"Over the Top"

By An American Soldier Who Went

ARTHUR GUY EMPEY Machine Gunner Serving in France

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"Chats With Fritz."

We were swimming in money, from the receipts of our theatrical venture, and had forgotten all about the war, when an order came through that our brigade would again take over their sector of the line.

The day that these orders were issued, our captain assembled the company and asked for volunteers to go to the Machine Gun school at St. Omar. I volunteered and was accepted.

Sixteen men from our brigade left for the course in machine gunnery. This course lasted two weeks and we rejoined our unit and were assigned to the brigade machine gun company. It almost broke my heart to leave my company mates.

The gun we used was the Vickers, Light .303, water cooled.

I was still a member of the Suicide club, having jumped from the frying pan into the fire. I was assigned to section 1, gun No. 2, and the first time "in" took position in the front-line trench.

During the day our gun would be dismounted on the fire step ready for instant use. We shared a dugout with the Lewis gunners. At "stand to" we would mount our gun on the parapet and go on watch beside it until "stand down" in the morning. Then the gun would be dismounted and again placed In readiness on the fire step.

We did eight days in the front-line trench without anything unusual happening outside of the ordinary trench routine. On the night that we were to "carry out," a bombing raid against the German lines was pulled off. This raiding party consisted of sixty company men, sixteen bombers, and four Lewis machine guns with their crews.

The raid took the Boches by surprise and was a complete success, the party bringing back twenty-one prisoners.

The Germans must have been awfully sore, because they turned loose a barrage of shrapnel, with a few "Minnies" and "whizz bangs" intermixed. The shells were dropping into our front line like hailstones.

To get even, we could have left the prisoners in the fire trench, in charge of the men on guard and let them click Fritz's strafeling but Tommy does not treat prisoners that way.

Five of them were brought into my dugout and turned over to me so that they would be safe from the German

In the candlelight, they looked very much shaken, nerves gone and chalky faces, with the exception of one, a great big fellow. He looked very much at ease. I liked him from the start.

I got out the rum jar and gave each a nip and passed around some fags, the old reliable Woodbines. The other prisoners looked their gratitude, but the big fellow said in English, "Thank you, sir, the rum is excellent and I appreciate it, also your kindness."

He told me his name was Carl Schmidt, of the Sixty-sixth Bavarian Light infantry; that he had lived six years in New York (knew the city better than I did), had been to Coney island and many of our ball games. He was a regular fan. I couldn't make him believe that Hans Wagner wasn't the best ball player in the world.

From New York he had gone to London, where he worked as a waiter in the Hotel Russell. Just before the war he went home to Germany to see his parents, the war came and he was conscripted.

He told me he was very sorry to hear that London was in ruins from the Zeppelia raids. I could not convince him otherwise, for hadn't he seen moving pictures in one of the German cities of St. Paul's cathedral in ruins.

I changed the subject because he was so stubborn in his belief. It was my intention to try and pump him for information as to the methods of the German snipers, who had been causing us trouble in the last few days.

I broached the subject and he shut up like a clam. After a few minutes he very innocently said:

"German snipers get paid rewards

for killing the English.'

I eagerly asked, "What are they?" He answered:

"For killing or wounding an English private, the sniper gets one mark. For killing or wounding an English officer he gets five marks, but if he kills a Red Cap or English general, the sniper gets twenty-one days tied to the wheel of a limber as punishment for his careless-

Then he paused, waiting for me to bite, I suppose.

I bit all right and asked him why the sniper was punished for killing an English general. With a smile he replied:

Well, you see, if all the English generals were killed, there would be no one left to make costly mistakes."

I shut him up, he was getting too fresh for a prisoner. After a while he winked at me and I winked back, then the escort came to take the prisoners to the rear. I shook hands and wished him "The best of luck and a safe journey to Blighty."

I liked that prisoner, he was a fine fellow, had an Iron Cross, too, I ad-

some Tommy would be sending it home to his girl in Blighty as a souvenir.

