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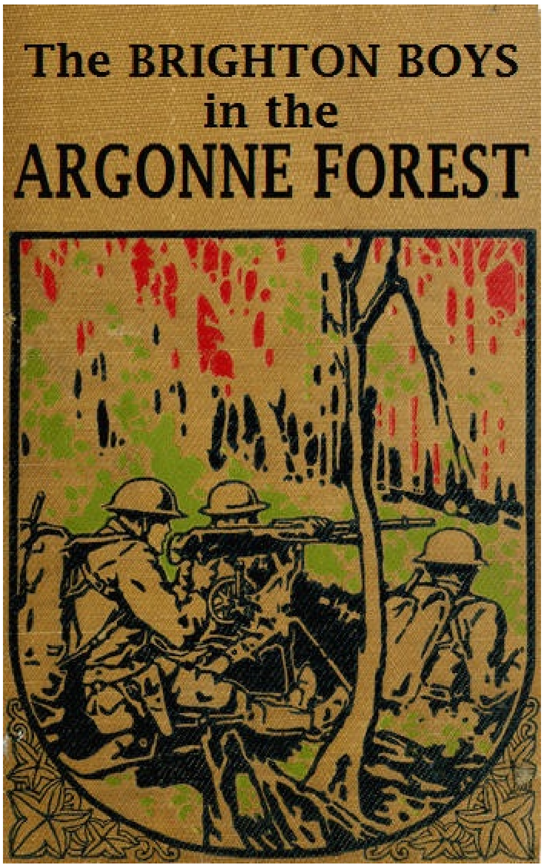

The BRIGHTON BOYS
in the
ARGONNE FOREST

THE BRIGHTON BOYS SERIES

BY

LIEUTENANT JAMES R. DRISCOLL

THE BRIGHTON BOYS
WITH THE FLYING CORPS

THE BRIGHTON BOYS
IN THE TRENCHES

THE BRIGHTON BOYS
WITH THE BATTLE FLEET

THE BRIGHTON BOYS
IN THE RADIO SERVICE

THE BRIGHTON BOYS
WITH THE SUBMARINE FLEET

THE BRIGHTON BOYS
WITH THE ENGINEERS AT CANTIGNY

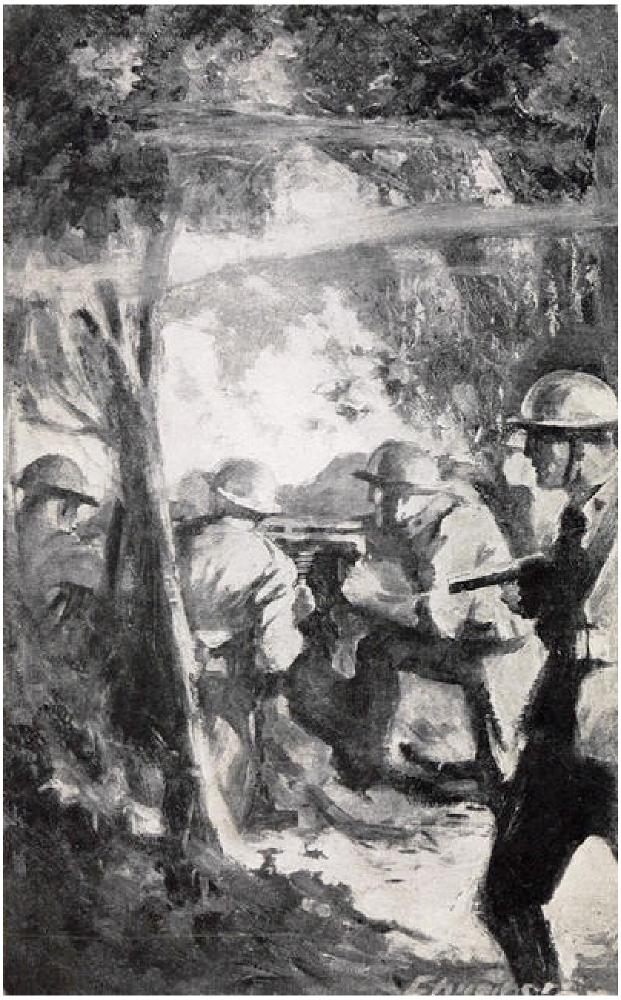
THE BRIGHTON BOYS
AT CHATEAU-THIERRY

THE BRIGHTON BOYS
AT ST. MIHIEL

THE BRIGHTON BOYS
IN THE ARGONNE

THE BRIGHTON BOYS
IN TRANSATLANTIC FLIGHT

THE BRIGHTON BOYS
IN THE SUBMARINE TREASURE SHIP



“Keep Cool! They Mustn’t Reach Us—Never!”

The BRIGHTON BOYS in the ARGONNE FOREST

BY
LIEUTENANT JAMES R. DRISCOLL

ILLUSTRATED

THE JOHN C. WINSTON COMPANY
PHILADELPHIA

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CHAPTER I
Going in Again

PLUCK and perseverance are American characteristics; in all the world there are none superior. Perhaps more than to anything else the physical advancements of our country have been due to the tremendous desire and the will to go forward, to gain, to consummate. Almost everything that we as a people have set our hearts upon we have achieved beyond the expectations of ourselves and other peoples.

The building of the Panama Canal, the discovery of the North Pole, the results attained at the modern Olympic games are but minor instances of our determination; the accumulative values of inventions and their commercialism, the acquiring of vast wealth and well being express this more generally.

And the great World War has given additional evidence of the [10]
kind of stuff that goes along with American brawn and bravery; there was shown more than mere momentary force. The fighter *par excellence* is he who stays in the battle until every ounce of energy he possesses is expended, if necessary, to beat his opponent and goes back for more and more punishment, with the determination to give more than he gets. Such a fighter and of such fighters the American Army proved itself to be, collectively and with wondrously few exceptions individually; it was this quality, as much as anything else, that caused the foe to respect the prowess of the Yanks, to make way before them and to surrender often when there was no immediate need for it.

Despite much luxury and pleasure, much easy living, much indolence of a kind, the fighting stamina has been instilled into the American youth; history, sports, teaching, habits of life, all have conspired to make him the kind of man to want to smash the would-be bully and rough fully as hard as he deserves. And then, when injustice looks like coming back, to go in and smash some more.

Brighton Academy, in common with other high-grade schools, in
the classrooms and on the athletic field, wisely implanted qualities [11]
of fairness and of determination into its boys. Imbued thus were the lads who had, from the halls of Old Brighton, gone forth to do and to die for their country against Germany, the thug nation.

Happy, then, was he who could go back after having been invalided home—and there were many, indeed, who gloried in it. One such, wearing the chevrons of a lieutenant of infantry, had come from Brighton Academy and had served with bravery and distinction in the trenches. He stood on the deck of the transport and gazed through moist eyes at the receding coast of the land of the free, for the most part seeing but one figure, that of a one-legged lad waving him a sad farewell.

"Poor old Roy! It's the first time I've really seen him so sick at heart as to show it keenly. But who can blame him? He'd rather fight than eat and now he's got to sit by and see us go without him." So thought the youth on the upper deck, as he long held up his fluttering handkerchief.

And then, after not many days of glorious, semi-savage anticipation, there followed disembarkation at an obscure port of
France and our returning hero, with many others, sauntered to the [12]
billets, laughing, some singing: "Where do We Go from Here?" and "There'll be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight." Suddenly the young officer's arm was seized, he was whirled about and found himself face to face with another lad, evidently a little younger, but quite as tall, with the accustomed military bearing, but upon his khaki sleeve reposed the familiar and much loved insignia of the Red Cross.

“Herb Whitcomb, or I’m a shad! You old dear, you! But ain’t it good to run smack into a son-of-a-gun from Old Brighton? And what now and where are you——?”

“You’ve got me, comrade—” the Lieutenant began, eyeing the speaker narrowly for a moment, his brows set in a puzzled wrinkle as the other grinned at the very idea of not being recognized by an old friend and classmate. Herbert, in turn, suddenly grabbed him, seizing him by the shoulders and chuckling with real delight.

“Don—Don Richards, by the wild, whistling wizard! You boy! Glory, but I’m glad to see you! But say, man——”

“Say it—that I’ve changed a bit. Must have for you not to have known me.” Don fell into step with Herbert.

“Yes, you have indeed! Sun-dyed like a pirate and older, [13]
somehow. But I knew that grin. The great thing about it is that you’re alive and looking fit as a fiddle. Why, man, we heard you’d been wounded past recovery—hit with a shrapnel.”

“Shrapnel all right, but it was uncommonly kind to me. Piece just went through my left shoulder and now it’s only a little stiff at times. Clem Stapley and I were together out there beyond Bouresches; the Belleau Wood scrap. He was hurt badly and I was trying to bring him in.” Don spoke mere facts; not with boastfulness.

“Red Cross work; we heard that, too. Clem pulled through; didn’t he?” the lieutenant questioned.

“Yes, just, but he won’t be good enough to join in again. Went back home last ship, three days ago. I didn’t go because Major Little came after me to serve again.”

“Why don’t you?”

“Well, I guess I ought to. It’s got under my skin, but I’d like to get a glimpse of the good old U. S. Came off this boat; didn’t you? Don asked.”

“Just landed. Going back to my company; can’t help it; it’s
permeated my carcass, too, with the gas I got near Montdidier. Poor [14]
Roy Flynn, you know, lost a leg, but he wanted to come back, nevertheless. I’m billeting with this bunch of fellows. Where are you stopping?”

“Down here at a sort of little inn; jolly fine place, but expensive. Major Little sent Clem and me there. How about your bunking with me now? Then we’ll go back together. If I go on again I guess it will be in an auto and there’ll be room for you. They want me to report at the base somewhere southeast of Rheims. Where is your old command?”

The boys had turned aside from the khaki-clad procession, Donald conducting Herbert toward a side street that led to his inn. Several of the “Yanks” shouted words of friendly banter at the lieutenant, whom they had come to know and respect aboard ship.

“Hey, you scrapper! Don’t let the Red Cross get you this soon!” “Where you goin’, boy? Stay with the bon tons!” “Sure, we need your cheerful reminders of what the Heinies will do to us!”

It was long past the noon hour and the hungry boys ordered a
meal; then began a long and minutely explanatory chat during [15]
which the affairs at Brighton, the pro-war sentiment in the United States, the retreat of the Germans and the American influence thereon were discussed with the vast interest that only those who had taken and expected again to take part in the conflict could so keenly feel. Presently a Red Cross messenger on a motorcycle came to seek young Richards.

“How about conveyance?” Don asked. “Major Little said not to bother with the roundabout on the crazy railroad; a car would make the direct run across in less time.”

“There are two new ambulances stored here that came in on the last freighter across. I have orders to turn one of the ambulances over to you if you wish,” the messenger said.

“Then I can deliver my reply to the Major in person, after I have dropped my friend here at general Army Headquarters. Let’s have your order. I’ll be on the road early in the morning and likely make the run by night.”

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CHAPTER II
To the Front

THAT swift ride through France in the new Red Cross ambulance was quite devoid of any startling incidents. There were the usual bits of well traveled and rutty roads and long stretches of fine highway, the occasional detours by reason of road mending; here old men and boys labored to keep up the important lanes of traffic for the oncoming hosts of Americans and the transportation of overseas supplies. The lads overtook heavily laden lorries, or camions as the French call them; they passed columns of marching men and those billeted in villages or encamped in the wayside fields. They noted the slow moving forward of heavy field pieces and here and there they came to drill grounds where lately arrived Americans were going through mock trench fighting or were bayonet stabbing straw-stuffed bags supposed to be Huns.

Everywhere the boys observed also that there were more people
in the towns and villages than the sizes of these places seemed to [17]
warrant, and in the fields and woods, in uncultivated or otherwise barren spots little settlements of tents and rude shelters had been established as evidence of the wide exodus from the battle-scarred areas far to the east and north. Hundreds of thousands of people, driven from their ruined or threatened homes, had thus overrun the none too sparsely inhabited sections beyond the war-torn region.

"*Non, non, non, non!*" That was the common refrain directed by Herbert and Donald to the solicitations of the French, for the purchase of sundry articles, mostly of edible character, whenever the car was forced to stop.

"If you want to get rid of your money very quickly," Herbert explained to the three Red Cross nurses riding with them in the rear of the ambulance, "you can sure do it if you patronize these sharpers. Their goods are all right generally, but the prices—phew! They must think every American is a millionaire."

"And yet one must pity many of them; they have suffered and are suffering so much," said the eldest nurse, a sweet-faced woman whose gray hairs denoted that she was past middle age.

"They seem to be very patient and really very cheerful," [18]
remarked the somewhat younger woman whose slightly affected drawl and rather superior bearing indicated that she belonged to the higher social circles somewhere back in the U. S. And then up spoke the third, a mere slip of a girl, who had been quite silent until now.

"I have wondered and wondered what it would all be like, what the people would be like; and now I'm glad I've come. Perhaps when the war is over we can do something for these——"

"We will every one of us be glad to get home again," said the gray-haired lady. "You, my dear, will prove no exception, however noble your reconstructive impulses are. But these people, no matter what they have gone through, will be well able to take care of themselves."

And as the car presently dashed on again, Donald remarked to Herbert, so that their passengers could not hear:

"Don't you think, old man, it is very true when they say that patriotism over in the dear old United States has had a remarkable awakening?"

"Yes, you can call it that, perhaps, if we were ever really asleep. [19]
You refer, I know, to these nurses, evidently ladies of refinement and culture, coming over here for duties that they must know can't be any cinch. The women, if anything, have led the men at home in their zeal for helping toward making our part in this scrap a good one."

"Very good and all honor to the women," Don said, "but I guess, from what you and I have both seen and will soon see again, that which is making America's part in this war a good one is mostly the scrapping ability of the lads with blood in their eyes. The humane part of it comes afterward."

"And a little before at times also," asserted the lieutenant. "There is the morale to keep up—the general good fellowship and well-being. If the boys know they're going to be treated right if they get winged, then they're heartened up a whole lot; you know that."

"I do," Don eagerly admitted. "Don't think I'm throwing any rocks at the splendid efficiency of the Red Cross; if anyone knows about them I ought to, from every angle of the service. But I have also seen the kind of work that threw a scare into the Huns, and believe me that was not a humane, not a nursing proposition, as you know."

"Yes, I know that, too. And it may be funny, but I've had a sort of [20]
homesick feeling to get back and see more of it, and the nearer I get the more impatient I am."

"Same here. But this boat is doing her darndest for a long run and we can hardly improve the time even if you get out and walk."

"From watching your speedometer register something over thirty miles in less than sixty minutes I am convinced that only a motorcycle or an airplane would help us better to get on."

The ambulance did get on in a very satisfactory manner. Here and there along the road and at all turns and forks splotches of white paint on stones, posts, buildings, bridges or stakes and by which the transport and freight camions were guided, made the way across the three hundred miles quite plain. The lads paid no attention to the French sign posts, here and there, which announced the distance in kilometers to some larger town or city and then to Paris farther inland, for the route avoided these places wherever possible and ran into no narrow and congested streets or masses of people.

At the next stop, for a bite to eat in a small village, the middle- [21]
aged nurse expressed some disappointment at not going into Paris.

"I have been there many times in former years when my dear husband was living; we stopped there once for several months. But they say now that the city is not like it used to be—I mean the people, of course, in manners and gayety; the mourning for the dead and the fear of invasion or bombardment——"

"There is no longer fear of invasion," Herbert declared. "That time has gone past. The business in hand now is whipping the Huns clear across the Rhine and into Berlin, if necessary, and we are going to do that in short order!"

"It's terrible. So much death and suffering," said the young girl. "And the Germans, too; who cares for them when wounded?"

"They have a Red Cross and very excellent ambulance and hospital service," Don explained. "We pick up a good many of their wounded and treat them just as well as our own."

"You have seen this yourself?" asked the gray-haired woman.

"My friend was in the thick of it, around Château-Thierry," Herbert announced eagerly. "He was wounded, invalided, but he is going back for more work."

The women all gazed at blushing Donald, who hastened to get [22]
even.

"He needn't heap it on to me!" he exclaimed. "He's going back, too, after having been gassed and sent across the pond to get well. And, you see, he got to be a lieutenant for bravery."

"You both seem to be very young, too," remarked the eldest nurse. "Hardly through school yet; are you?"

"No, ma'am; we are both students, junior year, at Brighton Acad——"

"Brighton? Well, I declare! Why, my brother is a teacher there; Professor Carpenter."

"Oh, hurrah! He's a dandy! The fellows all like him immensely!" Don shouted.

"It's fine to meet his sister over here, Miss Carpenter," Herbert said.

"It is indeed a pleasure to know you both," said the lady, and proceeded to formally introduce the other two nurses.

Then they were on the road once more and two hours later had safely landed the women at a Red Cross headquarters on the way, a few miles north of Paris. The boys parted from their gentle passengers with real regret; then sped on again, headed for the Army General Headquarters.

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CHAPTER III
Starting a Big Job

LIEUTENANT Herbert Whitcomb stood for a long half minute watching the slowly disappearing Red Cross ambulance. The car merely crept on down the long, straight road, as though the driver were loath to leave his companion of the last twenty-four hours, as indeed he was, for these old Brighton boys, meeting thus on a foreign shore and bent on much the same business, had become closer friends than when at school.

"I wish," Herbert was thinking, "that Don would get into the army service and could get assigned with me. He'd make a crackerjack of a scrapper; the real thing. But I suppose they've got him tied to hospital work."

Then, after saluting the guard and saying a word or two to an orderly who was waiting to receive or to reject visitors, mostly the latter, the young lieutenant passed inside. Ten minutes later he emerged again with a happy smile on his face and, accompanied by [24] several other men who had also returned to duty after the healing of minor wounds, Herbert Whitcomb led the way to a waiting motor car and presently was speeding away to the fighting front, all of his present companions being assigned, with him, to the Twenty-eighth Division and to a company that had suffered serious depletion because of many violent attacks against the stubborn Hun resistance in the drive beyond Rheims and on the Vesle River.

Herbert was far from being disappointed over the fact that he was not to rejoin his old battalion. Both his major and his captain had been invalided home and could never lead the boys again; several of his comrades-in-arms, among them three old Brighton boys, had been killed or pitiably wounded; there had been such a thinning out of their ranks that nothing but a skeleton of them remained, which must indeed be only depressing, saddening as a reminder. Moreover, this division had now been put in reserve where the American sector joined that of the British and was doing no fighting.

Much rather would the boy take up new duties with new comrades, feeling again the complete novelty of the situation, the test of relative merit, the *esprit de corps* of personal equation anew. [25] But however glad he was to get back again into the maelstrom of do and dare, a satisfaction inspired both by sense of duty and the love of adventure, he did not welcome the opportunity more than the boys of the —th welcomed him. Before Captain Lowden and First Lieutenant Pondexter received Herbert they had been made acquainted, from Headquarters, with Whitcomb's record and it meant good example and higher morale for an officer, however young, to be thoroughly respected by the rank and file.

And then, within a few hours back again into the full swing of military precision and custom, the young lieutenant was ready for anything that might or could come.

"The orders are to advance and take up a position on the up slope of that brown field on the other side of this little valley and thus try out the enemy; after which we may go on and attack him. So much from Headquarters. In my opinion the Colonel will say to just go ahead without bothering to try them out." Thus spoke Captain Lowden at a brief conference of his officers, immediately prior to the line-up after early morning mess. And then he added, by [26] way of sounding the human nature of his under officers:

"What would you say about that, gentlemen?"

Herbert waited until the first lieutenant should express himself. Pondexter was a grave and serious-minded fellow, oldish beyond his years, rather slow of speech, studious, thoughtful, austere.

"We don't know how strong the Germans may be there," he said, "and it would not be very wise, it seems to me, if an offensive were made against greatly superior numbers intrenched, or within strong, defensive positions. But if we first try them out then we can ——"

The captain did not wait for the lieutenant to finish, but suddenly turned to Herbert:

"I'd take a gamble on it and go over the hill," the young officer suggested. "We can be pretty sure, judging from the enemy's general distribution all along the line, that just at this point they do not greatly outnumber us; there can hardly be double our number. We are good for that many any day.”

Captain Lowden laughed joyfully and slapped his knee. He was a young fellow from Plattsburg and Camp Meade, an ex-football star, [27]
athletic in build, quick in his motions and decisions, stern, yet kindly toward his men and greatly loved by them. He had already proved his heroism near Vigneulles, during the St. Mihiel battle, when the German salient was being flattened. He gazed at his new second lieutenant in a manner that quite embarrassed that youthful officer; then the captain said:

“You’ll do! Your predecessor is in a hospital in Paris; I hope you don’t have to go there, but can stay with us. And I am blamed glad they pushed you right on through the replacement divisions and landed you here.”

“Oh, thank you! I—I—don’t——” But the captain paid no attention to Herbert’s stammering reply, and continued:

“And I hope the general tells the colonel to send us right on over the hill.”

Perhaps that is what the brigade commander did, or perhaps the colonel decided the matter on his own initiative; it would require a good deal of cross-questioning and then much guessing, probably, to determine these matters. Anyway, the battalion of four companies, each originally of two hundred and fifty men, but now considerably [28]
reduced, some of them to only half their number in spite of replacements from the reserve divisions in the rear, now advanced almost as though on parade, except that they were strung out, wide apart, making no attempt to keep in step.

And no sooner were they under way than the watchful enemy made the Yanks aware that their intentions were understood, for almost instantly the desultory firing of heavy shells and shrapnel aimed at our boys was increased tenfold. Added to this was the continuous roar of the latter’s own barrage, the combined American and French artillery sending over far more than shell for shell in the effort to cripple and stop the German field pieces and to chase the enemy to cover.

Of the four companies that composed the battalion advancing across this short open space with their objective the top of the slope between two wooded points, Captain Lowden’s company, composed mainly of very young men, proved to be the most rapid walkers. It appeared also that Whitcomb’s platoon, taking example from Herbert, speeded up until it was considerably in advance of those on either of its flanks. The advantage of this haste seemed evident: the [29]
abruptly rising ground and the fringe of trees at the top offered a natural shelter against the enemy fire. Thus only one larger shell landed and burst near enough to the platoon to do any harm, but that was a plenty. It tore a hole in the ground about a hundred feet behind Herbert and the flying pieces killed two privates, wounded two others, the concussion throwing several violently to the ground, the lieutenant among them.

Herbert regained his feet instantly, looking to see the damage and calling for a runner to hurry back for an ambulance. The lad dashed away and a man, heavy-set, with the sleeve marks of a sergeant, marching some distance in the rear, offered the remark, with what seemed a half sneer:

“Red Cross car just down the hill, coming up.”

“Don’t see it. Sure of that?” There was something in the fellow’s manner that nettled the young lieutenant and he spoke sharply, quickly; he must get back to his men. Then he added:

“Who are you?”

“Liaison officer. With the Thirty-fifth Division and this one.”

“Where are your men?” Herbert turned to go. [30]

“Scattered around, of course, and on duty.” The man spoke with an attempt to appear civil, but it was clearly camouflage; his habitual contemptuous expression and lowering glance indicated all too plainly that he possessed some animosity toward the lieutenant. Herbert, noting this, wondered. He had never seen the fellow before; evidently the dislike was sudden, mutual. Whitcomb ran on up the hill and rejoined his men, never once looking back, and the incident was at once almost forgotten.

CHAPTER IV [31]
“Into the Jaws of Death”

ON the platoons went, gaining the top of the low hill that crowned the valley slope and then—suddenly the terrors of real war descended with one swift stroke and bit and tore and gnashed with even more than their usual fury.

Captain Lowden had been walking with a French guide up the slope and not far from where Herbert preceded his men. A moment before the former had gained the top and come within sight of the enemy’s front-line defenses, hardly a second before the outburst of machine-gun fire from the entrenched foe, the captain had turned to his second lieutenant.

“He says,” meaning the guide, “that right over the hill is the edge of the famous Argonne Forest. It is a wild place; the Huns have chosen to make a stand in it and they have boasted that nothing will be able to dislodge them. But we shall see, my boy; we shall see!”

How false was this boast of the Germans has been well and [32]
repeatedly set forth in the history of the Great War. Among America’s most glorious deeds on the fields of battle; among the most heroic annals of all warfare the bitter fight for the possession of the Argonne Forest may be ranked with the highest. Perhaps nowhere on earth has the grit and bravery of men at war been so sorely put to the test as in this struggle of exposed attacking troops against thoroughly trained and efficient soldiers with the skill of expert snipers behind well masked machine guns.

The French, long practiced in the art of war, asserted that this wide tract which had been held by the Germans since 1914 had been made defensively impregnable. According to all previously held standards it was a place to avoid, but the Yanks took a different view of it; the Huns must be dislodged and the former were the lads who could, in their expressive slang, “make a stab at it,” and this in the early morning of the 26th of September, 1918, they were beginning to do.

Every soldier engaged in this stupendous undertaking had his work cut out for him and everyone knew this for a man’s size job. Therefore, each Yank went at the task as it deserved, do or die
being virtually every fighter’s motto. Throughout the long, bent line [33]
made up of the four combat divisions of infantry and their machine-gun battalion that now advanced toward the densely wooded hills, backed by brigades of artillery, there was one simultaneous forward movement with the two other army corps stretching eastward between the Aire and the Meuse Rivers. And there was one common purpose: to rout the Huns, destroy them or drive them back the way they had come. Never before in the history of wars had there been a clearer understanding among all ranks as to what was expected of the army at large and just what this forward movement was meant to accomplish.

