiled.

"I've no doubt of it," he replied. "However, this mission is not likely to be so dangerous. Don't worry, though," he added, as the faces of the lads fell, "I believe I may safely promise you some interesting moments."

"We're glad of that, sir," declared Chester.

"I wonder," said General Rhodes, "whether you have heard of the reported upheaval in Germany?"

"Yes, sir," said Hal. "Only a few moments ago we captured a man who declared the kaiser had abdicated."

"That," said General Rhodes, "is probably untrue; however, I know that the kaiser has considered abdicating. In fact, his abdication is being urged by his military leaders—his erstwhile friends, Hindenburg and Ludendorff."

"Can that be possible, sir?" asked Hal.

"Yes, we have authentic information to that effect. I understand, too, Germany is preparing to ask Marshal Foch for an armistice preliminary to signing a declaration of peace."

"By Jove, sir!" exclaimed Chester, carried away in spite of himself.

General Rhodes smiled again.

"It is good news," he said quietly. "Of course, I am not absolutely positive of that, but in view of recent German reverses I do not see how the enemy can do aught else."

"Well, sir," said Chester, "we'll impose terms on them that will make their hair curl."

For a third time General Rhodes smiled.

"We won't be too severe," he said. "Remember, we are not German."

"That's true, too, sir," said Chester. "But all the same, it should be done, if you ask me."

"Perhaps," said General Rhodes. "Now, I suppose you are wondering why I called you here?"

"Yes, sir," returned Hal.

"Well," said General Rhodes, "I have been summoned to report to the commander-in-chief and I want a couple of officers to go with me who can be useful as well as ornamental."

Both lads flushed.

"I know that you drive an automobile exceedingly well, Major Paine," the general continued, "and for that reason I am selecting you as my chauffeur on this trip."

"But I am afraid I shall not be so useful, sir," said Chester.

"Well," said the general, "I am taking you along because I thought you'd like to go."

"And so I would, sir," answered Chester.

"It may be," General Rhodes continued, "that before our return we shall be present at a very momentous gathering."

"You mean, sir—" asked Hal.

General Rhodes nodded.

"Exactly," he replied. "I mean that the commander-in-chief is summoning me for some purpose other than because he wants to see me. It would seem that matters have reached a point where something is likely to break at any minute."

"By George! I hope so, sir," declared Chester.

"I shall expect you to be ready in an hour," said General Rhodes ending the interview suddenly. "I shall have a car here at that time."

Chester and Hal saluted and departed.

"Now, this is what I call a regular mission," declared Hal, as they hurried to their quarters.

"It is if it develops," replied Chester.

"Something tells me it will develop," said Hal.

"Let's hope so."

The lads were back at General Rhodes' headquarters well within the time allowed them. A large army automobile stood without.

"Guess this is our steed," said Hal.

He was right.

General Rhodes appeared a few moments later and took his seat. He motioned Chester to a place beside him. Hal took the wheel.

"Where to, sir?" he asked of the general.

"Rheims," was the reply. "The commander-in-chief is there now. You know the road, of course?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you will take us there as speedily as possible."

The machine shot forward with a lurch.

Now if there was one thing Hal did better than anything else it was to drive an automobile. He was a fast though careful driver and his hands and nerves both were like steel when he clutched a wheel.

He had been over the road before, and his excellent memory served him in good stead now.

It was after 3 o'clock on the afternoon of November 7 when the automobile flashed into the outskirts of Rheims. Hal stopped the car long enough to inquire the way to General Pershing's headquarters, then moved forward again.

"You are a good driver, Major," said General Rhodes, as he alighted and motioned both boys to follow him.

"Thank you, sir," returned Hal. "I've had experience enough, sir, I should be, at all events."

General Rhodes vouchsafed no reply, as he mounted the short flight of steps to General Pershing's offices, with Hal and Chester at his heels.

Apparently his arrival was expected, for an orderly saluted and told him that he was to proceed to the commander-in-chief immediately.

"You gentlemen stay here until I send for you, or return," he instructed the two lads.

Hal and Chester stood stiffly at attention as he walked away.

"We're in luck, if you ask me," said Chester after their commander had gone.

"It would seem so," Hal agreed. "If anything happens, I'd like to be in at the finish."

"So would I. We've been in the war from the first. It would be no more than right for us to see the finale."

"Maybe we will," said Hal. "Here's hoping."

They sat quietly for some time. Two hours later an orderly approached.

"Major Paine! Major Crawford!" he said, "the commander-in-chief desires your presence at once. Kindly follow me."

CHAPTER XVII
STUBBS AGAIN

General Pershing greeted the lads cordially.

"Glad to see you again," he said. "General Rhodes informs me that you have been up to your old tricks and have again been cited for gallantry in action. However, it is no more than I would have expected of you."

The lads bowed in response to this praise, but neither spoke.

"It is fortunate that General Rhodes brought you with him," General Pershing continued. "Still, it may not be so fortunate for him, for I am about to deprive him of your services. I take it that you will survive the separation, though," and the commander-in-chief smiled.

"We are always glad to serve in whatever way we may, sir," said Hal.

"Good!" said General Pershing. "Then I shall avail myself of your services. Several hours ago I was in communication with Marshal Foch, who is now in Soissons. General Rhodes informs me that he has made you acquainted with the facts that seem to indicate an early cessation of hostilities, so I need not amplify here. Now, Marshal Foch, anticipating that Germany may really sue for peace, has asked my advice in the matter of armistice terms pending a final treaty of peace. These I have written out. As you will readily recognize, they are not to be trusted to

careless hands. I have confidence in you, however, gentlemen, so I shall ask you to carry this paper to Marshal Foch."

"We shall be glad to do it, sir," said Chester.

"Very well. Then I intrust this paper to you, and I need not warn you to guard it carefully and keep the matter secret."

General Pershing extended a document to Hal. The lad took it and put it carefully in his inside coat pocket.

"It will be safe there, your excellency," he said quietly.

"Now," said the commander-in-chief, "it is my wish that that paper be placed in Marshal Foch's hands at the earliest possible moment. The car in which you drove General Rhodes is at your disposal."

"We shall make all possible haste, sir," said Chester.

Both lads saluted their commander and left the room.

"By Jove!" said Hal, as he sprang into the car, "there is no use talking, important developments are pending. It begins to look like peace to me."

"And to me," Chester agreed. "Well, the sooner the better. Four years of war is enough to satisfy Mars himself."

Soon the car was speeding westward.

It was a long drive to Soissons and it was after nightfall when Hal saw the lights of the city in the distance. A few moments later they entered the town.

Hal had no difficulty ascertaining where Marshal Foch made his headquarters and he drove there at once. A few words to a guard before the building brought forth a member of Marshal Foch's staff and the lads explained their mission to him briefly.

"You are expected," said the French officer. "Follow me."

He led the way into the house and through a long hall. At the far end he tapped on a door.

"Who's there?" came a voice, that Hal at once recognized as belonging to the French commander-in-chief.

"Colonel Murrat," said the lads' guide. "The messengers from General Pershing have arrived."

"Show them in at once," said Marshal Foch.

A moment later Hal and Chester were in the presence of the generalissimo of all the allied forces. They saluted him respectfully.

"I may be mistaken," said Marshal Foch, eyeing them searchingly, "but I'll wager you are Majors Paine and Crawford. Am I right?"

"Yes, your excellency," said Hal. "We are honored that you remember us."

"I never forget a face," replied Marshal Foch; "and seldom a name. Then you bring me a communication from General Pershing?"

For answer Hal produced the document given him by the American commander-in-chief earlier in the day. He passed it to Marshal Foch without a word. The French commander took it and laid it carefully on his desk.

"That will be all for to-night, gentlemen," he said. "I shall be pleased if you will avail yourself of our hospitality. Colonel Murrat will find quarters for you. Will you report to me in the morning at 8 o'clock? I may have a reply for your commander-in-chief."

The lads saluted again and withdrew. Colonel Murrat showed them to excellent quarters in a house next to the one in which the French commander had his headquarters and left them.

"Well," said Chester, after he had gone, "looks like we are right in among things, doesn't it?"

"It certainly does," Hal agreed. "But say, I'm hungry. Let's step out and round up something to eat."

"Suits me," declared Chester, "I'm half starved myself."

At a little restaurant only three or four blocks away they were soon comfortably filled. Hal was on the point of suggesting that they turn in for the night when a figure entering the door caught his eye.

"By all that's wonderful," he exclaimed, "here comes Anthony Stubbs."

Hal was right. The little war correspondent espied the lads at the same moment and hurried toward them with outstretched hand.

"I'm awfully glad to see you boys again," he exclaimed. "What brings you here, if I may ask?"

"Sit down, Mr. Stubbs," said Hal. "Have something to eat with us."

"Thanks: don't mind if I do. But I repeat, what are you doing here?"

"How long have you been in town, Mr. Stubbs?" asked Chester, ignoring the little man's question.

"About fifteen minutes, more or less. But I say, what are you doing here? This is the third time I've asked that question."

"Then don't ask it again, Mr. Stubbs," replied Chester.

"Oh, I see," smiled Stubbs. "Can't answer, eh? Well, I'll wager another hat with somebody that I can tell you why you're here."

"You'd lose this time, Mr. Stubbs," said Hal.

"Oh, no I wouldn't. You're here in connection with the signing of an armistice by Germany and the allies."

Chester started to his feet.

"Sh-h-h! Not so loud, Stubbs," he exclaimed.

Stubbs smiled, but he lowered his voice when he spoke again.

"Well, would I lose the bet?" he asked.

"I can't say a thing, Mr. Stubbs," was Hal's response.

"Well, I'm bound by no such orders," said Stubbs, "so I can. First, however, I want you to understand that whatever I do say is in confidence."

"Of course," said Hal.

"Certainly, Mr. Stubbs," agreed Chester.

"Well, then," said Stubbs, "I want to tell you I'm on the trail of the biggest scoop in newspaper history. I'm going to be the first war correspondent to flash the news that the armistice is signed."

"You mean you think you are," said Chester.

"I'm dead sure of it. Now, I'm in close touch with a very influential naval officer. He has agreed to let me know the moment the armistice is signed; and the news will come to him over the only direct wire to the place of meeting between Germans and allies, for it will be an official wire."

"You're getting away ahead of the game, Mr. Stubbs," declared Chester.

"Certainly you have no information yet that an armistice is likely to be signed soon."

Stubbs smiled.

"But the trouble is I have," he replied quietly.

"Stubbs," said Hal with real admiration, "I don't know how you do it, but you certainly have a way of getting information when you start after it."

"That's why the New York Gazette sent me over here," replied Stubbs modestly.

"I see," said Hal. "Well, I wish you luck. But what are you doing here?"

Stubbs was silent a moment. Then he said:

"I know you'll say nothing about this, or I would keep mum. Truth is I came here to make these arrangements I've been telling you about."

"And how long will you stay, Mr. Stubbs?"

"Over night. I'm off for Versailles to-morrow."

"Versailles!" exclaimed Chester. "But you will be out of the fighting zone then, Mr. Stubbs, and it will take you longer to get word should your news develop."

"But I'll be where I can get it on the cables ahead of some of the rest of 'em," said Stubbs with a grin. "Also, I'll get word in Versailles as soon as the fellows get it here, or wherever the thing is pulled off. I've seen to that."

"I get you, Mr. Stubbs," said Hal. "Now take my advice and wait until you are sure of your facts before you do anything rash."

"I wasn't born yesterday," said Stubbs with another grin. "I'll flash the word when the time comes, not before."

"Sorry we can't help you a little bit, Mr. Stubbs," said Chester, "but you know how it is."

"Oh, that's all right," said Stubbs. "I understand. I don't make a habit of telling all I know either. Well, that was a pretty fair meal you fellows set me up to. Now let's get out of here. Where are you putting up?"

Hal told him.

"Guess there's no objection to my coming along, is there?" asked Stubbs.

"I guess not," said Hal. "Come along."

So Stubbs accompanied the two lads back to their temporary home.

"I'm going to turn in on that second bed there," he said. "You two fellows can bunk together. If I'm gone when you get up in the morning you'll know I'm on my way."

He threw his clothes off hastily, and crawled into bed.

"Good night," he said.

He was asleep and snoring loudly long before Hal and Chester turned in for the night.

"Let him snore," said Hal with a grin. "I'm not particularly fond of such noises, but I'd hate to disturb him. Anyway, he won't bother me long, and not at all after I get to sleep."

"Nor me," agreed Chester. "Let him snore."

So the lads also crawled between the sheets.

"Guess we'd better get all the rest we can," said Chester. "Things are liable to happen from this time on."

Chester was right. Things did happen.

CHAPTER XVIII
A MESSAGE FROM THE ENEMY

An air of confusion and extreme activity pervaded Marshal Foch's headquarters when Hal and Chester presented themselves to the French commander-in-chief the following morning.

The lads awakened early in spite of the fact that they had not gone early to bed. Stubbs already had taken his departure, but he had left a note which read:

"Good-bye. You were sleeping so peacefully I didn't wish to disturb you. You'll hear from me after I land the big scoop. Stubbs."

Upon entering the office of Marshal Foch the lads stood at attention for some moments before the marshal noticed their presence. Then he motioned them to approach.

"I'm very busy now," he said, indicating a mass of papers on his desk, "so I will ask you to sit down and await my pleasure. I am expecting momentarily to have news upon which to base a communication to General Pershing."

He turned back to his desk, and Hal and Chester found seats in the far end of the room.

From time to time, French officers hurried in, reported to Marshal Foch and departed again as hurriedly.

Marshal Foch tapped a bell on his desk. An officer who answered the part of private secretary arose from a desk across the room and hurried to his commander's side.

"Any word from General Marcel?" asked Marshal Foch.

"None, your excellency."

"Strange. My information indicated that developments would begin before now. What day is this, Colonel?"

"The eighth of November, your excellency."

"So it is, I had forgotten. In times like these, it seems I cannot keep track of the days. If General Marcel has not reported in the next half hour, you will send a messenger to ascertain why."

"Very well, sir."

The officer resumed his seat and Marshal Foch again plunged into the mass of papers on his desk.

Half an hour passed and in the interval no one had entered the room. Marshal Foch's secretary arose and approached his commander.