One dark and rainy night while on guard we were looking over the top from the fire step of our front-line trench, when we heard a noise immediately in front of our barbed wire. The sentry next to me challenged, "Halt, who comes there?" and brought his rifle to the aim. His challenge was answered in German. A captain in the next traverse climbed upon the sandbagged parapet to investigate—a brave but foolhardy deed-"Crack" went a bullet and he tumbled back into the trench with a hole through his stomach and died a few minutes later. A lance corporal in the next platoon was so enraged at the captain's death that he chucked a Mills bomb in the direction lads." A sharp dynamite report, a flare in front of us, and then silence.

We immediately sent up two star shells, and in their light could see two stretcher-bearers went out in front and nearly choking. soon returned, carrying two limp bodies. Down in the dugout, in the flickering light of three candles, we saw that they were two German officers, one a captain and the other an "unteroffizier," a rank one grade higher than a sergeant general, but below the grade of lieutenant.

The captain's face had been almost completely torn away by the bomb's explosion. The unteroffizier was alive, breathing with difficulty. In a few minutes he opened his eyes and blinked in the glare of the candles.

The pair had evidently been drinking heavily, for the alcohol fumes were sickening and completely pervaded the dugout. I turned away in disgust, hating to see a man cross the Great Divide full of booze.

One of our officers could speak German and he questioned the dying man. In a faint voice, interrupted by frequent hiccoughs, the unteroffizier told

his story. There had been a drinking bout among the officers in one of the German dugouts, the main beverage being champagne. With a drunken leer he informed us that champagne was plentiful on their side and that it did not cost them anything either. About seven that night the conversation had turned to the "contemptible" English, and the, captain had made a wager that he would hang his cap on the English barbed wire to show his contempt for the English sentries. The wager was accepted. At eight o'clock the captain and he had crept out into No Man's

Land to carry out this wager. They had gotten about halfway across when the drink took effect and the captain fell asleep. After about two hours of vain attempts the unteroffizier had at last succeeded in waking the captain, reminded him of his bet, and warned him that he would be the laughing stock of the officers' mess if he did not accomplish his object, but the captain was trembling all over and insisted on returning to the German lines. In the darkness they lost their bearings and crawled toward the English trenches. They reached the barbed wire and were suddenly challenged by our sentry. Being too drunk to realize that the challenge was in English, the captain refused to crawl back. Finally the unteroffizier convinced his superior that they were in front of the English wire. Realizing this too late, the captain drew his revolver and with a muttered curse fired blindly toward our trench. His bullet no doubt killed our captain.

Then the bomb came over and there -and a good job too, we thought. The captain dead? Well, his men wouldn't weep at the news.

Without giving us any further information the unteroffiz'er died

We searched the bodies for identification disks but they had left everything behind before starting on their foolhardy errand.

Next afternoon we buried them in our little cemetery apart from the graves of the Tommies. If you ever go into that cemetery you will see two little wooden crosses in the corner of the cemetery set away from the rest.

They read: Captain

German Army Died - 1916 Unknown R. I. P.

Unteroffizier German Army Died — 1916 Unknown R. L. P.

CHAPTER XXI.

About Turn.

The next evening we were relieved by the -th brigade, and once again by the boys when I got back, but it was returned to rest billets. Upon arriving good and plenty. at these billets we were given twentyfour hours in which to clean up. I had just finished getting the mud from my the night after I returned from my uniform when the orderly sergeant in- mear leave. formed me that my name was in orders to leave, and that I was to report to the orderly room in the morning for orders, transportation and rations.

I nearly had a fit, hustled about packing up, filling my pack with souvenirs such as shell heads, dud bombs, nose caps, shrapnel balls, and a Prussian guardsman's helmet. In fact, before I turned in that night, I had everything ready to report at the orderly room at nine the next morning.

I was the envy of the whole section, swanking around, telling of the good time I was going to have, the places I would visit, and the real, old English beer I intended to guzzle. Sort of

vised him to keep it out of sight, or rubbed it Into them, because they all do it, and now that it was my turn, I took pains to get my own back.