For the glory of America, for the honor of the corps, the division, the regiment, the battalion, the company, the platoon; for the sake of justice and humanity and for the joy of smashing a foe that had not played fair according to the accepted rules of warfare, the determination that led this force ahead could not have been excelled. And therein individual bravery and heroism enacted a very large and notable part in the victory over foes numerically almost as strong and having the great advantage of position.

As the line swept up the hill, Lieutenant Whitcomb noted the [34]
various expressions on the faces of those about him. Many of the boys were very serious and quiet, some positively grim because fully aware of what they must shortly encounter and were for the moment only shielded from by the terrain. Others seemed unchanged from their habitual cheerfulness, even bantering their fellows, and a little bunch of evident cronies started up a rollicking song, but in subdued voices.

Herbert heard one man near him call to another:

“A Frog who talked United States told me that the Heinies are a bad bunch up here!”

“These here Frogs know mostly what’s what!” was the reply. Herbert knew that “Frog” meant Frenchman; it was the common term used among the Americans, inspired, no doubt, by the idea that batrachians are a favorite dish with the French, though they cannot be blamed for their choice.

“A sky-shooter gave me the dope that the Jerries are just inside the woods,” another man said. “Reckon we’re goin’ to get it right sudden when we top the rise.”

“There’s goin’ to be some Limburgers short if I kin see ’em first!” said another, laughing.

One prediction proved true, in part at least; the line topped the [35]
rise—and got it. The barrage and preliminary artillery fire had done little in this case; bullets, or even high-powered shells could not penetrate far nor do much damage within the dense forest. But it was very different with the enemy among the trees and rocks; they could see out from these natural shelters well enough to choose clear spaces for shooting.

And shoot they did. As the Americans went over the first little hilltop across the nearly level ground towards the woods beyond, the streaks of flame in the misty atmosphere and the rat-tat-tat-tr-r-r of machine guns became incessant. The enemy also was on to his job, had his work well planned and it was now being well executed.

Did an order to charge on the double-quick come along the American line? Or was it rather a common understanding born of the impulse to get at an enemy that was capable of doing so much damage unless quickly overcome? At any rate, the men broke into a run, with no attempt at drill about it; every one for himself and yet with the common notion to work with his fellows, to support and be supported by them.

Herbert’s men, being still a little in advance, seemed to draw [36]
more of the enemy’s fire than they otherwise might have done. At one moment there was the full complement of men, a little separated from their company comrades, charging toward the enemy positions; in the next sixty seconds there was not two-thirds of this number dashing on, and in another minute, by which time they had gained the wood, less than half of their original number were in action.

It will be remembered that Lieutenant Herbert Whitcomb had been in several charges when serving in the trenches; a half dozen times he had “gone over the top.” In one desperate and successful effort to regain lost ground and then to forge ahead over a hotly contested field he had seen his men go down; in holding a shell hole gun pit, in springing a mine, in finally victoriously sweeping back the Germans when they were driven from Montdidier where he had been gassed, he had witnessed many bloody encounters, missed many a brave comrade. But here was a new and more terrible experience. The Americans had forced the fighting into the open, and yet again and again they were compelled to meet the foe within
well prepared and hidden defenses; therefore, the offensive Yanks [37]
must suffer terribly before the Huns could be dislodged.

The boys in khaki knew only that before them, somewhere from among the trees, the enemy was pouring a deadly machine-gun and rifle fire, sweeping the open ground with a hail of bullets in which it seemed impossible for even a blade of grass or a grasshopper to exist. The miracle was that some of the boys got through untouched, or were but slightly hurt. Those who had nicked rifle stocks, cut clothing, hats knocked off, accouterments punctured and even skin scratches were perhaps more common than those entirely unscathed.

Yet through they did go; and in the midst of the sheltering trees at last, where now the Yanks, too, were in a measure protected and where almost immediately a form of Indian fighting began, the Americans still advancing and stalking the enemy from ambush, in like manner to the German defense.

The Yanks took no time to consider the toll of their number out there in the open and to the very edge of the forest, where men lay dead and wounded by the score, the ground half covered, except
that the desire was to avenge them, to destroy the cause of the loss [38]
among their comrades. And this was a very palpable desire, serving to increase the fury of the offensive.

More than ever among the trees it was every man for himself; yet every man knew that his surviving comrades were fighting with him, and while this sort of thing strengthens the morale it was hardly needed here, for each man depended also on his own prowess, and there were many who, had they known that every one of their companions had been shot down, would alone have gone right ahead with the task of cleaning up the Argonne Forest of Huns. Numerous cases of this individuality were shown and will be forever recorded in history to the glory of the American fighting spirit, being all the more notable on account of the German boast that the Americans would not and could not fight, and they could expect nothing else than overwhelming defeat if they should attempt to combat the trained soldiers of the Central Empire.

In the advance across the open the singing and striking of small arm bullets accompanied by the roar of many running feet was the principal impression which Lieutenant Whitcomb received; the purpose of charging the enemy and overcoming him was so fixed in [39]
Herbert’s mind as to be altogether instinctive. Several times he glanced aside to see a comrade tumble forward or, going limp, pitch to the ground with his face ever toward the enemy. Several times the lieutenant but just observed the beginning of struggles in agony or the desire to rise and go on again. Once, after a particularly savage burst of fire concentrated from the forest upon his men, when several fellows in a bunch went down and out of the fight and the line for a moment wavered a little, the boy officer called out sharply:

“Steady, fellows, steady! Keep right on! We’re going to get those chaps in there in a minute and make them sorry we came!”

Then a moment later, when they were among the trees, he turned again to call to his platoon, within hearing at least of the nearest, though he could not have told how many of his men were with him, how many had survived the terrible ordeal of the charge in the open:

“Now, men, go for ’em in our own way! Trees and rocks—you know how to make use of them! Give them a taste of their own medicine, only make it ten times worse! Forward!”

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[40]

CHAPTER V
Kill or Be Killed

TREES and rocks. Lieutenant Whitcomb had always loved the woods and the wild places, but now, with quite a different reason, a sentiment based on a more concrete purpose, he could almost have worshiped these dim aisles of the forest, these noble maples, oaks and spruces and the rocky defiles that appeared on every side. Here was a place where an aggressor might be on nearly even terms with his enemy; at least there was less danger of being hit if one might shield a larger portion of his body behind some natural object the while he located his foe, or exposed himself only for a few seconds in his rush to overcome him.

Anticipating what the fighting would be like and anxious to do all the execution he could where mere directing could be of little avail, Herbert had possessed himself of the rifle and ammunition no longer needed by a grievously wounded comrade and behind the stout trunk of a low tree had begun to pepper away at the greenish [41] helmets of a number of men who were sending their fire from a deep fissure in the rocks against the line to the right. Skilled as the boy was with the rifle, and we remember how he had been chosen in the training camp at home as the instructor in marksmanship and afterward given duty as a sniper or sharpshooter in the trenches, there was every chance of that machine gun nest of the enemy suffering somewhat.

This was war and there could be no holding off in the manner of winning; there could be no sentiment against any means of destroying an enemy who was eager to destroy, no matter if it were against one man or an army that the fire was directed. The boy felt few or no scruples at the time, though he always hated to think of the occasion and he rarely spoke of it subsequently. Warfare is not a pleasant matter; there are few really happy moments even in victory. There may be certain joys, but they can be only relative to the mind endowed with human ideas and schooled to right thinking. Old Brighton labored to teach its lads altruism, charity, gentleness and kindness and these qualities cannot be lightly cast aside, even under stress of battle, which must be regarded mostly as a matter of self-defense, even in offensive action. If you don’t kill or wound the [42] enemy, so called, he will kill or wound you, and as long as the governmental powers have found it necessary to declare that another people must be considered as an enemy, there is nothing else to do. As against aggression, injustice, injury made possible by constitutional declaration, wars are, beyond argument, often most justifiable, even necessary. This idea must impel every patriotic soldier to do his best in the duties assigned him, even though he must rid the earth of his fellow men.

Herbert had a clear aim at about sixty yards distance through an open space in the foliage; he could see no more than the shoulders of any of the Germans. He emptied his rifle with three shots, slipped in another clip, fired five of these cartridges, replaced the clip and turned to see what else menaced. That gun nest was no longer in action; when a corporal and the two men remaining in his squad reached the spot there was one wounded man and one fellow untouched and eager to surrender out of the seven; the others were dead. But there must have been other Americans shooting at them; Herbert always liked to think that, anyway. And now he frowned [43] when one of the men who had remained with him remarked:

“By the Kaiser’s whiskers, Lieutenant, that was great work! Nobody in the army, not even General Pershing, could beat it! Say, if we had all like you in this reg’lar fellers’ army, it would take only this platoon to open the way to Berlin.”

Herbert ducked; so did his companion. Not fifty feet in front of them three Huns came quickly though clumsily in their big shoes, over the mossy rocks, dragging a machine gun. They meant to set it up behind a fallen tree trunk and in the shelter of a spruce; from their position they had not discerned the Americans near by.

The young lieutenant, slowly and without stirring a twig, raised his rifle. This indeed seemed like murder, but——. There was the crack of several guns just to the left and the three Huns sank to the earth as one man. It was this sort of work that made the German respect and fear his American foe.

“Come on; more work ahead!” Herbert shouted and as he and his men made their way through thickets, over rocks, roots and fallen trees they found plenty to do. A little hillock, almost perpendicular, rose in front of them; there was the rapid firing of a gun just over [44] the top of it, though the approach of the boys in khaki beneath wide-spreading branches and behind dense bushes could not have been observed.

“Some risk, but if we go up and over quickly, then——” Herbert began, starting to clamber up the rocks. It was slippery going, a difficult task at best, and he found it necessary, to avoid being seen, to go down on hands and knees. One foot slipped back and the other, too, was slipping when he felt a hand beneath his shoe holding him. He had but to stretch out and upward to bring his head over the rocks above, when a Hun saw him. The fellow could not have possessed a loaded pistol, or in his hurry he forgot it. With a guttural roar of discovery he seized a big stone in both hands and raised it. But Herbert had climbed up with an automatic only in his hand, leaving his rifle below. Now the weapon barked its protest and the rock was not sent crushingly down upon him. The young officer covered the other four men standing in a bunch by a machine gun, their eyes, wide with surprise, glancing from Herbert to their fallen comrade. Then their arms went up.

Now the Weapon Barked Its Protest

“Kamerad! Kamerad!” they shouted and there followed a string [45] of words in their unmusical tongue. In a moment three Americans were at the top of the rocks and Herbert said:

“Gaylord, you’ve had your hand hit, eh? Hurt much? Too bad, old man, but that won’t put you out of the fight, will it? Thought not; knew you’re the right stuff. Merritt, you hold these fellows until I tie up Gaylord’s hand.”

A rapid job of first aid was made to a by no means serious wound; then there were further orders.

“Lucky it’s your left hand. Now then, leave your gun here; your automatic will be sufficient to induce these chaps to go ahead of you to the rear. Turn them over to the guard and get fixed up, old man. I’ll bring your gun along if you don’t come back for it.”

"I'll be back, Lieutenant and find it. Come along, you Dutchies! Start 'em, Merritt. Now then, march!"

"Come on, Merritt, we'll catch up with the rest of our bunch," Herbert said, well satisfied with what had just taken place, but glancing woefully at the inert German lying among the rocks. The lieutenant climbed down to the bottom of the little hill, his soldier [46]
after him; they reached the more level ground, parting the branches ahead before proceeding. A flash and the crack of a gun almost in Herbert's ear, the poking of the muzzle of another weapon through a thick clump of bushes all but in the young officer's face. Quickly he stooped low with bending knees and at the very same instant a mauser blazed forth its fire, tearing away his hat. The boy fired his pistol directly in line with and beneath the enemy's weapon and the rifle fell among the bushes. Herbert was about to rise when down on top of him came the weight of a falling man. He caught Merritt in his arms, straightened up, then saw that his khaki-clad comrade's face was ghastly and that he was unconscious. Something warm, sticky, dark spread over the lieutenant's hands and with a gasp the soldier lay still. Herbert had liked Merritt, a boy only, no older than himself; thoughtful, studious, delightfully versatile, a writer of beautiful verses, many of which had been published, as had also some of his songs. Here was a youth of great promise, but war, red war, was surely no respecter of persons.

"They've got to find him and get him out of here, and save him," [47]
Herbert said aloud, at the same time looking sharply about to see if any more Hun muzzles were being poked through the leafy screen. The boy tenderly placed his comrade on the ground, gazed apprehensively for a moment at the white face, then turned to find someone to go seek stretcher bearers, if such were yet near.

Herbert ran back toward the edge of the woods; a minute or two would thus be consumed. A man in khaki was coming toward him; with the parting of branches and the rounding of a young spruce the two came face to face. The other, Herbert knew at once as the grouchy liaison sergeant whom he had met half an hour ago out on the hill.

"What, not running away, are you?" There was something more than a sneer accompanying this speech. Instantly Herbert lost his temper.

"Keep a civil tongue! I'll make you eat those words in a minute! You chase yourself back and bring the *brancardiers* here for one of my men!"

"You can't give me orders, Lieutenant. I get mine from men higher up. I'm on my way now to you from the field staff. Stop your men and withdraw; they're the orders. Pretty much everyone has [48]
them but you, and they are all halting the charge."

"You can't be correct. The orders were to go on till the bugle recall; then to——"

"Changed then. What can you expect, anyway? You heard what I said and if you know what's what you'd better obey."

"Something wrong about this. Give the orders to my captain, Captain Lowden."

"Lowden's killed, out there near the woods."

"Is that true?" Herbert was shocked, saddened more and more.

"Don't take me for a liar, do you?" queried the sergeant belligerently. Suddenly, hearing someone coming, he swung around and stared for a moment, then added quickly:

"Well, if you won't believe me, you needn't; it's your own funeral. I did my duty so far and I've got to go on." With that he turned and hastened away through the forest. Herbert had also turned, wondering what it could all mean. Then he heard a familiar voice, cheery and glad.

"Oh you Herb!" and Don Richards, pistol in hand, was coming rapidly toward him.

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[49]

CHAPTER VI
Shifted

UPON his return to duty at the new Red Cross base just south of St. Mihiel, Don Richards had been sent at once to the evacuation hospital four miles farther toward the front and there he reported to Major Little, who received him with many expressions of gratification over his return. The two entered the surgeon’s office and supply room in the rear of an old château and sat talking for a few minutes. In one corner of the room was an army officer at a table covered with documents and the man was busily engaged. Presently he arose and came over to the major.

“May I trouble you for that list once again, Doctor?” he asked. “I want just another peep at it.”

“Sure, sure. No trouble. Oh, Colonel, I want to introduce my young friend here, Richards. I don’t know whether you have heard of him or not; he did some fine ambulance work for us up at Cantigny and then above Thierry and along the Marne. Got one [50] through the shoulder near Bouresches—was trying to bring in a *blessé* there right back of the fight. He also got that Red Cross Hun spy who was signaling the balloon; you may remember hearing about it.”

“Remember? I guess I do. I had a hand in that; gave orders to a squad of the Marines to get him; one of them had some dope on him. Well, I’m glad to meet you, young man. But how about that shoulder? Get over it and come back to us?”

“Oh, he’s the right stuff, you may bet that!” put in the surgeon, searching for the list.

“I believe you, Major, and that’s what we want. Spin that full yarn about the spy to me, will you, Richards?”

Don looked a little sheepish; he did not much like to talk about himself, but Major Little said:

“Colonel Walton is in part command of one branch of the enemy Intelligence Division here.” And Don related fully his part in the spy affair, beginning even with the capture of the spy’s confederates back in the States and the important part also that Clement Stapley had performed. The colonel listened with much interest; then turned [51] and spoke to the major:

“Doctor, you have about as many men as you really need now for drivers, haven’t you?”

“Yes, but we can always make room for another expert at it.”

“Or you can let one go if he can be of more use elsewhere. We must have more men who are keen on spy work and this lad is a go-getter in that particular. Will you turn him over to me? You wouldn’t mind becoming a liaison officer; would you, Richards; also a messenger at times; that is, to all appearances? Your work will really be that of army detective, to operate in some little measure with the military police at times, when necessary, but to gain intelligence of what the enemy may be trying to do within our lines in seeking information. In short, to stop him from getting information. Agreed?”

“Anything,” Don replied, “to help lick the Huns!

“You have an automatic and ammunition? Good! Clothes and shoes O.K.? Fine! Continue to wear your Red Cross arm band. Now then, report first to headquarters of the First Army Corps and then to Captain Lowden, with the Twenty-eighth Division in the field. We [52] have some information from him. By the time you can get there the advance will be under way and you’ll probably catch up with the boys somewhere west of the Aire River; their orders, I believe, are to attack in the Argonne sector. You will find an ambulance or a lorry going up; the pass I shall give you will take you anywhere. You are starting out without any definite information now, but such may come to you from time to time. Now then, I’ll swear you and you can get on the job at once. Your rank will be a sergeant of infantry; the pay——”

“I don’t care what the pay is, Colonel. It’s the duty I’m after,” Don said.

A little while later the boy was on his way with half a dozen jolly, care-free fellows, who were a sapper squad, and two others who were transferred army cooks, all loaded into a big transport *camion* that thundered, jolted, creaked and groaned, sputtered and backfired over the uneven and rutted roads, stopping now and then for deliberate repairs, to cool the motor or for meals, when a rest was always in order, together with card games or crap shooting, accompanied by a vast amount of hilarity.

Don took no part in these latter performances, but was an intent [53] observer; he very plainly smelled alcohol fumes among the men and he noted that the driver, a morose and silent fellow, was evidently not under the influence of the beverage that was being passed around. The boy bided his time. Presently a bottle was offered to him, but he declared that it made him sick. A little later there was a call for more and the driver stopped the car, reached back under his seat and brought forth a bottle of yellow fluid which was handed around, the driver himself persistently refusing to imbibe. Don watched him and saw the fellow’s eyes take on a queer, wicked glance at the increasing intoxication of the men. The boy liked this so little that he decided something must be wrong; at least there was open disobedience to strict orders against the use of intoxicants, this being dared because of the isolation of the long run somewhat out of the usual route and the expressed desire of everyone in the lorry, except Don, who was evidently regarded from his youth as quite unworthy of serious consideration. Instinctively the boy felt that here was a chance for some investigation along his new endeavor.

Some risk was being run by the party; an M. P. was sighted [54] ahead as he rode toward them. The driver gave them all a signal and comparative quiet ensued, with only one choked-off snatch of a song. The policeman reined in his horse, turned partly and gazed after the lorry, evidently thought better of following them and they were presently as noisy as ever.

Another stop was made. Don did not believe, nor could he detect anything was the matter with the motor. Several of the men got out and started another crap game; some were asleep, or near it, inside the car. Don saw and took his chance to have a quiet word with the driver, though he foresaw that he must prod his own nerve.

“What’s the use of just delaying a little?” he said, looking the other in the face, with a wink. “Why don’t you run into the ditch and then get under and disconnect your steering rod, chuck the bolt away and blame it on that?”

“What you talkin’ about?” demanded the driver, turning almost savagely upon the boy.

“Why, it’s a nice day if it doesn’t rain tomorrow,” Don said, laughing a little. “I said cross steering rods are often weak and [55] ditches handy. That’ll fix these *teufels* so they can’t get to the front.”

“Who wants to fix them?”

“Why, don’t you and I both want to? What use are they there, anyway? The Fatherland doesn’t want anyone there; that I know.”

“Say, who are you and what?” the driver quickly demanded.

“You can see,” Don said. “Liaison officer messenger, Red Cross. I’ve got enough to keep them from even guessing who I may be. You don’t need to tell who and what you are; I know.”

It was an awful bluff, barely a guess, but Don reasoned that nothing ventured nothing have, and now that he had started to burn his bridges he would go ahead with his quest.

“Get out; you don’t know nothin’ ’bout me,” denied the driver.

“Nothing about where your orders came from, eh? When I get mine from the same general source? We’ve all got to work together. Say, if you haven’t the nerve to ditch her, let’s start on and give me the wheel; I’ll do it. And I know a way we can get off unsuspected, too.”

“Aw, gwan! You’re kiddin’ me, Sarge.”

“Aw, don’t be a clam! Your think works must be rusty or your [56] mush case too thick. Come on, get her to going and let me show you a thing or two that’ll put you wise.”

“How’d you get into this, Sarge?”

“How’d a lot of us get into it? One kind of money is as good as another, if it’s good in exchange. And it’s big money, too, eh? You know that. Quit your hedging, fellow, and let’s talk sense. Going to let me ditch her?”

“You daren’t ditch her. If you do, I reckon you’re givin’ me the straight dope. But let me say this first: You talk A-1 American; how, then——?”

“Well, what of that? So do you. But that doesn’t keep my folks from being—well, maybe like yours are. We’ve both listened to ‘*Deutschland uber alles*’ enough to know it by heart, haven’t we?”

“Let’s see you ditch her. I don’t believe you’ve got the nerve,” the driver said and shouting “all aboard!” they started the motor, gliding off as soon as the passengers were in the car. Fortune favored Don at the wheel. The driver saw at once that the boy knew how to handle the big car; the fellow sat watching him closely; watching also the road. It was very rutty for a stretch, but the [57] ground was solid; another motor car could pull them out of the ditch if they couldn’t get out alone.

The boy could not be sure of his ground; there were too many contributing circumstances for him to be altogether wrong. Yet there was a large element of risk, too, and it required all his courage to do what he did. It was really more impulse than an act of clear reason, but often unerring inspiration may come in leaps from an uncertain footing. And now before Don lay one course or the other; he had to choose and that quickly. Showing a lack of nerve would defeat his object.

There was a sudden grinding of brakes, a sudden swaying, a big jolt, a splash. Skidding into the ditch went the big car and stopped almost as though coming against a tree trunk. Half of the passengers were in a heap on the floor.

“You done it! You done it all right, *señor*. I didn’t think you had the nerve, but you done it!” whispered the driver fiercely.

“Now let’s get out and look her over,” Don said in a calm voice which belied his feelings.

They jumped to the ground, hearing expressions of injury and [58] protest from those within. Around at the front of the car the man and boy were quite alone.

“She’s fixed now, I think.” Don’s manner appeared stern.

“She is. We’d better attend to that rod and bolt, as you——”

“Plenty of time. Say, this is getting results. It’ll even things up with me and the coin—— Say, where did you say you’re from?”

“I didn’t say yet. Want to know? I’m Mexican born; folks came from Bavaria. Foreign colony at home; talk English mostly. My old man and his crowd lost all their money——”

“Where do we go from here, Betsy; where do we go from here?” sang one of the sappers within.

“We don’t go; we stay awhile, blast your boots!” yelled Don.

“—through an English oil syndicate; he was tryin’ to do them and they were tryin’ to do him and did it. Reckon there’s some way of getting square. I enlisted from El Paso. What’s your trouble?”

“Mebbe you’d be surprised if I tell you I was born in Germany and learned to talk English on a visit to America, where they got me [59] for this scrap. Who do you take your orders from? I get mine from ——”

Don paused, as though listening; then added: “That slow shooting is German machine-guns. Give it to ’em, Fritz, me boy!”

“I get mine from a liaison sergeant; he’s up at the front now. Got ’em complete fooled, he has. A German fellow that was in America before the war broke out. He raised the roof over there, he says; helped to blow up one ammunition storehouse and set fire to a gun factory.”

“Mebbe I’ve seen him and I ought to know him. What’s he look like?” Don asked, making no attempt to hide his eagerness.

“Short, thick-set; looks something like a wop. Little mustache; has a cast in his eye. Good feller, though, and free with the coin. You can ask one of the cooks in there—the big one; he’s with us, too; German. Where’d you say you got your orders?”

“From the United States Government!” Don replied, suddenly pulling his automatic. “Now, hold up your hands! Up, up, I say, and keep ’em up high!”

[60]

CHAPTER VII
A Good Beginning

A SUDDEN quiet, after much complaining, settled upon the occupants of the transportation *camion*; Don Richards' quick, sharp order had been heard and the driver was seen to back away with his arms in air. Then the chap with the red cross on his sleeve was heard again:

"Hey, some of you fellows in there, tumble out; will you? Bring a rope! Here's a German!"

A sapper and one of the cooks responded at once; the latter was a big man and he came ahead, evidently wanting to keep the other back. Don heard the cook say: "I'll be enough; you needn't butt in." But the sapper, a wiry little fellow, edged along just the same and he was quite sober. So was the cook, who spoke quickly:

"What's the trouble? What'd he do?"

There was something in the twang, or in the tone of this; something quite intangible, that caught Don's quick ear, even above the excitement of the occasion. He had heard this man talk a little [61]
before in typical American, to be sure; yet it seemed to be not wholly natural. The boy eyed the cook; then addressed the sapper:

"You, little fellow, get a rope off the curtains or in the box maybe and tie this——"

The driver replied to the cook's query:

"I ain't done nothin'! This feller's a German an' workin' fer the Heinies; he just told me so. Git him, not me! I'm American all over, I am, and I kin prove it!"

"Headquarters will make you prove it. Keep your hands up."

"That ain't no way to treat a fightin' man!" said the cook angrily. "You put up yer gun an' we'll take care o' this feller. He's reg'lar, all right; I know him."

Don kept his eye on the speaker, but made him no reply. Again he spoke to the sapper:

"Come on, you! Don't stand there like a wooden man! Get a piece of rope, I said!"

"Don't you pay no attention to him, Shorty! He ain't nobody we got to mind. Put up yer gun, feller, or I'll make you put it up!" The cook's hand went back to his pocket. Don didn't wait for him to draw his weapon, which he knew he was going to do; the boy, as [62]
once before on a somewhat similar occasion, dropped the muzzle of his automatic a little and fired. The cook twisted about in a rather comical fashion and flopped on his hands and one knee, quite as though John Barleycorn had seized and thrown him. The others in the *camion* had come tumbling out from the front and rear of the car and were pushing forward.

