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## "OVER THE TOP" AN AMERICAN SOLDIER WHO WENT ARTHUR GUY EMPEY

MACHINE GUNNER, SERVING IN FRANCE

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ARTHUR GUY EMPEY

"On the afternoon of the fourth day of Fritz' contemptuous use of the road mentioned the captain and I were at our posts as usual. Fritz was strafing us pretty rough, just like he's doing now. The shells were playing leap-frog all through that orchard."

"I was carrying on a conversation in our 'tap' code with Cassell at the other end. It ran something like this:

"Say, Cassell, how would you like to be in the saloon bar of the King's Arms down Rye lane with a bottle of Bass in front of you, and that blonde barmaid waiting to fill 'em up again?"

"Cassell had a fancy for that particular blonde. The answer came back in the shape of volleyes of cusses. I changed the subject."

"After a while our talk veered round to the way the Boches had been exposing themselves on the road down on the chart as Target 17. What he said about those Boches would never have passed the reichstag, though I believe it would have gone through our censor easily enough."

"The bursting shells were making such a din that I packed up talking and took to watching the captain. He was fidgeting around on an old sandbag with the glass to his eye. Occasionally he would let out a grunt, and make some remark I couldn't hear on account of the noise, but I guessed what it was all right. Fritz was getting fresh again on that road."

"Cassell had been sending in the 'tap' code to me, but I was fed up and didn't bother with it. Then he sent O. S., and I was all attention, for this was a call used between us which meant that something important was on. I was all ears in an instant. Then Cassell turned loose."

"I answered, 'Yes, sir,' and started sending this opinion over the wire to Cassell, but the captain interrupted me with:

"Keep those infernal fingers still. What's the matter, getting the nerves? When I'm talking to you, pay attention."

"My heart sank. Supposing he had rumbled that tapping, then all would be up with our plan. I stopped drumming with my fingers and said:

"Beg your pardon, sir, just a habit with me."

"And a d—d silly one, too," he answered, turning to his glasses again, and I knew I was safe. He had not tumbled to the meaning of that tapping."

"All at once, without turning round, he exclaimed:

"Well, of all the nerve I've ever run across, this takes the cake. Those Boches are using that road again. Bind my eyes, this time it is a whole brigade of them, transports and all. What a pretty target for our 4.5's. The beggars know that we won't fire. A d—d shame, I call it. Oh, just for a chance to turn D 238 loose on them."

"I was trembling with excitement. From repeated stolen glances at the captain's range chart, that road with its range was burned into my mind."

"Over the wire I tapped, 'D 238 battery, Target 17, Range 6000, 3 degrees 30 minutes, left, salvo, fire.' Cassell O. K'd my message, and with the receiver pressed against my ear, I waited and listened. In a couple of minutes very faintly over the wire came the voice of our battery commander

issuing the order: 'D 238 battery. Salvo! Fire!'

"Then a roar through the receiver as the four guns belched forth, a screaming and whistling overhead, and the shells were on their way."

"The captain jumped as if he were shot, and let out a great big expressive *dehn*, and eagerly turned his glasses in the direction of the German road. I also strained my eyes watching that target. Four black clouds of dust rose up right in the middle of the German column. Four direct hits—another record for D 238."

"The shells kept on whistling overhead, and I had counted twenty-four of them when the firing suddenly ceased. When the smoke and dust clouds lifted the destruction on that road was awful. Overturned limbers and guns, wagons smashed up, troops fleeing in all directions. The road and roadside were spotted all over with little field gray dots, the toll of a carnage. The captain smiled and left. Wilson whispered to me:

"Blime me, Yank, I see where I click for crucifixion. That captain is the same one that cracked us Goldflakes in his dugout and here I have been 'chucking' my weight about in his hearing."

"Wilson never clicked his crucifixion. Quite a contrast to Wilson was another character in our brigade named Scott; we called him 'Old Scotty' on account of his age. He was fifty-seven, although looking forty. 'Old Scotty' had been born in the Northwest and had served in the Northwest Mounted police. He was a typical cowpuncher and Indian fighter and was a dead shot with the rifle, and took no pains to disguise this fact from us. He used to take care of his rifle as if it were a baby. In his spare moments you could always see him cleaning it or polishing the stock. Woe betide the man who by mistake happened to get hold of this rifle; he soon found out his error. Scott was as deaf as a mule, and it was amusing at parade to watch him in the manual of arms, slyly glancing out of the corner of his eye at the man next to him to see what the order was. How he passed the doctor was a mystery to us; he must have bluffed his way through, because he certainly was independent. Beside him the Fourth of July looked like Good Friday. He wore at the time a large sombrero, had a Mexican stock saddle over his shoulder, a lariat on his arm, and a 'forty-five' hanging from his hip. Dumping this paraphernalia on the floor he went up to the recruiting officer and shouted: 'I'm from America, west of the Rockies, and want to join your d—d army. I've got no use for a German and can shoot some. At Scotland Yard they turned me down; said I was deaf and so I am. I don't hanker to ship in with a d—d mud-crunching outfit, but the cavalry's full, so I guess this regiment's better than none, so trot out your papers and I'll sign 'em.' He told them he was forty and slipped by. I was on recruiting service at the time he applied for enlistment."