"I shall send a messenger to General Marcel now, your excellency," he said.

Marshal Foch nodded, but did not raise his head from his work.

The secretary left the room. He returned five minutes later and resumed his seat without a word.

Another half an hour passed.

Then an officer in full general's regalia entered and approached Marshal Foch.

"I am here, sir," he said, saluting.

The French commander looked up.

"Ah, General Marcel," he exclaimed. "And what have you to report, sir?"

"Nothing, your excellency."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing, sir. I have heard no word from the enemy since my conversation with you last night."

"Please repeat to me your reply of last night to the unofficial overtures made through the Swiss ambassador. My memory is not as good as it once was, general."

"I simply repeated your words, sir. I said: 'If the German general staff desires to ask an

armistice on the western front, the allied forces will respect a flag of truce.'"

"And that is all, general?"

"That is all, sir. It was plain enough. The enemy knows now that he need attempt to gain no delay by subterfuge. If he is sincere in his appeal, a flag of truce will be sent from the German lines."

"Exactly," said Marshal Foch. "In the meantime, general, I shall order an attack in force along the whole front."

"I shall report to you the moment there are developments," said General Marcel.

"Very well, general. Let us hope the developments will come speedily. That is all."

General Marcel saluted and withdrew.

Marshal Foch swung again to his secretary.

"Summon General Magnin," he instructed.

The secretary went out hurriedly. He returned a moment later accompanied by a second figure, General Magnin, then acting chief of staff.

"General," said Marshal Foch, "I am going to order a further advance all along the line. Will you see that the necessary orders are given, at once?"

"At once, your excellency," said General Magnin, and withdrew with haste.

"Now, that's what I call getting action," Hal whispered to Chester.

"You bet," was Chester's low response.

Once more the French commander became immersed in his work. He took no notice of Hal and Chester, who, though trying to be as patient as possible, were beginning to get restless and to fidget uneasily.

At noon Marshal Foch showed no intention of stopping work for lunch.

"I can stand it if he can, I guess," Chester told himself.

At 2 o'clock the French commander was still with the papers and maps before him.

At 3 o'clock General Marcel entered hurriedly.

"General Dupree reports a flag of truce advancing from the enemy lines south of Rocroi, sir," he said, his voice trembling under repressed emotion.

Marshal Foch was on his feet instantly.

"By 'phone?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir."

"And what else did he say?"

"That is all, sir."

"Very well. Report to your own station, general. I'll get General Dupree on the wire myself."

General Marcel withdrew.

"Colonel Matin!"

The French commander's secretary was on his feet instantly.

"Get General Dupree for me on the wire at once."

Colonel Matin seized the telephone. Five minutes later he said:

"General Dupree on the wire, your excellency."

Marshal Foch seized the instrument.

"Hello, Dupree," he said into the transmitter. "This is Marshal Foch. Has the flag of truce reached our lines yet?"

"No, sir," was the response over the wire. "There seems to be some doubt that it will reach our lines."

"Some doubt? What do you mean?"

"The bearer has turned back twice, sir, and—one moment." The voice broke off and for several moments Marshal Foch waited impatiently. At last General Dupree spoke again: "The flag of truce is advancing again, sir."

"Good," said Marshal Foch. "I'll keep the wire open. Inform me at once of what the messenger says."

For perhaps five minutes Marshal Foch held the 'phone himself. From time to time his eyes wandered to the mass of papers that littered his desk. He called suddenly:

"Major Crawford!"

Chester sprang to his feet with alacrity and advanced to the marshal's side.

"Take this 'phone and inform me the moment General Dupree is on the wire again."

Chester did as commanded, and sat motionless before the telephone. Marshal Foch, meanwhile, bent over his desk and buried himself in maps and papers.

Not for a moment, it seemed, could this active man rest. He could not even content himself

the few moments necessary to await further word from General Dupree. His mind was never idle. He was busy and active every minute he was awake. This, perhaps, was what made him the great and successful military genius he was.

A voice came over the wire to Chester's ear.

"Your excellency?"

"One moment," said Chester.

He found it unnecessary to apprise Marshal Foch that General Dupree was on the wire again. At the first sound of the lad's voice, the French commander had left his chair and stepped to Chester's side. Now he took the receiver from the lad's hand.

"This is Foch," he said. "Well?"

"The message from the enemy," said General Dupree, "is signed by Ludendorff. In effect, it requests a meeting between a commission of Germans and the allies to discuss terms of an armistice."

"Hm-m," said Marshal Foch. "Signed by Ludendorff, eh?"

"You may tell the envoy," said Marshal Foch, "that to-morrow at noon I shall be at Hirson, accompanied by my staff. A flag of truce from the enemy's lines will be respected then as now. If it is the earnest and true wish of the enemy to seek means of bringing an end to hostilities, I may be seen at Hirson at that hour. That is all, general."

Marshal Foch replaced the receiver and returned to his desk. Then, instead of plunging again into the mass of work awaiting his attention, he sat in thought for some time. At last he raised his head.

"It has been thoughtless of me to keep you gentlemen here all this time," he said to Hal and Chester, "but to tell the truth for the time being I had forgotten your presence. Now, I don't know as it is really necessary for me to send any word to General Pershing. However, I shall be in touch with him by telephone shortly, and I shall take pleasure at that time in informing him that I am taking you with me to Hirson to-morrow."

In spite of themselves, Hal and Chester uttered exclamations of pure astonishment.

Marshal Foch smiled.

"I know it is a strange procedure," he admitted. "Still, it will be well if I have some one besides French officers when I meet the German delegates. Do you care to go?"

"Of course, your excellency," said Chester breathlessly.

"Of course, sir," declared Hal.

"Then go you shall," said Marshal Foch. "Report to me here to-morrow morning at 6 o'clock."

Hal and Chester saluted and took their departure, their spirits high.

CHAPTER XIX
HIRSON

Almost due west of Rheims approximately 150 miles as the crow flies, less than two hundred miles northeast of Soissons, is the village of Hirson. Through all the war, this little village, on the edge of the Franco-Belgian border, had retained its quiet seclusion. It had been the scene of much severe fighting during the four years of the war, but otherwise laid no claim to prominence.

But now Hirson was to become historic. In it was to be written one of the most important chapters in the history of all nations.

Into Hirson on the morning of November 9, steamed a special train. The Tricolor streamed from the engine pilot, from the rear car, and fluttered from each and every window as the train drew into the little station.

At the depot awaiting the arrival of the train stood a group of men. Included in this group was the burgess, the mayor of the city, and other officials of the city government.

As the train came to a stop a uniformed man dropped from the steps of the rear car, removed his hat and stood at attention. Directly other uniformed figures alighted. These also drew themselves up to attention. Following these there stepped from the car an elderly man, smooth shaven except for a flowing white mustache. Tall he was and erect. His uniform, though plain, nevertheless proved him of high rank and it was apparent to the casual observer that here was the man to whom the others now paid homage. In fact, a glance showed that the man who now stepped from the car was of the highest military rank in France. He was, as his stars and bars proclaimed him, a marshal of France—the commander-in-chief of all the allied armies opposed to

the Germans—Marshal Foch.

Following him from the car came his retinue of officers—members of his staff, and a few others who had been invited to accompany him to the coming conference with representatives of the German empire.

As Marshal Foch left the car, the mayor of the town hurried forward, and welcomed him to the city with a series of deferential bows and words. It is doubtful, so excited was the mayor at the unexpected honor paid his little town, if the man really knew what he said; but his intentions were all of the best, and Marshal Foch accepted them as such—and smiled.

"I am very glad to be here, Mr. Taylor," he said quietly, "particularly on such a mission. I know that the people of your little city will be proud to be hosts upon such an historic occasion."

"Yes, ye-s-yes, your excellency," stammered the burgess.

"Will you kindly see if you can prepare food for my officers and myself?" requested Marshal Foch.

"It shall be done immediately, your excellency," said the mayor, and bustled away.

Marshal Foch turned to the members of his staff and the others who composed the party.

"There is nothing for us to do at the moment, gentlemen," he said, "except to prepare ourselves for the feast. By the way, Colonel," turning to his secretary, "at what hour did I bid General Dupree report to me here?"

"Two o'clock this afternoon, sir," was the reply.

Marshal Foch glanced at his watch.

"And it is not quite noon yet," he said. "Well, we have plenty of time ahead of us."

Directly the burgess returned to report that luncheon was served in the depot, and to this Marshal Foch and members of his staff repaired at once.

The meal disposed of, it was after 12 o'clock. The next hour the French commander-in-chief spent in animated discussion with members of his staff.

Now Hal and Chester, in response to the commands of Marshal Foch, had reported to him at the hour appointed and thus found themselves members of the group that proceeded to Hirson. The heart of each lad beat high, for both were smart enough to know that they were on the eve of historic events.

"I'm willing to bet, though," said Hal, "that the Germans will go back on their promises."

"I don't think so," declared Chester. "They are aiming to get the easiest terms possible, and they must be smart enough to realize that the longer they postpone their cry for peace, the harder will be the terms imposed by the allies."

"Maybe so," Hal admitted; "but after four years' experience with the Germans, I believe nothing until I see it."

"You talk like Stubbs," said Chester.

"Perhaps; and yet I'm telling you just how I feel."

"For my part," said Chester, "I believe the enemy has at last come to the conclusion that they are licked and want to get out of the mess the easiest way they can."

"You may be right. It would be just like the Germans to have wreaked destruction on all other nations and then to try and crawl out without paying the cost."

"Don't fool yourself about that," said Chester. "They'll have to pay."

"I'm sure I hope so. Personally, I am in favor of dismembering the German empire."

"I believe that is what will be done. Certainly, with victory in their grasp, the allies cannot afford to allow Germany to prepare a second time for a conflagration that will consume the world."

"You wouldn't think so, that's certain."

The lads became silent as Marshal Foch, followed by members of his staff, approached them.

"Well, gentlemen," said the marshal, "are you glad to be here, or would you rather be on the firing line with your American forces?"

"For the moment," replied Hal, "we would much prefer to be here, sir. I want to say that we are indeed fortunate to be on the spot where history is about to be written, your excellency."

"Right you are, young sir," declared Marshal Foch, "and if I am not greatly mistaken, history will be written here—and that very soon."

"The sooner the better for all concerned, sir," said Chester.

Marshal Foch bowed slightly in acknowledging this remark, the lads saluted and the commander-in-chief walked away.

"Well," said Chester half an hour later, "I'm getting tired of sitting around here. I wish something would happen."

"I heard Marshal Foch say that General Dupree was to report here at 2 o'clock," said Hal "It's almost that now. Something may happen soon after that."

"Let's hope so. This is tiresome business."

Shortly before 2 o'clock, the sound of an approaching train raised the lads' hopes again. Others in the party also showed keen interest. A few moments later a train drew into the station. Marshal Foch and his staff were on the platform.

Presently there alighted a figure in the uniform of a divisional commander.

"General Dupree," said Chester to Hal.

The lad was right.

General Dupree hurried at once to Marshal Foch and the two engaged in conversation when the formalities of greeting had been exchanged.

"Then you say that the German envoys will be here this evening?" asked Marshal Foch.

"So I have been informed. They have sought safe conduct through our lines, and without asking your permission, sir, I have granted it."

"That is well. At a time like this we must not let a few formalities stand in the way."

"I thought you would say so, your excellency, therefore I have ordered that firing be suspended all along the line at 4 o'clock, the hour upon which I am informed, the German representatives will leave their own lines."

"You have done well, General. Now what is your idea as to their reception?"

"There should be no formal reception, sir. These men are coming to sue for peace. As defeated enemies, so they should be received. We must not lose sight of the fact, sir, that we are dealing almost with barbarians."

"True, General," said Marshal Foch, "and yet I wish it could be otherwise."

"You may be sure," said General Dupree, "that they will never be satisfied with any terms for an armistice which you may offer."

"That will be their misfortune," was the reply. "But as for my terms, they may take them or leave them. I shall stand firm."

"As you should, your excellency. The enemy is entitled to no consideration."

"I shall be no more harsh than necessary," said Marshal Foch. "All I am striving to bring about is peace—peace on such terms as will prevent a resumption of this murderous struggle."

Marshal Foch now turned and re-entered his car which still stood in the station.

"I shall receive them here when they arrive," he informed General Dupree, who accompanied him.

The day passed slowly for Hal and Chester.

Much as they would have liked to look about the city a bit they knew that their duty lay with the others who had come to Hirson, and they stuck close to the railroad station.

"Hope we don't have to linger here long after the conference," said Chester. "This is not my idea of having a good time, at all."

"Nor mine," Hal agreed; "and yet, when we get back to America we will have something to talk about."

"Rather," Chester agreed dryly. "But I wish something would hurry up and happen."

"So do I; but wishing won't do any good."

"Maybe not; but it gives a fellow something to talk about, and that helps pass away the time."

The day drew toward a close at last.

Hal and Chester, along toward 4 o'clock, found themselves close to the telegraph operator in the station. Suddenly the clattering of the instrument became more nervous. The operator pricked up his ears. Then he leaped to his feet excitedly.

"They're coming!" he cried.

CHAPTER XX
THE GERMAN ENVOYS ARRIVE

A third train drew into the station. Two French officers alighted first. These were the men who had been directed to receive the German representatives and accompany them to Marshal Foch's headquarters.

The German delegates, who left the train immediately after them, presented a strange appearance. Garbed in German uniforms, their eyes were blindfolded. This precaution had been

taken by direction of Marshal Foch in order that the delegates might not acquaint themselves with the allied strength and other military details as they passed through the lines.

The German delegates were worn and travel-stained. It had been a hard trip through No Man's Land in an automobile. There they rode in the drizzling rain, over shell holes and under the most trying conditions. Consequently, they were not in the best of humor.

Immediately upon alighting from the train that had brought them to Hirson, they were conducted to Marshal Foch's train.

In the rear car, Marshal Foch was busy at his desk. This car was fitted out with all material comforts. It was the marshal's private car. In it he often slept and worked. It had all the comforts of home and bore some resemblance to a large parlor.

His staff stood respectfully some distance away, while his guests, including Hal and Chester, were even farther back in the car.