At nine I reported to the captain, receiving my travel order and pass. He asked me how much money I wanted to draw. I glibly answered, "Three hundred francs, sir;" he just as glibly handed me one hundred.

Reporting at brigade headquarters, with my pack weighing a ton, I waited. with forty others, for the adjutant to inspect us. After an hour's wait, he came out; must have been sore because he wasn't going with us.

The quartermaster sergeant issued us two days' rations, in a little white canvas ration bag, which we tied to our belts.

Then two motor lorries came along and we piled in, laughing, jeking, and of the noise with the shouted warning in the best of spirits. We even loved to us: "Duck your nappers, my lucky the Germans, we were feeling so happy. Our journey to seven days' bliss in Blighty had commenced.

The ride in the lorry lasted about two hours; by this time we were covdark forms lying on the ground close ered with fine, white dust from the to our wire. A sergeant and four road, but didn't mind, even if we were

At the railroad station at Freported to an officer, who had a white band around his arm, which read "R. T. O." (Royal Transportation Officer). To us this officer was Santa Claus.

The sergeant in charge showed him our orders; he glanced through them and said: "Make yourselves comfortable on the platform and don't leave; the train is liable to be along in five minutes-or five hours."

It came in five hours, a string of eleven match boxes on big, high wheels, drawn by a dinky little engine with the "con." These match boxes were catile cars, on the sides of which was painted the old familiar sign, "Hommes 40, Chevaux 8."

The R. T. O. stuck us all into one car. We didn't care; it was as good as a Pullman to us.

Two days we spent on that train. bumping, stopping, jerking ahead, and sometimes sliding back. At three stations we stopped long enough to make some tea, but were unable to wash, so when we arrived at B-, where we were to embark for Blighty, we were as black as Turcos and, with our unshaven faces, we looked like a lot of tramps. Though tired out, we were happy.

We had packed up, preparatory to detraining, when a R. T. O. held up his hand for us to stop where we were and came over. This is what he said:



Dead Bodles Everywhere.

"Boys, I'm sorry, but orders have just that train, as it is going back. Rations journey to your respective stations. Beastly rotten, I know." Then he left.

A dead silence resulted. Then men the floor of the car; others said nothing, seemed to be stupefied, while some had the tears running down their cheeks. It was a bitter disappointment to all.

How we blinded at the engineer of that train; it was all his fault (so we reasoned); why hadn't he speeded up a little or been on time, then we would which were hanging into our trench. wood was infested with machine guns, have gotten off before the order ar-That return journey was misery to

us; I just can't describe it. When we got back to rest billets, we found that our brigade was in the

trenches (another agreeable surprise) and that an attack was contemplated. Seventeen of the forty-one will never get another chance to go on leave; they were killed in the attack. Just think if that train had been on time,

those seventeen would still be alive I hate to tell you how was kidded

Our machine gun company took over their part of the line at seven o'clock,

At 3:30 the following morning three waves went over and captured the first and second German trenches. The machine gunners went over with the fourth wave to consolidate the captured line or "dig in," as Tommy calls

Crossing No Man's Land without clicking any casualties, we came to the German trench and mounted our guns on the parados of same.

I never saw such a mess in my life -bunches of twisted barbed wire lying about, shell holes everywhere, trench all bashed in, parapets gone, and dead bodies, why, that ditch was full of them, theirs and ours. It was a regu-

lar morgue. Some were mangled horribly from our shell fire, while others were wholly or partly buried in the mud, the result of shell explosions caving in the walls of the trench. One dead German was lying on his back, with a rifle sticking straight up in the air, the bayonet of which was buried to the hilt in his chest. Across his feet lay a dead English soldier with a bullet hole in his forehead. This Tommy must have been killed just as he ran his bayonet through the German.

Rifles and equipment were scattered about, and occasionally a steel helmet could be seen sticking out of the mud.