"Take his gun, one of you!" Don ordered sharply. "Now then, pick him up and get him inside and and see how badly he's hurt. Bandages in the car somewhere. Two of you watch this guy till Shorty ties him."

"What's this all about, bo?" questioned a big sapper.

Don turned back his coat lapel and exposed an M. P. badge and that sufficed to compel obedience to his orders. The big fellow and two others took the cook in charge and at Don's directions started to search him, which immediately brought about a struggle. This proved the key to the situation; the sappers took from the cook's possession some letters that were written in German and postmarked from a German town and on the driver they found some evident orders, also in German.

At once the sentiment, rather lukewarm at first in any sense, [63]
turned against the two apparent traitors within the Army.

"Let's get a line of some kind and string these two skunks up by the neck to the first tree we can find!" shouted the big sapper. "Eh? Fellers, who're with me?"

There was a unanimous, loud agreement to this from the sappers and the other cook; they surrounded the prisoners threateningly, one fellow reaching over and with the flat of his hand striking the driver in the face.

Don, a little frightened at the turn of affairs, still saw his duty clearly. With drawn pistol he forced his way into the center of the group, standing before the cowering cook and hastily addressing the loyal sappers.

"Men, this won't do. Of course, we're all patriotically down on spies and traitors, but it's for headquarters to attend to these ducks; they'll fix them good and proper, never fear! Don't let it be said of us that we are no better than the Huns in acting the brute. A firing squad is more humane and more certain than a rope and, what's more, it's legal. We have no right to mistreat these polecats; only to arrest them and shoot if they get gay."

This little speech had the desired effect; the clamorous sappers [64] cooled down and stood listening to and nodding at Don. They saw the sense of his remarks and their sentiment in common changed quickly, finding expression in such phrases as:

"Right-o, bo! We ain't diggin' for no trouble."

"Sure we ain't, ner in love with no little old guard house. Me fer the road an' the outdoors; eh, Willies?"

"That's us, Pete!"

"Well, you fellows hold these Huns until I back your car out of the ditch; then two of you can go back with me and these spies, and the rest can camp here until we return, or go on in the next lorry up, as you choose."

Thus the good *camion*, doing the duty of a Black Maria, retraced its tracks to general headquarters. Here Colonel Walton had come to confer with his superior and what he and the General Assistant Chief of Staff at the head of Enemy Intelligence and Information had to say after hearing the lad's story and questioning his prisoners would have considerably swelled the head of anyone less modest. They boy, though he could not but feel somewhat cast down that his efforts had led two men to pay the supreme penalty, was inclined to [65] treat the matter with more levity than it deserved, for there had been, on thinking it over, several rather ludicrous circumstances concerning his duplicity, though not once had he directly lied, nor played unfair. It seemed, indeed, all quite too simple and Don wondered if his next case would prove as easy. He was to find, later, that it was anything but that.

The general and the colonel conferred; then the latter officer again beckoned Don.

"My boy, it's too bad that you are so young. But this war is filling many youthful heads with very adult knowledge; making men of many mere boys. Despite your youth we've got to reward your immediate ability. The general has ordered your promotion and his recommendation for a commission as second lieutenant of infantry will go through at once. It will be kept here on file and you may assume the rank and the shoulder straps now. Well, go to it again, young man, and good luck."

Once more the staunch lorry followed the road toward the front, guided now by a new and undoubtedly loyal driver. Don saw to it that the brandy that had been smuggled beneath the seat was all thrown out, the bottles smashed. The four sappers and the other [66] cook were again taken aboard and on the car went, with few stops. Camp for the night was made in a deserted and shell-torn old house within sound of the occasional firing and bursting of heavier caliber shells. Early the next morning, about two hours after the start at daylight, Lieutenant Richards and his companions crossed a bridge over the Aire River, reached the top of a long hill and were suddenly almost within range of the German machine guns at the edge of the Argonne Forest.

"You fellows go on to your destinations," Don said. "I stop here; the bunch I'm hunting are in there fighting now."

As Don approached the woods habit was strong within him and he wanted an ambulance with which he could aid in helping the seriously wounded that seemed to be everywhere. But the stretcher men, the *brancardiers*, were on the job and the boy had now no business to take a hand. Guided by the plop, plop of rifles and the more rapid staccato of machine guns he ran on into the dense woods, from out of which all along its edge wounded men were staggering, crawling or being carried and some few were going in; [67] messengers also from the division C. and C., liaison men with information tending to hold the units together, Y. M. C. A. and K. of C. workers, relying on the success of the Americans and at once eager to advance their depots, even some Salvation Army lassies, two of whom Don saw ministering to the wounded, but being gently checked from further dangerous advance by the Military Police.

Don had made several inquiries of the M. P.’s and of less seriously wounded soldiers; he knew he was on the right track, but knew not how he would find Captain Lowden. Under the stress of immediate circumstances the officer would hardly have time to talk with him now, but the boy could stand by and wait; he could even take some part along with the soldiers, and at this his heart leaped. With an instinct born of knowing well how to use a gun and how to play at Indian fighting, he would welcome a chance to join this sort of thing.

Immediately ahead of Don, dodging along through the trees, was another fellow, probably bent on a similar errand, but evidently in no great hurry; rather was he looking about him sharply as he advanced, as though fearing to run into the enemy. As the two [68]
clambered together over a pile of rocks and through a thicket of scrub trees the boy introduced himself, noting also that the other was a liaison officer, a sergeant. He was not inclined to talk; did not give his name, but seemed to want to turn aside.

There was sudden shooting just ahead of them; some yells and loud voices in unison. The sergeant stopped and Don, facing him by chance, looked him over, the former saying:

“They’re at it right ahead. I guess the Heinies are all through this wood and what one bunch of our men doesn’t find, another will.” Then the boy noted that his *vis-à-vis* was short, heavy-set, with features decidedly Italian, though with gray eyes, and in one of his eyes there was undoubtedly a cast. A small black mustache with a tendency to an upward curl at the outer ends completed Don’s recognition from the description the treacherous driver had given him. And yet he could not be sure this was the man. In what way could the boy bring about a positive identification?

A bunch of men came pushing through the woods, in front
several German prisoners with arms held up from outward elbows, [69]
behind them two khaki-clad privates, with rifles ready, conducting the prisoners to the rear. It was a most interesting sight and Don was all attention; when he turned again the liaison sergeant was gone. The boy hastened forward, the sound of shooting was on all sides of him now, even almost behind him, though a good way off. He must be very close to where the most advanced American line was contesting with the Huns for the well defended forest.

The way seemed a little more open to the left; Don went that way. A long, level stretch more devoid of branches permitted him to see ahead and fifty yards away the liaison sergeant and an officer were talking. The short fellow was looking all about him; at the same time his right hand came slowly behind him and under his coat. Then he turned his head and saw Don. Instantly the man brought the hand out again, pointed as though asking directions and disappeared among the trees. Don, his automatic in hand, was running forward and in an instant he had come face to face with Lieutenant Herbert Whitcomb.

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[70]

CHAPTER VIII
Much to Do and Many to Do It

"SAY, who is that fellow?" Don asked quickly.

"Don't know; something funny about him. Don, I'm tickled to see you, old top! Where'd you come from?"

"Headquarters. With the information force now, posing as messenger, liaison, anything else but——. Detective work, you know. I'm glad to see you, Herb. How's the fight going?"

"Right ahead; all the time ahead!" declared Lieutenant Whitcomb. "The Heinies are putting up a good scrap, though. This is only the first round. Say, I wish we could chin awhile, but——"

"I know. And now you——?"

"Going to find some stretcher bearers to get a man of mine out."

"I'll do it; where's the man. But first I must tell you to keep an eye open for that liaison sergeant; I believe he's bad medicine. He may have been laying for you."

"I know he was lying to me; said there were orders to withdraw. I [71]
ought to have held him. Come with me now; then I must get back to my men."

Herbert quickly led Don to where Merritt lay; then clasping Don's hand and saying that they'd meet again, shortly perhaps, went on a run in the direction of the fighting.

Don knelt and at once saw that the youthful soldier's wound had soon proved fatal and so, folding the poor fellow's arms and placing his handkerchief over his face, the boy arose to again make his way through the woods.

Suddenly he came to where a number of officers advanced together and the boy asked for Captain Lowden. The company commander acknowledged his own identity and receiving the note from Colonel Walton seemed eager to talk to Don, explaining that the fight was going very well, that it was a matter of breaking up machine-gun nests and capturing or routing the enemy who manned them; the officers could have little part in this, except to keep their men together and busy.

"We are ordered to proceed only due north and to maintain our alignment," he said, "but I'm afraid some units will meet and get mixed. However, they're bringing in the bacon."

"I think you mean the wieniewursts, don't you, Captain?" [72]
suggested Don.

The officer laughed. "Yes, but I wish we had some of the genuine article," he said. "Good eats get to us a little too slowly sometimes. Well, the colonel gives you a fine send-off in this; you must be the real thing. Now, as to this spy: my men have reported him several times and I think he was seen around here this morning. But it is hard to identify him fully and we don't want to make a mistake; that is the reason he hasn't been arrested. We haven't a very clear description of him, either, and don't know what rank he assumes. I rather think it is several. But we do know that acting as a messenger he has carried some false orders and he may be still at that."

"Not ten minutes ago and to Lieutenant Whitcomb, for one; orders to quit; retire. I think I know him; liaison officer, thick-set, dark-skinned, cast in his eye. If anyone by that description runs into you again hold him, please, by all means!"

"We shall, you may wager! I hope you get him. Hello! that sounds like an extra heavy scrap over to the right. I guess that's within our
zone of advance, gentlemen." The captain addressed a first [73]
lieutenant and a color sergeant: "Let's hurry on and back the boys up!"

Merrily the bushwhacking fight in the Argonne Forest went on; that is, it might be characterized as merry from the standpoint of the results obtained by the determined Americans. The Germans had reason to regard it quite otherwise. And so had both sides when they took into account the resulting toll in lives and those maimed for life. Before nightfall of that first day the Germans were routed or captured all along the edge of the forest and upon the southeastern slopes of the Aire Valley, the Yanks flanking these latter positions to the left and descending upon them, instead of charging up the hills from the stream, a movement that the Hun had never expected.

Then night came down and the attacking Yanks, eager to continue their work on the day following, literally slept on their guns and in numerous cases found need for so doing.

Don Richards had now one very special task to perform, though his duty lay in apprehending anyone that might aid the enemy in any way, particularly in gaining information. But the boy did not seem [74] able to land on concrete evidence of any kind, nor to meet up with those he might suspect. Conscious that the task was a difficult one and also that his superiors knew it so to be, he went about it with a calmness and assurance that would have done credit to a veteran. No grand stand plays for him; simply unqualified results were what he meant to obtain and to this end he kept his mind alert as he had never done before. Wherever he went and with whomever he talked, his pass gaining for him complete access to all units and what information he desired, he was generally received with courtesy and much consideration from commanders of all ranks, for there is nothing so appealing to the universal sense of justice as anti-spy work.

To the boy also there was large satisfaction connected with his efforts; he gloried in the fact that at least he was endeavoring to do something worth while for his country and the cause of justice and right. Whether he succeeded or not, he was one among those who were keeping their eyes open for a sly and watchful enemy’s attempts to discover the Americans’ purpose in detail and thereupon deliver telling counter-strokes.

All of that first day of the Argonne fight, Don had footed over [75] many miles just behind the fighting front, seeking to again encounter the short, dark man uniformed as a liaison sergeant. The boy had passed from one field of operations to another; he had gained many a conference with officers, from non-coms to colonels; he had made them all aware of the spy’s evident character and his disguise, so that if he again tried to deliver false messages he would be forestalled and arrested. At night Don returned to the position behind Captain Lowden’s company and bunked with one of the Red Cross men in an injured ambulance, the driver having known the boy on the Marne.

All that night the American-French artillery, both near and miles away, was barking sometimes fitfully and now and then German heavy shells would come over and burst too near for real comfort. Occasionally also there were night raids, or German counter-attacks along and beyond the Aire, but these never reached the proportions that the daylight permitted.

Then, with the first coming of daylight, the opposing forces were at it again, the Americans, as before, tearing the Hun defenses [76] within the forest to pieces and driving off their determined counter-attacks, now being made in force and with selected shock troops.

Don gathered information from various sections of the forest, over the area from the Aire westward to the end of the American left wing, that sector covered by the First Army Corps. Reports came to the boy mostly from persons not directly engaged in the fighting.

Lieutenant Whitcomb? Oh, he was strictly on the job. The lad, as once before, seemed to bear a charmed life; he had not been so much as scratched when last seen and he had been in the forefront of the fighting almost continually, with pistol in hand, the weapon often emptied and hot, leading, always leading his platoon, now a mere handful of men. Captain Lowden? On the job also, though slightly hurt. Two reports had come that he had been killed. Lieutenant Pondexter was dead, killed in the early morning of this second day, and so were the other officers of Lowden’s company. Thus Whitcomb and two sergeants were the only ones left to assist their superior in directing the company’s efforts and in keeping it in line with its supports.

How far had the Americans advanced from the edge of the [77] woods? At least a mile; in some places where the line bent forward it was much more than that and they were still going; by night again it would be another mile or more.

This opinion proved to be correct. The first part of the Argonne attack, on the 26th, 27th and 28th of September, on a front of nearly thirty miles, had succeeded in driving the Huns out of half the Argonne Forest and from many small towns and villages along the Aire Valley and between it and the Meuse River. Then, except when forcing minor attacks on separate defenses and by an advance of the artillery making good the ground gained, the Yanks prepared for a still stronger offensive beginning on October 4th.

During this period of lesser offensive engagements there was evident a sort of unrest on the part of under officers and men; the sweet taste of victory had further nourished the spirit of daring. The desire was to continue demonstrating that the supposedly invincible and highly-trained Germans could be thoroughly beaten. Prove this the Yanks did many times, when the numbers were even, or the odds slightly in favor of the Huns; it remained for the Americans to [78] show also in some isolated cases that they were the masters of the enemy when he was twice their strength. Again, with exceeding bravery and grit they defied the foe when it outnumbered them many times.

It was this zeal for scrapping and the adventurous tendency that led minor expeditions against German positions to exceed their orders or to penetrate too far without support into the domain still held by the enemy. Thus it occurred that a machine-gun squad went over a hill, routed the Huns from an old stone ruins and then, after being unmercifully pounded with shrapnel for an hour, were attacked by ten times their number of infantry. How those Brownings, with their record of six hundred shots per minute, did talk back and how nearly every man in the bunch learned perforce to become a crack shot with his Springfield-Enfield, is a record that the survivors who tried unsuccessfully to compel the squad to surrender could well bear witness to. And when the Huns were finally beaten off and dared not to make another attempt to rout those few Yanks because of reinforcements, just half of that little group of gritty dare-devils came out of the old building alive and [79] most of them were wounded. But they could still pull triggers or turn a gun crank.

Who has not heard of the lost battalion, missing when the reports were turned in on October 3d, a contingent of the Seventy-seventh Division? It had been sent to rout out some gun nests that were proving troublesome in the Argonne Forest. When this task was done they just kept going and knew not when to stop until night shut down upon them. Then they sent runners back to ask for instructions and these fellows could not get through because of a flank movement of the Germans in some force between the battalion and the main division. So Major Whittlesey and his seven hundred men were trapped and for five days those brave boys, having lost almost half their number in killed and wounded, without food for three days and daring to get water only at night and that from a dirty swamp, stood off the repeated assaults of thousands of Huns upon the rocky hillside in the clefts and fissures of which the Americans found some shelter. They were fired upon from the hills on each side; enemy trench mortars smashed most of their machine guns and their ammunition ran out. Many of their number were [80] captured also and one was induced to bring back a typewritten message demanding surrender, but to this Major Whittlesey returned a very decided refusal. Finally rescue came to the lost battalion; men in the forefront of the second drive reached them and chased out the Huns. Whereupon the dead that had been laid aside waiting burial that could not have taken place because of the danger, were now peacefully interred.

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[81]

CHAPTER IX
INDIAN FASHION

NO braver deed was ever done than that undertaken by seventeen men—all that remained of a platoon—and one other, a messenger from a squad in trouble. The platoon was left without a commissioned officer and was under the command of a sergeant; he and his men dared the very jaws of death to effect a rescue, performing that which seemed well-nigh miraculous.

The squad of Yanks, like many others exceeding their orders, had advanced too far and found their return cut off. Perhaps the corporal in a measure lost his nerve, or perhaps he showed wisdom, for he was unwilling that they should all make an effort to get back. He chose but one of their number, who seemed best fitted for the task, as a messenger. An account of this fellow's adventures in making his way through the German lines resembles chapters of the pioneer history of the western United States. For sheer daring there could hardly be a parallel.

Billy Morgan was the name of this fearless chap. He was a mere [82]
youth, in his teens; very tall and large for his age, as agile as a cat, as strong as a young mule, as soft-spoken as a girl. When urged to make haste and report the condition of the squad he had smilingly assented; then had departed at once on the errand. It was after nightfall, but it did not take the boy long to ascertain that his way was barred.

The Germans occupied the base of a low hill in front; another bunch of them had fortified themselves in a bit of dense woodland to the right, and to his left were even a greater number, a relatively large encampment that included some sort of headquarters, probably that of the field commander of that section. All this the young fellow had to find out by the most painstaking and silent scout work, during which he crawled half a mile or so, emulating a snake much of the time. Low voices, almost invisible camp fires, seldom seen moving figures and the stertorous breathing of sleeping men gave Morgan his clues.

There was no way to get through the enemy's lines, except between the positions in front and to the right of the unfortunate messenger, and the Germans were practically in touch with each [83]
other at this place. Time was flying, the night was wearing on; the order, rather a plea, to hasten and the immediate need of his comrades, their ammunition largely spent and no water to drink, inspired the youth.

A small ravine, with exceedingly precipitous sides and a dry waterway or gully along its bottom formed the ground over which he must make his way. Probably the Germans believed this terrain would be impassable to an assaulting or scouting force and hence did not occupy it, except to station a sentry there.

An unfortunate sentry he proved to be, for Morgan, after ascertaining that the enemy occupied only the ground at the top of the hills on either side, crept down the gully, spied the light of the Hun's pipe or cigarette, approached near enough, without being heard, to hit the fellow with a stone and when the sentry showed signs of regaining his wind and yelling Morgan banged him another that finished him for good.

Wearing the sentry's cap, his own stuffed in his blouse, the messenger advanced then a little less carefully and presently he came to another sentry, who took him for a comrade and sleepily let him pass without question.

On the messenger went, even a little faster. The Huns seemed to [84]
be farther away on both sides of him; was he getting through and past them? He actually straightened up and was stepping along the water-worn gully in almost a trot. The woods were silent; there was hardly a sound except the everlasting boom of guns miles away to the east. A large hare, in no great haste, crossed the ravine directly in front of him, leaping up the hill and startling the boy not a little. Small birds also, from time to time, were frightened from their roosting places in thickets. With a ripping sound following a sharp blow a bit of bark on a tree not two feet ahead flew off, sending pieces that stung his face and upon the instant came the report of

the gun that sent the bullet. This was intended for him, no doubt; a forward sentry had caught sight of a moving figure where he must have known a Hun soldier had no right to be.

Morgan stopped and crouched. At the brink of the gully not three feet above was a clump of grasses; up the back of this the boy dived, lying flat, at the same time pulling his automatic.

A voice, some little distance away, spoke in German; another, much nearer, made reply. Then almost beside him a third man [85] growled out a lot of guttural stuff. He it was who had fired the shot, but with what result he could not have ascertained. The fellow was on the steep slope opposite and across the gully from where Billy Morgan lay and the least move of the latter might be seen.

Morgan could plainly discern the outline of the German against a patch of sky above and between the trees. The young fellow’s home was in the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas; he had three brothers and all had enlisted together. Since quite small he had been almost as familiar with shooting irons as he was with a knife and fork, and hunting turkeys on their roosts at night had been a much followed pastime with the brothers. To get one’s sights against the sky before shooting did the trick. An automatic pistol was not the accurate weapon that a finely sighted rifle is, but the man was much nearer than one could ever get to a roosting turkey.

Morgan, quite noiselessly, turned partly over on his side and brought his right arm around with the elbow resting on the ground. He glanced along the barrel of the little weapon, holding it toward the open sky above the German’s head. Then without altering the [86] relative line of eye and weapon he lowered his arm until the pistol barrel was blended into the dark form of the Hun and pulled the trigger.

No doubt the sentry’s ears had been troubled with at least the suggestion of some sound, perhaps the faintest rustle, and this had caused him to remain motionless, listening intently. But it is doubtful if he heard even the crack of the automatic. A man shot through the brain cannot know what hit him. Morgan’s bullet, though a line shot, went high, naturally. The sentry’s tumbling body had hardly reached the bottom of the ravine before the Yank was on his feet and going at the best rate he could down the gully, hearing a short call in German from beyond and hurrying feet in his direction. They must not see him now, he knew, and he would leave them behind, for he was making no noise on the hard earth.

But not a hundred yards from where the last tragedy occurred the gully ended, spreading out into a sort of little sand bar over level and more open ground. Ahead of the American was another hill. He could look up and get his direction by keeping a little to the left of the milky way and in line with the bright star Altair, which he knew, [87] having studied a bit of astronomy.

Up the steep slope he went, encountering much dense undergrowth and brambly thickets, though these held him back but little. On the top a clearer space lay before him; he could again see the sky and get his bearings. And then right in his path arose three figures, men, but he could not distinguish whether they were friend or foe. The group stood there, silently confronting him. Morgan, pistol in hand, was ready for the slightest hostile move, if he could detect it. Suddenly it occurred to him that the three were similarly in doubt concerning him. There must be a show-down. If these fellows were Germans, the Yank meant to get all three of them as fast as he could pull the trigger, though at least one of them would probably get him before his triple task could be completed.

Which side would first make itself known? It seemed to be up to the strongest party to take the initiative, the risk.

A rifle was raised a little, pointing toward Morgan and aimed from the hip. There was a sort of movement in his direction. Were they satisfied that he was an enemy? The messenger was on the point of being sure that his first shot would count and was about to [88] press the trigger of his automatic when his finger went straight instead and he dropped the muzzle toward the ground, fearing it would go off.

“Come on, Heinie; hands up!” were the words that turned a possible tragedy of some kind into a very welcome reception.

“I’m right glad you spoke,” remarked Morgan in his soft voice.

“Ho, a Yank! Where’d you come from, fellow?”

“From back yonder half a mile or so; the other side the German lines.”

“Huh? No you didn’t; ’taint possible! We been prowlin’ and the Heinies is in there thicker’n cooties. You couldn’t shoot in the air without gettin’ a few when she comes down. Nobody could come through ’em.”

“But I happened to get through and I’m going back,” Morgan protested.

“Mean it? Spy work, I reckon.”

“No; some of my comrades, my squad, are cut off in there.”

“Saint’s love! Do the Heinies know it?”

“Not when I left.”

“Did they hunt a hole and pull it in after em? Come daylight, they’ll be found. Say, pards, let’s take this fellow to the sarge and see what he has to say about it.”

CHAPTER X
Without Orders

THE three Yanks who accosted Morgan, the messenger, on his way from the surrounded platoon were out doing scout duty for the bunch of seventeen mentioned at the beginning of the last chapter. When they heard Morgan's story they chose one of their number to conduct the messenger to their own camp at the southern foot of the hill on which the unexpected meeting had occurred.

Sergeant Grout eagerly listened to what Morgan said; although the message was not intended for him, he determined to act upon it without delay. The young fellow's information concerning the lay of the land decided him to take this course: a bunch of plucky boys, at night and led unerringly, could get through to the surrounded men, taking them ammunition, food and water and then the lot of them could come back against big odds.

But Grout still hesitated. He was in command and yet a non-commissioned officer. Would even a lieutenant or a captain dare [90]
assume such responsibility without orders from higher up?

At this precise moment who should wander in upon them but Major Anderson, of their own battalion, and Grout instantly put the matter up to him. Anderson was the sort of man that goes in for action; he was also utterly devoid of useless self-importance; entirely without that arrogance too often found, without reason, in the highly trained men of the Army.

"You're in command here, Sergeant," he said, "and your past deeds are sufficient guarantee for your wisdom and scrapping qualities. I'll leave the matter to you. If you go in, good luck to you, and you'll do some good, I know."

It seems strange, perhaps, to one not accustomed to the conditions that naturally influence the fighting man in the midst of battle scenes that a lot of fellows who had been almost continually in action and had lost half their number in dead and wounded should actually want more action, seek further adventure and deadly risks. But such was the case with the majority of the Americans and such was the case now with these seventeen Yanks.

Grout put it up to them, which may have been not according to [91]
military customs, but they were buddies, one and all; therefore, they should act only upon their combined decision. This proved to be a unanimous verdict; there was not a dissenting voice among the lot and forthwith they prepared for the foray, starting after extra water and food had been obtained, though in what manner is not recorded.

Morgan led the way back, just as he had come out: over the hill to the ravine, then up the gully. The advance was single file, the men five or six feet apart, following each other exactly and as silently as a lot of Indians.

Rapid progress was made and the platoon had, without incident, reached the spot where Morgan had shot the sentry, the man's body still lying where it had fallen.