Came footsteps on the vestibule without. Instantly an air of excitement pervaded the car. Staff officers, trying to look unconcerned, failed miserably, and no wonder. Great events were impending. A man could hardly help showing the strain under which he was laboring.

Marshal Foch was by all odds the coolest man in the car.

Directly the door opened. In stepped the German delegates—five of them—and behind them came the French officers who had been their pilots.

General Dupree arose to receive them. Marshal Foch was still busy at his desk. He did not look up.

First the German envoys were allowed to remove the bandages from their eyes. Then they were presented to General Dupree, who acknowledged the introductions with a stiff salute.

"If it is your desire to speak with the commander-in-chief," he said to the Germans, "his excellency will grant you a brief interview. But he is very busy, so you must be brief."

He spoke to the commander-in-chief, who laid down a sheaf of papers and rose to his feet.

Marshal Foch and the Germans saluted stiffly. Introductions followed.

"You must be brief, gentlemen," said Marshal Foch. "My time is valuable."

One of the Germans advanced.

"We have come," he said quietly, "to learn on what terms we may accept the armistice you have offered."

"Armistice?" repeated Marshal Foch, "I have made no offer of an armistice."

The German officer bit his lip.

"But I understood—" he began.

"Enough of this subterfuge," said Marshal Foch sternly. "It is my understanding that you come hither to request an armistice preliminary to negotiations for peace. If I am mistaken, we are losing valuable time."

Marshal Foch saw plainly through the Germans' plan. It was to make it appear that the armistice had been offered by the allies, and not sought by the German high command. The French commander-in-chief realized, too, what effect this would have on the German people. It would bolster their flagging courage and might possibly result in many more months of war.

"But—" began the German again.

"It is idle to argue," said Marshal Foch. "As I say, I understood that the German high command seeks an end of this war. If so, I shall be glad to state my terms. If not, I shall order an advance along the whole front within two hours."

The German delegate to whom had been assigned the role of spokesman bowed.

"It is our misfortune, sir," he said, "to ask for an armistice, in order that negotiations may be begun to put an end to further bloodshed."

"That is different," said Marshal Foch. "In that case, I shall be glad to state my terms. Briefly, they are these: That Germany immediately surrender to the allies quantities of arms and ammunition, the amounts to be determined later; that a certain number of war vessels and other ships, including submarines, be turned over as evidence of good faith; that German troops, in a specified time, shall withdraw to the east banks of the Rhine. In a word, I demand such sacrifices as will preclude the possibility of Germany renewing the struggle."

The German delegates uttered exclamations of protest.

"But, sir," said the spokesman, "Germany cannot submit to those terms."

"Take them or leave them," said Marshal Foch, throwing wide his hands.

"Have I your permission to confer with my associates?" asked the spokesman.

Marshal Foch produced his watch and laid it on his desk.

"I will allow you fifteen minutes," he replied.

The Germans withdrew to the far end of the car, where they began an animated discussion. At last the spokesman again approached Marshal Foch and saluted.

"I am afraid," he began, "that it is not in our power to accept such conditions out of hand. It will be first necessary to obtain the consent of higher authorities than we chance to be."

"Yes?" said Marshal Foch inquiringly.

He had expected something like this.

"In which case," went on the German, "we have to request a cessation of hostilities while we return to our lines for further instructions."

Marshal Foch shook his head.

"It is impossible," he said quietly.

The German was surprised. Clearly he had expected nothing like this.

"But, sir," he protested, "it is utterly impossible for us to accept these conditions. We have not the authority. We must secure it from the high command."

"That is your misfortune," said Marshal Foch.

"Then what are we to do?"

"You may return to your own lines at your own risk," said Marshal Foch. "I shall order firing stopped for a brief space that you may leave the allied lines; also, a flag of truce will be honored again, if you care to return. But in the interval, I propose to renew the fighting."

Again the German delegates debated.

"If that is the best you can do, sir," said the spokesman at last, "we shall have to be content."

"It is the best I can do," said Marshal Foch. "Now let me make a suggestion. It is perfectly plain that if the sentiments of the German high command are sincere, the sooner you return the better for all concerned. Do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly, sir."

"Then my suggestion is this. I shall place a fast army plane at your disposal that you may return to your own lines the quicker."

"But we have no pilot," protested the German.

"I will furnish the pilot."

A third time the Germans debated the matter.

"We accept, sir," said the spokesman at last.

Marshal Foch surveyed the group of French officers in the car. Then his eyes fell on Hal and Chester.

"Major Paine!" he called.

Hal stepped forward and saluted.

"If memory serves," said Marshal Foch, "you are an experienced air pilot?"

Hal bowed his assent.

"Good," said the commander-in-chief, "then we need look no further for a pilot, gentlemen."

"Major Crawford."

Chester stepped forward and saluted.

"You will place yourself at the disposal of Major Paine, sir."

Chester saluted again and stepped back.

"General Dupree!"

The officer addressed stepped forward.

"You will present my compliments to the burgess of the town, and ask him to place his largest aircraft at your disposal."

General Dupree left the car.

"I guess that is all, gentlemen," said Marshal Foch. "I shall remain here until to-morrow at this time, awaiting your return. If you are not back within that time I shall consider negotiations suspended!"

"Major Paine."

Again Hal stepped forward.

"General Dupree, before you leave, will furnish you with a map showing where you may pass safely through our lines and at what hours fire will be remitted at certain points. It will be all the safeguard you need. I shall continue to advance in all other sectors. Good day, gentlemen."

Marshal Foch saluted the Germans stiffly, and then signified that the interview was ended by turning again to his desk.

Hal and Chester led the way from the car, closely followed by the German delegates. Outside, they encountered General Dupree, who announced that the large army plane would be ready within fifteen minutes.

Hal then mentioned the map Marshal Foch had said General Dupree would provide, and the general hastened away to prepare it. He returned within a few minutes and placed the map in Hal's hands.

"I shall issue the necessary orders at once," he said.

He, too, saluted the Germans again and then took his departure.

Less than fifteen minutes later the mayor of the town himself hurried up.

"Follow me, gentlemen," he said with great dignity. "Your craft is ready."

At the far side of the little town, Hal, Chester and the Germans came to the machine. No time was wasted in words. The Germans climbed in and Hal and Chester took their places.

"Let her go!" shouted Chester, to the men on the ground.

The huge airplane began to move.

CHAPTER XXI
STUBBS' SCOOP

To keep in proper touch with all the characters in this story, it will be necessary for a few moments to go back several days and give an account of the activities of Anthony Stubbs, war correspondent of the New York Gazette.

Now when Stubbs left Hal and Chester in Soissons he had, as he had told the lads, laid what he considered all necessary plans to make sure that he would be apprised of the signing of the armistice between Germany and the allies ahead of any other of the war correspondents in Europe.

Reaching Versailles, Stubbs took quarters in one of the largest hotels. Now it is a fact, that in many quarters, even in Europe, it was thought that General Foch and the German delegates had come together several days before they really met. Stubbs, in constant touch with his source of information, from time to time received so-called details of progress of the proceedings supposed to be in progress.

The little man was greatly elated. There were a score or more other war correspondents in Versailles and Stubbs managed to worm from them the fact that they were without information regarding the armistice. Believing his own information absolutely true, he naturally felt that he was a step or so ahead of his rivals.

On the night of November 9, Stubbs retired early. The little man slept literally with one eye open. He didn't intend to miss anything.

He came to himself with a start. The telephone bell in his room was jingling.

"Wonder who wants me at this hour?" he muttered sleepily, and turned over, for the moment losing sight of the fact that this might be the particular call he was so anxious to get.

The bell continued to jingle.

"May as well answer it, I guess," said Stubbs. "It won't stop till I do."

He climbed out of bed, switched on the lights and put the receiver to his ear.

"Hello," he said.

"Stubbs?" came a voice over the wire.

"Yes."

"Admiral W— talking. The armistice was signed this morning at 11 o'clock."

"What's that?" Stubbs yelled into the 'phone, jumping up and down excitedly. "Hello! Hello!"

But the voice on the other end of the wire was gone.

In vain Stubbs rattled the hook. He could not recall the voice.

"May be somebody trying to have some fun with me," muttered Stubbs. "I can't take a chance on any such message as that. I must verify it. I'll call the admiral and see if it were really he on the wire."

It took him a good five minutes to get the connection, but at the end of that time a "hello" was wafted over the wire.

"Admiral W—?" demanded Stubbs.

"Yes."

"This is Stubbs. Did you call me a moment ago?"

"Yes."

"Then it is a fact that the armistice has been signed."

"It is. I had my information not more than fifteen minutes ago."

"I just wanted to make sure it was really you who called," Stubbs explained hurriedly. "Good-bye."

He slapped the receiver back on the hook and literally flew into his clothes.

"No time for an elevator now," he muttered as he dashed out the door, through the hall and down the steps.

In the lobby downstairs half a dozen war correspondents had gathered in a little knot. They came to their feet as Stubbs dashed down the steps.

"What's the matter, Stubbs?" one called.

But Stubbs did not stop to reply. Out the door he dashed, his coat trailing behind him.

It was perhaps half a dozen blocks to the cable office. Stubbs covered the distance in jig time, formulating his message in his mind as he went.

"No time for details now," he muttered. "Just the flash. I'll get the details later."

Into the cable office he dashed.

Behind him the little knot of correspondents became alarmed.

"The little man knows something," said one of them. "Don't suppose the armistice could have been signed, do you?"

"Not a chance," said another. "We'd have the word."

"Well, Stubbs was in a terrible hurry about something," said a third. "We'd better get busy and find out what it's all about."

They sprang to action.

"I'll go after him," said Jennings of The World. "The rest of you fellows get busy on the 'phone. Call every man in authority in the city. Some of them will know something. Doesn't matter whether they kick about being called at this hour or not. Get busy."

He dashed out the door after Stubbs.

In the cable office Stubbs grabbed a blank and wrote, in code:

"Armistice signed this a.m. at eleven o'clock at Hirson. Stubbs."

The message he handed to the clerk with instructions to rush it.

"That'll be enough," said Stubbs. "They'll know at the office what to do with it. They'll probably write columns at that end describing the scenes at Hirson between Marshal Foch and the German delegates. There'll be pictures and everything. Now I'll go and learn a few of the details."

He encountered Jennings of The World as he moved toward the door.

"Look here, Stubbs," said Jennings, "why all this rush. You're not going to leave the rest of us out in the cold, are you?"

Stubbs smiled.

"I'm not working for you fellows," he replied. "The New York Gazette is paying me my weekly stipend, but I don't mind saying I've landed a big piece of news."

Jennings attempted to minimize the matter.

"Oh, I guess it's not so terribly big," he said.

Again Stubbs smiled.

"Guess again," he said.

"But I say, Stubbs, give me a hint."

"Not a hint," declared Stubbs.

"Well, all right," said Jennings, "but you'll be sorry."

"Not half as sorry as the rest of you'll be when you hear from home after The Gazette is on the street," declared Stubbs.

Jennings looked at Stubbs closely. The latter was clearly excited.

"By Jove! He must know something," Jennings decided. "I can't waste time here."

He turned on his heel and was gone.

An hour later, after Stubbs had made ineffectual efforts to learn from Admiral W— details of the signing of the armistice, he gave it up for the night.

"I know no more than I have told you," said the admiral. "I should have the details in the morning. Call me then."

Stubbs returned to his hotel. Again he was surrounded by the other correspondents who, after trying all their channels of news, had failed to learn anything of importance.

"Come across, Stubbs," said one.

"Not yet," said Stubbs. "But I'll tell you what. I'll give you my news one hour from now. That will assure The Gazette of a beat."

He remained deaf to all urging, and directly the other correspondents gave it up as a bad job.

Jennings, watch in hand, an hour later said.

"Come, Stubbs, time's up. What's your news?"

"Well," said Stubbs quietly and with an air of great importance, "the armistice has been signed."

"What?" yelled Jennings. "You're crazy, man! There has been no conference yet."

"Nevertheless, it's true," said Stubbs. "I have my information from unimpeachable sources."

"Who told you?" demanded Timothy, of The Mail.

"You've been in the game long enough to know a newspaperman doesn't divulge the source of information, Timothy," said Stubbs. "Nevertheless, I can say that it came from a very high source."

"Well," said Jennings, "I don't believe it. I'm not going to flash my paper on any such information. I'm standing pat."

"Same here," declared Timothy.

"And here," "and here," chimed in the others.

"Suit yourselves," said Stubbs with a shrug. "You'll probably get the word in the morning."

He returned to his room.

In spite of the fact that the other correspondents declined to take Stubbs' words as gospel, it was an uneasy group of men Stubbs left behind him.

All night long they tried in vain to confirm the signing of the armistice. It could not be done.

Stubbs came downstairs again at 7 o'clock. Once more he was surrounded by the correspondents.

"Boys," he said, "I shall call my source of information now. If I get the details, I will tell you where you can verify them."

He entered a telephone booth, where he remained for perhaps ten minutes. When he emerged again, his face was drawn and he walked with the air of a man who has lost his last friend.

"Well," demanded Jennings, "what have you to tell us?"

"Boys," said Stubbs slowly, "my days in the newspaper business are ended. I have just committed the cardinal sin. I have sent false information to my paper, though in good faith. The armistice has not been signed. Admiral W— has just informed me his information was premature. What his message should have said is that the conference is in session. My resignation shall be cabled to The Gazette together with my retraction."

Sadly the little man walked away.

"By Jove! that is tough," commented Timothy. "Yet, with such information I should have done the same. Well, our jobs are saved, but I'll bet Stubbs' resignation will be unnecessary. He's fired right now, though he doesn't know it."

And so it was none other than Anthony Stubbs who was responsible for the premature flash that reached America that the armistice had been signed. Every city in the United States, almost, when the news was heard, had declared a holiday. Hours and days passed and still the news could not be confirmed. And then the state department issued a statement denying it. The feeling of happiness changed to disappointment.

But in the French city of Versailles Anthony Stubbs was, at the moment perhaps, the most disappointed man in the world.

CHAPTER XXII
SPA

The German envoys, returning to their own lines, were silent as the big airplane driven by Hal sped across the allied lines. Eyes below were strained as the craft dashed along, for news traveled swiftly among the soldiers and word that the preliminary meeting between the German delegates and Marshal Foch had not been entirely satisfactory had spread among the troops.