At one point, just in the entrance to communication trench, was a stretcher. On this stretcher a German was lying with a white bandage around his knee, near to him lay one of the stretcher-bearers, the red cross on his arm covered with mud and his helmet fifled with blood and brains. Close by, sitting up against the wall of the trench, with head resting on his chest, was the other stretcher-bearer. He seemed to be alive, the posture was so natural and easy; but when I got closer I could see a large, jagged hole in his temple. The three must have been killed by the same shell-burst.

The dugouts were all smashed in and knocked about, big square-cut timbers splintered into bits, walls caved in and entrances choked.

Tommy, after taking a trench, learns to his sorrow that the hardest part of the work is to hold it.

In our case this proved to be so. The German artillery and machine guns had us taped (ranged) for fair; it was worth your life to expose your self an instant.

Don't think for a minute that the Germans were the only sufferers; we were clicking casualties so fast that you needed an adding machine to keep track of them.

Did you ever see one of the steam shovels at work on the Panama canal? Well, it would look like a hen scratching alongside of a Tommy "digging in" while under fire. You couldn't see day light through the clouds of dirt from

After losing three out of six men of our crew we managed to set up our machine gun. One of the legs of the tripod was resting on the chest of a half-buried body. When the gun was firing, it gave the impression that the body was breathing. This was caused by the excessive vibration.

Three or four feet down the trench, about three feet from the ground, a foot was protruding from the earth. We knew it was a German by the black leather boot. One of our crew used that foot to hang extra bandoliers of amenunition on. This man always was a handy fellow; made use of little points that the ordinary person would overlook.

The Germans made three counterstacks, which we repulsed, but not without heavy loss on our side. They also suffered severely from our shell and machine-gun fire. The ground was spotted with their dead and dying.

The next day things were somewhat quieter, but not quiet enough to bury the dead.

We lived, ate and slept in that trench with the unburied dead for six days. It was awful to watch their faces become swellen and discolored. Towards the last the stench was fierce.

What got on my nerves the most was light, to be trying to twist around. in both hands, to see if I could feel a cate as quickly as possible the cause movement.

it for a hatrack just before I lay down a standstill. been received cancelling all leave. If for a little nap, as things were quiet, you had been three hours earlier you and I needed a rest pretty badly. that he could play a tune while the would have gotten away. Just stay in When I woke up the foot was gone. gun was actually firing, and demon-He had cut it off with our chain saw strated this fact one day on the target w'll be issued to you for your return out of the spare parts' box, and had range. We were very enthusiastic and plastered the study over with mud.

During the next two or three days, started to curse, threw their rifles on foot dreadfully; seemed as if I had Conductors Have Big Feet." suddenly lost a chum.

I think the worst thing of all was to watch the rats, at night, and sometimes in the day, run over and play about among the dead.

Near our gun, right across the parapet, could be seen the body of a Ger- ran around the base of a hill, on the man lieutenant, the head and arms of top of which was a dense wood. This The man who had cut off the foot used rived? Now it was no Blighty for us. to sit and carry on a one-sided conver- will, and sweep the streets of a little sation with this officer, used to argue and point out why Germany was in the in reserve. wrong. During all of this monologue I never heard him say anything out of which used to get our goats, it had the the way-anything that would have exact range of our "elephant" dugout hurt the officer's feelings had he been entrance, and every morning, about the alive. He was square all right; time rations were being brought up, its wouldn't even take advantage of a bullets would knock up the dust on the dead man in an argument.

To civilians this must seem dreadful, but out here one gets so used to them. awful sights that it makes no impression. In passing a butcher shop you are not shocked by seeing a dead turkey hanging from a hook. Well, in France, a dead body is looked upon from the same angle.

But, nevertheless, when our six days were up, we were tickled to death to Fritz became a worse nuisance than be relieved.

Our machine gun company lost seventeen killed and thirty-one wounded in that little local affair of "straightening the line," while the other companies clicked it worse than we did.

After the attack we went into re serve billets for six days, and on the seventh once again we were in rest billets.

CHAPTER XXII.