Just at this spot the leaders, Morgan and Grout, sensed danger ahead. There were unmistakable evidences of the presence of a camp: the slight and almost indefinable sounds that must come from a large number of men, even though many are sleeping, for a combined loud breathing pulsates on the night air not unlike the ticking of a clock.

The Yanks halted; stood waiting, listening, hardly expecting [92]
anything to occur and when it did two of them never knew it. The dense forest was lighted up for yards around and the detonation was heard for miles. Probably some shrewd officer of the enemy surmised that a relief expedition would come along in the way of the death-dealing messenger had gone out and a mine had been laid, with an automatic set-off, no doubt. The odd thing, however, was that more than half the Yanks had gone past before the mine was set off and that the two men, who were literally blown to bits, had debouched from the path that Morgan had taken. It appeared afterward that the messenger had turned aside to pass around the body of the sentry, merely pointing it out to Grout, and the act had saved the lives of many of the men, not one other of whom was hurt.

The explosion, however, was a signal to the foe. In half a minute there was a curtain of fire being spread out down the ravine from above and probably every one in the enemy camp ahead was up and busy with rifles and machine guns. But the trees were thick, the rocks on the hillsides made good shelter, there could be no marksmanship in the darkness. As a matter of fact, not until long afterward did the aroused Germans know whether they had been [93] shooting at one man or one thousand; indeed, it might have been a hare that had set off the mine.

Grout was a quick-witted fellow; Morgan, as we have seen, equally so. The advantage for the Americans lay in the darkness and the density of the woods. The orders, given more by motions than by words, and the latter in whispers, were to keep down and get back a little. This done, they climbed the steep side of the ravine and followed its slope just below the fringe of bushes on its crest, keeping forward and parallel to the gully. In this way they were out of the zone of fire and they came out on the level ground above to within fifty yards of the disturbed Huns, who were still shooting down the ravine.

This was a remarkable piece of work; both as a matter of leadership, and as a streak of pure good luck it was almost unique. That fifteen men should so elude a watchful foe and get entirely through its lines untouched, especially after the mine incident had doubly alarmed the Huns, is almost beyond belief.

A little farther on Morgan advanced a hundred yards alone to the entrenched squad, the men of which had begun to think they were doomed to have a sorry time of it on the morrow. Then Grout's platoon came forward, were received with silent plaudits and very [94] soon the entire bunch of twenty-two was on the way back to its own lines. And they made it, but not as easily as had Morgan and the platoon of fourteen who had sneaked through the German positions.

When they were in the ravine again, which seemed to be a place of death, they suddenly encountered a small number of Huns, evidently out to ascertain the cause of the mine explosion, and as the Yanks were upon them before they were aware of it, they offered no resistance, but began to fade away. At the moment good fortune was again with the Americans. A flare had been sent up by the Germans on the hill and Grout saw an opportunity that was not to be lost.

At a sharp order the Yanks leaped forward, spread out, heading off the Huns from retreat back to their own lines and so, without more ado, they surrendered and the daring rescuers and rescued, driving nine prisoners before them, made rapidly for the hill to the south of the ravine.

To reach it, they again had to pass through the open space and as they came into this, beneath the luminous sky, a machine gun hard to the right, possibly set there to intercept them, opened fire.

Pausing not an instant and now without orders, the larger [95] number of the Yanks swung about and went for that machine gun, but at the first fire and before they got the Huns who manned the weapon, several of our boys went down.

With both wounded and prisoners the little platoon returned and Grout immediately sent in a report, which brought Major Anderson again to visit the boys back in their old camp, which they had left hardly ten hours before. The officer went with Grout into the shed tent to see the wounded; when they came out the two stood talking of many things.

"You'll get a commission for this bit of work and you'll deserve it! Every one of your boys ought to have a D. S. M.!" exclaimed the Major.

"I wish that messenger—Morgan his name is—could have had one," said the sergeant sadly.

"Yes, isn't it a pity? And after such heroic work. That fellow is the real stuff. But enemy lead is no respecter of persons. He can't live."

"No, but heaven be praised, he doesn't suffer any," Grout asserted. "Poor chap; only a kid, too. A pluckier, cooler one never drew breath. I found this paper on him; his name and his home. Wm. [96] T. Morgan; sounds like a fighting name."

"Yes, I suspect the T stands for Tecumseh. Named after old General Sherman, I judge."

"Likely. And I found this on him, too; pinned on his shirt. You'll take charge of them, Major, and send them to headquarters."

The Major held his bull's-eye to shine on the thing that dropped into his hand; it was a bronze bar without much ornament; across it ran some letters and figures.

ALMA MATER
BRIGHTON ACADEMY
CLASS OF 1919

Truly the chances of battle are not governed by what we deem as befitting in a world of needful justification, else this bright and brave lad would have been spared. Amidst those scenes of carnage many such an one went down; others less worthy were spared. Many brave deeds had their only reward in death. Often it was quite the reverse.

The adventures that were encountered by a squad of Yanks under the command of Herbert Whitcomb, accompanied by Don Richards, illustrate these facts and portray many of the conditions that the invading Americans faced with remarkable intrepidity in the Argonne Forest.

CHAPTER XI
A Risky Undertaking

DON RICHARDS received some information on the morning of October 1st that caused him a sort of real joy. This word came from an orderly sergeant sent by the lieutenant-colonel of a regiment of the Twenty-eighth Division, after a messenger had been received from Captain Lowden, who had, in turn, obtained facts from two of his men. A liaison man with the sleeve straps of a sergeant had been seen, among bushes, to go quickly forward beyond the American positions and toward a point farther on known to be occupied by the Germans. There could be but little doubt but that the man was carrying information to the enemy. A watch had been set for his return, which was likely to occur at any time, and identification was desired.

Don was on his way at once and soon reached the position held by Captain Lowden’s company; the boy also then went on watch, which really amounted to picket duty, and he knew there were other [98] pickets lying among the bushes and boulders fifty yards or so on each side of him. He had requested to be allowed to watch the spot where the liaison sergeant was seen to disappear, but the captain said two of his best men had that position and no one could get past them. So Don hid himself among some bushes in a little vale, along which a narrow path ran, hugging the hillside. There were many such paths traversing the forest, crossing and re-crossing, leading in every direction; the boy wondered whether they were made by hares or deer; there were enough humans frequenting the place to make their tracks thus visible, though since the Germans came into this area they no doubt used these paths because of the easier walking.

This picket duty was a long and tiresome vigil; the other men were relieved, but Don refused to turn over his watch to another. It was a warm day, balmy, spring-like, reminding him of Indian summer in the States, and as the afternoon came on and the hours still slowly trailed away, the boy grew drowsy.

He hardly knew what made him wake; there was no sound, no other impression upon his senses that he could understand, but suddenly his eyes were wide open and his thinking apparatus was [99] going one hundred per cent. This was compelled by what he discerned some distance away within the little valley: a German soldier and a man in khaki were just parting; the latter turned to say another word to the Hun, then came slowly, watchfully along the path.

Don knew the fellow at once—the same short, stout, dark-featured sergeant, and the boy, whom it was impossible for the other to see, crouched like a cat about to spring on its prey, the reliable automatic held in his hand. This was his duty, though no doubt another human being would be compelled to stand before a firing squad.

But again this conjecture was to prove erroneous; the plan was sidetracked. What alarmed the spy Don never knew; the fellow suddenly stopped when less than half way along the vale, stood peering ahead and stooping to see the better; then as quickly turned and retraced his steps, disappearing around the bend of the hill.

Don was on his feet immediately and running back to Captain Lowden. That officer’s remark when he got the story hit the nail on the head:

“Go get him!” he said. “I’ll send Whitcomb, a squad and machine [100] gun with you. There are not half a dozen Germans within a mile along that valley path; our scouts have ascertained that. Go get him and bring him in! They’re not likely to give you any trouble in that region.”

No sooner said than put into execution. In fifteen minutes, with Lieutenant Whitcomb and ten chosen men, each carrying plenty of ammunition, some grub and a canteen, the young member of the Army Information Force started a rapid and silent march adown the little valley, in single file, following the path around the edge of the hill.

“On duty together, old man, at last,” Herbert said. “I always wished you could get into it in some way with me.”

“It’s great, being along with you! I feel like just stepping over to Berlin and grabbing the Kaiser. Anyhow, we may grab one of his smart agents.”

“I’m afraid that isn’t going to be so easy,” Herbert said. “The duck’s evidently a shrewd one and up to more than one trick; you can’t tell what he may pull off. But orders are orders and here we go, you and I.”

“Think it’s a little risky, though?”

“Oh, everything is risky; everything is a gamble in this scrap [101]
against an enemy that’s part fox, part snake and more than half hog. They are rooting, squirming about everywhere and you can’t have eyes enough to get on to all their doings. We’re approaching their territory now.”

“That’s what I was thinking,” Don said.

“Men, make a more open formation; spread out a little, anyway, but keep together,” Herbert said. “Keep a sharp lookout. Report what you see to the next man and pass it along. Talk low; make no noise. Be ready to take to cover any second; there’s plenty of it everywhere.”

“Lieutenant, you know Jennings and Gill scouted all through here this morning,” the corporal said, “and they didn’t see a single Heinie. They swore they’d all cleared out for over toward that creek they call the Aire River—that is, all of ’em this side the big hill up here, ’bout a mile. Up there, I reckon, there’s a million of ’em waiting for us.”

“Think, then, we’re pretty safe right around here, eh?” Herbert questioned, knowing the man’s squad had all been detailed for scout duty during the last two days.

“If they sneak in around here it’s only on scout duty, too, from [102]
the hill,” replied the corporal. “Reckon this duffer we’re looking for trades back and forth from the hill to near our camp.”

“Probably; but I’m not so sure,” Herbert said, “now that we’ve let up a bit, that machine-gun squads won’t filter through these woods to try to head us off when we make the next drive. We can take a gamble on it, however, and follow orders to comb these woods for signs of Mister Spy. The captain wouldn’t have sent us in here if he hadn’t been pretty sure it’s all right, though we’ll take precautions and be on the *qui vive*. What do you think, Don?”

“I think you’ve got the right idea and I hope the dope the scouts brought in holds out. I know I’d like to get another peep at that liaison sergeant.”

“You’re sure he was with a Heinie when you first saw him in here?”

“Positive!”

“That shows, then, that they’re making bold enough to think we’re lying back; maybe for good.” And Herbert laughed softly. “But they’re going to get badly fooled pretty quick!”

“How far ought we to go on, Herb?” Don asked.

“The captain wants us to find out about this Hun,” he said. “I [103]
didn’t exactly grasp what he meant and he added that we ought to discover, if possible, where the trail goes that the spy uses, find his camp if he has one, or lay for him up here where he won’t suspect us. If any general orders come in the captain will send a runner. I expect we’d better follow this pathway another quarter of a mile, or until we find an extra good place for an ambush. There some of us can lie low and a few can scout around. What say you?”

“I’m agreed, Herb. You know best.”

“No, and I hate taking the responsibility in this sort of thing. I really don’t mind a scrap or going against what a fellow can see, but this thing of risking men on the possibility of walking into a trap gets my nerve a little.”

“You think a trap is possible?” Don asked.

“Well, you might not call it that; it wouldn’t be intentional, but we might walk into a noose, nevertheless.”

“Say, Herb, what do you think of this? Dandy spot for an ambush, eh? I suggest we stop right here.”

They had come up out of the valley, rounded a little knoll, over
the top of which some of the men had climbed and come out at the [104]
head of another valley. At one side, well on up the hill, there was a mass of squarish boulders forming a sort of restricted and oblong basin perhaps a hundred feet in length and three or four feet in

average depth. On every side among the rocks, grew low, branching spruces, their spreading branches making a dense shade over the spot.

“A ripper! Dandy! Perhaps old Mother Nature put this here for our express purpose, nothing else.” Herbert was enthusiastic. He gave the word to halt and to assemble; then, stooping under the spruces, led his men into the natural little fortress.

“Make all ship-shape, boys,” Lieutenant Whitcomb ordered. “Toss out these few small stones and sticks and we’ll call this a drawing-room. Take positions and stow equipment, except guns and ammunition. Make yourselves all comfortable and easy so that there won’t be a lot of hitching around later. If we keep right quiet here for a while maybe we’ll see something. We may get a chance to take in some Hun scouts or that spy.”

“I’ve got a hunch,” Don said, when all had settled down upon the dry carpet of spruce needles, Herbert and himself sitting together, [105]
with their backs against a big rock, “that there’s going to be something doing around here. I don’t know whether I can smell sauerkraut or not, but these woods ought to shelter some Heinies somewhere near and if so they’ll be likely to spy on us. Can’t we beat them at that game, Herb?”

Lieutenant Whitcomb turned to the men:

“Corporal, how about sending Jennings and Gill out to scout around? they’re crackerjacks at that. We ought to know if we have any neighbors; we might make them a call, or if the forest here is too well populated with those things from across the Rhine, we want to send a runner back and tell the captain about it.”

“All right, sir; those boys are always keen to get out and hunt Huns. Old deer hunters back home, they tell me.” The corporal got on his hands and knees and crawled over to the other side of the rocky basin, taking the orders to two of his men, who immediately, grinning with positive pleasure, got up, made a hasty survey of the forest and then sneaked off quickly.

“I don’t wonder they feel that way about it,” Don said. “I’d enjoy doing a little scouting myself. With your permission, I——” [106]

“I’m not telling you what to do, Don,” Herbert replied. “This is your job as well as mine. Three are better than two, but if I were you I wouldn’t go far; anything may happen and we’ll all want to be together.”

Don nodded and arose; in a moment he, too, was making his way slowly, noiselessly through the underbrush, peering all about, listening. The forest seemed to be almost silent; hardly a sound came to his ears. The flutter of a bird ahead, startled from its feeding; a few stridulating crickets chirping monotonously beneath dead leaves; far off the occasional boom of heavy guns and once, perhaps more than a mile away, a brief period of rapid shooting—probably a raiding party of one side or the other had been warmly received. Don marveled; what remarkable conditions and surprises intruded upon the great war! Here, hardly a mile from where hundreds of thousands of men eagerly awaited the slipping of the leash to spring at each others’ throats, the aisles of the forest seemed as peaceful as those within a great cathedral; as though only the plowman or the harvester dominated beyond the woods and red war was undreamed of.

Don had noted that Gill had gone about due west—for what [107]
particular reason was not apparent—and that Jennings had disappeared toward the north and the known enemy positions. Therefore, an easterly course was Don’s choice.

Densely wooded low hills in ridges very close together and with narrow, dry valleys between, that were masses of tumbled rocks and jungle-like thickets, lay before him. Don crossed three of these valleys, making his way with the utmost caution and breaking twigs for a blazed return, in case he had to make it. It turned out that he did. Reaching the top of the fourth ridge the boy paused upon detecting a familiar sound—the muffled tramp of many feet only a short distance away. But he could not see any distance toward the sound and he was about to shift his position when he heard the snapping of a twig a few yards away.

Don crouched and was motionless, his automatic in his hand, ready for any emergency. A figure was coming toward him; he could see the bushes move a little as though pushed aside. Was this a Hun scout spying on his enemy also? Were these marching men Americans or Germans?

Nearer came the lone man, moving along to keep pace with the [108] tramping feet below. Don dared not move, trusting to chance, though it seemed that the other must stumble over him. The boy made up his mind not to shoot unless he was compelled to; then to break all records for sprinting through a tangled forest.

Right over him the bushes swayed and then an arm and a leg was thrust through the interlocking branches. The boy was about to creep aside, but on the instant he saw that the sleeve and the trousers were khaki. He straightened up. Immediately a figure was flung forward almost upon him and before he could make or whisper a word he was gazing into the muzzle of a U. S. Army revolver.

“Glory be, it’s you, Lieutenant! By the jumpin’ geehaw, I came near lettin’ you have it, thinkin’ you were a Hun!” This, though said excitedly, as one may imagine, was little above a whisper. And then Jennings, whom Don had by no means expected to see, put his finger on his lips.

“Sh! They’re down yonder; hear ’em? I follered ’em from near their biv’wack up there most a mile. Where they’re goin’ to you can [109] search me, but they’re headin’ the wrong way for our comfort back to the rocks.”

“How many are there down there?” Don questioned.

“‘Bout three hundred; sev’ral comp’nies, I reckon. Machine guns an’ such. Headin’ the wrong way. We gotta foller ’em an’ see.”

The two did follow, toiling along the ridge most warily until they came to its end, where the evident roadway from the valley turned a little to the southwest.

“They’re goin’ to locate right where we come up,” the scout whispered. “Hadn’t we better go back and report?”

Swiftly they retraced their steps along the ridge and then, Don leading at a pace that caused Jennings to breathe hard, they went straight to the camp. And there was Gill, just returned ahead of them.

“They’re fillin’ up the whole woods south of us,” he was saying. “Coming in from every direction and making an unbroken line across. We can’t get through, Lieutenant; not even at night.”

And to this information Don and Jennings could but acquiesce.

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[110]

CHAPTER XII
Surrounded

“TRAPPED, eh? I was afraid something like that would occur!” Lieutenant Whitcomb exclaimed. “It’s not the first time the Heinies have vacated ground and then quietly occupied it again; a trick of theirs to take us by surprise when we go after them. Well, this is bad for us in two ways.”

“How’s that, Herb?” asked Don.

“Why, you can see it. In the first place we’re surrounded, for you may bet the Huns are in close touch with each other; they always are. So we probably cannot get out, as Gill says. If we try to hold out, then when our boys make the next drive we may be between two fires. But our worst fear is of discovery before the next drive commences.”

“We’re in here pretty snug, Lieutenant; they may never get on to us at all,” offered the corporal.

“That’s possible, but hardly likely. We’ve got to lie low.”

“We’ve a crackerjack place to defend, Herb,” Don said. [111]

“Very good and I don’t want to be a pessimist, but with a good many hundred against twelve—well, we might hold ’em off for a time, even with only one machine gun. But there’s a limit to grub and ammunition, and especially to water. What do you fellows know about water near here?”

“A spring run ’bout as big as a shoe lacin’ over yon a couple o’ hundred yards to the northeast,” said Jennings.

“Very good. Who will volunteer to refill all canteens?”

“I’ll go, Lieutenant!”

“Me, too!”

“Count me in on that, please!”

“Say, Lieutenant, if I kin shove my ol’ face into that ’ere riv’let fer ’bout five minutes, I wouldn’t want another drink fer close on to a week!” Jennings declared.

“Oh, boy, you must be kin to a camel!”

“Sure, an’ my middle name’s tank. Better let me go, Lieutenant; I know the place.”

“Who do you want with you?” Herbert asked.

“That ’ere young lieutenant feller that I run acrosst a while back, if he’ll go.” Jennings indicated Don, who was up at the other end [112] cleaning his automatic.

And so it befell that the boy and the big Pennsylvania mountaineer were once more on duty together and it may be recorded that they got back with every canteen brimming. Gill, meanwhile, had crept over to a previous find of his, a former German position that had been discarded for no apparent reason and he returned with the complete parts of a wooden bucket, hoops and all, which was promptly put together and in turn filled with water. Thereafter, admonished to drink and eat as little as possible, lie low and make no noise and above all to be ready for discovery at any time, the squad went into what Herbert called hopeful retirement and thus remained until the day ended and the night passed without incident. Dry leaves and spruce boughs made warm and comfortable beds.

The morning of October 2d began ominously; at the first peep of day all were awake and some bantering chatter was heard among the men. Presently the corporal, who had crept to the outer rocks to take a look around, held up his hand for silence and came crawling back.

“They’re coming down the valley, sir, as you reckoned they’d do,” [113]
he said to Lieutenant Whitcomb and a moment later the sound of tramping feet could be heard.

“Slip a spruce bough over the end of that Browning gun!” Herbert ordered. “Now, men; all quiet! Corporal, pass that along. Tell the boys that our lives may depend on our ability to lie low. And they are to understand this: if the Heinies get on to us now, we are not going out of here alive and prisoners! We’ll all croak rather than that. Be ready for action, but nobody must go off half-cocked.

Corporal, you and Gill and Judson and Kelly and Farnham and Tomlinson man the up hillside; Lieutenant Richards, Jennings, McNabb, Wilson, Gerhardt and myself will look to the valley. Silence now and no heads up. I can see what is going on through this crevice and I'll report from time to time."

On came the men in gray-green, probably a full regiment of infantry, including a dozen machine-gun squads. They marched well, these sons of the Fatherland, and they were mostly young and vigorous-looking men, presenting not the slightest suggestion of weariness, nor of being underfed. But there was not a word spoken [114]
among them; the entire number was as obedient to evident orders as though possessing but one brain and as the soldiers filed along the valley and around the little hill, past and not fifty yards away from the position of the hidden Americans, they reminded Herbert of so many automatons. Thus they entered the ranks, were taught and trained, and thus they fought, a wonderfully coördinated whole, but without individual incentive. The boy understood, as never before, how it was that the German army was at once so remarkably pliable and effective in strategic movement and yet he had seen that in battle the Huns were readily disconcerted when confronted with conditions foreign to their teaching and understanding.

Tramp, tramp, tramp. The boys were indeed marching, but they were not the sort of boys, nor did they have the end in view that made them, as in the old song, pleasant to contemplate by those twelve Americans up among the rocks within hailing distance, but as yet unsuspected by the Huns.

That muffled jarring of the earth from many tramping men would haunt Don Richards' memory as long as he lived. But perhaps he would need to remember it but a very short time, for how could the [115]
little band fail being discovered, and Herbert had declared they would die fighting. So be it; Don for one would stick by his friend.

There was a sharp command given to the marching men below. Instantly the nearest footfalls ceased, though beyond the little hill they were heard to go on and on, the sound growing fainter; then ceasing. More commands given to those near by and a general confusion of breaking ranks ensued; the unslinging of equipment followed.

Herbert, his eye against the slit between two boulders, felt a momentary sinking at the heart when he realized that this company, at the rear of the column, was separating from the others of its unit and was stopping here, perhaps for breakfast, or to rest; probably it had been night marching.

For how long could the Yank squad remain undiscovered? And remaining so, would it not be a veritable torture within this narrow defile, hardly able to change position? Well, for grit and determination, in any event Whitcomb knew he could rely on the squad; there were none better nor more loyal; no better shots in the whole Army.

The German company prepared camp at length. The men ate [116]
breakfast with the methodical exactness that characterizes all the Huns' doings, though they were four times as long at it as the Americans would have been. Each man carried his allotment of food and utensils; each with a regularity that showed long practice got out his duffel and fell to the task. They sat in little groups and the mumbled words from the few who conversed came to the squad up in the rocks like a dull murmur. Herbert noted that the officers, four in number, kept to one side, standing, and talking very earnestly, one of them gesticulating toward the south. Evidently something was on foot that meant a still more determined resistance to the Americans and this was the company in reserve of the regiment that was intending to hold the woods at this point.

The young officer knew that his men must become impatient to see what was going on, so he relinquished his place to Don for a peep; then beckoned the corporal. Farther along the rocky basin some of the men were at another peep-hole they had found and one fellow was trying to lift his eyes just above the level rocks, but Herbert sternly motioned him down; then crawled over and explained again the inevitable result of being discovered. This [117]
admonition he imparted to each of the others also and the agreement again was to try to hold the place in any event.

Hours wore on. The sky became entirely overcast, the air damp with a suggestion of rain. From time to time it would get brighter and the sun would appear for a few minutes. Perfect quiet was maintained in the rock basin, though after a time Herbert called Don’s attention to a silent game of cards going on at the other end of their stronghold. That indicated the American spirit: next door to death or imprisonment at the hands of the Hun, yet getting what fun and cheerfulness they could.

Noontime came. Herbert set the example of not eating. It went harder with some of the fellows that they could not smoke, for the white fumes might be seen below.

The enforced inaction was becoming terribly tiresome, but the cause of some whispered jests at that:

“I’ve completely wore out this here rock what I’m a lyin’ on,” commented the chap from the Pennsylvania mountains.

“Listen, fellow, this old earth right here is good enough for me. It’s a blamed sight softer than Heinie lead.”

“I wish the ‘corp’ would take a notion to get out his mouth organ [118]
and play a jig. He might charm those Jerries down there so that they couldn’t do a thing.”

“Sho! The only thing that charms them is tin-pan music and a bass drum. I expect old man Wagner is right down there with ’em now.”

“Him? He’s dead! His noise killed him long time ago.”

“No, sir; I took him prisoner last week and showed him some eats. He said the dinner horn was the prettiest music he ever heard.”

“Those fellows they call Faust and Mephistopheles, they were Huns, weren’t they?”

“Sure, but a Frog set ’em to music; that’s why it’s worth listening to.”

“I’ll bet if we all started singin’ ‘The Watch on the Rhine’ out loud, those Jerries down there would pull their freight for Berlin in two minutes; they’d think we were ghosts.”

“Sho! You’d have to sing it in German.”

“Would, eh? No, thanks! My throat’s a bit sore now as ’tis. Wonder if the feller that invented that language kept pigs and learned the sound of it from them.”

“Sh! Lay low an’ quit gabblin’, you duffers!” whispered the [119]
watcher at one peep hole. “Here comes two Heinies up the hill!”

Don, at the other rock fissure, turned and spoke to Herbert and the corporal. A hasty and whispered order went around the rock basin and in the quiet that ensued the sound of heavily shod feet, treading among loose stones and of rustling leaves, could be distinctly heard.

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[120]

CHAPTER XIII
Lying Low

THE next ten minutes were almost a non-breathing experience for twelve good men and true; they had decided that their safety lay in at least keeping most woefully quiet. A little while after the ordeal had passed, Herbert and Donald were telling each other what had been in their thoughts during those tense moments when the heavy footfalls were drawing nearer. Herbert had imagined one of his men suddenly sneezing and Don had wished for the chance to turn a good old American skunk loose to scent up the place; this would have surely kept the German officers at a safe distance.