As General Dupree had told Hal, firing ceased in the zone that the airplane traversed. Guns snorted and bullets flew on all other sides, but Hal, laying his course by the map General Dupree had given him, avoided all danger.

From the spokesman of the German delegates Hal had learned that their destination was the little German village of Spa. It was there that the German emperor and the High Command was quartered. Hal laid the nose of the airplane in that direction.

Now, in flying, great distance can be covered in a very short period of time. The plane that Hal drove was capable of making almost 200 miles an hour under proper conditions. Hal, however, did not attempt to get that speed out of the machine. Flying well above the ground, the craft sped quietly along at something like 100 miles an hour.

It was dark when they passed across the brief expanse of No Man's Land. Looking down, Chester saw a few twinkling lights. These, he knew, came from the German positions. Some were signal lights for the enemy aircraft, others just the lights usually to be found in a great army encampment.

Chester leaned forward and touched Hal on the shoulder.

"Sure you have the right course?" he asked.

"Perfectly," was Hal's response, his voice raised almost to a shout to make himself heard above the humming of the motor and the purr of the giant wings of the aircraft.

Chester sat back, apparently satisfied.

The lights displayed among the German troops disappeared as the plane continued its journey toward the northeast. Soon, however, other lights came into view below.

"This," said Hal, "should be Spa, unless my geography and sense of direction are all wrong. I'll take a chance, at all events."

Almost above a score of the lights, Hal shut off the motor and the machine began to descend. A short time later it came quietly to earth just beyond the village. Hal scrambled out and spoke to the Germans.

"This should be Spa, according to my calculations," he said. "Correct me if I am wrong."

"You are right, sir," said one of the German delegates. "You have done well in bringing us here in such a short period of time."

The Germans alighted, and Chester also scrambled out.

"If you will come with us," said the spokesman of the enemy mission to the lads, "we will see that you are provided with quarters for the night. It is hardly possible that we will return before to-morrow at noon, if at all."

The lads followed the Germans into the town. Before a building somewhat larger than the rest, the men stopped and the one who appeared to be leader of the party said:

"You gentlemen wait here. I will go within and see that quarters are provided for the young Americans."

He motioned the lads to follow him, which they did. Inside a German officer barred their progress, but the German soon set the man's doubts at rest, and the latter stepped aside.

"Captain," said the German envoy, "these gentlemen have brought us back from the allied lines, and will conduct us there again to-morrow should it be necessary for us to go. You will kindly see that they have all necessary accommodations for the night."

"Yes, sir," said the captain.

"Then I shall leave them to you. I will return for them to-morrow some time."

"Very well, sir."

The German bade the lads good night and took his departure. The German captain addressed them.

"Kindly follow me, sirs," he said.

The lads did so. Along a long hall they were led. Then they turned into a large room at the far end of the hall. Inside were a dozen or more German officers. The captain led the way toward a door across the room. All eyes were turned on the lads as they stepped across the room.

Suddenly there came an exclamation from a man who sat near, as Hal and Chester passed. A chair scraped the floor and a man sprang up and confronted them. Hal and Chester looked into the eyes of General Knoff, the German general whose daughter Chester had befriended in Sedan some weeks before.

"So," said the general confronting the lads with a gleam of anger in his eyes, but his gaze resting particularly upon Hal, "so you made fools of me in Sedan, eh?"

Hal smiled. He was perfectly safe now and he knew it. Not a man there nor in the German lines any place for that matter would dare harm the officer who had piloted the German envoys back from their tryst with Marshal Foch.

"It had to be done, General," said Hal, still smiling.

"But," protested the general, "why was it necessary for you to pick me for your tool?"

"We wouldn't have done that, General," said Hal, "had you not been so insistent upon our having breakfast with you."

"Well," said General Knoff, "it would appear that the fates are just, after all. I have no doubt

that it was information you gained from me that spoiled our plans."

"I have no doubt of it either, sir," Hal smiled.

"And such being the case," the general continued, "I shall see to it that you are tried as spies."

"But we are in American uniform now, sir," said Hal.

"You weren't then," was the reply, "as I stand willing to prove. No; I shall have you shot. No man can make a fool of me and live."

"You can't do that, sir," said Hal, quietly.

"I can't, eh?" exclaimed the general. "I would like to know what is to prevent me?"

Hal's smile seemed to infuriate the general.

"Captain," he said, "you will place these men under arrest."

The German captain saluted respectfully, but he shook his head.

"It is impossible, sir," he said.

"What's that?" demanded General Knoff angrily. "Do you dare dispute my orders?"

"Only when I have previously received commands from your superiors, sir," was the reply.

"What do you mean?"

"These young Americans," the captain explained, "have safe conduct in our lines. I only know they have piloted our delegates who have been discussing an armistice with the French commander-in-chief. I cannot arrest them, sir."

"I see," said General Knoff. "You are perfectly right, captain."

He stepped close to Chester and extended a hand.

"As a military measure," he said, "I would have you shot for what I know, but I want to thank you again for a service you rendered me in Sedan."

Chester was taken absolutely by surprise. Nevertheless he grasped the general's hand, for that was what seemed to be expected of him.

"I am glad I was on hand at such an opportune moment, sir," the lad replied.

"So am I," said the general. "You know my name, of course. When the war is over, should you chance to be in Berlin, it would give me pleasure to entertain you at my home in Berlin."

"Thank you, sir," said Chester. "Should I chance to be in Berlin at any time, I shall avail myself of your offer, sir."

The general bowed slightly, insisted on shaking hands with Hal also, and then said:

"Well, gentlemen, you are probably tired from your trip, so I will not detain you longer. Captain, I leave the young Americans to you."

The lads followed the German captain from the room.

Their quarters for the night were commodious, though not richly furnished. However, as Hal said: "I have slept in whole lot more unpleasant places and thought I was doing well."

"It's plenty good for me," Chester agreed. "By the way, Hal, has it occurred to you that we may return to Hirson to-morrow alone?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, that the German high command may refuse to accept Marshal Foch's terms, and refuse to negotiate farther."

"Hardly likely," said Hal. "My view is that the Germans are so anxious for peace that they will accept almost any terms."

"I hope I'm wrong, of course," said Chester. "but I am simply judging by what one of the envoys said about 'if' they returned to-morrow."

"I heard him," said Hal, "but at the same time I don't take much stock in any such statement. In the first place, these envoys don't have any more to say about what terms they shall accept than I do."

"Oh, they don't, eh?"

"Of course not. It is the German high command, that will make that decision. The delegates will do whatever they are instructed to do. They are merely the representatives of the powers that be."

"Nevertheless," said Chester, "if they sign terms, the terms will be binding."

"Of course; unless it should be that the Germans consider the agreement simply another 'scrap of paper,' as they did the Belgian treaty."

"I think the Germans have learned a thing or two," said Chester. "I don't believe they'll ever try such tactics again. They have at least learned that the majority of nations are honorable, and that they are in honor bound to respect treaties."

"Let us hope so," said Hal. "Now we've talked enough. I vote we turn in. We may have a hard

day to-morrow."

"All right. It suits me. And here is one night we will sleep within the German lines in comfort, for we will not have to be on the watch for enemies and fear possible discovery."

"Right," agreed Hal, "and at the same time we are here in the line of duty. Well, me for the hay."

"Not a very elegant expression, perhaps," said Chester with a grin, "but very much to the point. Me for the hay, too."

Ten minutes later both lads were fast asleep.

CHAPTER XXIII
THE KAISER ABDICATES

It was another historic conference that Hal and Chester attended the following morning. It is true they were not invited guests; neither, perhaps, were they supposed to overhear the nature of historical facts as they were written that day. It was, most likely, an oversight that permitted them to be near when the German emperor signed a formal decree of abdication.

It still lacked a few minutes of 7 o'clock on the morning of November 10 when Hal and Chester turned out, greatly refreshed by a good night's sleep. They strolled from the house where they had spent the night, and for perhaps an hour took in the sights about the German city. Then they returned to their temporary quarters, for, as Hal said, "there is no telling when we shall be wanted and it is just as well to be there."

It was half an hour later when a German officer appeared and instructed them to follow him. This the lads did without hesitancy. Their guide led them to a distant part of the village, where an extraordinary array of tents told the lads that they were near important personages in the German ranks. The guide showed them into a tent somewhat smaller than the rest, where he left them.

After they had been alone perhaps twenty minutes, Hal explored.

"Well," he said, "if these fellows don't hurry they won't get back to Marshal Foch's rendezvous until too late."

"Oh, I guess they'll get there in time all right," replied Chester. "At least they will if they know what's good for them."

Meanwhile Hal, peering through the canvass door at one end of the tent, ascertained that the door of the second tent in some unaccountable manner had been left open. Also, the lad perceived that the tent was filled with uniformed figures.

"Something going on," he said to Chester in a low voice.

Chester stepped forward and peered over Hal's shoulder.

"There certainly is," he agreed. "Wonder if we will be able to hear what they say?"

"I guess we can," said Hal. "I don't like to eavesdrop, but we might learn something that will help."

"I guess the end will justify the means," said Chester.

They became silent.

It was clear to both lads that the figures in the tent were awaiting the arrival of another person. And presently the latter came; and when he entered, the tent both lads stifled exclamations of surprise with difficulty.

"Well, what do you think of that!" Chester ejaculated.

"By Jove! I didn't know he was in this part of the field," said Hal.

For the man who had just entered the tent was none other than the German Emperor, Wilhelm II.

Gazing more closely, the lads made out other familiar figures. There was, first, General Ludendorff, chief of the German staff; General Von Hindenburg, and newly created Chancellor Ebert. Also the tent was crowded with other notables, both military and civilian.

It was the kaiser who spoke first. Straining their ears, the lads were able to catch every word that was uttered.

"Well, gentlemen," said the kaiser, "I am here at your request. What is it you desire of me?"

It was General Ludendorff who replied.

"Your majesty, it is my painful duty to acquaint you with the terms laid down by the enemy commander-in-chief."

"What are they?" demanded the kaiser briefly.

In as few words as possible, General Von Ludendorff outlined the terms of an armistice as Marshal Foch had presented them to the German envoys.

The kaiser fidgeted impatiently until his chief general had concluded. Then he burst out:

"We shall accept no such terms."

General Ludendorff bowed.

"As I supposed you would answer, your majesty. Nevertheless, it again becomes my duty to acquaint you with other unpleasant facts."

The German emperor appeared surprised.

"Explain, sir," he said briefly.

Again General Ludendorff bowed.

"Well, your majesty," he said, "it must be plain to you that the war is lost to German arms."

"Not at all," said the kaiser. "I still have millions of men in the field, and there are others who yet may take up arms."

"Very true," said General Ludendorff, "they may be able to take up arms if they will. The trouble is, your majesty, that they probably will decline longer to wage a losing fight."

The German emperor started back.

"What!" he exclaimed in a loud voice. "The German soldier refuse to obey my commands?"

"Exactly, your majesty," said General Ludendorff.

"Any such men shall be instantly shot," declared the kaiser.

"That would be all very well, Sire," said General Ludendorff, "if there remained any to carry out the sentence of execution."

The kaiser began to catch a glimmer of the true situation.

"You mean," he asked in a low voice, "that my men will refuse to fight longer?"

Again General Ludendorff bowed.

"Precisely, your majesty," he said quietly.

The kaiser dropped abruptly into a chair.

"I should have been warned," he muttered. "I should have been warned. For years I have seen this coming, and yet I would not take heed."

He rose to his feet again.

"Tell me," he said to General Von Ludendorff, "what are your sentiments in this matter, General?"

"The same as the sentiments of the soldiers, your majesty."

"You mean that I must accept the enemy's terms?"

"Yes, your majesty."

"Well, I won't do it."

"There is yet an alternative," said General Ludendorff slowly.

"And that?" demanded the kaiser, his voice hopeful.

"Abdication," said General Ludendorff quietly.

"What!"

The kaiser stepped quickly forward and raised his right hand. General Ludendorff stepped quickly back several paces.

"I should strike you down where you stand," said the kaiser, lowering his arm and letting his hand play with the hilt of the sword that he wore at his side. "Give up my throne, and throw my people upon the mercy of the enemy?"

"The people would be very glad to be thrown upon such mercy," said General Von Hindenburg, now stepping forward. "Your majesty, let me add my voice to that of General Ludendorff. I have fought for you as best I know how, but it has been a losing fight, as we have known, almost from the first. Something must be done, and that at once."

"Then you, too, general, urge that I renounce the throne?"

"I do, Sire, most emphatically."

The kaiser's face grew grave. Apparently such a thing as abdication had never entered his head.

"Well, gentlemen," he said at last, "I shall give my decision when my son, the Crown Prince, arrives, which should be in a very few moments."

The officers in the tent bowed low. Wilhelm II was still emperor, and would be until he had signed a formal decree of abdication. As officers of the emperor it was the duty of every man present to serve him.

As the kaiser had predicted, the Crown Prince, known more familiarly in allied circles as the

"clown prince," because of his peculiar appearance, entered the tent.

He slapped his father familiarly on the shoulder.

"What's the matter?" he demanded. "Have the allies taken Berlin?"

The kaiser smiled feebly.

"Even worse, if possible, son," he said. "These gentlemen here," and he swept the interior of the tent with his arm, "ask that I renounce the throne of Germany so that my people may have peace."

The Crown Prince stepped back as though he had received a blow in the face. He recovered himself quickly, however, and said quietly.

"Please repeat that again, Sire."

The kaiser did so, and for a space of perhaps five minutes there was silence in the tent. Then the Crown Prince said:

"Well, Sire, what are you going to do?"

"Abdicate," said the kaiser briefly. "I shall abdicate in your favor. You may treat with the enemy."

"Hold on," ejaculated the Crown Prince. "You don't need to abdicate in my favor, sir. I don't want to be emperor, not under present conditions."

"Are you afraid?" demanded the kaiser sternly.

The Crown Prince was not to be bluffed like that.

"Maybe I am, and maybe I'm not," he said doggedly; "but I'm not going to be left in any such plight as this. You may wager on that, sir. If you abdicate in my favor, I shall follow suit, your majesty."