Punishments and Machine-Gun Stunts. Soon after my arrival in France; in two machine guns in trees, in a little

fact, from my entistment, I had found that in the British army discipline is very strict. One has to be very careful in order to stay on the narrow path of government virtue.

There are about seven million ways of breaking the king's regulations; to keep one you have to break another.

The worst punishment is death by a. firing squad, or "up against the wall," as Tommy calls it.

This is for desertion, cowardice, mutiny, giving information to the enemy, looting, rape, robbing the dead, forcing a safeguard, striking a superior, etc.

Then comes the punishment of sixtyfour days in the front-line trench without relief. During this time you have to engage in all raids, working parties in No Man's Land, and every hazardous undertaking that comes along. If you live through the sixty-four days you are indeed lucky.

This punishment is awarded where there is a doubt as to the willful guilt of a man who has committed an offence punishable by death.

Then comes the famous field punishment No. 1. Tommy has nicknamed it "crucifixion." It means that man is spread-eagled on a limber wheel, two hours a day for twenty-one days. During this time he only gets water, bully beef and biscuits for his chow. You get "crucified" for repeated minor offenses

Next in order is field punishment No. 2.

This is confinement in the "clink," without blankets, getting water, bully beef and biscuits for rations and doing all the dirty work that can be found. This may be for twenty-four hours or twenty days, according to the gravity of the offense.

Then comes "pack drill" or defaulters' parade. This consists of drilling, mostly at the double, for two hours with full equipment. Tommy hates this, because it is hard work. Sometimes he fills his pack with straw to lighten it, and sometimes he gets caught. If he gets caught, he grouses at everything in general for twentyone days, from the vantage point of a limber wheel.

Next comes "C. B." meaning "confined to barracks." This consists of staying in billets or barracks for twenty-four hours to seven days. You also get an occasional defaulters' parade and dirty jobs around the quarters.

The sergeant major keeps what is known as the crime sheet. When a man commits an offense, he is "crimed," that is, his name, number and offense is entered on the crime sheet. Next day at 9 a. m. he goes to the "orderly room" before the captain. who either punishes him with "C. B." or sends him before the O. C. (officer commanding battalion). The captain

of the company can only award "C. B." Tommy many a time has thanked the king for making that provision in

his regulations. To gain the title of a "smart soldier." Tommy has to keep clear of the crime sheet, and you have to be darned smart

to do it. I have been on it a few times, most ly for "Yankee impudence."

During our stay of two weeks in rest billets our captain put us through course of machine-gun drills, trying out new stunts and theories.

After parades were over, our guns' crews got together and also tried out some theories of their own in reference that foot sticking out of the dirt. It to handling guns. These courses had seemed to me, at night, in the moon- nothing to do with the advancement of the war, consisted mostly of causing Several times this impression was so tricky jams in the gun, and then the strong that I went to it and grasped it rest of the crew would endeavor to loof the stoppage. This amused them I told this to the man who had used for a few days and then things came to

> One of the boys on my gun claimed decided to become musicians.

After constant practice I became before we were relieved, I missed that quite expert in the tune entitled "All

When I had mastered this tune, our two weeks' rest came to an end, and once again we went up the line and took over the sector in front of Gwood.

At this point the German trenches which used to traverse our lines at village, where we were billeted while

There was one gun in particular road; more than one Tommy went West or to Blighty by running into

This gun got our nerves on edge, and Fritz seemed to know it, because he never gave us an hour's rest. Our reputation as machine gunners was at stake; we tried various ruses to locate and put this gun out of action, but each one proved to be a failure, and ever. He was getting fresher and more careless every day, took all kinds of libertles with us-thought he was in-

vincible. Then one of our crew got a brilliant idea and we were all enthusiastic to put it to the test.

Here was his scheme:

When firing my gun, I was to play my tune, and Fritz, no doubt, would fall for it, try to imitate me as au added insult. This gunner and two others would try, by the sound, to locate Fritz and his gun. After having got the location, they would mount

clump of woods to the left of our ceme tery, and while Fritz was in the middle of his lesson, would open up and trust to luck. By our calculations, it would take at least a week to pull off the

If Fritz refused to swallow our balt, it would be impossible to locate his special gun, and that's the one we were after, because they all sound alike, a slow pup-pup-pup.

