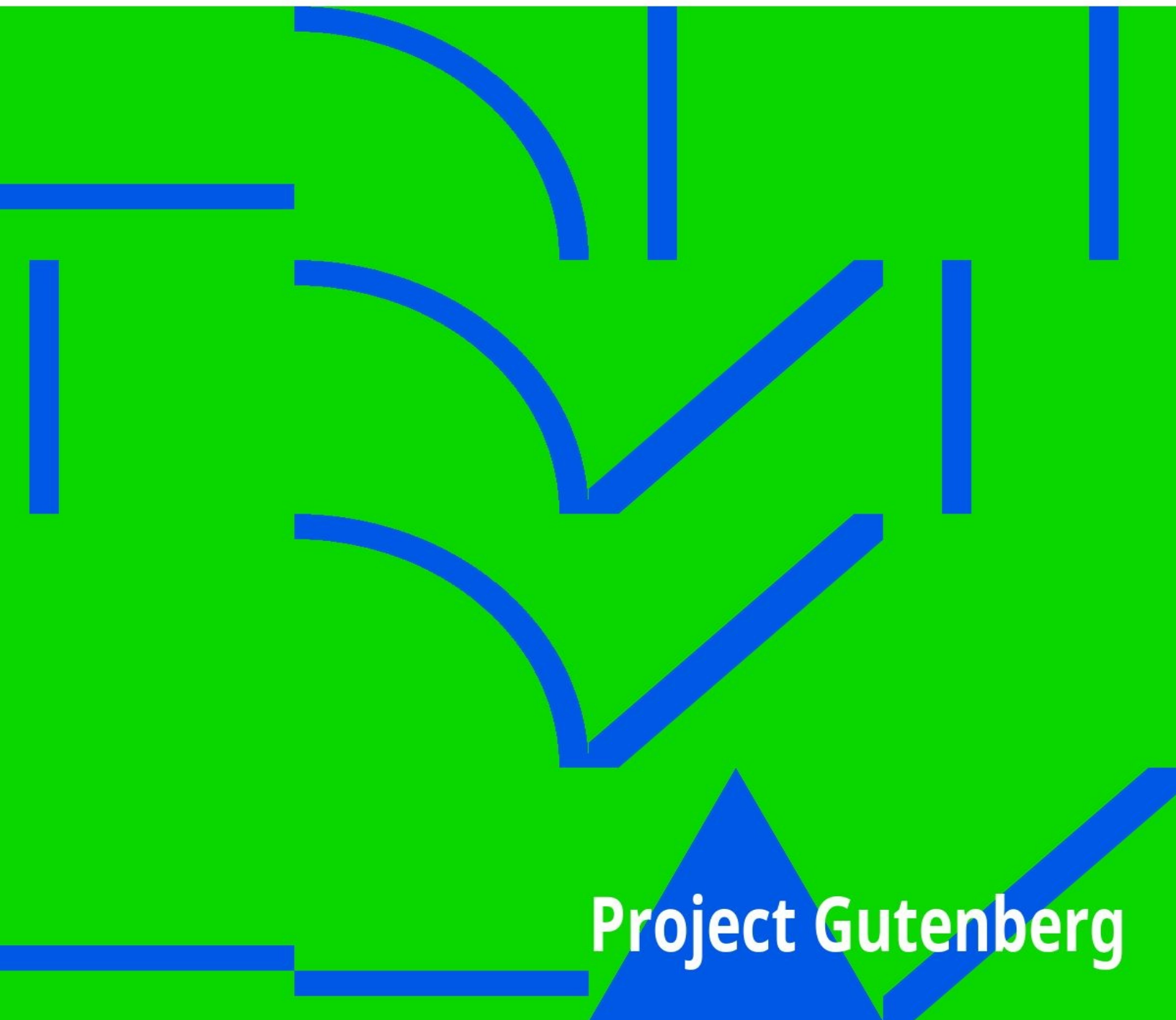


Fighting in France

Ross Kay

An abstract geometric pattern consisting of various blue lines and shapes on a green background. The pattern includes several concentric arcs, straight lines of varying lengths and orientations, and a large blue triangle at the bottom right. The lines are thick and vibrant blue, creating a modern, geometric aesthetic.

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"Forward!" shouted the captain in a loud, clear voice.
"Forward!" shouted the captain in a loud, clear voice.