"As you will," said the kaiser. "I, at least, shall abdicate, and that at once. General Ludendorff; how soon can you have the necessary papers prepared?"

"I have already had them prepared, your majesty," was General Ludendorff's response. "I had hoped that you might see the light."

"Play the coward, you mean, eh?" said the kaiser. "But no matter. Put the paper before me and I shall sign."

From his pocket the general produced a long parchment, which he laid on the table. As his officers gathered about him, the German emperor read the paper carefully.

"You don't seem to have had much doubt about how I would act," he commented dryly. "Well, perhaps it is for the best."

He seized a pen and scrawled his name across the paper. He stepped back and looked at General Ludendorff.

"Perhaps," he said, "you have Had a similar paper drawn for the Crown Prince to sign?"

"I have," said General Ludendorff briefly. "I have overlooked nothing, Sire."

"So it would seem," said the Crown Prince angrily, "but I shall sign just the same."

He attached his signature to a second paper produced by General Ludendorff.

And thus ended the rule of the family of Hohenzollern.

CHAPTER XXIV
IN TROUBLE AGAIN

Hal and Chester, from their place of concealment, had been interested spectators of the abdication of the German emperor, and his son, the Crown Prince.

"By Jove!" said Hal, drawing back, "this is a sight we can brag about the rest of our natural lives."

"I should say so," agreed Chester. "And so the kaiser has abdicated. Who would have thought it?"

"Certainly not the kaiser himself four years ago," was Hal's response. "But it just goes to show that right is bound to triumph in the end."

"So it does. Now I suppose the signing of the armistice will be only a matter of form."

"I should judge so. But who will sign the armistice for Germany?"

"Chancellor Ebert, I imagine," said Chester. "He should be the proper man to do so now."

"Well, I guess we'll know soon enough," said Hal. "But see, the conference is breaking up. We'd better get back a bit. No need having them learn we have overheard what has happened."

The lads drew back to the far end of the tent.

Perhaps fifteen minutes later the man who had acted as spokesman for the German delegates at the conference with Marshal Foch entered the tent.

"I see you are still here," he said, smiling slightly. "We shall be ready to return to your lines soon."

"Very well, sir," said Hal, "we await your pleasure."

The man withdrew.

"Well," said Hal, "I guess the war's as good as over. Of course, it will be weeks and perhaps months after the armistice goes into effect before peace is signed, but I guess there will be no more fighting."

"I hope not," said Chester. "It's true enough that we've had a good time in Europe, such as it is, but how much better it will be when men turn their energies to up-building instead of destroying."

"True," agreed Hal, "and yet we know that until German militarism was destroyed, nothing was safe in this world. The war has been a benefit to mankind."

"From that standpoint, you are right, of course; and still, it would seem that there must be better ways than by wholesale killing. It is a long ways from being pleasant."

"It is indeed. I shall be glad when it is over. I don't believe there will ever be another war."

"Oh, I wouldn't go as far as to say that," said Chester. "I suppose that as long as there are nations, and men think as they do now there will be war. Of course, some day nations will come to observe the Golden Rule, and then wars will cease."

"I heard Colonel O'Neil say the other day," said Hal, "that wars will cease only when men quit thinking war."

"A very apt remark, by Jove!" said Chester.

Further conversation was prevented by the entrance of half a dozen figures, one of them the German delegate who had left the tent a few moments before.

"We will be moving any time you are ready, gentlemen," he said, addressing Hal.

"We are ready now, sir," was the lad's reply.

"Good! Then there is no need to delay. Let us go."

Hal and Chester followed the Germans from the tent.

Straight to the airplane in which Hal had piloted the Germans to their own lines from Hirson the Germans led the way. Beside the machine, they came to a stop.

"This trip," said the spokesman to Hal, "you shall carry a more distinguished personage."

"Very well, sir," said Hal with a slight bow. "Who, sir?"

"Chancellor Ebert," was the reply. "However, it is not desired that his departure be known; besides which, he will go incognito, his identity to be revealed only to Marshal Foch, and to be kept secret after that."

"I see," said Hal. "I shall never mention the matter, sir."

"I was sure I could depend on you. And your brother officer?"

"I can answer for him, too, sir."

"It is well. Then we may as well move."

He stepped aside to allow the German chancellor, a man of slight stature but imposing countenance, to enter the craft. The latter climbed in nimbly.

The others followed him.

Hal was about to take his place in the pilot's seat when there was a sudden interruption.

Came a body of infantry forward at the double and there was a shouted command to halt. Chancellor Ebert stood up in the airplane.

"One moment, sir," he said to Hal, and raised a hand.

The leader of the advancing troops, catching sight of the chancellor, halted his men and came to attention.

"What can I do for you, sir?" demanded Chancellor Ebert.

"There is a rumor about the camp," said the other, "that the emperor has renounced the throne in favor of the Crown Prince, who also has signed papers of abdication."

He stopped speaking and stood expectantly, awaiting a reply.

"Well?" asked Chancellor Ebert.

"We wish to know if the rumor is true, sir?"

"And what if it is true, General?"

"Nothing, sir, except that my men will obey none but his majesty."

"You mean," asked the chancellor, sharply, "that you will dispute my authority?"

"I do, sir."

"General Herwigs," said the chancellor, addressing one of his companions in the airplane, "will you kindly dispatch one of your men for assistance? It seems there is mutiny here."

In response to a command from the general, a man who had been standing near the airplane started away. He was immediately halted by the officer who had accosted the party in the plane.

"One moment, my man," said the officer. "You cannot pass here until I have verified the rumor of the kaiser's abdication."

"General Herwigs," said Chancellor Ebert quietly, "will you kindly place that officer under arrest."

"With pleasure, sir."

General Herwigs sprang from the machine with alacrity and approached the officer and addressed the latter's own men.

"You know me, men," he said. "I have ever been a stanch supporter of his majesty. But now General Derloff questions the authority of the imperial chancellor. I order you to arrest him."

It was plain that the sentiment of the troops was about evenly divided. General Derloff immediately began to harangue his followers, and while the argument continued the man whom General Herwigs ordered away in search of reinforcements took the opportunity to disappear.

He was out of sight before anyone noticed his absence. Ten minutes later, while the argument between the two generals still waxed hot, the troops meanwhile being undecided just what to do, a second force of infantry appeared in the distance, coming forward at the double.

General Derloff was the first to see them.

"Quick, men, away!" he cried. "We have been tricked!"

His men turned in confusion and ran.

As they did so, the loyal troops opened fire on the mutineers. Immediately the latter, angered, turned to reply to the fire.

Rifles cracked right and left.

The allied airplane, caught thus between two fires, was in a dangerous predicament.

"Climb in here, sir," said Hal to General Herwigs, "and we will make our escape while we may."

But Chancellor Ebert stayed the departure.

"A moment," he said. "I cannot fly while Germans, through a misunderstanding, are at each other's throats."

"But we must go, sir," said General Herwigs. "Time is growing short. Marshal Foch said that if we had not returned in twenty-four hours negotiations would be considered suspended. We have little time now, sir. Haste is necessary."

For answer Chancellor Ebert stepped from the plane.

"As I have said," he said quietly, "I cannot go now, under these conditions. But you may go, general, you and the other delegates. Before all these witnesses, I designate you to sign the armistice terms with Marshal Foch. But I cannot go. My place is here."

"But, sir—" began General Herwigs.

Chancellor Ebert stayed further words with upraised hand.

"Enough," he said quietly. "You heard me, sir. I am your superior, and as such will be obeyed. Report to me when the armistice has been signed, and not before."

General Herwigs, it appeared, was about to protest further, but the chancellor stayed him with a gesture.

"Hurry now," he said. "You have not much time."

Unmindful of the bullets that were flying overhead, he turned on his heel and walked toward the loyal troops, who, still firing at the mutineers, hurried forward to receive him.

General Herwigs, realizing that to protest further to the chancellor was useless, climbed in the airplane again and took his seat.

"No use arguing with him," he muttered.

Hal smiled slightly and made sure that his spark was set.

"All ready, sir?" he called back over his shoulder.

"All ready," was the reply; "and hurry."

The huge plane slid gently over the ground. Gradually its momentum increased until it was traveling with the speed of an express train. Then Hal touched the elevating lever.

The airplane leaped aloft.

Almost at the same moment, a dozen or more of the mutineers, who were still facing the loyal troops firmly, at command from General Derloff, turned their rifles on the airplane and fired.

Hal, catching their movements out of the corner of his eye, veered the course of the airplane

sharply. Prompt though he was, he had not acted promptly enough.

A hail of bullets sang above and on both sides of him. The plane fluttered like a big bird, wounded.

Hal's heart sank within him.

"Something wrong," he told himself grimly. "We're hit."

Chester also was alarmed. His fear grew as the airplane began to descend.

"What's the matter, Hal?" he called.

"Don't know," was Hal's reply. "I'm going to land and find out."

CHAPTER XXV
A BATTLE

The descending airplane became the target at which a hundred or more rifles were aimed. Nevertheless, it reached the ground without any of its occupants being wounded.

Out sprang Hal and Chester and behind them the German envoys. While Hal darted around to examine the nature of the machine's injuries, Chester and the Germans drew their revolvers.

At the distance, however, as Chester well knew, revolvers were of no avail against the rifles in the hands of the mutinous Germans. But from behind, loyal troops were closing in on the latter. It appeared for the moment that the mutineers must yield in the face of this overwhelming force against them. Several threw down their rifles and raised their arms in token of surrender. The others, however, as they retreated before their erstwhile friends, drew even closer to the crippled airplanes.

One of the German envoys gave a sudden cry as a rifle bullet grazed his left arm. The mutineers had now come within range of the revolvers of the little party gathered about the fallen airplane, and the latter opened fire.

Confusion ensued in the ranks of the mutineers.

"Give 'em another," cried Chester, forgetful for the moment that his companions were Germans. Nevertheless, his words were understood, and a second volley of revolver bullets checked the approach of the enemies.

"How's the machine, Hal?" shouted Chester.

"I'll have her fixed in a jiffy," was Hal's reply, as he tinkered with the engine. "Nothing serious."

From all sides of the German camp, troops, attracted by the sounds of firing, rushed toward the scene of conflict. The mutineers, heavily outnumbered, nevertheless fought on doggedly. They must have realized that death would be the penalty should they be captured, and it seemed to be their intention of bringing down as many of their former companions as possible before being killed themselves.

The attack from the rear and either flank had become so severe that the mutineers were forced to abandon their efforts to shoot down the German envoys. Their ranks were sadly depleted now, but those who were left showed no signs of surrender.

And at last there remained but half a dozen.

"Surrender!" cried a German officer, and ordered his men to withhold their fire.

The mutineers' reply was a volley that laid the officer low.

But the shot that struck the officer did not kill. With difficulty the man raised himself on his elbow and gave a command to his men.

"Kill them!" he said quietly.

Three more volleys flared forth in rapid succession, and when the smoke had cleared away there was no mutineer left standing.

Chester breathed a sigh of relief.

"Safe again," he muttered.

This outbreak of German troops had an unpleasant effect on the German envoys.

"It is time we had peace, no matter at what price," mumbled one to himself. "Our people are on the verge of open revolt. Those men professed to be loyal servants of the emperor. It just goes to show the temper of the masses. Mutiny is in the hearts of the armies. Soon they would take matters in their own hands."

"You are right," said another. "It is to be earnestly hoped that we may have peace and set up a stable government before rioting becomes rampant."

"I am afraid it is too late even now," declared the first speaker.

At this juncture Hal came from beneath the airplane with the announcement that the machine was fit to resume its voyage.

"Please get in at once, gentlemen," he said. "We have not much time."

The German envoys stepped aside to permit Chancellor Ebert to return to them. This the chancellor did a few moments later, but what was the surprise of the others when the chancellor announced that he would not accompany them.

"My duty is here, it seems," he said quietly. "Events that have just transpired seem to prove that. No, gentlemen, I shall not go with you."

"But, sir—" began General Herwigs.

Chancellor Ebert stayed the protest with upraised hand.

"I have decided," he said quietly. "You, General Herwigs, I have designated as my representative. These gentlemen," and he included Hal and Chester with the others, "are witnesses to the fact."

The other bowed, but made no reply.

"That is all, gentlemen," said the chancellor. "You would better be on your way."

General Herwigs seemed to realize that further protest was useless. He drew himself up stiffly, as did the other envoys, and saluted the chancellor. Then, without another word, he re-entered the airplane.

The others took their seats, and Hal climbed again into the pilot's seat.

"All ready?" he asked.

Chester glanced around to make sure that all the passengers were ready for the trip.

"Let her go, Hal," he said a moment later.

The airplane sped across the ground. Directly it began to ascend. Soon Hal turned it a trifle so that its nose pointed toward the distant village of Hirson, where Marshal Foch and staff were awaiting the return of the two lads and the German envoys.

"And I hope," Hal muttered to himself, "that there will be no other delays."

But in this he was doomed to disappointment, and it was due to the lad's own carelessness that the trouble came about.

Looking now for the map given him by General Dupree, which was to mark out for Hal the safety zones in the allied lines, the lad was unable to find it.

Frantically he explored his pockets, the while keeping one hand on the wheel. He could not find the map.

"Now what do you think of that?" he muttered. "By Jove! I've just naturally got to have that map."

He slowed down the speed of the craft to enable him to make a more careful search of his pockets. The search was futile. The map was not there.

Hal turned the situation over in his mind as the craft sped on.

"I don't know how," he told himself, "but I've lost the map. That much is certain. What a dunderhead I must be, by Jove! Well, what shall I do now?"

Again he considered the matter.

"Well," he said aloud at length, "there is no need alarming the others, but if I don't have a map to show the safety zones at certain hours, I'll just naturally have to get there without one. That's all there is about that."

With Hal to decide was to act. He acted now, and without further thought of the danger that lay ahead.

The speed of the plane increased, and it soared higher into the heavens.

"It's safer up here," the lad told himself.

The airplane had now passed from over the German lines, so it was clear that the danger that Hal feared, whatever it was, was not from German aircraft. What worried the lad was the fact that he might be unable to run safely the gauntlet of allied machines that were patrolling the sky.