But there proved to be no fear of the one, nor need of the other doubtful procedure; the khaki squad was as silent as death and the two ascending German officers no more suspected their presence in the spot than they would have a herd of elephants. And so they came quite to the edge of the spruces, sat down on a boulder and conversed in low tones for about ten minutes; then got up again and [121]
as slowly went back to their camp. Twelve breathing sets of apparatus were in easier working order when it was reported that the Germans had gone.

Jennings was heard then to roll over on his improvised couch of moss-lined rock and remark, decidedly *sotto voce*:

“Don’t know’s I’m so durned glad they didn’t ketch on to us. They’d ’a’ been two more dead Huns right sudden. I could ’a’ got ’em both by myself before they could ’a’ hollered ’donner vetter!’ and I would ’a’ done it, too, soon’s I seen their eyes a stickin’ out when they ketched sight of us.”

“Sho! You’d been so scared you’d forgot you had a gun,” Gill bantered his fellow scout and buddy.

“Well, then, I’d ’a’ reached over an’ grabbed ’em an’ fetched ’em in here an’ held ’em so’s you could ’a’ bit their ears.”

“Quietly there, men, for the love of Uncle Sam! Levity is usually admirable, but this is an exception,” Herbert cautioned, hearing the subdued laughter that went around.

“It might be a case of being tickled ’most to death,” Don remarked.

“We might vary the monotony of this existence by having a bite [122]
to eat all round,” Herbert ordered. “Rations, boys, but limited to half that you want. Hard, I know, but perhaps necessary. After ’while we may need full stomachs to fight on. Literally that, down back of these rocks.”

“If them Jerries is ever goin’ to get me, I’d heap ruther they’d have me satisfied than hungry,” Jennings remarked.

“I reckon I could eat about a whole Heinie right now! I always was partial to pork,” Gill declared.

Again the time dragged on; to relieve it in part the men went through silent pantomime. Two fellows, on their hands and knees, butting at each other like rams gave Gill the idea of imitating a dog digging out a field mouse, and four chaps, who were wont to sing together when silence was not so golden, sat in a row and went through the motions of various musical selections, as dirges, ballads and ragtime, granting several encores in answer to a perfectly silent handclapping.

Through all these trying hours there had been men constantly at both peep-holes, all taking turns. The Germans at the bottom of the hill had simply done little or nothing all day, except to hang around,
eating occasionally, cleaning their weapons, some few writing, [123]
others sleeping or lolling on the ground. Only once was there a break in this monotony, when a group of officers, probably high in command, came through the little valley. Then every Hun got to his feet, with heels together, and saluted for dear life; but unlike the democratic Americans and Frenchmen, the officers did not appear as though aware of the presence of the common soldiers or under officers.

And then once more the shadows grew long and the darkness came slowly down, with the far distant sounds of occasional firing more distinct and a chill breeze coming up that caused both friend and foe to seek some covering for the night. The little squad in the rocky hollow on the hillside again resorted to dry leaves and spruce boughs, both under and over. The watch was detailed to include every man, three acting at a time, and if there was the least suggestion of snoring or of talking in sleep the offender was to find himself awakened instantly, with a hand placed firmly over his mouth. And one such instance did occur; it was Don who toward morning began to mumble and then suddenly cry out:

"Go get him! He's the m-m-m——" The rest of this utterance [124]
came through the corporal's fingers; after which the boy chose to remain awake for the remaining hour before dawn.

Jennings had been gone since about eleven o'clock, in the effort to find an unguarded spot where the squad might sneak through under cover of the darkness. About midnight a single shot was heard not far away, followed by another ten minutes later. It was becoming gray in the east and, all being awake and the scout's continued absence being noted, Herbert remarked:

"I hope they haven't got him. He might have stumbled into a picket, but I can hardly think it of Jennings; he isn't that careless. Let us hope——" Even while the lieutenant spoke there was a slight stir among the spruces above them, on the up side of the hill, and when they all turned that way, some expecting the enemy and having their guns in hand, the grinning face of the Pennsylvania mountaineer peered at them.

"They ain't no way, Lieutenant. Them Jerries is got the hull ground clear acrosst took up with gun nests an' some trenches. They're in there as thick as hair on a yaller dog; there's one or two [125]
mangy spots, but they're watchin' them close. Got to stay here, I reckon, a while more an' then some. Me fer sleepin' a little now, if you don't object, Lieutenant."

"Go to it!" Herb said, laughing, as ever softly. "We're awfully glad to see you; thought you might have had bad luck. Did you hear those shots soon after you left?"

"Rather did." Jennings grinned again. "But he missed me and when they come into the brush to look they most stepped on me. Second time I reckon they thought they heard me again an' jes' fired random-like, an' I sneaked out. There was four Heinies together settin' still on a log, like buzzards waitin' fer a ol' cow to croak, or somethin'."

"The War Cross for you, old scout!" Don said. "And say, boys, if the Heinies down there don't show any more curiosity about their surroundings than they did yesterday, we'll likely pull through another day all right."

"Pull through is right," remarked the corporal. "It is a pull."

"If I was the boss of this outfit," Gill said, with an apologetic grin
at Herbert, "I'd just get up and slip down yonder and take them [126]
fellers prisoner and march 'em into our lines. Nerve is what counts; if they saw us coming from up out of the earth, they'd all throw up their hands and holler 'kamerad'!"

"I'm afraid not, Gill; we won't risk it, anyway," said Herbert. "The inside of a Hun prison camp wouldn't look good to any of us and unless we wanted to commit suicide on the spot, they'd get us. Twelve men against a good many thousand makes the odds too great; eh, boys?"

The remarks in reply to Herbert's were characteristic:

"Stayin' here is bad enough, but ketchin' Hun cooties is worse!"

"Me fer layin' low some more."

"I'd like to see the good little old United States again if I can."

"This place looks good enough to me just now, though it might have hot and cold water, real sheets on the beds and a kitchen."

"If we've got to stay here long enough and the Jerries down there wouldn't object to the noise, we might accommodate you and build a hotel."

"Reminds me of the Connecticut Yankee they tell about who got
wrecked on nothing but a sand bar in the ocean and in two years he [127]
had a prosperous seaport going, with two factories and a railroad. Who's a liar?"

Again the hours took upon themselves snail-like speed and life among those rocks became well-nigh unendurable. Imagine, then, the feeling of relief when the present watchers of the squad beheld the German company in the valley, under sharp orders, pick up their accoutrements and move on toward the south again, out of sight and hearing, to occupy, no doubt, a new and better position. True, the present risk was not lifted; messengers from or to the front might pass, or Hun units at any time approach, though it was not likely that the woods this far back of the occupied defenses were picketed.

“We can take a gamble far enough,” Lieutenant Whitcomb declared, “to get out and build up our defenses; pile more rocks all around. Get at it, men, and make them heavy enough to stop machine gun bullets.”

Four of the squad were sent on either side to do picket duty and to keep an especially sharp watch. It was one of these pickets, through thoughtlessness while meaning to do his duty fully, that, as Don expressed it, “spilled the beans.” Farnham went into a large [128] patch of bushes not quite head high, intending to use it as a screened place of observation just as a Boche one-man airplane passed, flying low and so far to one side that Farnham knew he could not be seen by the pilot. Suddenly there was the sound as of breaking camp again; another unit over the ridge was moving on and Farnham craned his neck, exposing also his shoulders in order to see ahead. At that moment the airplane swerved and before the Yank thought to duck down he was seen.

Then the Boche made an error. Had he passed on and signaled to the nearest contingent, they could have sneaked up, surrounded and captured the American, but with the usual show of hate dominating, the flier wheeled again and sent a stream of incendiary bullets into the bushes. For a wonder the Yank was untouched; he quickly crawled on hands and knees back toward camp and the birdman, unable to see him longer, headed straight for the nearest Hun signal station. When Farnham reached the squad the pickets were immediately called in, once again the crowd lying low. It was now only a question of time when they must defend themselves against terrible odds.

“Here they come and on the run, some of them!” announced the [129] corporal, with his eye to the peep-hole. Every man gripped his gun, feeling the moment had arrived for him to do or die. Still a little longer it was to be postponed. Intent upon reaching the patch of bushes on the hilltop where the airman had signaled that the American was seen, the half dozen Boches hastened on, two going directly past the rock basin and never once turning to look it over. Several of the Yanks, though lying prone, could see for a moment the helmets of these searchers who believed they were on the track of a lone spy, or a lost picket. They disappeared up the hill and Farnham, who had been responsible for this scare, but had received not one word of censure from his commanding officers, ejaculated fervently:

“Thank the good Lord they didn’t see us!”

But the relief was short-lived. There being no sign of the spy on the ridge top, the searchers spread out and two of them came back down the hill and were again about to pass on. And then the possibility of a good hiding place beneath the dark spruces may have occurred to one of them, though it can never be known what he thought. With a guttural exclamation he turned and saw far more [130] than he had expected, but he didn’t exist long enough to make even a mental note thereof. As he tumbled in a heap the other Hun started to run and he, too, joined his late companion in the unknown. With admirable coolness the Americans had met the situation and only one shot for each of these foemen had been used; the ammunition must not be wasted. Farnham’s gun was warm and he was minus two cartridges.

“Get out there and drag those poor chaps under cover, two of you, Kelly and Wilson!” Herbert ordered. “Make short work of it!”

But they could not make that gruesome task short enough. Attracted by the shots, the four remaining searchers had turned that way and one began shooting at Kelly. Lieutenant Whitcomb leveled his rifle at the tree where only the head and arms of the Hun showed, at a distance of a hundred and fifty yards; then no more shots came from behind that tree. Getting an inkling of the situation, though unable to estimate the number of men among the rocks, the other Huns retreated and carried the news to their commander. In twenty minutes thereafter the surrounded squad was facing all that they had known must come to them.

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[131]

CHAPTER XIV
Grit

PUT your guns low in the niches, instead of on top of the rocks; that keeps your heads lower. See your front sights fine and shoot low, low, low! Don’t over aim! Make every shot count! But don’t fire until the word is given, or it is necessary! This may mean the end, anyway, fellows, but if so, we’ll make it a glorious one and our memory—it will do some good; leave a record behind of what Americans can do.” So spoke Lieutenant Whitcomb, crawling about among the squad, as a platoon of Huns approached the position and rifle and machine-gun bullets began cutting through the spruce branches, flattening or ricocheting with a singing whir against the rocks. After the first deluge of fire, lasting perhaps twenty minutes, the Germans, unable to note a result, or to bring an answering shot, determined to know something of their enemy. And so, quickly chosen by lot, eight or ten soldiers rapidly drew near, carrying hand grenades and rifles and the eight or ten— [132]
they were not counted—died when half way up the hill. Whereupon the entire platoon, with fixed bayonets, charged. And then quick work was needed. Herbert called out:

“The Browning! Give it to ’em, McNabb! Sweep the line! Hold your rifle fire, boys, until I say ‘now’—now, fire! Shoot low; low! Don’t miss! Steady! Keep cool! They mustn’t reach us! Never!”

They did not. In the face of a stream of machine gun bullets that scored fearfully from one end of the line of men to the other and back again, seeking spots untouched, and rifle bullets that counted a far higher percentage of hits than the Hun knew how to score, the enemy wavered, stopped, fell back, hunted cover and at once a messenger was sent for more men. This fellow started up the valley and Don, knowing what Herbert could do with a rifle, now shouted:

“Don’t let him go, Herb! Stop him from getting away!”

To make a shot of the kind the marksman had to rise a little to have a clear sight over the rocks and among the trees and he had to choose his time. The others of the squad, the few who could see the hastening German messenger, watched him. The crack of the rifle [133]
occurred simultaneously with the collapse of two of those thus noted; the ambling Hun went down and lay still; the lieutenant, his weapon slipping from his hand, gave a little gasp and lay back as quietly as though merely tired. Don, the corporal and Gill saw his white face and crawled to him. He was insensible; across his temple there was a blue-black scar, but not a sign of blood.

“Stunned only,” Don said, in a relieved voice. “I thought he was killed. He’ll come to in a minute. Be all right, I think.” The boy had seen more than one similar case of glancing blow when in the Red Cross service.

“Thank the good Lord!” Farnham said again.

“He got it just as he pulled trigger; a dozen bullets came over his way, but he got his man with one bullet; did you see that? He’s one dandy shot! Best I ever did see, or ever expect to.” So enthused the corporal.

“I’d like to take him once after deer in Sullivan County,” Jennings remarked. “There goes anothor messenger; I reckon mebbe I kin get him.” And rising to his full height the big mountaineer let fly three shots in rapid succession, the last of which tumbled the second [134]
dispatch bearer into a silent heap. Whereupon Jennings got down again, untouched, though the bullets had been singing all about him.

“Sho! My turn next!” declared Gill, between whom and Jennings there was always a good-natured rivalry. “If I don’t get my man with the first shot and tie with the lieutenant, you can take me out and give me to the Jerries for a barbecue.”

“Better do that, anyway, so’s to kill ’em. Ain’t nobody kin eat polecat an’ live through it,” Jennings countered.

But Gill didn’t get his shot. The squad did not see the next messenger leave; he must have got away through the thickets in a roundabout way.

With the added rocks that had been piled up to strengthen their position the men could stoop low on their feet, or kneel erect. The machine gun was placed at a hole and above it McNabb and Wilson, the lively crew, had managed deftly to place a wide, flat stone as a shield beneath which they could sight very well, indeed. This rendered the chance of getting hit a comparatively slight one, but who can tell what direction the flight of bullets will take? The Huns were keeping up a constant fire, uselessly wasting ammunition on [135] stones impervious to anything but heavy cannon and except the glancing blow that the lieutenant had received and a flesh wound in Judson’s right cheek, not one of the Americans had been hurt.

But it appeared as though the Huns were getting ready for another charge and so McNabb was going over the mechanism of the Browning gun again when a bullet, among a dozen or more sent over in the past half minute, entered the space between the flat stone and the gun barrel and the cheery, brave little Irishman sank down, without a groan. Wilson leaped to his place and sent a volley into the very spot from where the shots had come and several Huns were seen to drop, but it could never be known whether the death of McNabb was avenged.

Meanwhile Don was working over Herbert and soon had the satisfaction of hearing that lad’s voice: “Huh! Got hit, eh? Not as bad as gas; head aches, though, some. We are still alive; are we? Don’t pay to show so much as a finger; does it?”

Then they told him about Jennings’ risk and what had happened to the machine gunner and Herbert came to his senses in a jiffy. But [136] his were not the only tear-dimmed eyes that gazed upon the body of the sturdy little scrapper.

“We can only lay him aside there, boys, now. Make his temporary bier pretty and fragrant, anyhow, with some spruce boughs, just as though he were asleep and had laid down to rest. Now, watch out, fellows; we need every man to hold off those weasels. I wonder what they will do next?”

It was soon very evident what they would do. Another contingent, perhaps two squads, came to reinforce them. No doubt the commander had been reprimanded for not killing or capturing the Americans and more men could not be spared for the task. At least forty men should be able to clean out a dozen, the number of the Yanks having been correctly estimated after noting the gun fire coming from their rocky stronghold.

So the Hun commander who meant to rid their very midst of those daring Americans resolved upon strategy, which was immediately put into effect, but which Lieutenants Whitcomb and Richards at once foresaw. The Hun ranks became suddenly thinned, a number of the men going off through the trees, hastened by another round of machine-gun fire admirably directed by Wilson. [137] Back of trees, logs, stumps and mounds the others waited for some little time; then, probably at a signal from the ridge above the Americans, they came charging again up the hill.

Jennings, Gill and Lieutenant Whitcomb, with the machine gun, received the up-hill charge and stopped it. Don, the corporal and the other five men watched the ridge and presently, from among the dense shrubbery and thickets, gray-green clad forms began to emerge and most of them were sorry for it. But one Hun got far enough among the spruces to make the throwing of a lighted grenade effective and back went his arm. Then he dropped, for Farnham had proved to be a wonderfully quick shot. The grenade, which had fallen with the man, exploded, blowing the body of a brave fellow to bits.

In this sort of Indian fighting, a heritage of their forefathers, the Americans excelled; they proved it many times in the woodlands of France and the Germans came to fear the Yanks accordingly. This case was no exception. Though a young and enthusiastic officer urged them on down the hill, the Huns refused to face the accurate close range shooting that came from they hardly knew where. It is [138] one thing to charge a foe that can be seen and its powers of resistance estimated upon and quite another to attack that which is an unknown quantity and proves itself stronger than any estimate.

Once again the squad was left alone for a time, barring the desultory firing that always occurs when one foe is besieging another; but to this the Americans rarely responded, except when a Hun would carelessly show himself. At the two hundred yards intervening between besieged and besiegers this was not safe, a fact that, after several of their platoon were hurt or killed, the enemy discovered.

There were several ways of reducing a weakly held position, or of destroying a small isolated force, but before some of these methods of modern murder could be brought into use, before the means of which could be obtained, the shades of night once more were falling fast, though no long and idle vigil was now looked forward to. The hours of darkness promised plenty of action, for the Yanks all knew the schemes practiced by the Germans.

“They’ll eat and rest a bit and wait until they think we believe they’re not going to bother us—probably two or three hours—then [139]
we’ll be ready for them,” Herbert reasoned. “If they have flares, they can’t use them to advantage in this woodland and they can’t be sure enough of our position to waste ammunition on us. How do you regard that, Don, Corporal? Come on, fellows, we want all your opinions. Don’t let us make this so much a matter of leadership as is usual; we’re all fighting as man and man, now; shoulder to shoulder; brothers in a big effort to save our own and each other’s lives, so that we must all have a say. One of our teachers at school—good, old Brighton Academy, eh, Don?—when he would frequently consult the class on a difficult problem would say: ‘in a multitude of counselors there is wisdom.’ Well, fellows, we’ve got to have all the wisdom there is amongst us trotted out here and now; we need it; we can’t make any blunders.”

Herbert was talking more than he had ever done before, but necessity was prodding him. He continued:

“Because I am already your appointed leader I am willing to take the responsibility of giving sudden orders when needed, but we must all have a hand in the plans. Now, they can send a whole [140]
company here, a regiment perhaps, and rush us. Can we hold them off? Or they can try to wear us out by continued attack and reduce our numbers. They may use rifle grenades, trench mortars; they probably have to send for them, else they would have had them going before now. They might even find means of treating us to some gas, but I guess that’s difficult in a small way. Then, there is the night attack—we must watch for that; we cannot see so well to repulse the considerable number that may make it and they can get some grenades over, which in this small place won’t be comfortable. That is the situation as far as keeping up our defense goes.”

The young officer paused for a moment; then, speaking very slowly, his voice a little lower, he propounded a question:

“I can hardly imagine it,” he said, “but—are there any among you who would like to surrender? It would mean a big chance for life and here—well, we might as well face it—you all know this means a big chance for the beyond, or to be taken prisoner, anyway, after being wounded perhaps and then to be neglected and suffer. We’ve got to face it; to decide—now.”

“Durn them limberg chasers; they don’t get me livin’!” spoke up [141]
Jennings.

“Here, too!” said Gill.

“We ought to accept your decision, Lieutenant,” declared young Farnham, “but as for me, I’d rather hang on and fight!”

“That’s me!” “I’ll say so!” “Good boy!” came from the other men.

“There are ways, Lieutenant, to meet pretty nearly everything they can pull off. Can’t we make some rock and pole shelters here, against grenades and if the Heinies come up tonight, can’t we play a trick on them?” Judson, merely a boy and showing some embarrassment, made this suggestion.

“What kind of a trick?” Herbert asked, and Judson explained, an idea that took with every one of the squad. Herbert was enthusiastic.

“You ought to get a commission for that, Judson! Oughtn’t he, Don? It’s a crackerjack and we all agree to it. Now, then, let’s get to work on the whole idea. Some of these flat stones will do for a couple of dugouts; all we’ve got to do is to remove some of the stones to go down several feet. Each one ought to be big enough to hold five men, sitting down; we’ve got to sleep any old way.”

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[142]

CHAPTER XV
Strategy

With three men on watch and eight working like beavers, silently and effectively, the two partly excavated and stone-built shelters were completed in little more than two hours. Tomlinson, a brick mason and with a head for construction generally, was given direction of the work. From the fact that a little noise could not be avoided and indeed was desirable, the Huns were sure that the Yanks were alert. But with all quiet a little later it must have seemed more opportune for a night attack. That such would come the squad had no doubt and, therefore, it proceeded to put young Judson's scheme into practice.

It was very certain that no attempt would be made by the enemy to penetrate the dense thickets on the up-hill side; it could never get through without lights. And so the squad began assembling a low breastworks of stones on the up-hill side and but a few yards beyond the rock basin. Forming a line behind this in order that every man's [143]
rifle would command the basin, the Yanks set themselves to patiently waiting.

"A ol' deer stand ain't nothin' to this fer expectin'," Jennings remarked to Gill.

"More like waitin' for bear," was Gill's reply.

"It must be fast and sure work, boys," Herbert said. "Don't stop to see your sights, but get the glint all along the barrel and shoot low; always shoot low! You have McNabb's rifle; eh, Don?"

"Yes, and it's all right; seems to throw lead just where you hold it. I tried it, just before it got dark, on a Hun who was cleaning his gun, away on the far side of their camp, and I knocked his gun out of his hands. I'll bet he was some surprised." This was said lightly; then the boy's voice lowered and he spoke thoughtfully, as might an old friend and present comrade to another at such a time:

"I think, old man, that in the football days back at Brighton we never could have imagined we would be together in anything quite like this."

"It would have been just dreaming, Don, if we had. Football! Child's play! And yet in many a game we had as much determination [144]
to win as we have now. Funny; isn't it, how the human mind can be swayed by big and little things to show similar tendencies? Professor Galpard would call that 'a most interesting study in comparative psychology, young gentlemen;' wouldn't he?"

"Just that and right he'd be, too," Don replied. "But I think the determination to win out now is somewhat different from anything I have previously experienced; you'll have to admit it has more pep to it than any game we ever got into."

"I will admit that," Herbert said.

"For back of it is that primal love of life. We are willing to sacrifice everything rather than miss the glory of fighting on until we're done for, but yet, Herb, it's kind of sweet to think of living to do something worth while; to make an effort to gain happiness. You know I'm quoting a little from the principal's last commencement address."

"And yet I know as well as that I'm lying here on a hard rock that it's a hard, cold fact that nobody could induce you to surrender," argued Herb.

"Perfectly right, old man. If there were ten thousand Jerries, as the boys call them, going to rush us in ten minutes I would want to [145]
stay right here and give it to 'em until our cartridges were all gone."

"Do you remember young Gaylord at Brighton, Don?"

"Remember him? Who doesn't? You're going to refer to the fact that he was generally considered a softy; that he was so blamed gentle that every one looked for him to burst into tears at any trying moment; aren't you?"

"Yes, but you know what he did once; don't you?"

"You mean standing off those burglars?"

"Just that," said Herbert. "They tortured him horribly for an hour to make him tell where Grant, his roommate, kept his money hid—a lot of it—and did Gaylord tell? Not he! He refused and made mental notes of the men; they were arrested and sent up on it."

“But what, exactly, has that to do with us, Herb?”

“It only shows that no matter what a fellow’s get-up is he may rise to any occasion. And I guess that’s us, Don. I know I used to hate the idea of shooting any living thing, and I do now, but in war—and they are human beings, too!”

“I know, but human beings may be thugs and criminals, Herb. I’d [146]
rather much less shoot a robin or a bluebird than some murderers and cut-throats who deserve nothing else.”

“But, Don, granting that the Kaiser and his war ministers are no better than murderers, all of his soldiers are not thugs and cut-throats. Many of these fellows are kindly, fair-minded family chaps, living blamelessly at home and minding their own business; hard-working, enjoying their simple pleasures until war calls them and they have no choice but to enter into the killing of their fellowmen of another nation. Because they are the dupes of an unjust military system they must be driven into duties that may make them victims of others who have no personal desire to harm them, except that being at war makes it necessary. I tell you, Don, there is nothing more harshly unjust than war!”

“I guess you’re right. We ought to know, being in it. And yet, we wouldn’t be called pacifists, Herb.”

“Pacifists? Never! Our cause is just; our country had to fight and it is the duty of those who could fight to get busy for her.”

“Sure; just the same, I take it, Herb, as when a ruffian terrorizes [147]
a town. The police must go get him, stop him, or there’s no telling what harm he may do. Germany is that ruffian and our army is one of the policemen.” Don was nothing if not logical.

“You’ve got the right dope,” Herbert said. “And yet isn’t it a pity that there are ruffians and that those who must go get them are liable to get hurt; perhaps killed? Don, I think there should be no such thing as war; something should be brought about that would make war impossible.”

“I reckon every fellow who is in this thing would agree with you, Herb. Listen! What’s that? Kelly and Gerhardt coming in?”

“Yes, and in a hurry, too. There’s something doing down the hill. What is it, Kelly?”

“They’re coming up, Lieutenant, on the quiet; the whole bunch, I think. Gerhardt saw them first and came over to me; then we waited a little and could hear them plain. So we sneaked in quick.”

“Then get to your places,” Herbert said. “Dead quiet, now, everybody!”

“And don’t anyone shoot too soon and spoil the scheme!” Judson demanded.

“Nobody shoot until Judson yells ‘fire’!” Herbert ordered.