THE BIG WAR SERIES

FIGHTING IN FRANCE

BY

ROSS KAY

**Author of "The Search for the Spy," "With Joffre
on the Battle Line," "The Go Ahead Boys and the
Treasure Cave," "The Go Ahead Boys on
Smuggler's Island," "The Go Ahead
Boys in the Island Camp,"
etc., etc.**

***ILLUSTRATED BY
CHARLES L. WRENN***

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Fighting in France

PREFACE

When the greatest war in the history of mankind rages in Europe it is not only natural but right that every one should be interested. History is being made every day and heroism is displayed, unrivalled in any previous conflict. In this book the author has striven to chronicle some of the valorous deeds and to relate some of the incidents and events that are part of the everyday life of the soldier who is fighting in France. It has been his aim to present the story devoid of sensationalism and to weave nothing of the impossible into the tale. Most of the episodes are founded on fact and while the book is not historical it has its inspiration from actual happenings.

Ross Kay.

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"Forward!" shouted the captain in a loud, clear voice *Frontispiece*

Leon whirled swiftly in time to see a big-helmeted German with the butt end of his rifle upraised preparing to strike

The air was filled with smoke and dust from the crumbling plaster

"Let 'em have it!" cried Leon and the three automatic guns spoke almost as if they were one piece

FIGHTING IN FRANCE

CHAPTER I

A DUEL IN THE AIR

"Well, Leon, it looks as if there was going to be a fight around here pretty soon."

"Right you are, Earl. That suits me all right though and from the way the rest of the men are acting it seems to suit them too."

Earl and Leon Platt, two American boys in the army of the French Republic, were seated outside their quarters behind the fighting line. The scene was in Champagne, one of the provinces of France that already had witnessed some of the heaviest fighting of the Big War.

At the outbreak of the great European struggle these twin brothers had been traveling in Europe. Earl was in England with friends and Leon was visiting his aunt and uncle in a suburb just outside of Paris. At the earliest possible moment Leon had enlisted in the French army. Assigned to the aviation corps he had taken part in the great retreat from Belgium to the gates of the French capital. Slightly wounded at Charleroi, he had been in one of the hospitals for a few days.

When his wound had healed he had made his way south, arriving in time to take part in the battle of the Marne which rolled back the tide of German invasion and saved France. Through all these varying experiences and hardships Jacques Dineau, a young Frenchman, had been his inseparable companion. These two boys, for they were nothing more than that, had more than once distinguished themselves for bravery and daring until they had become the favorites of their regiment. Now they were stationed in Champagne, in the trenches, where for weeks and months both sides had been deadlocked, neither able to push the other back.

With the declaration of war Leon's parents had naturally been anxious as to his safety and not hearing from him had instructed Earl to find his missing brother at all hazards. This Earl had endeavored to do and after many kinds of adventures had finally been successful. The lure of further adventure however had attracted him and he too had enlisted. Now all three boys were in the same company of the same regiment.

"Yes, sir," exclaimed Jacques, who spoke English with only the slightest suspicion of an accent, "there will certainly be some real fighting soon. It will seem good after all these months of quiet."

"I shouldn't describe them as especially quiet," laughed Earl grimly.

"I mean," explained Jacques, "that we have been in the trenches all the time. Now we will have a chance to get out of them; perhaps for good."

"If we can break the German lines," suggested Leon.

"We will give them an awful bump anyway," laughed Jacques.

"And we'll lose half our men," added Leon soberly.

"We do not think of that," exclaimed Jacques proudly. "We are assigned to the front line, the post of honor. We will lead the charge and I think we are very lucky."

"The other regiments are jealous of us anyway," said Earl. "When does the attack start?"

"To-morrow morning at nine-fifteen sharp."

"And we'll move into the first line trenches tonight I suppose."

"Exactly."

"That's it," exclaimed Leon. "Pierre Garemont told me not thirty minutes ago that he had just been talking with Captain Le Blanc and that was the information he received."

"I suppose everything is arranged," said Earl.

"You may be sure of that," said Jacques heartily. "Our officers are not the kind to send us into a battle without doing everything that is possible."

"Think of the artillery support we'll have," cried Leon enthusiastically. "I don't see how they can stop us."

"How much will we have?" demanded Earl.

"Our guns will drop four shells every minute in every yard of German trenches. Think of that."

"You mean," exclaimed Earl, "that in every space three feet long a shell will explode every fifteen seconds?"

"I certainly do."

"It seems incredible," muttered Earl. "Why, there'll be nothing left of them."

"That is just what we want," cried Jacques. "When we smash their trenches to pieces then we can drive them out of our country and France will be free once more."