Once sighted by allied pilots, Hal knew, and there would be trouble. Any plane approaching from the direction of the German lines, and not in that section of the field designated as a safety zone by General Dupree, Hal was perfectly well aware, would incur the suspicion of whatever allied airman sighted it.

"He might let me explain, and he might not," the lad told himself. "Best way, I guess, is to keep out of their reach."

The lad made out the forms of several sky fighters several miles away. Of these he had no fear, however, for the distance was too great and they seemed, if anything, to be moving away

from his machine. But soon the boy saw half a dozen craft, in close battle formation, bearing down on him.

"Here they come, ready for business," he muttered, "and they're Frenchmen, too, judging from here. Well, we'll have to go up a little higher and see if we can't dodge them."

The airplane went higher in the air.

But the craft bearing the German peace envoys had been sighted by the pilot of the air fleet, and the entire squadron now dashed toward Hal.

Came a rifle shot from the distance and Hal heard the whine of a bullet not a great distance from his ear.

"Too close for comfort," the lad muttered. "Now here is a case where I'm sorry the French air fighters are such confounded good marksmen. I'll have to see what this craft can offer in the way of speed."

The airplane seemed to leap forward as Hal touched the controls.

The machine bearing the lads and the German envoys was now many feet above the allied battle squadron. And, before the commander of the air flotilla realized what was happening, his prey sped by him unharmed.

Instantly he flashed a command to his other vessels to give pursuit, and the entire squadron turned and gave chase.

Although Hal had not warned the others of their danger, they were now fully conversant with what was going on. Plainly the German envoys were worried, for they had come on a mission of peace and naturally supposed Hal would pilot them safely to Hirson without their being molested.

But Chester had some glimmering of the truth.

"Hal's lost his map," he told himself. "Oh, well, I guess it won't make any difference. We'll get there safely enough. Hal is as full of tricks as a magician. Besides, we seem to be leaving those fellows in the lurch."

It was true. The pursuing flotilla was falling behind.

And directly Hal was so far in advance of his pursuers that he knew he was safe.

"Now for Hirson!" he muttered.

The remainder of the journey was made without incident, and several hours later the airplane landed only a few yards from where it had started the day before.

CHAPTER XXVI
THE CONFERENCE RESUMED

The mayor of the village was there to greet the German envoys when they stepped from the airplane. He announced that they would be conducted at once into the presence of Marshal Foch. He signified that Hal and Chester were to accompany the party.

The lads saw, as the mayor led the way, that the conference was to be resumed in Marshal Foch's private car, which still stood on a side track in the station yards.

Upon the platform of the car stood General Dupree. He greeted the German delegates stiffly.

"It is late," he said. "We had begun to fear perhaps you would not return. However, you are within the allotted time."

"We are later than we expected to be for unavoidable reasons, sir," said General Herwigs. "In fact, we came with difficulty."

He explained the trouble within his own lines, but for some reason he said nothing of the pursuit by the allied airplanes.

"I hope he forgets all about it," Hal murmured to himself. "It was gross carelessness on my part, and I should get a wigging. However, if he says nothing about the matter, it's a sure thing I won't."

General Dupree now showed the delegates into the car. As before, Marshal Foch sat at his desk, immersed in a pile of papers. He looked up as the delegates approached.

"Ah, gentlemen," he said, "pray, be seated."

He motioned the five men to seats at his table. Besides these, there were also seated there three or four members of the marshal's staff.

"I trust you had a pleasant trip, gentlemen?" said Marshal Foch politely.

"Not so very pleasant, sir," said one of the envoys, and explained what had befallen.

Marshal Foch expressed his condolences, then added:

"And now to business, gentlemen."

"We are ready to discuss terms, sir," said General Herwigs.

"Ah," said Marshal Foch, "but there shall be no discussion. I have stated my terms. It is for you to say whether Germany will accept."

"You have the terms in writing, Marshal?"

"I have, sir. They are here," and Marshal Foch extended a paper to General Herwigs.

General Herwigs read the several sheets of foolscap carefully. Then, without a word, he passed them to his associates, who scanned them carefully in turn. The paper was passed back to General Herwigs.

"They are very severe, sir," said General Herwigs.

"So they are," agreed Marshal Foch, "but under the circumstances I can do no better."

"But surely, sir," said General Herwigs, "you realize that they are more harsh than have ever before been imposed upon an enemy by a civilized nation?"

"Perfectly," said Marshal Foch. "At the same time, sir, never has a civilized nation wrought such ruin on the world at large as has Germany in the last four years. He who plays, must pay the fiddler, you know, sir."

"Is there no hope, sir," asked General Herwigs, "that the terms may be modified?"

"None," said Marshal Foch briefly.

For the space of perhaps five minutes General Herwigs was silent. Then he said:

"You will grant me a few moments' private conversation with my associates, sir?"

"As many as you choose," replied Marshal Foch.

The German delegates retired to the far end of the car, where they conversed in low voices for perhaps ten minutes. Then they returned to their seats.

"Since you insist upon these terms," said General Herwigs, "I want to record formal protest against their severity."

"It shall be duly recorded, sir," said Marshal Foch gravely.

"And," continued General Herwigs, "as you refuse to modify them, there is only one thing Germany can do."

There was an air of expectancy in the car. Hal felt his breath coming quickly. Chester's hands clenched and unclenched nervously.

At General Herwigs' last words, it seemed to both lads that he was about to defy Marshal Foch. Neither lad was able to place any other construction on his words.

"And that is?" asked Marshal Foch, answering General Herwigs' last statement.

"That is to accept the terms, sir!"

General Foch got to his feet and took a step forward.

"I am glad," he said simply. "There can be no one more glad than I that peace shall rest again upon earth after four years of war."

There was a subdued cheer from the allied officers in the car, but these were quickly suppressed.

"There remains, then," said Marshal Foch, "nothing now except the formal signing of the terms, which accomplished, I shall order an armistice effective from 11 o'clock to-morrow morning."

General Herwigs bowed.

"I am ready to sign now."

"You have the authority to speak for the German people?" asked Marshal Foch.

"I have, sir. Since the formal abdication of the kaiser and the Crown Prince——"

There were exclamations of surprise from all parts of the car. Even Marshal Foch seemed moved.

"The emperor has abdicated?" he questioned.

"Yes, sir, and the Crown Prince has declined to take the throne. Chancellor Ebert, now acting head of the government, has authorized me to sign the armistice terms in the name of the German people."

"It is well," said Marshal Foch.

The paper was spread out on the table. Once more General Herwigs read, as his associates grouped themselves about him.

"It is hard thus to sign away virtually the freedom of a mighty nation," he said, "but there is no help for it."

He signed.

Then the other German delegates affixed their signatures as witnesses, and Marshal Foch

wrote his name.

So the armistice was signed. While formal peace negotiations would not be begun for perhaps months, the war was over so far as actual fighting was concerned.

In signing Marshal Foch's terms, Germany virtually had signed away her rights to be classed as one of the great powers. Besides agreeing to surrender the bulk of her arms and ammunitions, she had announced she would give up her most effective weapon of warfare—the submarine—the majority of her undersea craft to be turned over to the allied navies at a specified time.

By the terms of the armistice, Germany agreed to withdraw her armies from occupied territories to the east bank of the Rhine. It was stipulated that mooted questions, such as the disposition of the captured German colonies and the amount of indemnity Germany would be required to pay, would be left to the formal peace council of the allies. But, to make it absolutely certain that Germany would have to accept the decisions of the peace council, Marshal Foch, in imposing his stringent armistice terms, had tied the hands of the foe. Germany, once the terms of the armistice had been carried out, would have practically nothing with which to fight should she desire to resume the struggle.

Marshal Foch, having pocketed the document, indicated that the conference was adjourned.

"There is no other business before us, I believe, gentlemen," he said, "so I shall detain you no longer. I have much work to do in the next twenty-four hours and I must get about it."

At the door to the car the German envoys saluted the French commander-in-chief before taking their departure. Marshal Foch returned the salute stiffly. Upon suggestion of General Dupree, Hal and Chester were to take the German envoys back to their own lines. Neither lad was greatly pleased with the task, but there was no use of protest. The trip was made in record time, but when Hal and Chester returned to Hirson in the airplane, they found that Marshal Foch and his staff had gone to Soissons.

"Did the commander-in-chief leave any instructions for us?" Hal asked of the mayor.

"None," was the reply.

"Then we must report to him in Soissons," declared Chester. "We may not return to our own command without his permission, Hal."

"Right you are, Chester. Well, as long as we have this plane at our disposal, we shall continue to Soissons in it, if our good mayor here has no objections."

"None, sir," said the burgess of Hirson. "I am proud to be honored, as is every one of my fellow citizens. This has been a great event for Hirson."

"And for the world," said Hal briefly.

"Very true, sir," replied the burgess; "and for the world. But the plane is yours, if you will have it. After 11 o'clock to-morrow morning, we will have need of no such messenger of the air."

"Not for warlike purposes, at all events, I trust. Many thanks, Mr. Mayor. With your permission, we will be on our way at once."

The mayor bowed and insisted upon shaking hands with each. Then the lads repaired again to their machine and climbed in.

"Here's one trip we'll take without fear of danger," said Chester, as Hal touched the controls.

"Right," Hal agreed. "By the way, the mayor made us a present of this airplane. I've a good mind to keep it and take it back to America."

"Guess the French government would have something to say about that," laughed Chester. "However, you can try it if you want to."

"No," returned Hal, "guess I'd better leave it here. I've had trouble enough in the last few years and every German is my enemy. I don't want to make any more, particularly among our friends, the French."

The plane was now speeding through the air.

"Step on her, Hal!" cried Chester. "I want to get back to Soissons and then to our own command. Remember, the armistice doesn't become effective until 11 o'clock to-morrow morning. The fighting is not over yet. We may have a chance for a little more fun before it's all over."

"By Jove!" Hal ejaculated. "You're right. I hadn't thought of that."

The plane dashed forward faster than before.

CHAPTER XXVII
STUBBS REDEEMS HIMSELF

Now, it is a fact that for some hours after the armistice between Germany and the allies was signed the matter was kept secret, for some reason or other. To this fact was due, in a large measure, Anthony Stubbs' ability to redeem himself for the false information he had sent his paper some days before.

Much disgusted with himself over the false "scoop," Stubbs had left Versailles, more to escape the jibes of his fellow war correspondents than for any other reason.

The afternoon of November 11 found him again in Soissons, where he had parted from Hal and Chester several days before. The little man was very morose, and not without reason. So far he had received no reply from his cablegram to The Gazette, announcing that the previous information was untrue; but he was expecting an answer momentarily.

And at last it came. It read like this.

"Your error made us ridiculous. Sending man to relieve you. In meantime, depend upon you to keep us posted."

"Oh, I'll keep them posted, all right," said Stubbs, "but it won't do me any good now."

It was late in the afternoon when Stubbs ran into Hal and Chester, who had recently left Marshal Foch after reporting to the latter on their return from Hirson, where the armistice had been signed.

"Why, hello, Mr. Stubbs," said Chester. "What are you doing here? I thought you were in Versailles."

"I was," said Stubbs, "but I didn't stay very long."

"What's the reason for your return here?" demanded Hal. "I thought you wanted to be where you could save time when you got word of the signing of the armistice."

"I did," said Stubbs, "and that's the trouble. I got word two days ago that the armistice had been signed."

"But it hadn't," said Chester.

"Oh, I know that now," said Stubbs sorrowfully, "but it would have saved me a lot of worry had I known it then."

"You don't mean to tell me that you filed that dispatch to your paper, Mr. Stubbs," said Hal.

"I did," replied Stubbs briefly.

"Great Scott! Then it's a wonder you haven't been fired by this time."

"I have," said Stubbs, briefly again.

"What?" exclaimed Chester. "Fired from The Gazette, Mr. Stubbs?"

"Exactly; and I don't blame The Gazette, either."

"But how on earth did you come to file such a report?"

"Because I had it from a source that should have been authentic."

"From whom, may I ask?"

"Admiral W——"

"But the admiral should have known better," said Hal.

"Maybe he should have," said Stubbs; "trouble is he didn't."

"Now that's too bad, Stubbs," declared Chester sympathetically. "I'm certainly sorry."

"So am I," declared Stubbs grimly. "But that's the trouble with the newspaper game. You never get any credit for what you do, but you are always due for a wigging any time something goes wrong."

"And I suppose The Gazette put out an extra," remarked Hal.

"I'm dead sure of it," replied Stubbs grimly. "Here, look at this cable I just received."

Hal read the cablegram and then passed it to Chester.

"Pretty tough, Mr. Stubbs," said Chester, after scanning it hastily. "Now, isn't there anything you can do to redeem yourself?"

"Nothing that I can think of," was the reply, "unless I could be fortunate enough to get first word of the real signing of the armistice."

Hal and Chester both expressed their surprise.

"Great Scott, Mr. Stubbs!" said Chester, "didn't you know the armistice had been signed?"

"No, I didn't know it," declared Stubbs, "have you heard anything about it?"

"Have we?" exclaimed Hal. "Why, man, we were there when it was signed."

"Now listen here, Hal," said Stubbs, "I've been in hot water once. I don't want to get back there again."

"But I'm telling you facts, Mr. Stubbs," declared Hal. "The armistice has been signed. Chester and I were there when General Herwigs and four other German delegates affixed their

signatures."

"Are you telling me the truth?" demanded Stubbs excitedly.

"The absolute truth, Mr. Stubbs," said Chester.

Stubbs looked at them closely.

"By Jove! I believe you are," he ejaculated at last. "And has this fact become generally known?"

"I don't see why it hasn't," replied Hal. "The armistice becomes effective at 11 o'clock to-morrow."

"Funny some of the other correspondents haven't heard of it," mumbled Stubbs to himself. "Some of them returned to Soissons with me."

"Well, you'd better get busy, Mr. Stubbs," said Hal, "or they will beat you to it."

"Then upon your advice," said Stubbs, "I'll get busy. Come with me, boys, and tell me what you can on the way. Hurry now."

Stubbs set out at a rapid pace for the nearest cable office, Hal and Chester at his heels.

Now, as it chanced, there was but one place in Soissons where, due to war conditions, a cable dispatch could be filed. The wire from there led direct to Versailles, where messages were relayed. It was the only possible means of communication with the outside world outside of military lines.