Our prestige was hanging by a thread. In the battalion we had to endure all kinds of insults and fresh remarks as to our ability in silencing Fritz. Even to the battalion that German gun was a sore spot.

Next day, Fritz opened up as usual. I let him fire away for a while and then butted in with my "pup-pup-puppup-pup-pup." I kept this up quite a while, used two belts of ammunition. Fritz had stopped firing to listen. Then he started in: sure enough, he had fallen for our game, his gun was trying to imitate mine, but, at first he made a horrible mess of that tune. Again I butted in with a fcw bars and stopped. Then he tried to copy what I had played. He was a good sport all right, because his bullets were going away over our heads, must have been firing into the air. I commenced to feel friendly toward him.

This duet went on for five days. Fritz was a good pupil and learned rapidly, in fact, got better than his teacher. I commenced to feel jealous. When he had completely mastered the tune, he started sweeping the road again and we clicked it worse than ever. But he signed his death warrant by doing so, because my friendship turned to hate. Every time he fired he played that tune and we danced.

The boys in the battalion gave us the "Ha! Ha!" They weren't in on our little frameup.

The originator of the ruse and the other two gunners had Fritz's location taped to the minute; they mounted their two guns, and also gave me the range. The next afternoon was set for the grand finale.

Our three guns, with different elevations, had their fire so arranged, that, opening up together, their bullets would suddenly drop on Fritz fike a hallstorm.

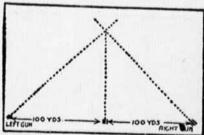
About three the next day, Fritz started "pup-pupping" that tune. I blew a sharp blast on a whistle, it was the signal agreed upon; we turned loose and Fritz's gun suddenly stopped in the middle of a bar. We had cooked his goose, and our ruse had worked. After firing two belts each, to make sure of our job, we hurriedly dismounted our guns and took cover in the dugout. We knew what to expect soon. We didn't have to wait long, three salvos of "whizz-bangs" came over from Fritz's artillery, a further confirmation that we had sent that musical machine-gunmer on his Westward-bound journey.

That gun never bothered us again. We were the heroes of the battalion, our captain congratulated us, said it was a neat piece of work, and, consequently, we were all puffed up over the stunt.

There are several ways Tommy uses to disguise the location of his machine gun and get his range. Some of the most commonly used stunts are as fol-

At night, when he mounts his gun over the top of his trench and wants to get the range of Fritz's trench he adopts the method of what he terms "getting the sparks." This consists of firing bursts from his gun until the bullets hit the German barbed wire. He can tell when they are cutting the wire, because a bullet when it hits a wire throws out a blue electric spark, Machine-gun fire is very damaging to wire and causes many a wiring party to go out at night when it is quiet to

repair the damage. To disguise the flare of his gun at night when firing, Tommy uses what is called a flare protector. This is a stovepipe arrangement which fits over the barrel casing of the gun and screens the sparks from the right and left, but not from the front. So Tommy, always resourceful, adopts this scheme: About three feet or less in front of the gun he



Showing How Fritz Is Fooled.

drives two stakes into the ground, about five feet apart. Across these stakes he stretches a curtain made out of empty sandbags ripped open. He oaks this curtain in water and fires through it. The water prevents it catching fire and effectively screens the flare of the firing gun from the enemy.

Sound is a valuable asset m locating a machine gun, but Tommy surmounts this obstacle by placing two machine guns about one hundred to one hundred and fifty yards apart. The gun on the right to cover with its fire the sector of the left gun and the gun on the left to cover that of the right gun. This makes their fire cross; they

are fired simultaneously. By this method it sounds like one gun firing and gives the Germans the impression that the gun is firing from a point midway between the guns which are actually firing, and they accordingly shell that particular spot. The machine gunners chuckle and say, "Fritz is a brainy boy, not 'alf he

(To be Continued.)