"I suppose our batteries will all have the exact range," said Earl.

"You need not worry about that," smiled Jacques. "The exact location of every German trench is marked to the inch on our officers' maps. What do you think our aviators are for? Don't you know that they take pictures of the enemy's fortifications from their machines and that all the pictures are developed and enlarged? Oh, they'll have the range all right. You'll see."

"Look!" cried Leon suddenly. "Here comes one of our aerial scouts now."

Far away in the eastern sky a tiny speck appeared. It approached rapidly and increased in size as it came nearer. At least four thousand feet above the trenches the great mechanical bird flew and the three young soldiers watched it in silent admiration.

Suddenly a puff of white smoke appeared below the aeroplane.

"The Germans are firing at it," cried Earl.

"And there goes one of their machines up after it," exclaimed Jacques as another speck appeared against the horizon. It was lower than the French machine but rose in great circles with amazing speed until it had reached a point above its enemy. At this point it headed west and sped in pursuit of the French aeroplane.

"One of those new *fokkers*," remarked Jacques quickly.

"The German machine, you mean?" queried Leon.

"Yes. They are very fast too."

"He'll never come over our line though," said Earl. "He'll turn back soon."

"There goes another of our machines up to help," exclaimed Leon.

From the aviation field in the rear of their quarters came a great clatter and noise. A moment later a big monoplane came into view and rising rapidly higher and higher set out to the aid of its companion.

Meanwhile the first aviator, pursued by the German *fokker*, had evidently determined to give battle. He dipped suddenly and shot downward at incredible speed. All about him the bombs from the high-angle guns of the enemy were exploding and it did not seem possible that he could escape. The cheering of their comrades in the trenches came faintly to the ears of the three watching boys.

"He'll be hit," cried Leon tensely.

"Wait," cautioned Jacques.

The aeroplane still raced towards the earth. Suddenly it began to rise and up, up, it soared. Higher and higher it went, describing huge circles in its flight. The little white clouds all about told with what zeal its destruction was sought, but still it kept on. Now it had reached a level as high as the giant *fokker*. Meanwhile the other French machine raced to its aid.

"You'll see the German turn back now," predicted Jacques.

"Why shouldn't he?" demanded Earl. "It's two to one."

"His only hope is to disable the first machine before the other comes up," said Jacques. "Otherwise he'll have to run for it."

"How high do you suppose they are now?" asked Earl.

"Five thousand feet," said Leon. "Is that about right, Jacques?"

"I should think so; just about," replied the young Frenchman.

Almost every soldier in the great camp was standing, gazing skyward at the combat going on among the clouds over their heads. These duels in the air were not infrequent but they never lost their power to thrill. To see two huge mechanical birds each maneuvering for a chance to strike a death blow to its rival was a sight to stir the blood of any man, no matter how often he had seen its duplicate before.

"What did I tell you?" demanded Jacques suddenly.

The *fokker* turned at the approach of its second enemy and in full retreat made for the German lines. The two French machines did not attempt a pursuit, but after one or two triumphant circles were headed for home. A few moments later they passed directly over the spot where the three young soldiers were seated, on their way to their respective hangars.

"Why didn't they chase that fellow?" exclaimed Leon. "They were two to one and it seems to me they had a great chance to bring him down."

"You must remember this," Jacques reminded him. "He had a good start on them and, if anything, had a faster machine than theirs. Then that scout of ours may have very important news for headquarters as a result of his observations. He probably wants to report as soon as he can."

"That's true," said Leon. "I had almost forgotten this attack to-morrow I got so excited watching the aeroplanes."

"You started to tell what Captain Le Blanc said," Earl reminded his brother. "Go ahead and finish what you heard."

"Well," said Leon, "he said that everything was ready. He even knew the number of German batteries that will be opposed to us; he also knew just what

regiments hold the line opposite. He said that along the whole length of our front line steps had been cut in the trenches so that we can climb out easily. The barbed-wire entanglements have had little lanes cut through them every few feet so we can get through without any trouble."

"Whew," whistled Earl. "It looks as if we meant business all right."

"We surely do," agreed Leon. "We're to carry along bridging to form pathways across the German trenches so we can bring up our guns and supplies quickly. All shoes and extra clothes and blankets are to be turned into the quartermaster; every man is to put on clean underclothes so that if he is wounded he won't be infected. You're to have your gas-masks ready and every one will receive one hundred and thirty extra rounds, making two hundred and fifty in all."