At the door of the cable office, Stubbs encountered Jennings, correspondent of The New York World, who had returned to Soissons at the same time Stubbs had.

"Hello, Stubbs," he grinned. "Armistice signed again? I see you're headed for the cable office."

"Never mind, Jennings," said Stubbs. "You think the laugh's on your side now. Maybe it won't be later."

"Perhaps not," Jennings admitted, "but if I were you, I'd be almighty careful of the next dispatch I sent The Gazette. Chances are your people will not relish being fooled a second time."

Now Stubbs was well aware of the fact that it would be possible for only one message to be sent out of Soissons at a time. So he said:

"Jennings, you have been pretty decent to me, so if you'll come along I'll do you a favor."

Jennings looked at Stubbs peculiarly.

"Something up?" he demanded.

"Considerable," returned Stubbs.

"Then I'll go along," said Jennings. "I haven't anything else to do."

He accompanied Stubbs and the two lads into the cable office.

"Now, Jennings," said Stubbs, "I'm not going to tell you what's up until I have filed my dispatch. But you'll have the next chance at the wire."

"Fair enough," said Jennings smiling. "I guess your stuff is not so awfully hot."

"Maybe not," said Stubbs. "Wait."

Briefly he scribbled on a cable blank, and passed the message to the operator. What he wrote was this:

"Armistice signed this P.M. at Hirson by General Foch, General Herwigs, representing Chancellor Ebert, and four other delegates. Information absolutely authentic. Trust me this time."

"Now," he said, turning to Jennings, "I'll tell you my news."

"Let's have it," said Jennings, somewhat indifferently.

"The armistice has been signed."

Jennings started, then recovered himself.

"That's what you said before," he declared with a grin. "Guess I'd better wait and get my information first-handed."

"That's what I've done this trip," replied Stubbs calmly.

"What do you mean?"

"Why," said Stubbs, "my friends here, Majors Paine and Crawford, were at Hirson when the armistice was signed this afternoon."

Jennings wheeled on the two lads, his face flushed with excitement.

"Is that true?" he demanded.

"Absolutely," said Hal.

Without further words, Jennings rushed toward the operator. But Stubbs was ahead of him.

"Hold on, now," said the little man. "I'm first at this wire, and I haven't finished my message yet."

"Hurry then," said Jennings, "and give me a chance."

"You stick close," said Stubbs, "and you shall have the second chance at the wire. But I haven't half finished yet."

"Great Scott, man! You've sent your flash, haven't you?"

"Yes; but I want to add a few details."

"Well, let me get in a few words ahead and I'll gladly relinquish the wire again."

"Not much," said Stubbs. "I have the wire now and I intend to keep it for the next hour if I have to file the first chapter of Genesis."

"Stubbs," pleaded Jennings, "don't be a hog. I've got to get word to The World. You know that."

"Then you should have got your own information," declared Stubbs.

Meantime, the little war correspondent had been scribbling busily, from time to time passing sheets of paper to the operator, who sat with his hand on the key.

Suddenly there was the sound of confusion without. A moment later half a dozen men rushed into the room. Stubbs smiled, as he recognized other war correspondents.

"I'm a little ahead of you, fellows," he said good-naturedly. "Now, I intend to keep this wire for the next hour. Then I shall release it to Jennings here. He'll probably do his best for you."

The other correspondents smiled sickly smiles. They were beaten and they knew it. True to his words, Stubbs ceased writing an hour later and Jennings captured the wire. Stubbs turned to Hal and Chester.

"Come," he said, "let's be moving. I think I have redeemed myself."

And he had, as later events were to prove; for The New York Gazette was the first paper in America to announce the fact that the armistice had been signed.

CHAPTER XXVIII
THE END DRAWS NEAR

"WHEE-E-E-E-E-OU-O-O-O-O—BANG!"

Chester raised himself to a sitting position in his funk hole and looked over at Hal.

"Gosh all fishhooks! Looks like this was all a fake about the war being over at 11 o'clock this morning," he said. "Those shells don't sound like the end of the war to me. Do they to you?"

Hal admitted that they did not. The burst had almost covered both lads with earth and had been to close to allow either of them any peace of mind. "Down!" shouted Chester and again Hal rolled himself into a knot and wished that his funk hole was as many inches deeper. He had seen days when such a funk hole would have been sufficiently deep, but on that day of all days—half an hour before the end of the war—a forty-foot well wouldn't have been any too deep.

Hal's calculation was a bit off. The shell came whistling in, like the weird cry of a hungry beast, and exploded in the hollow below the funk holes in which Hal and Chester found themselves, throwing up a geyser of earth and rocks that did no harm to anyone.

"That guy's as wild as a hawk," came a cry from a nearby hole. "I could do better than that myself, and I ain't no artilleryman, either."

"You talk like you wanted him to shoot closer," Hal called back. "That was plenty close enough for me."

The next shell broke on the brow of the hill. Then came a whole shower of them, each one singing its own little tune that struck terror to the hearts of the bravest.

Chester squirmed down into his funk hole until he could see the dial of his wrist watch. It was 10.35. In twenty-five minutes more the war would be over.

A moment later American batteries behind them began sending over reprisal fire. The 75's passing over their heads whined savagely, but not so savagely as those boche shells coming in.

(It is a well-known fact that a shell going out has a different whine than a shell coming in, also a different effect on one's nerves.)

Twenty-five minutes is a long time when a man is hiding from death. To know that in twenty-five minutes, providing you are alive at the end of that time, death's shadow will have ceased to follow in your footsteps, is a great inducement to live.

Hal and Chester found it so.

They were back with their own command again after the trying days they had spent with Marshal Foch and the German envoys whom they had accompanied to and from their own lines and back again.

After leaving Stubbs in Soissons, following the little man's triumph in flashing first word of the signing of the armistice to his paper in America, they had reported to General Pershing in Rheims.

The American commander-in-chief had, of course, been informed some time before that the armistice had been signed. So, in fact, had all other officers in the allied armies. This had been necessary in order that there would be no doubt as to the hour upon which the armistice would become effective.

General Pershing expressed his pleasure at seeing the boys again, and his gladness that they had been so fortunate as to be present at the signing of the armistice.

"It is an honor that I would have been glad to have had myself," he declared.

After a brief interview with the commander-in-chief, the lads were dispatched by him with a message to General Rhodes, their old commander, with the Forty-second division, still quartered at the front, just to the south and east of Sedan.

Following the capture of Sedan, the American lines had been pushed forward in the face of determined resistance. Though the fighting was severe, the Germans did not have such a stiff front as they had formerly. It apparently was a well-known fact all through the German army that armistice proceedings were in progress, and consequently it appeared that the German officers were not willing to sacrifice their men needlessly.

So the American positions had been advanced despite enemy efforts to halt them.

After reporting to General Rhodes and delivering the communication they carried from the commander-in-chief, the lads repaired to the quarters of Colonel O'Neil.

"By George!" exclaimed the colonel, "I certainly am glad to see you fellows again. You have been gone so long that I feared you had come to grief. Where have you been?"

"Well, Colonel," said Hal briefly, "we saw the armistice signed."

"You don't mean it," was the colonel's ejaculation. "You were certainly confounded lucky. It's an event I would like to have seen myself. You must feel pretty important, eh?"

"Not so important that we cannot do a little more before the war ends," Chester said quietly.

"There is still work to be done," returned Colonel O'Neil quietly. "Hear the firing?"

The lads did not need to strain their ears to hear the distant rumble of big guns and the sharp crack of infantry firing, nearer at hand.

"Still at it, eh?" murmured Chester. "You would think that with the end of the war so close at hand, officers and men alike would be content to sit quiet."

"On the contrary, though," laughed Colonel O'Neil, "it would appear that each side is determined to wreak what death and destruction it can before a few written words shall stop this business of wholesale killing and ruin."

"So it would seem," Hal agreed. "But in the meantime, Colonel, is there nothing we can do? We would like to be in this war right up to the finish, you know, sir."

The colonel considered briefly.

"Well, yes, there is a little work you may do," he said. He turned to his desk and scribbled briefly. Turning again, he passed a paper to Chester.

"Major Lawrence," he said, "has not yet been informed at what hour the armistice becomes effective. This message will enlighten him. Will you deliver it for me?"

"Yes, sir," said Chester briefly.

"And me, Colonel, what am I to do?" demanded Hal.

"Oh, you, Major," laughed the colonel, "you accompany Major Crawford and see that my instructions are carried out."

"It shall be done, sir," said Hal.

The two lads left their colonel and hurried towards Major Lawrence's detachment, at the extreme front.

"Well," said Chester as they hurried along, "looks like our fighting days are over."

"It certainly does," Hal agreed, "but you never can tell, you know."

"True enough. It's as likely as not that one of us may fall yet before the war ends."

"I guess not," Hal said. "We've gone through four years of it now. I've begun to believe we bear charmed lives."

"It does seem so, but it only takes one bullet, in the proper place, to settle that argument."

"That's right enough," Hal admitted, "but I've a feeling that we shall both live to spend many pleasant days in the United States."

"Oh, I'm not thinking of getting killed," Chester declared. "I'm just remarking on what is possible."

"Anything is possible at this age of the world," said Hal sententiously.

The lads now had come within sight of Major Lawrence's detachment. Bullets were flying thick and fast among the American troops, who had sought the shelter of long lines of funk holes, until recently in possession of the enemy. Chester delivered his message at once.

"Well," said Major Lawrence, "I guess we'll be about here when the war ends. Believe me, I am not going to order an advance when I know the war's about over, and I don't think the enemy will."

"They seem bent on doing all the mischief they can while they have a chance, Major," said Hal.

"So it seems; but I've decided to squat here in these holes and let them fight to their heart's content. Of course, should they rush us, we'll give them more than they bargained for; but I'm not going to attack myself."

"I don't blame you, Major," declared Chester. "But now I've a favor to ask."

"Consider it granted, sir," replied Major Lawrence.

"We have been assigned to no particular duty," Chester continued, "and we should be glad if you would allow us to pass the remaining hours of the war with you, sir."

"I shall be glad to have you with me," was the reply.

This is the reason, then, that Hal and Chester found themselves again in the front lines, a scant hour before the armistice ending the greatest war of history went into effect.

CHAPTER XXIX
THE LAST ZERO

The boche shells were now breaking in the hollow below the spot where Hal and Chester found themselves. Hal was congratulating himself on having a lucky spot in which to witness the closing minutes of the war, when, just on his right, a geyser of earth and rock was hurled up by a mighty explosion.

His first thought was of Chester. But after he had successfully dodged several falling stones, he peered over the edge of his funk hole and there was Chester, grinning broadly.

"How are they coming, Chester?" he called out.

"Closer than I like," Chester answered. "But here is an old friend of yours and I am afraid he has got his."

"Who is he?" demanded Hal.

"Sergeant Bowers."

"What? Bowers here?"

"Yes, but he's rolling on the ground right now, and I can't get to him. He seems to be about all in."

"Is he dead?" Hal asked.

Chester listened for a moment to make sure that a shell wasn't headed his way, then he took another peep.

"No, I think he is still alive, but is badly wounded."

Hal and Chester, braving the enemy fire, both crawled out of their funk holes and started for Sergeant Bowers, who had fallen just outside the funk hole in which he had sought refuge. But they were back quicker than a man could say "Jack Robinson."

A shell can be heard coming when it is passing to one side or overhead, but when it is headed straight toward you its cry is heard usually after the explosion, or is drowned out by the explosion. Common mathematics will show why. Air conditions also help. If the wind is traveling with the shell, one stands a fair chance of hitting the earth before the shell explodes. But if the wind is traveling against the shell, one hasn't much salvation.

In this case the wind was in the lads' favor. As they both heard the shell coming, they moved like lightning. It is surprising sometimes how fast one can move at a time like this.

In taking their places in the funk holes, which had been dug by the Germans when they were in possession of that piece of ground, Hal and Chester had calculated on just one thing—having time to fit themselves into the holes before shells should find them. And now that both found it necessary to make a quick fit of it, they were disgusted with their laziness in not spending enough energy and taking the chances necessary to making them big enough in the first place.

"Why didn't I?"

That was the question each lad asked himself a dozen times during the brief space of a moment they lay there half exposed and waiting for that which they feared.

It broke at last. The earth boiled, up, a mass of clods and stones, only a few yards in front of Hal. A piece of shell fragment struck his helmet a glancing blow; another buried itself in the earth only a few inches from his nose.

Hal crawled out of his funk hole and reinserted himself, making sure this time that he was below the surface. By his watch it lacked still five minutes of 11 o'clock. Almost time for all this business to stop.

At intervals for several seconds, Boche shells came screaming in, exploding hither and yon.

"Gas! Gas!" came the startling cry down the line.

Chester crawled deliberately into his gas mask, for the bursts, which he recognized on the moment as being gas shells, had been too far away to cause them any immediate alarm.

There followed then a strange, unbelievable silence, as though the world had died. It lasted but a moment, for perhaps the space that a breath may be held. Again Hal glanced at his watch.

"Eleven o'clock!"

He uttered the words aloud.

Eleven o'clock. The armistice was now effective. Fighting should cease.

Came suddenly such an uproar of relief and jubilance, such a shrieking of claxons—gas claxons that shrieked now with pure joy—and such a shout from both lines that only men possessed of sheer happiness can utter.

Chester pulled off his gas mask and shouted with the rest. And even as he did so he caught a faint odor which he knew to be that of mustard gas. But nothing mattered now.

Hal and Chester piled out of their funk holes with the rest, waving their helmets and shouting at the top of their voices. Then, like a covey of quail scurrying from a hawk's shadow, they piled back again.

"Whizz—bang!"

Scarcely ten yards from Chester's hole a shell exploded.

"Wow!" exclaimed a voice. "Who said the war was over? Marshal Foch'll have to come out and tell me himself before I believe it."

Another brief silence. A 75 barked behind Hal and Chester. Then the battle seemed to start anew, one of the American batteries firing and then another; the contest seemed to be between two batteries of 75's.

Chester could never remember which battery fired last, but he heard, a few days later, that two second lieutenants of artillery were haled blushingly before a general and severely reprimanded for disregarding the rules of the armistice.