There was the suggestion of a sound as of moving objects down [148]
the hillside. It seemed to grow a little plainer, be multiplied, to come nearer and was barely discernible. To every member of the squad it was not apparent that the enemy was approaching; a few of trained and keener senses knew it. Jennings and Gill detected the fact very soon after Kelly and Gerhardt came in. Said Jennings, presently, in something like a stage whisper:

“Most here, Lieutenant. Reckon this is goin’ to be a reg’lar circus fer all concerned, ez they say in court.”

“Sh!” “Hush!” and “Can the talk!” came in muffled accents from along the line.

“Sho! He knows how far away they are and that they couldn’t hear him. The nearest one ain’t closer than half way up the hill and they’re all coming together. When you lay for deer——”

“I think we’d all better keep quiet now,” Herbert said, and the deer hunters subsided.

Several minutes passed without any apparent incident; if straining ears caught any sounds they were difficult to distinguish until a stone was displaced on the down hill side of the rock basin. This was hardly a signal, but if an accident it probably precipitated the ensuing action.

There was a sharp, shrill whistle; the yells as of a thousand imps [149]
of Satan suddenly filled the night with a fury of sound. With a rush the enemy’s suspected night attack began. Quick orders in German, the leaping forward of heavy feet upon and over the rock parapet, the surging on of men eager to kill marked the arrival of the entire platoon into the Americans’ stronghold. And then a transformation,

almost as sudden as the charge, took place.

The yells died down, ceased. Exclamations followed, guttural expressions of evident surprise, announcement, chagrin, at finding the enemy gone. The natural question was: had the Americans quitted their refuge? And the answer was self-evident. Lights were thrown here and there about the rocky floor, into the stone shelters, out among the spruces. Under officers and men gathered in the very center, in hasty conference; twenty, or more, were thus beneath the dim light from a torch stuck in a limb of a spruce tree. Other torches in the hands of the Huns within or on the rocky sides of the basin suffused the place in a pale fight. Only a few men remained without the stronghold. And then, more suddenly than the coming of the platoon, the action, like a well rehearsed drama, took on a vastly [150]
changed aspect.

"Fire now!" yelled the shrill voice of Judson, from among the dense herbage ten yards up the hill; the burst of flame and the roar from eleven rifles almost drowned the last word. Nearly as many Huns went down; the second and third irregular volleys followed before the invaders could more than lift a gun and about as many more men dropped. More shooting, fast and furious, sent still others to the earth, a few wounded, most of them done for. Of the reinforced platoon not a dozen men got safely out of the place and disappeared in the darkness. There had not been a single shot fired in answer to the American fusillade.

What followed with the squad was partly mild elation; partly an immediate performance of duty. A detail went about to get the wounded into the shelters, giving them also first aid wherever possible. Another bunch became the undertakers.

Those Huns who had escaped from this virtual massacre in reprisal would, of course, make their way to their divisional headquarters to report and another and stronger body of men would be sent to make short work of the Americans, but all this would take [151]
time. Probably, too, hearing the firing at the rear, the officers in command of the new line would also send a reserve detachment to clear the matter up and such a combined force would simply mean annihilation of the squad.

Swiftly the duties of the Americans were performed. Half the night was yet to come. Wilson and Kelly begged leave to inter poor McNabb's stiffened body and to mark the spot. Lieutenant Whitcomb, after another earnest talk with Don Richards and the corporal, called the men together again. They were cautioned against too much elation now, or self-assurance. Not one of them, Herbert knew, felt any real delight at the defense they had made, except that which was prompted by having once more defeated an implacable foe and of being spared a bayonetting, a blowing up or other almost certain death.

The corporal had made a suggestion: What was the sentiment regarding a breaking up and an attempted escape, every man for himself, through the German lines and back to the American front? Could it be done? Would it be worth trying?

Some of the squad looked rather askance, some dubious, some shook their heads.

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[152]

CHAPTER XVI
Pluck

"I GOT a objection to quittin' any o' me buddies." Jennings was always the first to announce an opinion and it ever rang true.

"Sho! Me, too. I'll stick t' him, if all the rest leave!" Gill exclaimed vehemently, loyal beyond measure to the man he loved to banter.

"Lieutenant Richards and I feel the same way," Herbert said, "but we want to do what is the best not only for ourselves, but for our country. If we stick here, we'll likely stay forever; if we try to break through tonight some of us may be successful and can go on helping to lick the Huns. Perhaps, though——"

"Let's all stick," Farnham suggested. "We can do just as much here. Even if they get us, we can get a lot of them and the fewer Heinies there are, the sooner they'll get what's coming to them."

"You bet, Lieutenant, they won't get us without we do up a lot more of them!" Kelly declared.

"It seems to be the general desire, Herb, to stick," Don said. [153]

"Stick we will, then. Back to the mines!" Herbert turned to the rock basin. "Wilson, better set up that Browning again. Corporal, detail two men to fix up some comfortable beds out here on the ridge and four others to make a couple of rough litters to carry these wounded men. We've got to get them out of here. Don—you're a doctor's son—can you see what these fellows need and look after them a little?"

"Sure. They all have first aid kits. I'll pick out those who are the least hurt and get them to looking after the others. Corporal, I'll be one to fix up a hospital. Who—? Gerhardt? Come on, then, young fellow; we'll have these poor chaps comfortable as possible in a jiffy."

But one of the wounded Germans was far gone, with a bullet evidently through the bottom of his right lung. He was coughing blood and slowly bleeding to death. Another was terribly ill from a shot through the abdomen; eventually he would die. Of the other seven one was blinded, another had a part of his jaw shot away, the rest had injuries to legs, arms, shoulders, a hip. And one was a [154] medical student, which fact he made known to Don in mixed German and bad English, the former of which the boy understood a little, or guessed at it.

The student was genuinely grateful for the care that Don insisted that the wounded men must have and for the help in getting his own shoulder bandaged. Then, beneath an improvised cabin of poles, with thatched roof of spruce boughs, the embryo surgeon went to work with one hand. Jennings, meanwhile, somewhat against his will, had made a trip to the spring run and refilled the water bucket for the wounded foes and returned to fill the empty canteens of the squad.

"Didn't see nary Jerry on the way," he announched. "Reckon we got 'em scared off."

"Sho! You'll find out about 'em bein' scared a bit later. Trouble with you is your swelled head," Gill asserted.

"I'll swell your head with my foot if you don't go away from me!" the big mountaineer threatened.

"If you sling your old hoof this a-way, I'll jest bite it off," Gill chuckled.

The two went on working side by side, still further strengthening the defenses. Presently they were seen, with arms over each other's [155] shoulders and carrying their beloved rifles, sitting on the stone wall, swapping experiences about shooting deer and bear.

During the rapid work about the stronghold, Lieutenant Whitcomb had gone out on picket duty, choosing the valley side of the hill. The corporal was on the hillside above. The orders then to the squad were that all who could must get some sleep before morning. The food had been exhausted, but the boys, though ravenously hungry, made no complaint. Some coarse rye bread, found in the Kits of the dead Huns, did not go very far nor give much satisfaction. Into the shelters several of the boys went and to sleep almost immediately; others were too wakeful to think of closing their eyes. Jennings and Gill, questioned as to their need of rest, declared they were too empty to sleep and being used to long night vigils when hunting, they preferred to chat awhile.

“Ever go on a coon hunt, son?” Jennings asked Kelly. The latter had never experienced that pleasure.

“Me, I’ve been coon hunting three nights straight an’ follered the plow all day between,” Gill said.

“Huh! Four nights straight fer me,” was Jennings’ boast. [156]

“Sho! ’Course you’d lie to beat the world’s record for stayin’ up. Jen, listen: I’m an awful good liar myself, but you make me jealous.”

“Fact, you runt! Four nights. Me an’ my brother Ben. You knowed Ben an’ you kin ask him.”

“Now? Where is he?”

“Back home; when you go back——”

“Mebbe I won’t, so I better do it now, only my holler’s a little wore out tryin’ to talk sense into you and I reckon Ben wouldn’t hear me ’bout four thousand miles.” Then the two went on bantering over some trifling incident.

Herbert moved slowly across to where the German wounded were ensconced and was accosted by Don as the latter was leaving.

“I suppose human nature doesn’t differ much the world over,” Don said. “Those poor chaps in there are a queer lot, nevertheless. Some of them seem grateful for what I was trying to do for them; one of them caught and tried to kiss my hand. Another, who is very bad, kept talking to me and when I held my torch and stooped over to say something that he might understand for sympathy, I’m [157] hanged if he didn’t reach up and try to strike me and he spit at me, too, like an angry cat. It made the young surgeon so mad that he slapped the fellow’s face; then apologized to me most profusely. And the string of German talk—ugh! I’ll never want to hear a word of it again when I get back home.”

“You won’t ever hear much of it, I’m thinking,” said Herbert.

“Why, do you think we’re not going to get out?”

“I was meaning that the language is going to be very unpopular at home for a long while.”

“How about Professor Meyer at school?”

“Just before I left I heard that he had left; was fired. They traced some propaganda to him, and other things.”

“Hurrah for old Brighton!” Don said.

“And may we enjoy her bright halls once more, Don.”

“Amen! But it’s a toss-up; eh, Herb?”

“It must be getting near morning now. Have you had any sleep?”

“No; I don’t need it. I couldn’t go to sleep. But how about you? I’ll take this watch and you can go up and turn——”

“Listen! Firing. Away to the south.” [158]

“Southeast, too. Must be all along the line. And more and more. Herb, is it a *barrage*?”

“What else could it be? Is another drive on—the one that was soon to come off? Oh, Don, if it is, there’s a chance for us. If it is not, then before long——”

“I know it’s serious, old man, and I guess you and the corporal see it clearer than the rest of us. But—it’s a *barrage* in full force and the drive will follow.”

“Look! It’s getting gray over yonder; morning. Let’s go up and get the fellows awake and in their places. If the Heinies are chased back again, and they will be, some of them may want to stop on the way and take another fling at us. I wish we had more ammunition; there are barely fifty cartridges left to each man. I have about seventy, but I must have been a little more careful.”

“Slower and surer, Herb. I tried to follow your example. There are about seventy in my box; poor McNabb’s. How about pistol ammunition?”

“Plenty, I guess, Don. We must fall back on that at close quarters. Oh, hear the music of that cannonade!”

“I hope they don’t drop any long ones over on us, Herb.” [159]

“They won’t. The barrage is not much good in the woods, nor are shells. East of the Aire in the more open country, you know, it’s different. What we hear in the south is the Hun machine guns and our rifle fire. Our divisions are attacking again in force all along the line. The boys are at it, Don; they're at it and they'll get here!"

The young commander's joy and enthusiasm were shared by all the others of the squad except Jennings.

"Lieutenant, we're havin' a right good time here, ain't we? Nobody hurt much, except McNabb, and laws! most ev'ry year some feller gets killed even huntin' deer. Some fool takes him fer a ol' buck an' lets fly. Well, me an' Gill, my buddy, we're havin' a little fun makin' these here Huns wish they'd stayed home an' if——"

"Sho! You talk for yourself, Jen," Gill said, for the first time deserting his friend. "I told you, Lieutenant, that the big boob wasn't right; he's got bog mud in his head 'stead o' brains. Thinks he can lick the whole German Army."

"I kin, too, if they'll give me a chanct t' hunt a tree an' then come [160]
at me one at a time in front," asserted Jennings.

"You couldn't lick a postage stamp if it was sick a-bed," Gill muttered, evidently angry because the big mountaineer didn't seem to know good news from bad.

There was no levity in Gill's manner nor speech and the others appeared to share his feelings, though Jennings' statements generally caused a laugh. However joyful the squad may have felt over the resounding evidence of a new drive, they all sensed that the final hour or so before their probable delivery must hold for them the question of survival. They knew that their leader's foreboding was correct; they would be furiously attacked by some of the re-established Huns, and in greater numbers than before, for then men had been needed to hold the line elsewhere.

Therefore, it was a quiet and serious lot of young fellows that looked to their weapons and lay behind the rocks of the little basin as the continued sound of firing came slowly nearer and nearer.

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[161]

CHAPTER XVII
THE WORLD'S GREATEST BATTLE

CONSIDERING the numbers engaged, the severity of the defense, the difficulty of dislodging a foe entrenched with nature's aid, and the dash, energy and destructive work of the offensive, the fight for the Argonne has no equal in the records of mankind. This has been the verdict of many witnesses; not alone those with the desire to give praise to their fellow Americans, but alien critics also have affirmed it.

History has recorded many bloody encounters of modern times. Waterloo, the Bloody Angle, Pickett's charge—these are but a few instances of the pluck and bravery that men will show when facing an equally determined enemy. The greatest war has furnished innumerable evidences that men are no less courageous than in former times.

As we have seen, it was a trick of the Germans, practiced over and over again, to vacate a position under pressure and at night, when the victors had paused to reinforce and count results, to come [162]
back again, occupying much of the ground they had vacated during the day. But the Americans soon discovered this ruse and looked for it; they also followed the Huns more closely and held all of the ground taken from them.

Greater dash, a more complete disregard for danger which amounted in many cases to individual foolhardiness, causing at the same time the enemy to feel that he was up against foemen that outclassed him in that sort of thing, had much to do with the winning streak that the Yanks maintained. The Germans fooled themselves into thinking that they were above defeat where the great forest, its ravines and hills, afforded them such protection, but this was the sort of thing that the Americans—many of them hunters, sportsmen, woodsmen, mountaineers, or with vacation experiences in such places and having the hereditary instincts of ancestors who were pioneers—now welcomed.

This manner of fighting took from the Germans their natural inclinations following their training as a body of men who depended upon the spirit of comradeship and who were only at their best when fighting shoulder to shoulder. But it was exactly according to [163]
the American standards and training, showing clearly the superiority of the latter method of making each man depend on himself. Moreover, it was what is known as open fighting, differing from trench warfare and though the opposing forces often fortified themselves behind natural rock masses and within thickets and groves, they were not as fixed as in the elaborate dugouts and fortresses beneath the surface of the ground. In some instances, however, over officers had erected cabins or stone huts.

The fighting in the Argonne occurred mostly in the daytime and except where some few night raids were carried out with slight gain either way, the opposing forces were content to lie in wait until early morning hours, when they again leaped at each other's throats, the Yanks doing most of the jumping and the Huns getting the larger part of the throttling. Then, until the fall of darkness again, the battle went on uninterruptedly.

Naturally, slow progress was made in the forest. Between the Aire River, which skirts the Argonne region on the east, and the Meuse, an average of twelve miles away, the attacking Americans got on much faster, taking village after village and compelling the [164]
Germans to fall back continually. Units of other divisions cleared the immediate valley of the Aire of Huns, but before all this was done the now famous 77th Division had penetrated into the very center of the forest and was still going strong. After pausing to make good the ground and re-form, the drive was resumed in the early morning of October 4th, the sounds thereof conveying the glad fact to Herbert Whitcomb, Don Richards and their brave little company.

The open farming section to the west of the Argonne was vacated by the Germans after the St. Mihiel battle and the severe fighting on the Vesle. The Huns knew they could not hold this section against the combined French and Americans; therefore, they retired to within the forest proper, believing that nothing could dislodge them there and it became the job of the Americans alone to prove them wrong.

Where a successful offensive is conducted, even against open formations or ordinary trenches, the attacking force necessarily outnumbers the defenders and this was the case in the Argonne battle, but the differences were not by any means as great as might have been expected, considering the terrain and the decisiveness of the defeat.

In many separate actions, or what might be termed somewhat [165] isolated fights, where bodies of Americans were separated from their fellows, though the Germans managed generally to keep in touch with each other, the defenders also decisively beaten at these points, often greatly outnumbered the attacking forces. Sheer inability to recognize the possibility of being beaten or even seriously repulsed carried the Yanks on to victory, compelling the foe to give way before their terrific onslaughts.

This sort of fighting while it lasted did not surprise the American commanders, but the English, French and Italian officers detailed to visit the American command viewed with astonishment the result of the battle. Never before had they seen such persistent energy and cool determination shown by an army of such large numbers. Only the Canadians and Australians, on certain smaller occasions, demonstrated the more hardy purpose and tenacity of men from less densely settled countries where the pioneer spirit still prevails.

May it be that, however advanced our country becomes in the niceties and needs of civilization, however earnestly we come to adhere to those finer traits of national integrity and purer [166] manliness, we still retain much of that pioneer spirit which made of our forefathers the kind of men to gain the greatest nation on earth.

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[167]

CHAPTER XVIII
Playing the Game

"HERE they come, men; some of them! Drifting back," announced Lieutenant Whitcomb, with his eye at a peep-hole in the rocks. At almost the same instant Farnham called out the same news and Jennings, rising to glance over the stone breastwork of the basin, remarked:

"By glory, they be! Let'em went, Lieutenant; we don't want to stop'em from goin' right on home. Ain't that where they're headin'?"

"Yes, but with a good long way to go yet. Get down, man, unless you want to stop a mauser!"

The little valley below rapidly became filled with gray-green figures, most of them hurrying along. There was very little artillery; only now and then some light field pieces on wheels, that were pulled along by men. The weapons used in this forest defense were mostly machine guns and rifles. Officers were all along urging the retreating Huns to greater speed and the watchers on the hillside [168] witnessed many cases of wanton brutality shown toward the wearied privates who, underfed and overworked, were often lacking in patriotic effort. There was instant obedience on the part of these thoroughly drilled and long-practiced troops, but they had begun to feel when they were overmatched in dash and energy; to know when they were being beaten at their own game. Had it not been for the officers, who were personally more responsible to the high command, the defense of the Argonne would have cost the Americans far fewer casualties.

Either there had been orders to ignore the little bunch of Americans on the hillside, or else in the endeavor to get back unscathed from the furious attack being made upon them, the existence of the squad in their midst had been forgotten. The Huns were making every attempt to hold the ground and, where that was impossible, to save themselves and their army impediments from capture. Back, back, ever back they were being forced, contesting every inch along the fighting line; when beaten and not forced to surrender rushing back in order to form new lines and points of defense. Every moment, up among the spruces, the lads, grown [169] bolder as the first few hours of the morning went by and they were not attacked, gazed over the rocks and saw the narrow wooded valley filled and emptied and filled again with retreating men, ever passing on to the north, marching in loose formation, straggling, often with wounded among them, with heads and arms bandaged, but still in the ranks, and others borne on stretchers carried either by their comrades-in-arms or by men of a hospital corps. But there was never any stopping, never a turning back of those retreating until near the end, when the numbers very perceptibly began to thin.

Then quite suddenly there was a change. Down from the north, from the direction the retreat was taking, came a full platoon of men, exhibiting far more haste than had been shown by those withdrawing. Most of this platoon were on the run, lashed to greater effort by the sharp commands of their officers. They were a fresh contingent rushed into line in place of those units exhausted and depleted and reaching the head of the vale that sloped away to the north, as the Yank squad had done, they stopped at another command. With a precision of drill that resembled an exhibition [170] contest, they almost leaped apart to given distances and stood with rifles and machine guns ready for action. Then, at still another command the under officers of each squad began to lead them to selected spots most suitable for defense, thus beginning to spread the force out widely. It was evident that the intention was to hold this part of the forest, as many other spots were being defended, against a further advance of the American divisions whose task it was to drive the Huns from the Argonne.

Again the word had been given to the khaki-clad squad to lie low. Herbert, at his hole in the rocks, saw exactly what was about to happen. The spreading out of the German platoon would surely tend to the occupancy of the ground held by the Yanks among the spruces and a clash was therefore certain, though with no greater numbers than the American squad had faced, before, unless others came on the scene.

It was Herbert’s intention to lie low, as before, until again discovered. Not one of these Germans now in the valley could have known of the existence of the Americans in their midst; in the shifting about those who had previously attacked the position on the [171] hillside must have been moved elsewhere prior to the retreat, or else had all been captured in the new drive.

But Herbert’s well-laid plan to surprise the enemy went wrong, as plans often do, though this was due to no lack of foresight on his part. There was always the chance of information of the position of the Yanks being given. And now this very thing happened.

Don had an eye at one of the peep-holes. He was observing with swift comprehension all that was transpiring down the hill. Suddenly the lad saw that which no one else in the squad could have as fully understood. Hastening forward through the woods and up the hill came a man dressed in the uniform of an American officer and accompanied by two German lieutenants, the commanders of this platoon. At first it seemed as though this khaki-clad individual was but a prisoner, tamely submitting. Then, as he drew nearer, it could be observed that there was a white ribbon tied on either arm and one on his service cap, one mark of the spy by which his friends the Huns would know him. But Don saw more than this; he saw that this apparent American was short, heavy-set, swarthy; then he knew the fellow.

Don, it must be remembered, was not a soldier; he had not been [172] enlisted as a fighting man. His first experience on the front was as a saver of life, instead of one who was expected to kill, though in the latter capacity he had visited upon one spy and the murderer of his dear friend Billy Mearns a just revenge. Now with the Intelligence Division it had not been expected of him to enter battle, nor to use firearms, except in extreme cases. But for the last two days he had been allied with several extreme cases involving a most warlike undertaking and to play the soldier had been as much his part as that of any member of the squad with Herbert Whitcomb. The taking part in war, of shooting, under excitement, at the enemy line, or picking out figures in that line as special marks to hit seemed truly enough the office of a fighting man, but the act of deliberately shooting down an individual, especially when the victim was unaware of his peril, must appear to him who reasons more of an assassination than warfare. Justifiable homicide, it might indeed be, for there may be such a thing, even outside of the bounds of war, but in the deliberate act itself there cannot be utter disregard of its cold-blooded character.

To what extent these considerations entered Don Richards’ head [173] are now uncertain; he has never given expression to the incident in full, but it may easily be inferred, judging from the boy’s humanity and right-mindedness, that for a little disinclination held him, perhaps only for the turn of a few seconds; then bold circumstance demanded action.

The three men came on up the hill, walking now more and more slowly and finally advancing with some caution. They were easily a hundred and fifty yards away when they halted, facing the spruces. And then the khaki-clad figure deliberately raised its arm and pointed out, with evident care, the precise position of the fortified squad of Americans.

It is possible that even then the spy would have got away with his ruse, so earnest had been Lieutenant Whitcomb’s orders to his men. Perhaps Don did not feel exactly bound by these orders; Herbert had frankly admitted that he was independent of the command, though bound by courtesy and necessity to generally act with the squad. Perhaps, under the stress of the moment, Don forgot orders, purposes, strategy. The spy, clad in the uniform of those against whom he was striving, condemned to death by his occupation, the [174] most contemptible and often the most dangerous of enemies, stood there, openly giving information to his friends of that which he had in some way become possessed. It was a sight to make the justice-loving blood of any patriotic lad boil.

It is an axiom with the marksman, in warfare as well as in hunting dangerous game, to keep cool and bend all effort on the correct aiming of his weapon. Once before, in the flight of a spy, Don had lost sight of this important rule and his man had escaped. Another, at shorter range, though in the fury of a duel battle, had paid the penalty. And now bitter anger clouded the sighting of the rifle. Indeed, the boy hardly contemplated that he raised his gun, that he glanced along the barrel, or that he pulled the trigger at the supposed moment of seeing his front sights low. He knew, however, that at the crack of the weapon the white-ribboned cap of the spy flew into the air and that at the next instant the fellow was behind a tree, dodging thence to another, his companions with him.

The shot was a signal. Herbert had been disturbed by the act of the spy, as had others of the squad; then when Don fired, the jig was [175] up and the Yanks, in their little natural fortress, became this time the aggressors.

“Get ’em, men! Get all three of them!” the lieutenant shouted and three guns spoke with flaming malice. Don fired again. Unable to see enough of the spy and conscious of his first error, he took quick, low, accurate aim at a fleeing officer and knew intuitively, as any expert marksman may call his shot on a target, that the bullet had hit the fellow between the shoulders. With something of a shudder at seeing the German go down the boy tried again to draw sight, but unsuccessfully; the fellow was quick, elusive and fortunate with his protecting trees. Herbert, master of the rifle, fired but once. The other Hun officer fell. Five or six shots went after the spy, but without avail, making him all the more wary. And at that the big mountaineer grew furious.

Jennings towered above his fellows, climbing upon the rocks and leaning far out from the spruce shadows. His marksmanship was superb; the spy was so far among the trees that the others, even Herbert and Gill stopped firing. But Jennings’ bullets cut a twig right over the khaki-clad fugitive’s head; then splintered the bark beside him as he dodged around a tree; then tore the cloth from his [176] hip and seared the flesh. Again one shot ripped open his sleeve. But the fellow ran on until hidden behind several large trees growing close together.

Naturally the American squad had not been the only observers of this brief and exciting episode; a Hun squad of machine gunners, locating on the hillside a little to the north of the spruces and almost level with them, saw clearly whence the firing came, spied the mountaineer’s figure and immediately got busy.

Jennings turned about, defeated in his effort, but elated, nevertheless.

“I ain’t never shot no closter, even to a ol’ groundhog huntin’ his hole; hev I, buddy?” he said to Gill.

“No, nor anybody. That was drawin’ a bead some fine. An’ him movin’ an’ dodgin’ that way worse’n a cottontail through corn. Fine work, boy; fine work! I couldn’t done any better me own self.”

The big mountaineer glowed with pride; nothing pleased him more than genuine praise from his life-long pal. Jennings stood straight on the rock and swelled his chest.

“Jest you wait, Lieutenant, till I git a chanct t’ draw on the ol’ [177] Kaiser at about three hundred yards! I’ll clip that ol’ fish tail o’ his’n on his lip fust on one side, then on t’other an’ then plant one right here.” Jennings raised his hand and tapped his forehead; with a broad grin he gazed down at the others, then suddenly toppled forward and pitched headlong among them. At the same instant a dozen leaden slugs pounded, flattened, glanced from the rocks where Jennings had stood and half of those fired from the machine gun had hit him.