"In an undertone to me, 'Keep a brass front, Wilson, and for God's sake, stick.' I answered with, 'Rely on me, mate,' but I was trembling all over. 'Of course nothing went through,' he replied. Then his face fell, and he muttered out loud: 'But, by Jove, wait till Old Pepper gets wind of this. There'll be fury over his face and he exclaimed: 'But who in h—l gave me the order to fire. Range and everything correct, too. I know I didn't. Wilson, did I give you any order for the battery to open up? Of course I didn't, did I?' I answered very emphatically, 'No, sir, you gave no command. Nothing went through this post. I am absolutely certain on that point, sir.'

"General's compliments to Captain A—. He directs that officer and signaller report at the double to brigade headquarters as soon as relieved. Relief now on the way.'

"In an undertone to me, 'Keep a brass front, Wilson, and for God's sake, stick.' I answered with, 'Rely on me, mate,' but I was trembling all over.

"I gave the general's message to the captain, and started packing up.

"The relief arrived, and as we left the post the captain said:

"Now for the fireworks, and I know they'll be good and plenty. They were.

"When we arrived at the gun pits the battery commander, the sergeant major and Cassell were waiting for us. We fell in line and the funeral march to brigade headquarters started.

"Arriving at headquarters the battery commander was the first to be interviewed. This was behind closed doors. From the roaring and explosions of Old Pepper it sounded as if raw meat was being thrown to the lions. Cassell, later, described it as sounding like a bombing raid. In about two minutes the officer reappeared. The sweat was pouring from his forehead, and his face was the color of a beet. He was speechless. As he passed the captain he jerked his thumb in the direction of the lion's den and went out. Then the captain went in, and the lions were once again fed. The captain stayed about twenty minutes and came out. I couldn't see his face, but the droop in his shoulders was enough. He looked like a wet hen.

"The door of the general's room opened and Old Pepper stood in the doorway. With a roar he shouted:

"Which one of you is Cassell? D—n me, get your heels together when I speak! Come in here!"

"Cassell started to say, 'Yes sir.'

"But Old Pepper roared, 'Shut up!'

"Cassell came out in five minutes. He said nothing, but as he passed me he put his tongue into his cheek and winked, then, turning to the closed door, he stuck his thumb to his nose and left.

"Then the sergeant major's turn came. He didn't come out our way. Judging by the roaring, Old Pepper must have eaten him.

"When the door opened and the general beckoned to me, my knees started to play 'Home, Sweet Home' against each other.

"My interview was very short.

"Old Pepper glared at me when I entered, and then let loose.

"Of course you don't know anything about it. You're just like the rest. Ought to have a nursing bottle around your neck and a nipple in your teeth. Soldiers—by gad, you turn my stomach to look at you. Win this war, when England sends out such samples as I have in my brigade! Not likely!

"Now, sir, tell me what you don't know about this affair. Speak up, out with it. Don't be gaping at me like a fish. Spit it out."

"I stammered, 'Sir, I know absolutely nothing.'

"That's easy to see," he roared; "that stupid face tells me that. Shut up. Get out; but I think you are a d—d liar just the same. Back to your battery."

"I saluted and made my exit.

"That night the captain sent for us. With fear and trembling we went to his dugout. He was alone. After saluting we stood at attention in front of him and waited. His say was short.

"Don't you ever get it into your heads that Morse is a dead language. I've known it for years. The two of you had better get rid of that nervous

habit of tapping transmitters; it's dangerous. That's all."

"We saluted, and were just going out the door of the dugout when the captain called up back and said:

"Smoke Goldflakes? Yes? Well, there are two tins of them on my table. Go back to the battery, and keep your tongues between your teeth. Understand?"

"We understood."

"For five weeks afterwards our battery did nothing but extra fatigues. We were satisfied and so were the men. It was worth it to put one over on Old Pepper, to say nothing of the injury caused to Fritz' feelings."

"When Wilson had finished his story I looked up and the dugout was jammed. An artillery captain and two officers had also entered and stayed for the finish. Wilson spat out an enormous quid of tobacco, looked up, saw the captain, and got as red as a carnation. The captain smiled and left. Wilson whispered to me:

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"Don't you ever get it into your heads that Morse is a dead language. I've known it for years. The two of you had better get rid of that nervous

rifles in the darkness, but the bullets were going over our heads.

"We lost three men killed and one wounded in the arm. If it hadn't been for our officer's quick thinking the whole patrol would have probably been wiped out."

"After about twenty minutes' wait we went out again and discovered that the Germans had a wiring party working on their barbed wire. We returned to our trenches unobserved with the information and our machine guns immediately got busy.

"The next night four men were sent out to go over and examine the German barbed wire and see if they had

been got busy.

"At this time the Imperial German government's naval staff had planned its first great thrust at America—the sinking of the Lusitania. Wireless messages in secret code are being sent to Nauen, Germany, from the basement of a fashionable home in the most exclusive residential section of New York and through other mediums.

"The Imperial German Ambassador and his aides are busy in Washington, while Heinrich von Lertz and his lieutenants are active in New York, concocting perjury evidence that the Lusitania carried guns as an excuse for her destruction.

"Dr. Albert, in Washington, suggests

that the United States may resent the

sinking of the great liner. Von Bernstorff smiles and replies that the

United States cannot fight, for it has

no army. Boy-Ed, his face wreathed

in his sardonic smile, replies 'I have

attended to that contingency, you know.'

"The conspirators discuss their final

plans for insuring the sinking of the

Lusitania and Boy-Ed says they can