After the two batteries had ceased firing and the roar of the last cannon died out across the valley, there came a silence that was even more appalling than the first. It was something like the lull that follows a terrific thunderstorm, only this storm had been raging for nearly fifty-two months.

In the midst of this ghastly silence, a startling thing occurred. The sky line of the crest ahead of the American troops grew suddenly populous with dancing soldiers, and, down the slope, all the way to the barbed wire entanglements, straight for the Yankees, came the German troops.

For a moment there was confusion in the American ranks. It seemed that the enemy was launching his troops forward in a desperate charge. Yankee officers shouted hoarse commands. Gunners sprang to their batteries, and these were trained on the advancing foes.

But the excitement soon died out. No danger threatened.

The Germans came with outstretched hands, grins and souvenirs to trade for cigarettes, so well did they know the weakness of their foes.

But neither Hal nor Chester had time for the Germans. They were thinking of Sergeant Bowers, who still lay just beyond his funk hole, apparently badly wounded.

Hal hurried to his side. His face was chalky white, but his eyes were wide open. Chester also hurried to Sergeant Bowers' side. The sergeant recognized them immediately and greeted them with a faint smile. The lads smiled back at him.

"Is the war over?" he asked.

"It's all over, sergeant," Chester said, "and the Germans are licked," Hal explained. "Look at them out there—" and Chester waved his arm in the direction of his erstwhile enemies.

"That's good," said Sergeant Bowers. "Great sight, isn't it? It's tough though, to be killed on the last day of the war, and almost at the last minute."

But Sergeant Bowers did not die.

Tenderly Hal and Chester helped him back of the lines where he could receive proper medical attention. His wounds were dressed and within two hours the sergeant of marines announced that he was feeling as fit as ever.

"Nevertheless, you'd better lie quiet for several days," said Hal.

"I guess not," declared Sergeant Bowers. "Why should a big healthy man like me be idle when there is so much work to do. Of course, I'll admit I'm naturally lazy and all that, but I don't like to stand around and see the other fellows do all the work."

"All the same," said Chester, "I'll venture to say that when you get to bed you won't want to get up again in a hurry."

"As for that," said Sergeant Bowers, "I never do want to get up."

When night fell on the battlefield the clamor of the celebration waxed rather than waned. It seemed that there was no darkness. Rockets and a ceaseless fountain of star shells made the lines a streak of brilliancy across the face of France, while by the light of flares, the front with all its dancing, boasting, singing soldiers was as clearly visible as though the sun were still high in the heavens.

When morning dawned again, peace and quietness—the quietness that was strange and unbelievable—had transformed the front from a roaring, seething strip of madness into a rest camp. Rather, it had that appearance until a bugler broke the spell.

Hal was sleeping in the corner of what had once been a church. Chester was resting comfortably upon a pile of green camouflage a few feet away. Sergeant Bowers, despite his wounds, also slept near by.

"I can't get 'em up, I can't get 'em up—" said the bugler.

"You sure can't," said Chester. "Not me, anyway."

Then he turned over and went to sleep.

Hal did likewise, after one sleepy look at the sun.

Sergeant Bowers merely rolled over.

It was almost noon when the sergeant finally crawled out from under his blanket. Hal and Chester were standing nearby.

"What's the use of getting up?" Sergeant Bowers complained. "The war's over, ain't it?"

When the sergeant and the two lads finally emerged from the shattered church, the former soon discovered that life on the front line had become suddenly complicated by the presence of a young lieutenant.

"Where have you been all day?" the lieutenant demanded of Sergeant Bowers the moment he saw him.

"Sleeping," replied Sergeant Bowers briefly.

"Well," said the lieutenant, "you're on guard. You go on duty right now."

Sergeant Bowers bit of a chew of tobacco and strode off. But before he went he delivered this parting shot, addressed to Hal and Chester:

"This old armistice," said he sadly, "isn't what it's cracked up to be, is it?"

CHAPTER XXX
CONCLUSION

Thus ended the greatest war in the history of the world. True, no formal treaty of peace had been signed, and none was signed until months later. But fighting ceased on the western front and in virtually all quarters of the globe on the moment the armistice became effective.

In the days that followed, Hal and Chester did their full parts with the American troops. They were with the American army of occupation that marched to the west bank of the river Rhine soon after the armistice. As usual, they saw considerable excitement, but of their adventures with the Yankee troops in the German interior we have not space to speak here.

And yet there is one incident that is worthy of particular mention.

The American army had crossed the Rhine and the Thirty-second division, with which the lads now found themselves, was stationed in the little city of Frankfort, only a few miles within German territory.

What seemed strange in the minds of Hal and Chester, and other American officers as well, was the fact that the Americans were most cordially received in the German towns through which they passed. It is true that they were able to relieve the privation of some German families by

distributing food to the needy, but it is probable they would have been welcomed anyhow.

It was because the allied staff believed the Americans would be more welcome than British or French troops that the Yankees were selected to form the bulk of the army of occupation. The presence of an Anglo-French force on German soil, it was realized, would arouse the resentment of the Germans, and this the allies were anxious to avoid.

Already rioting had broken out in Berlin and other German cities. The German emperor, following his abdication, had fled to Holland, where he sought refuge under the laws of neutrality. There was some talk in allied countries of demanding his surrender and bringing him to trial on a charge of murder, but this was still being debated when the American army of occupation was called home.

The bolsheviki movement, which had originated in Russia, had spread to several of the German states and was particularly rampant in the capital. In fact, there was hardly a town in the German empire, or in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, either, for that matter, that was not struggling in the throes of riot and revolution.

Several times American troops had been called upon to assist the German military authorities in preventing bloodshed in some of the border towns. So far, there had been little loss of life, but things were to change as the revolutionists gained power.

The German Crown Prince also had fled to Holland, where he remained secure. The Empress, soon after the kaiser's flight, also crossed the frontier of The Netherlands and joined her husband.

In the meantime, at Versailles, a peace council of the allies had been summoned. This council was to decide upon the amount of indemnity to be paid by Germany, what was to be done with the enemy country and other things that would go toward making a permanent peace. These matters, it was realized, however, would take time. In order to facilitate matters, President Wilson crossed the ocean to be present at the conferences. His presence helped a lot.

Hal and Chester, walking through the streets of Frankfort on the Main one night, were attracted by the sounds of confusion in the river section.

"Another riot, I guess," said Hal. "We'd better steer clear of it. You know orders are not to mix in unless we are molested."

"Right," Chester agreed. "Then we'll head the other way and let 'em fight it out."

Accordingly they turned to retrace their steps. But at that moment Chester caught the sound of a cry in English.

"Help!" came the voice.

"Hear that, Hal?" he demanded.

"Yes; sounds like one of our own men in trouble."

"Then orders or no orders," said Chester, "we've got to help him out."

"Come on then," cried Hal.

The lads turned quickly and dashed toward the river.

Rounding a corner, they came upon a crowd of struggling figures. Apparently, three men in the center of the crowd were fighting for their lives against a mob of German soldiers, who were armed with clubs and knives. (Under the terms of the armistice, certain soldiers had been deprived of all but their side arms.)

Against the weapons of their assailants, the lads saw that the figures in the center offered two revolvers each. With these they were attempting to stand off their assailants without firing.

"Why don't they shoot?" demanded Chester, as he dashed forward, Hal at his side.

Hal did not reply, but the reason was clear. The three Americans, for such the figures proved to be, did not fire for fear of arousing greater resentment among the Germans. They were perfectly cool, and it was plain they would shoot if it became necessary.

As Chester came closer he realized what stayed the fingers of the American officers. Nevertheless, he produced his own revolvers before dashing into the crowd. Hal followed suit.

"Don't shoot unless you have to, Chester," the latter warned.

The crowd gave ground as Hal and Chester, bringing football tactics into play, bore down on them; and soon the lads were beside the officers in the center of the circle.

"Well, there are five of us now," said one of the officers, "but you would have shown better judgment, Major, had you gone for reinforcements rather than coming to our aid."

"I didn't stop to think of that," Hal confessed. "But you are right, sir."

"Never mind," said another. "We can fight our way out of here if it becomes necessary."

"But we don't want to use force," said the first speaker. "It would be much more wise to overawe them with a show of force."

"It's no time to talk about that now," said the other. "But come, I'm in favor of getting out of here."

"And I," agreed the third man. "See, the crowd is increasing."

"I'll tell you," said Hal. "Five of us should be able to fight our way through that crowd without shooting. We'll club our revolvers, and make a break for it, keeping as close together as possible."

"As good a way as any," agreed the first officer, a colonel of infantry. "As I am the senior of this party, I suppose it is up to me to take command. All ready, gentlemen?"

"All ready, sir," came the reply from each of the other four.

"Then let's go. Forward!"

With revolvers upraised, but without a sound, the five Americans stepped forward. They did not seem to hurry; they were perfectly cool. But it was apparent to every German in the crowd that they were in deadly earnest.

For a moment the crowd gave way; then closed in again.

Knives flashed in German hands; clubs were raised.

Hal, walking close to Chester's side, caught a slashing knife arm with his left hand, still gripping his revolver, and twisted sharply. There was a screech from the German, followed by a snap that announced the man would not use the arm for some time to come.

The Germans sprang forward, and despite the unbroken front presented by the five Americans, they were borne back by the force of numbers. It appeared that the Yankee officers had underestimated the temper of their foes.

They retreated fighting, until their backs were against a house.

"We can defend ourselves here, using our revolvers if necessary," said the colonel.

"I've a better plan, sir," said Chester.

"What is it?"

"We'll back up the steps just to our left, sir, and take possession of the house."

"And then what?"

"Then I'll run the gauntlet of the crowd and bring reinforcements, sir."

"Not a bad idea," said the colonel. "We'll try it."

The little party moved to the left and mounted the steps, still presenting an unbroken front to their foes. Chester tried the door. It was unlocked. The lad opened it and the Americans stepped inside.

"Bolt the door!" cried the colonel.

"One moment," said Chester. "Let me out first."

"I'm going along, Chester," said Hal quietly.

"All right," said Chester. "Come on. The rest of you cover us with your revolvers. Tell you what. Fire a couple of shots over their heads. That will give us time to make a break. Then bar the door behind us."

He waited for no reply, but darted directly toward the crowd of Germans, both revolvers levelled directly into their midst. Hal, keeping close beside his chum, did likewise.

"Crack! Crack! Crack!"

The three American officers left behind had followed out Chester's injunction and fired over the heads of the crowd. Instantly confusion swept the mob.

It was the moment for which Chester had hoped. Into the crowd he dashed, reversing his revolver and striking right and left. Hal was right beside him, his own arms flying about like flails.

And almost before they knew it, so sudden had been their actions, they burst clear of the crowd.

"Now run!" shouted Hal.

Chester needed no urging. The lads sped over the ground, while from behind came cries of anger. Balked of their prey, about half of the Germans nevertheless gave chase. The other half, as though by prearrangement, remained to guard the Americans who had sought shelter in the house.

But Hal and Chester were too fleet of foot for their pursuers. They outdistanced them easily. The rest was simple.

Fifteen minutes later a company of American soldiers marched to the house where the officers were hiding and cleared the streets of Germans.

As Hal walked through the dispersing crowd, a hand caught him by the arm.

"Aha!" said a voice, "Major Paine, eh?"

Hal glanced into the countenance of General Knoff, whom he had seen first at Sedan.

"And," continued the general, "Major Crawford, too, eh?"

"The same, general," said Chester, smiling.

"It is good," said General Knoff. "You may remember recently, at Spa, I invited you to see me when you come to Berlin?"

"Yes, sir," said Chester, "and so we shall, when we get there."

"But," protested the general, "my daughter and Frau Knoff are in Frankfort. Even now, looking from the window, my daughter saw you, which is the reason I am here. I came to aid, but I was too late."

"But we do not like to impose—" began Chester.

"Impose?" exclaimed the general. "Did you not once render me a service I shall never forget? Come, now."

Laughingly, Hal and Chester accompanied the general to a house nearby.

"It is my wish," said General Knoff, "that my family shall be better acquainted with the Americans. They are a brave race."

The lads bowed their thanks.

Both the general's wife and daughter expressed pleasure at meeting the lads again. Hal nudged Chester slyly.

"A real pretty girl, even if she is German," he said.

Chester flushed angrily, then smiled as he added:

"All we need now to complete the party is Stubbs."

At the same moment General Knoff, glancing from the window, uttered an exclamation, jumped to his feet and left the room hurriedly. Five minutes later he returned, accompanied by another figure. It was Stubbs.

"Well," said Chester, "if this isn't a miracle there never was one."

"I saw him passing," General Knoff explained.

"What are you doing here, Mr. Stubbs?" asked Hal. "I thought you were fired. You might as well return home."

"No," said Stubbs. "It's true I was fired, but I've been hired again. You see, The New York Gazette scooped every paper in the United States on the signing of the armistice."

"Scooped 'em twice, in fact, you might say, Mr. Stubbs," Chester put in slyly.

Stubbs frowned.

"Never mind that," he said. "The war's over and we are all glad. And I'm glad to be with you here at this minute. I am assigned to stay with the American army of occupation, and I suppose I shall see considerable of you. And it is my hope that we may all return to America together."

The general's daughter now placed tea and cakes on the table, and the general invited all to pitch in.

"Now," he said, "we all are friends once more, eh?"

Neither Hal nor Chester replied; they looked back over four years of war, and in memory they saw the ruin and destruction wrought in many lands; and Chester expressed the sentiment of the American nation when he said to himself in answer to General Knoff's query:

"No, we are not all friends once more—not yet."

As there was an end to the great world war, so there must be an end to all things—even to Hal Paine and Chester Crawford. So, seated comfortably about a table in the temporary home of General Knoff, once a general of the kaiser, we shall take our leave of them, knowing that, in due course of time, they will return to their homes in America, where they will live the lives of useful citizens.

There is no need telling of the voyage home, of the honors showered upon them. Suffice to say that when they reached the shores of America, each wore the United States distinguished service cross—for bravery and valor in action; and when their friends address them now, it is not as major.

For out of four years of war emerged Colonel Hal Paine and Colonel Chester Crawford.

THE END.

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