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[178]

CHAPTER XIX
Retaliation

"LIEUTENANT, I ain't complainin', I ain't kickin' an' I don't want to disobey no orders, but please let me go out an' round up them polecats on the hill, that killed my buddy. I knows just where they're at an' I can do it. Please, sir, I want t' go."

So begged the hunter and scout Gill, the big tears rolling down his cheeks, though his features were grim with determination. Beyond the unutterable love for his dead friend and comrade, only revenge stirred him; the desire to get the very ones who had caused Jennings' death was now his one purpose in life.

But Herbert shook his head. "No, Gill, old chap, if only for your own good; they'd get you, too. And we can't spare you now. They are making ready to hit us hard and we've got to fight, man; hold 'em off. There are no more of them than before, but they've got a
field piece out there on the hill and shells probably. They'll hammer [179]
us a bit and then rush us."

It proved to be as Herbert foresaw; these tactics would be most effective and the Huns could not tolerate a nested enemy able to do much damage upon their immediate flank. Directed now by a gray-haired veteran just arrived on the scene, there was a precision of action that augured badly for the Yank squad. The first shell came over a few minutes after the raking machine-gun-fire that had killed the big mountaineer and the shot struck well up among the spruces, splintering a tree, throwing bits of wood and limbs down upon the men, the concussion throwing several of them to the ground. Then Herbert ordered all within the two stone shelters, except one who must risk going on watch, and he elected himself for this task, though some of the others strongly objected. The lieutenant crouched down close to the rocks and two of the boys reared some large stones about him as a shield; then the tired and hungry squad awaited results. And these results were a little beyond their most pessimistic estimates, if even one of the remaining ten could have taken anything but an optimistic view of the situation.

The second shell also landed among the spruces, but far back; [180]
the third, fourth and fifth struck outside of the stone breastwork and one was a "dud." Then came the sixth, which squarely hit the side of one stone shelter, making the rock splinters fly and the explosion seemed as though it would tear down the heavy walls. Though the watcher was several yards away and protected in part, he was terribly affected by the concussion and his first thought was the fear of shell shock if this sort of thing was to continue. But what could the squad do, other than remain here, even though it meant annihilation or insanity?

Don Richards also, from nearest the doorway of the smallest shelter, saw clearly, as all of the squad must have seen, the inevitable; with him to determine was to act.

"That gun has got to be stopped! Two of us can do it. Who?"

"Me, me! Take me!" Gill held out his arms like a child begging a favor. "I wanted him to let me go, but he said we'd all be needed here."

"So we will, later. They don't know how many of us there are here and they won't rush us yet a bit; we ought to get back before
that, if at all. There's no need of Lieutenant Whitcomb's knowing; [181]
he's too busy watching to take note of us. Now then, Gill, we'll slide as soon as the next shell lands, if it doesn't get us."

The next shell didn't get them; it struck, as most of the others had done, against the rock wall. With about one-half minute between each shot there was time and to spare for a get-away. Out under the shadows the two leaped, Don leading, and however agile the slim young mountaineer was, he was no quicker on his feet than the school athlete.

But long training in the woods and then the special course in fighting methods in the camps had made of the mountaineer an expert that no tyro, nor even few so drilled could hope to equal. Conscious of this, Don motioned that Gill now take the lead.

"Soft, still; go easy like," Gill cautioned. "Big game ahead! They killed my buddy and we've got to git 'em. Don't break no sticks nor jar no high bushes."

On through the dense undergrowth the two went, doing that which Donald had deemed impossible: making haste and going cautiously at the same time. The boy, an apt pupil, following almost in the footsteps of his comrade, doing whatever Gill did, avoiding [182] whatever he dodged. Then it occurred to Don that he was not sure of the ground; rather uncertain of the direction they must take. Could he trust the woodsman? Did Gill know?

Suddenly the scout stopped, crouched, gestured for Don also to get down. Thus they remained, silent, motionless for a full half minute, hearing plainly someone beyond pushing through the thicket, the sound coming nearer. Gill was moving his head about in the effort to see through and beyond the bushes; then he held up one finger and finally pointed to himself, motioning Don to come on slowly, which Don did; fearing to spoil his comrade’s plan, then only to witness in part the subsequent tragedy. But as little as he saw of it, for one fleeting second the question assailed him: was he to go on with this task alone? He felt that he could go on with it, for his automatic was in his hand and he knew well how to use that weapon. Then he saw Gill’s bayoneted rifle lifted high; he saw it strike forward and down; he heard a gasping exclamation and the scout, turning once to glance back among the bushes and wiping his bayonet on a tuft of grass, rejoined the wondering boy.

“He near got me, acrosst the peepers; his blade was longer than [183] mine,” Gill remarked, in a whisper. “Scout, too, lookin’ for a way to get to us from this side. Come on!”

Again Don followed. They made even more rapid headway than at first, veering continually to the right until the boy was almost convinced that they had completed a circle. Finally, straight ahead, they described a more open woodland on ground sloping away. This they closely scanned from a screened position within the underbrush.

“See ’em, eh?” Gill made remark, grinning fiendishly. And Don, craning his neck above the friendly branches, had a full view of half a dozen Huns, rapidly operating a long-barreled field piece under the expert direction of an under officer. The Germans were not a hundred paces distant and chance favored the two Americans for there were but few trees between them and the cannoneers.

“Now, then, buddy, lay low and watch your uncle! If they come a huntin’ up here, an’ they won’t, you can wish ’em well with your gun and automatic.” Gill openly took command in this sort of thing, as it was right that he should. It was surely his game, even if partly Don’s idea, and the young officer was not arrogant. He knew he was no match for the other with a rifle and that they might need every [184] cartridge they had in close work before their task was completed, if completed it could be.

The Huns were about to fire their long weapon; the officer stooped to sight it. As his hands loosened upon the adjusting mechanism and he slumped to the earth, the others glanced quickly around to see where the bullet came from that had killed him. One big, fat Hun raised his arm to point in almost the exact direction where Don and Gill knelt; another also had his eyes turned upon the spot where the Americans crouched. Then the fat fellow pitched headlong and the man with him leaped back to a machine gun; he had seen a movement, the flash of flame from Gill’s weapon, or detected the gaseous drift from smokeless powder. But before the death-dealing weapon could be brought into action, the gunner also tumbled over, grasping at his side, struggling a little, then lying inert, as were the other two. Two of the remaining gunners flung themselves flat on the ground; the other leaped toward the machine gun, but fell between the legs of the tripod, upsetting the weapon in his struggles before he, too, lay still.

“Reckoned I’d make ’em sorry they killed old Jen,” Gill said. “Now then, buddy, let’s go down an’ fix them other two.”

But seeing that this would be a foolish attempt, Don now took [185] command.

“No. You stay here, Gill, and pick off any others that come up and try to use that gun, which they will and soon. I’ll go back to the rocks. In about ten or twenty minutes you come back, too. If you get some more of them they’ll likely let the gun alone for a bit and then try to grenade us. If they get to working the gun again, then—— Listen, Gill; listen! The shooting all along the line is getting awfully near. It can’t be half a mile away. They’re coming fast. I’ll get back now.”

There was little trouble in retracing his steps and creeping under the spruces. Don found the squad just as he had left it, except that another man was missing. Gerhardt had gone a little out of his head; had become quarrelsome and abusive, mumbling that he was hungry, that there were apples and pears down in the woods and that, Germans or no Germans, he was going after them. Before the others of the squad could lay hold to stop him he had leaped over the stone barrier and actually untouched by a veritable hail of bullets had gone off on a wabbling run. And that was the last any of them had ever seen of Gerhardt; his fate was never known. Probably [186] he got into the German lines, was killed because dangerously insane and his unmarked grave would tell no tales.

Herbert, still on watch and looking terribly pale and haggard, had not known of the expedition of Don and Gill. When young Judson crawled out and insisted on taking the lieutenant's place on watch and Herbert had almost reluctantly crept back to the shelter, he remarked that the Hun shells had ceased being fired. Then Don informed him of what Gill had done.

"That has saved our lives, Don! They were getting our exact range to a T. We never could have survived that shell fire. And Gill is still out there?"

"If he gets back, Herb, that fellow will deserve all the honors that may be put upon him. He's coming back in twenty minutes."

"Listen! Was that a bugle, men?"

"It might have been; off a long way."

"If it was, it was Yank."

"The shooting is nearer all the time."

"Slow, but mebbe sure, Lieutenant."

"I am sure it is sure. They'll get here, Farnham."

"And find us sitting up and waiting for a square meal."

[187]

CHAPTER XX
Gill Performs

THE young Pennsylvania mountaineer, with his eyes, followed Don until the boy disappeared among the dense bushes; then Gill turned again to his grim duty—that of keeping the long gun out of action. The two Huns who had got away evidently had recognized that to attempt to work the piece in its present position, with enemy marksmen concealed where they could pick off the gunners, was a much too risky business.

Gill knew that these conditions would be reported at once to the nearest officer and that very soon men would be sent to hunt the mountaineer out and others to work the gun again.

Well, let them come; he would endeavor to give as good as they sent, or better, even if he were only one against many. He had about thirty cartridges left; they ought to be enough for a couple of dozen Heinies, if they didn’t crowd him too fast. And then he had his [188]
automatic; he had hardly needed so far to fire a shot from it, but he knew how to use it. Also he had his bayonet as a last resort.

Probably in the end they would get him, but it didn’t matter very much now that his buddy, Jennings, was dead. To be sure, he would love again to get back to the dear old hills of his native state and again follow the plow or the hounds. Going after raccoons, foxes, deer and bear was milder sport than this, with no danger in it, but it didn’t inflict upon one’s mind that primitive desire to destroy an enemy; it didn’t stir the blood as did this war game.

Quite calmly, but without relaxing for an instant his keen watchfulness on all his surroundings, Gill began cleaning his rifle, examining his cartridge clips and pistol ammunition, looking to his general well-being, even to the extent of re-tying his shoe lacings. He had little to wish for, except that Jennings were with him and that he had something to eat and a cup of good water. This going hungry and thirsty for so long was not calculated to put a fellow on his best edge. But still his eyes and nerves were good and his stanch muscles all there. If his buddy had not been killed and were to share his fortunes now, he might get into really far greater misery than [189]
the grave: long imprisonment. It wouldn’t be exactly desirable to be seriously wounded, either, and to lie for hours in these bushes. But Gill promised himself that if he were hit and not knocked out completely, the Huns would have no little trouble finding him.

He remembered rather vaguely that Don had told him to come back in twenty minutes. Gill’s watch had been smashed, he had thrown it away and how long was twenty minutes? There would be more Huns at the field piece before half that time and there was no telling how long it might take to further impress upon them that its mere vicinity was fatal ground.

Gill was right in this conjecture. He had hardly finished his task and shoved a new cartridge clip into his gun before he saw a half dozen men come running up the hill. He recognized one of them as belonging to the gun squad and this fellow was evidently protesting to the young officer at the head of the new bunch.

They came boldly into the little space, the member of the old squad trying almost to hold the officer back. Suddenly that smirk-faced leader turned and struck the well meaning man a blow across [190]
the face.

The sheer brutality, the nasty ingratitude of this act impressed the watcher in the bushes much as when he had once seen a drunken coon hunter kick his dog when the beast was doing his best to make known the whereabouts of a hunted animal.

It was well now to get busy and the rule was to get an officer, if possible, so as to upset the morale of a fighting force, big or little.

The Hun leader was still glaring at the man who would dare to try to tell him his business or interfere with his duty; he had also a thing or two to say about it, judging from the way he flung out his chest and pounded it with his fist. Suddenly he bent forward, placed both hands upon his stomach and sank to the ground. Gill hoped that his bullet had not done enough damage to keep the fellow from repenting his meanness.

The other Huns had all rushed for cover; one was a little slow and the mountaineer’s next shot did not permit him to gain shelter.

One fellow, from behind a tree, began shooting at where he must have noted the flash of Gill’s gun and the bullets were cutting low over the mountaineer’s head as the latter drew a fine bead to the [191] left of that tree. The Hun marksman stopped shooting, but Gill knew the man had only been nicked a little; hurt only enough to render him unable to keep on worrying the Yank.

But others were shooting now and the spot that Gill occupied was getting to be uncomfortable. A bullet struck and split a stout scrub oak sapling right in front of his face, the missile going off at a tangent, else the mountaineer would have been done for. Therefore, he moved, and quickly, backing out on hands and knees, and when screened completely he slipped into the friendly shelter of some other bushes where, back of a sprout-grown tree stump he was still better hidden. The bullets continued to cut and to tear through the thicket he had just left, all of them wasted, of course, and Gill smiled grimly.

“No good, Heinie,” he thought, “though if I’d ’a’ stayed there you’d ’a’ got me, I reckon.”

Presently he observed that only one gun was blazing away at his supposed position and he suspected a ruse. This fellow was trying to keep Gill’s attention, or to draw his fire; others would make a detour and try to surprise him from behind. Well, he’d be ready to give [192] them a warm reception.

He had not long to wait. Directly back of the place that he had just occupied he saw the bushes sway a little. He did not take his eyes from the spot and presently a German cap came slowly up above the mass of foliage, followed by a pair of staring eyes that spied Gill just as the latter fired. The cap flew into the air, the eyes disappeared from the mountaineer’s view and he ejaculated, half aloud:

“Sho! I done missed him. Here’s fer gettin’ him, though.” With that, not having rifle cartridges to waste, Gill drew his automatic and sent a half dozen bullets into the bushes, low down. The only immediate result, as far as he could be aware, was some Hun language and the sound of hasty retreat, evidently of at least four or five men who had been advancing close together upon him. They must have either imagined themselves outnumbered, or else the leader or several of them had been hit.

Gill chuckled to himself and remarked *sotto voce*:

“Guess my ol’ buddy Jen was about right in thinkin’ he could ’a’ licked the whole Hun army, give him a show.” Then he turned his [193] attention again to the sniper down the hill and at last, locating that fellow behind a fallen tree, he set himself to stopping him, which his third bullet effectually did. Having the habit of talking to himself, as probably without exception every lone hunter has, Gill further indulged in it now.

“Reckon my twenty minutes is up, but I got t’ wait here a bit an’ see they don’t try fer to work that field piece some more. They will try it an’ groun’ hog shootin’ ain’t no touch t’ the sport o’ stoppin’ these fellers. Reckon they ain’t goin’ t’ try t’ come after me again right off.”

The mountaineer lay there for fully fifteen minutes longer and nothing occurred as far as he could see. The cannon was as lonesome as though in the middle of the Desert of Sahara; no one approached it. Gill worked himself down into a comfortable sort of nest amid dry moss and leaves in the warm sunshine and still waited.

It is hard to believe that under stress of such circumstances sleep would come to one unawares. But the mountaineer had not closed his eyes for more than forty-eight hours and outraged nature must assert its natural protest. Before the poor fellow was conscious of [194] the danger to himself his head dropped on his outstretched arm and he was actually snoring.

He awoke after a time at the sound of a gruff voice above him and glancing up he beheld the muzzle of a gun not six inches from his head. Words that he did not understand followed. His rifle was snatched away. But with the quickness of a wildcat the Yank was half on his feet, reaching for his automatic and meaning to kill or be killed.

A blow descended upon his head; he dodged it in part, but it struck the pistol from his hand. He leaped at the fellow who was striking at him with the butt of his gun, catching the Hun a wood wrestling grip around the waist. The two went down together, Gill on top, and no sooner had he thrown his man than he tried to get away from him. But his antagonist was a big chap, with muscles like iron and hands like hams; he held to Gill with a grip that seemed impossible to break. In doing this, however, both hands were kept so busy for a time that a weapon could not be used.

The Two Went Down Together

Gill got a hold on his antagonist’s throat and the Hun began to [195]
choke. Not being able to break that hold and to save himself, the big fellow tried to reach around under him for his pistol and Gill tore loose, flung himself over the ground and got his own automatic. The two men fired almost at the same instant, the German’s bullet tearing through Gill’s blouse not six inches from his heart, but without even scratching the skin. Gill’s shot was better placed. Without another glance at the dead Hun the mountaineer remarked to himself.

“They’re onto me here. Reckon I’ve got t’ move again.” He crept back into the bushes once more and made another detour, coming out at the edge of the thicket farther away from the field piece, but an increase of distance did not worry him much regarding his certain marksmanship.

Again he took up his vigil and pinched himself to keep awake, but the need of sleep was even greater than before and he made the same mistake of getting into a comfortable position. A few flies and mosquitoes aided his efforts to maintain wakefulness, but apparently nothing short of a Hun charge upon him could have sufficed.

When he awoke again not one, but five, grinning Huns stood over
and around him. Gill got to his feet and made an instant mental [196]
reservation not to surrender. He would not go into Germany as a prisoner. Finding his weapons taken, he did the only thing he could: rush at the nearest man, get him in the stomach with his shoulders and, upsetting him, fetch another a blow on the jaw that put him down and out. There is no telling what the Yank would have succeeded in doing next had not all light and sense been blotted out. The well directed butt of a gun proved harder than his head.

CHAPTER XXI [197]
Once More the Offensive

WHIZZ! Plunk! Bang!

The men in each of the stone shelters gazed at their comrades not in surprise, not in question, but with returning horror at the bursting of the shell; some shuddering, others putting their hands over their faces. And into the midst of the bunch closest the watch came charging young Judson, his face livid, his eyes staring, his mouth limp and jabbering, as one driven insane. He caught the nearest man by the arm and flinging himself on his knees cowered behind Wilson’s legs.

“Another one,” remarked the corporal, “but this is plain shell-shock. Wait till we get the lieutenant here. Tomlinson, you tell him.”

This tall soldier, always erect, ready, precise, who now stood near the door, was more averse than any of the squad, excepting Jennings, to getting under cover. He barely stooped as he left his shelter and passed along to the other one. At its doorway he gave [198] Herbert the message. Then he turned to go, but fell back limp into the lieutenant’s arms. Other hands stretched to assist; as they laid him on the floor only a glance was necessary to learn his fate.

“Men, another! They’re slowly and surely getting us. At this rate our friends won’t be here soon enough. And Judson out of it, too. There are only six of us left here; if they knew that down yonder they’d have us in ten minutes. Come, you fellows, we’ll call this hut the morgue and bring Jennings in here, too; the other must be the hospital. Hands and knees now and carefully!”

Death was solemn enough, but the horror on poor Judson’s face called from the others words of sympathy for the victim and of detestation of the enemy. It was all in the practice of war, of course, but such heart-touching incidents bring the natural hatred of foemen uppermost. Those of the little squad who now remained were none the less eager to hold out and fight.

Then came another shell, striking and exploding outside of the rocks again and had Wilson possessed nerves as sensitive as those of young Judson there would have been another case of shell-shock, [199] for both men had been previously jarred and shaken. It is generally the continued and persistent menace of these horrible spreaders of death and destruction that drive men into a chronic fear that utterly overmasters their strength of will. As it was, splinters of stone and shell flew through the lookout opening and struck the watcher in the head, painfully, though not seriously wounding him. Back he came, crawling and bleeding, as poor Jennings would have said, “like a stuck pig.” Don bound Wilson’s head; then the leader said:

“Men, there is really no alternative for us. We cannot wait longer here. Something has happened to Gill, or he would stop that gun again. We must get out of here by the hilltop and then Wilson will stick up a white rag. Come on!”

The surviving five—Herbert, Don, the corporal, Kelly and Farnham—shook hands with Wilson; then creeping farther into the shadows, gained the dense growth above. At the brow of the hill Herbert again addressed his followers:

“We must make a choice here, boys. Are we to lie low, hide, hoping for the drive to reach us; are we to try to get through the [200] German first line positions, as suggested before, or are we to stay on the job and take it out on those gunners? If you will all join me, let us go for the chaps who have played the Old Scratch with us for the last two hours.”

“I’m with you, Lieutenant,” Farnham said.

“Of course we are,” said Kelly.

The corporal smiled and nodded eagerly.

“Then, Lieutenant Richards, we are under your leadership,” Herbert said. “You know how you and Gill went about it. Go to it, old sport!”

And go they did, sneaking through the thickets like boys playing Indian or hunters stalking game, Don leading the way, and they came out at the exact spot that he and Gill had reached, but there was no sign of the mountaineer.

The German field piece was in the same place as before and an artillery squad of seven or eight new men had been working the gun. Having noted the white flag, a bit of poor Tomlinson’s shirt, on a stick they had stopped shooting while Hun officers investigated the inside of the recent stronghold of the Yank squad. But the Hun artillery men were not idle. They had received orders of a more [201] exacting character than the shooting up of a small squad of Americans; now they were to shoot at the American Army and to join in the effort to stem its advance. So each man was engrossed with his duties: the cleaning of the piece, the oiling of mechanisms, the storing of shells for immediate and rapid use when the occasion demanded.

“Now then, men,” said Don, “we’ll select a moment when all of them seem particularly busy and at the word let them have it; then charge. Herb, you take the fellow at the extreme left; I’ll take the next man; Farnham, you take the third in the line; Kelly the fourth. Corporal, that big guy with the specs is yours. And hit ’em, boys; fire at command! Now then, are you ready?”

What followed was a complete surprise to all concerned, Americans and Germans alike. The little bunch of avenging Yanks had planned to spring something, most unexpected, upon their foes and the Huns themselves figured upon doing their duty. Was this for them a fateful spot, or was the gun an unlucky piece, as such things are often said to be? One squad had been nearly wiped out here working the gun and now——

The big shell, fired from a French or an American large caliber [202] gun, may have been aimed with precision from information given by an Allied airplane high in air, or it may have sent its terrible messenger partly at random, hoping that it might land somewhere even near a Hun position. And as Don said afterward, the missile must have had good luck written all over it, for it performed its mission fully.

As the avengers raised their rifles and waited for the deliberate word to aim and fire, their eyes fixed upon those gray-green figures in the open grove, they heard the whine of the great shell and amid the many long streaks of flame, the volcanic-like dust, smoke and flying particles of a great explosion, the entire Hun squad, with the long gun and the boxes of shells exploding also, disappeared. For many minutes the Americans crouched there in silent awe.

“First message from our lines! Good omen!” Herbert declared.

“Effective, anyway, but awful,” Don said.

“Our boys are coming up through the valley!” Farnham exclaimed. “Didn’t you hear that yell down there? It was a Yank cheer, sure!”

They all stood, listening intently and were swiftly convinced. The [203] firing had become very rapid; there were other sounds of battle as though an attack, fast and furious, were being made. The positions of the Hun platoon far down the hill and just below the spruces were being assailed.

“Let’s go meet them!” Herbert shouted; then turned, laughing. “Any of you fellows had dinner recently?”

“Me for chicken, waffles and ice cream, P.D.Q.!”

“Mush and molasses wouldn’t go bad, but I could stand steak!”

“A good old Irish stew for mine, with plenty of gravy!”

“Can’t we make a short cut, Lieutenant?” They could and did; straight down the hill, through the dense thickets, everyone racing, but Don was well in the lead, this sort of thing being familiar work to him. Suddenly he halted, dodged back and much effort was required of him to stop all of the others.

“Herb, there’s a bunch of Huns ahead, with machine guns.”

Herbert peeped. “They’re in a position to do our boys an awful lot of damage. We could get around them, but we won’t. Ready, men; [204] we’re going to take that crowd by surprise. There are nine of them, two depleted squads, but if we surprise them quickly——”

“They are our meat, Lieutenant,” the corporal said and Kelly echoed:

“We’ll eat ’em alive!”

Down on all fours went the five, creeping in single file after Herbert, who, in turn, followed Don. Around a cluster of birches they crept; then into a mass of prickly furze that shielded them well and yet could prove a telltale if much disturbed. This occasioned slow going, but beyond was a clearer space with clumps of high grass as a wide shield. Don caught the advantage, whispered to

Herbert and the commander motioned to the three others to come up, all then having an even start. After a little pause the word was given and a second later the five men were leaping down, straight at the machine gunners and almost behind the Huns, all of whom were gazing expectantly into the valley.

A German officer wheeled about and his hand went to his pistol; someone fired and the fellow dropped. Another grabbed a gun, making a club of it, and a pistol shot put him out of business. The other officer tried to swing the machine gun around, but a rifle butt [205] full in his face jarred the notion out of him. The remaining men, more surprised than if a snow squall had struck them and taken completely off their guard, saw no alternative but to fling their arms upward and shout rather unintelligible German, one word of which was recognized as “*kamerad*.” Ten minutes later, disarmed, but not appearing terribly dejected, the six able-bodied fellows, carrying their injured comrades, were headed down through the woods.

Putting the machine guns out of action caused Herbert a moment’s delay; Don remained by him. One of the prisoners addressed the latter in pure German, of which the boy understood enough to get the general meaning.

“Herb, he says there’s an *Amerikaner*, wounded, back here in the bushes. It may be Gill. Had we better go see?”

“Sure! You and I. Corporal, hold those chaps; if they try to make a break, you men know what to do. Come on, Don!”

Into the hilltop thicket the boys, spreading out, forced their way. Presently Herbert called: “Hello! Anyone in here?” An answering call came from somewhere ahead. The lads came together and advanced again, going fully fifty yards in all from the more open [206] woodland on the slope. A big pine towered ahead and as usual there was a small cleared space here, into which the boys went hurriedly. A khaki-clad figure lay on the ground, hands and feet tied with twine. Herbert and Don ran toward it.

“Hands oop, *Amerikaner*” came a terse command from the bushes and with that four Huns, with rifles ready, leaped out confronting them.

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[207]

CHAPTER XXII
Presto! Change-o!

WHAT could the lads do but comply with this order? The German soldiers seemed jubilant; they had merely been set to guard a prisoner who, though firmly bound, had proved himself somewhat of the wildcat species. Now, in pure good luck they were to add two more prisoners and thus gain some recognition from their commander; perhaps added rations.

The biggest Hun handled his automatic with evident evil intention; he thrust it almost into Don’s face and called on his comrades to disarm and to bind the captured Yanks, which was speedily done. Then he flung them both upon the ground and Don fell across the legs of the first prisoner, who lifted his head to stare from bloodshot eyes. The boy gazed into the much bruised face of Gill.

“Sho! Got you, too, eh? And the lieutenant! Reckon we’re in for Berlin now, sure enough. And there ain’t no way to make a break. I tried it; fit three of ’em over ’bout ten acres, I reckon, an’ hurt ’em [208] some, too, I’m bettin’, but they got me, final. Wish I had somethin’ to eat.”

“I’d go without grub for a week longer to be out of here!” Don exclaimed.

“This is tough luck,” Herbert agreed. “But we seem to be in for it. If we could only get a yell out that would reach the other fellows; maybe they’d understand.”

“Let’s try it, Herb! All together, Gill; now then——”

And the yell of “Help!” twice repeated that rent the air was almost enough to wake the dead. The big Hun leaped forward and swung the butt of his gun at Herbert’s head, but the lad leaned back quickly and avoided it; then the fellow tried to kick the agile lieutenant in the face, but again without avail. Two of the other men went over to Don and Gill and threatened to shoot them. Don understood that much. He urged that it would be better not to risk too much by shouting more. But Gill was of a different opinion and obdurate; he would not then have taken orders from the President of the United States and he yelled again, as only a full-lunged mountaineer can yell. The flow of hasty and guttural German that resulted did not equal in ferocity the heavy-booted kicks that the [209] American received from all four of the captors, taking turns that seemed to greatly satisfy them. They turned away and immediately Gill yelled, even louder than before. The biggest Hun caught up his rifle and put the muzzle against Gill’s head and the torrent of German that followed was like ten pigs in a pen clamoring for swill. The weapon was held in this position for some time; then was withdrawn with apparent reluctance and the very moment that the barrel was pointed elsewhere Gill set up another yell.

Don undertook, then, a means of saving Gill from further torment. He rolled over in front of the mountaineer and with a grin and a shake of the head looked up at the Germans. The boy’s face was at once so kindly and youthful that even the big brute of a man hesitated while Don admonished Gill:

“They will surely kill you if you keep it up. Why persist? For our sakes, Gill, please don’t yell again!”

“I’d rather they would butcher me than keep me this-a-way and carry me off to have that old Kaiser feller rub it in on me!” Gill declared.

“Maybe there’ll be a way out of this, Gill,” Herbert suggested. [210] “Don’t yell again and let’s wait a bit.” Whereupon the mountaineer subsided and lay back upon the ground. Don bethought him to try a little German on their captors, but it fell flat. Either they did not understand him at all, or they affected not to; he got no reply. He addressed his countrymen:

“If we could manage in some way to get them to loosen up on this twine, I’d feel almost like whistling a tune. These strings cut and there are some plagued mosquitoes around here.”

“They’re here, too. I’m going to bite the legs off one presently,” Herbert affirmed. “Don’t you think it’s queer if our fellows out there didn’t hear us and Gill?”

“Mighty funny if—— Lie low! I hear someone coming.”

“In the brush yonder. A lot of them. More Huns, I suppose. They’ve stopped now. The Germans seem to hold this hill and we must have been right in the thick of them, Don. They’ll get our fellows, too, and turn our prisoners loose if they don’t keep a sharp eye.”

“They’re coming on again, Herb. Our jailers are taking notice, [211] too. Friend or foe, I wonder.”

“We’re going to find out mighty sudden. Look alive, Gill! There may be something doing in about half a minute. Our dear friends here are getting on to them.”

One of the smaller Huns had climbed on the big fellow’s shoulders in order to see over the bushes; suddenly he slid to the ground and all four crouched, one of them gazing anxiously at the Americans, especially at Gill. Nearer came the noise of advancing men, forcing their way slowly through the thicket. Then the sound veered off to the right and was surely passing.

“Huh! Them’s Yanks,” Gill observed quite calmly. “I can tell by the way they hit the ground with their feet. Heinies walk like a ol’ raccoon full o’ huckleberries. Them fellers’s goin’ past, eh? Not if I got any holler left!”

And yell he did, once again, with no uncertain voice; upon which the four Huns leaped to their feet, picked up the guns of the Americans also and ran past the prisoners, giving Gill another savage kick or two as they went.

“I’ll get you fer them kicks an’ things, if I got to hunt you from here to Hail Columbia!” the mountaineer shouted after them. And [212] then, bursting through the bushes into the clearing by the old pine came a most welcome half dozen khaki-clad men.

Hardly stopping to take in the situation, they at once knelt to unbind the late captives, the corporal of the squad, however, making quick use of his very ready tongue:

“Reef the mainsail and throw the jib overboard! Oh, you Whitcomb, alive and kickin’ and ain’t we overjoyed? Won’t the captain cut a caper? Where have you been? And how did you get lost? How long have you been in this fix? And if there ain’t old Gill! Lieutenant, where’s the rest of your bunch?”

“Thanks, thanks for this timely release, Peters, my man! Three of my men are out yonder with a lot of Hun prisoners; the rest are pretty much all dead. This is my friend Lieutenant Richards, Corporal Peters. Say, man, you came just in time.”

Further question, reply and comment were interrupted by Gill:

“Get me free, quick! And I want your gun, buddy!” This to one of the squad. “Make him lend it to me, Corp.—Lieutenant. I got to go after them polecats that beat me up and just quit here. I got to get ’em! They got our guns, too.”

The man’s eagerness was catching; his words thrilled both [213] Herbert and Don, for they had witnessed some of his treatment at the hands of the captors and they felt now instinctively that he would make good. Telling Corporal Peters that he would be entirely responsible, Herbert insisted that Gill be given the weapon. In spite of his bruises and aching bones, the mountaineer, gun in hand, dived into the thicket like a panther, and those in the clearing, uttering hardly a word, stood waiting and listening.

A shot sounded not a hundred yards away. Two more followed in quick succession; then was heard only the more distant shooting in the valley and beyond the ridge, the firing in the continuous battle.

“It’ll be either Gill or some of them. I think it won’t be Gill,” Don said in a whisper. Again they all waited.

“That fellow’s a terror. He’ll come back with a big score, or he won’t come back at all,” Herbert remarked in a very low voice.

“Listen. He’s coming back!” asserted one of the men.

“Someone is coming, sure.” And then, eager to satisfy their wonder, Gill, just beyond, let out a joyous whoop. A moment later he [214] came limping, laboring, grinning, into the open again.

“Got three. Three shots. The big one. Would ’a’ chased him to Berlin. Here’s your gun, Lieutenant, and yours, fellow. I got mine, too.” Then to Don: “The feller that got away took yours, I reckon, buddy.”

“You got more than even for that kicking, then, Gill? asked Don.

“A little. They’re out there and to bury. Say you fellers, have you got anything to eat and drink? My ol’ stomach would be thankful for melted lead and horseshoe nails raw.” Herbert turned to the corporal:

“That about states our case. We’ve had nothing to eat nor drink since I don’t know when. You’ll get a history of our experiences later. We must go now and join the other fellows out yonder. Where is Captain Lowden?”

“Down the hill, now,” Peters replied. “The company is on this slope. But won’t the captain be glad to see you? Calls you his lost sheep; thought you were all dead or behind the enemy’s lines by this time. What I’m thinking you’ll want most to see is the chuck wagon.”

“We want everything that’s coming to us. If you are glad to see [215]
us, how do you think we feel about it? Now, we’ll be getting along. We owe you barrels of gratitude, Corporal—all of you. Come on, Don and Gill!”

Rejoining the men with the docile Hun prisoners, the three quickly told the story of their very short captivity; then all headed for the valley. That Captain Lowden received them warmly is putting it mildly; his joy seemed unbounded. After getting a brief report from Lieutenant Whitcomb he gave immediate orders that the needs of the lost squad be looked after in every way. In this poor Judson, Wilson, the honored dead and the battered, though still defiant Gill were tenderly considered.

Gratified at their reception and eager to recoup at once and to get back into the fight with his platoon, Herbert looked about for Don, wishing to share with him the present happiness.

But Don was missing. He had believed a report from him was hardly needed and so, thinking of Judson and Wilson in the shelter beneath the spruces, he had turned his steps that way. It would be fine for them also to know that the Americans had come.

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[216]

CHAPTER XXIII
The American Broom

VAULTING over the stone breastwork Don ducked beneath branches and reached the doorway of the first shelter, desiring to enter cautiously. Upon the instant he grasped the situation within the small space before him, though its precise explanation did not appear until later.

In a corner poor Judson was crouched, staring, shuddering, jabbering. On the floor Wilson lay sprawled out, as one having fallen heavily; inert, unconscious. Beside the fallen man and facing Judson the short, heavy, khaki-clad figure of another stood, pistol in hand, menacing the crazed soldier.

Don had approached quite silently; above the not very distant noise of firing and the jabbering man he had not been heard. But the man on his feet turned his head, his face aflame with hate. The boy, off his guard for the moment, yet with instant presence of mind, saw that he could not draw his automatic and use it, however skillfully, as quickly as the other, with his pistol, could swing and [217]
fire. But to dodge was quite another matter, and with a leap to one side Don had the wall between himself and the spy.

Even then the boy was not safe. There had been no cement to put together the stones of the shelter walls, the crevices were large enough to see through and for a bullet to pass through in some directions, if aimed with accuracy.

At the first shot from within the shelter, Don felt something strike his hip; another and another shot and he knew the spy was trying to shoot through a hole in the wall before which the boy stood. He had become the target of this would-be assassin, as he had once made the fellow his target from this same spot. Don could not retreat; a shot from the doorway, or from a crack, with the muzzle of the other’s pistol placed in it might easily get him. And Don dared not play the game for fear of hitting Judson.

Chance then favored him a little, even if against him with the creviced wall. Below where he stood a large rock on edge at the base of the wall extended a yard or more upward and from the corner of the doorway. Another shot came from the spy and, uttering an exclamation not unlike a groan, Don dropped to the [218]
ground. This bullet had been better aimed; it had dislodged a bit of stone through the crack and this had hit the lad a blow over his stomach that felt like the kick of a mule. Fair on the solar plexus the blow landed and there is no surer place where one may be hit to score a knock-out.

For an instant almost insensible with pain, then sickened and nearly helpless, his nervous energy at a standstill, but his mind struggling, groping, demanding swift self-consciousness and muscular action, the boy got upon his hands and knees.

Within the spy must have known that Don was hit; perhaps wounded or killed. A gasp of pain, then a sound as of falling and a struggle probably convinced him that his last shot had won the fight. But he must be sure.

The big rock prevented the fellow’s seeing what had happened to Don; therefore he crept stealthily forward to the wall, sought a crevice and tried to peep through it. All he could see at the downward angle was a figure apparently lying there. Inert? It did not move as the spy gazed. There could be little doubt of the outcome now.

It was compatible with the German’s usual methods to shoot all three of these Americans through the head before he made for over the hill to rejoin his friends. The wounded man inside had opposed [219]
his entrance and had been flung unconscious upon the floor; the shell-shocked youth might be better dead, but first he would make sure of the fellow outside—the spy-catcher. Faugh! One shot around the corner of the doorway, the pistol held low, would complete the business.

“I must think; I must get on my feet; I must fight him, fight him!” These thoughts crowded into Don’s still befuddled brain; he wanted to sink down and rest, to ease the torture in his body, but violent death was hovering near again. He could not give up; he must fight.

His eyes were open; his hand still clutched the pistol; he was still kneeling. And then, as he half sank down again, an object round, tubular, shining, came slowly from the doorway, past the end of the big stone. For a moment Don gazed at it with a sort of dumb fascination; then his senses, with another struggle for mastery, became a little more acute.

The other’s weapon was thrust farther forward; the fingers of the hand that grasped it appeared. Lifting his own gun and at the distance of hardly a yard, the boy, with a mighty effort at steadiness, fired point blank at the weapon and the hand. The thing [220]
that had been his target seemed to dissolve; the struck pistol went bounding along on the stones; the hand was withdrawn. A cry from the shell-shocked man was the only sound then heard within.

The result of his shot proved a partial tonic to Donald. He got to his feet, his mind still a little cloudy, and staggering forward, entered the shelter. His antagonist, with another weapon, might have killed him then, for the boy was still far from alert. But the spy stood with his back against the stone wall, a hand thereon to steady himself, and the other hand, a mass of torn flesh, hanging and dripping big red splotches on the floor.

“I guess,” said the boy, thickly, “I’ll just finish you now. I know who you are. I’ll just——” and then the sunlight seemed to be blotted out and without a further effort Don dropped.

For one moment the spy gazed at him; then he leaped toward the automatic lying on the floor. His good left hand was about to clutch it; he would yet wreak vengeance and get away.

“Drop that and stick up your paws! Hello, Don! What’s this? Have you killed him? Then, I’ll kill——”

“I Guess,” Said the Boy Thickly, “I’ll Just Finish You Now”

“No, no! He’s all right. He shot me here in the hand—you can see [221]
for yourself. I—he mistook me for a German. I came in here to help these——”

Herbert motioned the fellow to silence. “You’ll tell that at Headquarters. Stand where you are! My men will be here in a minute and attend to you. I think, too, we’ll have enough on you.”

Hours later, toward sundown, Lieutenants Whitcomb and Richards walked from the army kitchen to the captain’s tent, but paused without for a chat. Whitcomb, now first officer of the company under Captain Lowden, was talking:

“I know just how it felt, Don; been hit there boxing. Hurts for a little while; you did mighty well to keep up under it as you did. Well, news for you: The captain wants another lieutenant and with your commission you fit in without more red tape. So he sent a messenger to Colonel Walton asking for your transfer, and now that you’ve landed that spy, they’ve granted it. So tomorrow, old scout, we go on again together.”

“Nothing could tickle me more, Herb! I guess I know enough of this military business now to carry on.”

[222]

CHAPTER XXIV
Fast Work

IT is the unexpected that often happens, in battle as well as in everyday life.

Captain Lowden had given orders to his men to cease advancing a little before darkness set in and to hold the ground they had gained against counter-assaults, a plan carried out by the 77th Division wherever the fighting was so severe as to show that the Germans equaled or exceeded the Americans in numbers and were most bitterly contesting the ground.

About twenty men of a depleted platoon were now with the Captain and operating directly under him. With the setting of the sun they began to prepare a hasty camp, putting up a few small tents, all used for the temporary relief of the wounded. A messenger had been sent after stretcher bearers and several men had been detailed to roughly clear an old roadway that led out to the nearest approach for ambulances.

But although there was much hustle and bustle about the camp, [223] it really bore a remarkable contrast to the daytime scenes of men in action and of those supporting and aiding them in every way. In a little while the activities quieted down and the men began to seek places of rest, a few pickets being sent forward, as usual, and others detailed to remain on guard against an attack of the enemy. Captain Lowden went back to the hospital tents.

Needing sleep more than anything else, Lieutenants Whitcomb and Richards selected ponchos and rolled up on beds of leaves, dropping off instantly into perfect oblivion. Don meant to ask something about Gill, who had suddenly acted as though ill and had been sent to the rear, but the question died before the boy could frame the words. He would not have got a reply had he spoken.

The hours dragged on for those awake. Private Neeley had been hit in the hand; so slight a wound that he did not report it. But now it commenced to hurt and gaining his corporal’s consent he went to the rear to have the wound dressed. That done, he returned, coming alone through the short stretch of woods between the camp and the *abri*. It was not very dark and now and then distant flares [224] brightened the surroundings a little, even slightly penetrating the forest.

Neeley paused to rub his paining wrist; he looked off among the trees quite absent-mindedly, and an object that ordinarily he would have taken for a stump seemed to move slightly. The soldier gazed at it curiously; the thing moved again.

The Yank was without his gun; he had placed it against a tree, calling the corporal’s attention to it. Neeley had his automatic, but while no coward, he was cautious; it would hardly do, with only a pistol, to challenge a possible enemy scout. Better pretend not to have noticed the object and then to watch it.

Therefore, Neeley calmly walked on slowly and when he knew he was out of sight of the thing, if it were human, he silently doubled back and crouching within the gloom of a big spruce, kept his eyes sharply directed toward the spot where the moving object had been.

Was it possible, he wondered, for a Hun to sneak so far through the American lines and would one dare to do it? The Yank’s query was answered very soon. There was not one, but fully thirty men slowly advancing, still for half a minute, then moving forward for a [225] few seconds, all together as in drilling. They were strung out like sheep, though far apart, and they came along this unoccupied stretch of woodland from the densely grown hilltop above the late fortified position of the lost squad. That great thicketed patch was surely Hun territory, up to the present time, at least.

If these were Yanks, they would not come among their friends in this manner, but the enemy would do just so. Surely an error had been made in not picketing the slope below the rocks. And now the little bunch of Yanks separated from the rest of the company, would soon face, in a night assault made upon them, superior numbers, with the advantage of surprise.

With all the speed possible, not to apprize the foe, Neeley got out of his place of close observation and, once beyond sight of the Huns, made rapid progress to the camp. The fellow fairly flung himself upon Herbert and shook him like mad, bringing the lad to a sitting posture; then instantly to his feet and awake. Neeley knew it was necessary to spread the alarm silently, lest the Huns should be impelled to attack at once; the Yanks, in turn, must quickly be ready to give the enemy a surprise.

Lieutenant Whitcomb shook the cobwebs out of his brain; he [226]
caught Don Richards by the collar and yanked that officer to his feet, dodging his sleepy blow, and sent Neeley to apprize the guard and pickets, that they might all, observing caution, waken their sleeping comrades. With whispered commands Herbert brought the platoon silently to attention and made his hasty plan known. From a few spare garments a figure not unlike a scarecrow was erected and a few yards away a bull’s-eye lantern was left burning. Then, dividing the men into two groups of ten each, one with Don and the other with Herbert, they sneaked off into the woods in opposite directions and a little toward the rear, each man following the example of the leader by crouching or hiding behind a tree. The signal for action, a combined rush from two directions, was to be the whistle of a bird, as though some belated songster was disturbed on its roost. Each man tied a handkerchief, or white rag, to his cap band to avoid being shot by friend instead of foe.

But the Yanks had long to wait and just exactly what they were waiting for they did not know. There was no sound of a definite
character in the forest near by; it was not possible to see for more [227]
than a few yards. At any moment, back near the camp, they expected to hear the sound of rushing feet and the Hun order of “Hands oop, Amerikaner!” It never came.

After nearly half an hour, almost convinced that some mistake had been made, Don took it into his head to do some scouting. If there were a false alarm, a needless scare, he would endeavor to find it out.

Asking Sergeant Fetters to take command, the boy went off toward the stretch of more open woods at the base of the hill and just below the rock basin and spruces, the scene of so many recent tragedies and brave acts. The boy knew this spot, even at night; he knew the only way that might be taken without mishap after dark to gain the top. Did he hear some sounds a hundred yards or more away, as of feet stepping on loose stones, a cracking stick, a low command, or was he imagining this?

Don quickly and by a slightly circuitous route gained a position at the bottom of the hill and waited. Even now he half believed he was on a sort of wild goose chase; it was probably all quite absurd.

But what was that? Another breaking stick, a low word spoken [228]
and now quite near. With field glasses one may discern objects much farther away and more clearly at night, and the boy’s handy little lenses came into play. Coming slowly almost toward him, working their way with infinite caution and at a snail’s pace up the hill, were many figures. Were they friends or foes? Did this bear out Neeley’s observations?

Don held his place, with some risk of the advancing men’s discovering him, but he was sufficiently curious. Again the little glasses performed their duty. The first man in the van wore a German officer’s service cap.

The fact was pretty evident that after a painfully tedious, silent march into the very jaws of the American positions, in order to surprise and capture a platoon of sleeping men, of which in some way they had gained knowledge, they had found these fellows had become alarmed and so, patiently, after the German painstaking method, the Huns were retracing their steps.

A quick mental calculation convinced Don that he could get back and bring up the platoon to a position on the hill, ahead of the Germans and, once away from possible observation, he moved like a June hornet.

Single file, as usual on such expeditions and almost on a dog trot, [229]
the Yanks followed Don and Herbert up through the woods where the much interfered with field piece had been destroyed, reached the very spot where Gill had been captured, skirted the thicketed edge once again and then dropped to the ground. And this time the waiting was brief.

“Hands up, Dutch!” ordered Don, as the tall officer came abreast of him, and as the Yanks on either side of the way, with leveled guns leaped to their feet the enemy made no resistance.

Coming to make a capture, they were themselves taken prisoners by the very men they meant to surprise.

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[230]

CHAPTER XXV
Forward

BUGLES called Captain Lowden's company together on the night of the 5th for the purpose of re-forming, a practice pretty regularly followed throughout the army when engaged in continual fighting and advancing, it being desirable to keep tabs on losses, to reorganize and to fill gaps among officers and men.

Four lieutenants in this company so far had been killed or wounded; it was to replace the last one that Don Richards had been pressed into immediate service. Lowden had been hit in the shoulder, disabling his left arm, but after a brief treatment while still on his feet he had kept on with his men, carefully directing the re-furnishing of supplies, the ambulance work, and, where possible, keeping their efforts lined up with and not encroaching upon the work of other units on either side.

Placed in command of a platoon, Don's heart beat fast with the joy of the responsibility and the honor of it. Though a mere boy, he [231] was in every way a manly fellow; older than his age, to use a paradox; much younger than he looked to be. So full of stirring incidents had been his experiences in France, as spy catcher and Red Cross driver during the period of America's participation in the Great War that he might now as well be called a seasoned veteran as anyone thrice his age.

"Now then, gentlemen, our duty lies ahead, as before," Captain Lowden was saying, as the several officers together curled up on the ground for a few hours of sleep, with two-thirds of the men about them already lost in slumber. Their leader continued: "We can plan no particular action, as you know, but just take what comes. The only order now, just received, is to vary the general direction of attack to about three degrees east of north, or as a sailor would box it, north, northeast by north, and not to exceed one-half mile per hour until further orders, unless there is evidence of a larger part of the line's making greater progress. This is done to keep separate units from getting so far ahead as to become cut off from immediate support, as has occurred.

"Whitcomb, you take the right center of the advance; I shall [232] proceed with the left center; Jones and Morley will work off to my left and Richards to the right of Whitcomb. Every little while it will be the duty of each officer to get in touch with his nearest comrades, thus to know where we all are, and after three hours, if possible, despatch a messenger to me with a brief report. I am doing the same with the captains of the other companies and reporting to the colonel, who, in turn, sends back word of agreement or other orders by the returning messenger. In this manner we aim to co-ordinate our efforts.

"Now then, fellows, go to sleep and good luck tomorrow morning! Good-night."

Almost with the first streaks of dawn, when it was hardly light enough to see what one was doing, the men were preparing breakfast, carrying portions to those on watch, and the portable field kitchen was soon emptied of its supplies, though soon to be replenished. Most of the men stuffed a little for lunch and a nibble between times into duffle bag or pockets, often adding a bit also in case of accident.

An hour before sun-up they were roughly formed and advancing, depending upon the scouts ahead to apprize them of the nearest [233] enemy positions and after that finding these as the advance continued.

Herbert and Don had a few minutes together before the advance began.

"Pills says that Judson will come round all right in a few weeks, Don."

"I'm glad of that; I like that fellow. How about Wilson?"

"Oh, he'll be back with us in a few days; he's keen to get another whack at the Heinies."

"And Gill?"

"That's a funny thing," Herbert declared. "He simply didn't know how badly he was hurt; some kind of a nerve shock and yet he kept his wits about him. Clear case of grit, will power, though he had to be invalided home. Didn't want to go, either, but the captain and I made it clear to him that he had done more than his share of reducing the Hun army and that poor Jennings was more then avenged. Say, Don, if an army could be made up of such chaps as Gill it wouldn't take more than ten thousand of them to lick the whole German army."

"He didn't seem to know what fear is and he got positive sport and satisfaction out of killing Huns. Odd, isn't it, considering the really good heart in the fellow, as shown toward his friends? I expect, Herb, there are a good many such as he in this man's army." [234]

"Right, there are. I'm glad Gill didn't get his quietus. He asked for you; then when the ambulance had to go before you came over he insisted that as soon as we get back from Berlin and across the pond again you and I must go see him. I guess we'll have to accept his invitation, Don, and have a coon hunt."

"Let us hope we may do so. It'll be some fun to hear him relate his experiences; to live over what he went through back there on the hill and before. Well, Herb, is it nearly time to start out now?"

"About. I feel good and rested; don't you? And I want to get back into the scrap. We're going right on and make a clean-up, Don."

"We sure are! Got to carry out orders," Don agreed.

First Lieutenant Whitcomb became more positive:

"The main thing now is driving the Huns out of these jungles and we surely are on to that game. By another week we'll have them herded into Grand Pre and then we'll chase them into Sedan and after that we'll cut their supplies off and break up their army. You'll see how it'll turn out, though it means many a hard scrap yet." [235]

We know now how true Herbert's words proved. That program was commonly accepted throughout the Army, from the C. and C. to the sutlers. What befell our two young fighting officers over this bitterly contested ground and from the Argonne drive to the morning when the armistice became effective must be left to a further account of the part the boys from Brighton Academy played in the Great War.

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