"When do we move into the trenches?" asked Jacques.

"Ten o'clock to-night."

"And final inspection is when?"

"One hour before that."

"We'd better get ready," exclaimed Jacques. "It's almost supper-time now and we've got lots to do."

Every man who passed their tent seemed, to be unusually business-like. No one seemed nervous or worried, but perhaps a little more serious than usual. But there was not a man among all those thousands who was not glad that on the morrow he was to come up out of his hole in the ground and meet his enemy face to face. An air of quiet confidence pervaded the camp; the air was full of it and one glance at these grim-visaged warriors of France was enough to convince any observer that they were eager for the battle to come.

CHAPTER II

PREPARATIONS

At nine o'clock that evening all arrangements had been completed and the final inspection held. The last letters were deposited at the regimental post-office, a most solemn ceremony. Many a long thought passed through the minds of the soldiers as they mailed what might be their final messages to their loved ones.

"I don't like this business of hanging around," whispered Jacques in Leon's ear. "I'd like to get started."

"So should I," agreed Leon. "It seems sort of weird standing here in the darkness with thousands of men all about you, all waiting for the same order that we are."

The night was clear and the stars were unusually brilliant. Not a cloud appeared and the long lines of troops resting on their arms looked like misshapen hedgerows in the faint light. The roar of the French artillery came distinctly to the ears of these men who stood and waited. Every man knew why it was that its activity was so greatly increased that night. Their guns were playing a stream of metal death on every yard and foot and inch of the opposing trenches. Not a spot in the German lines but was being searched by these great mechanical monsters.

"Listen!" warned Earl suddenly.

Nearby some man had started to sing the Marseillaise. Soon others joined in and the chorus swelled as man after man lent his voice to that stirring anthem. In a few moments every soldier present was singing and even the roar of the great guns became faint and indistinct as the thousands of throats chanted the great hymn of victory.

A thrill ran up and down Leon's spine. He used to regard the Marseillaise as the national anthem and had often heard it sung without any particular feeling. Since the war had started, however, it had seemed different to him. As the soldiers sang it, biting out each word sharp and short, it had become a battle-cry. He realized how terribly in earnest these Frenchmen were who stood there in the darkness and hurled defiance at their German foes.

At length the order came to move. Slowly the column moved out of the camp

and turning to the right marched down the road leading to the trenches. On both the right and left could be seen other columns moving in parallel lines and in the same direction.

"Who are they?" whispered Earl.

"I can't tell," replied Jacques in answer to his comrade's query. "Both regiments are attached to our division though, I think."

Slowly and at the same pace the three columns advanced. The men were unusually quiet and none of the customary bantering was present. Perhaps every man was busied with the thought of what was going to happen to him at quarter past nine the next day.

"This seems like a funeral march," exclaimed Leon in a low voice.

"And I don't like it, either," added Earl.

"Wait," cautioned Jacques. "Everyone's spirits will revive in a few minutes. The strain will wear off soon."

His prediction proved to be correct. A short time later the pace was quickened and the murmur of low-voiced conversations could be heard. The men even began to tease one another and tell jokes. It seemed almost incredible that men preparing to face what they were to meet-on the morrow could be so light-hearted.

"Here we come to the trenches," exclaimed Jacques. "What time is it?"

"Just eleven o'clock," said Earl, consulting his watch.

"An hour so far," murmured Jacques.

One by one the soldiers filed into the trench. All talking ceased and mile after mile they moved forward. In single-file the men marched through the communicating trench. Every little while a lateral trench appeared and as they came closer to the front these trenches increased in number. The roar of the giant guns steadily became louder and louder.

Soon the lateral trenches became very numerous. Every one was filled with

soldiers, their arms resting on the ground. They eyed the regiment filing past them enviously and were apparently curious to know why it had been selected to lead the charge in preference to themselves.

"Who are you?" demanded one man.

"*La douzième*," said Jacques.

"Ah," said the man. "I see."

It was a famous regiment to which these three boys belonged and its record for daring and bravery was known by all the army. No wonder it had been chosen to lead the advance. If anyone could get through, *la douzième* was that one. A feeling of confidence pervaded the regiment and the knowledge that the army shared that feeling was a source of satisfaction to every member.

"Look!" exclaimed Leon suddenly. "What place is this?"

"There's not much left of it whatever it is," replied Jacques grimly.

The regiment had suddenly emerged from the trench into the street of a village. At least it had once been a village, but only its ghost now remained. Every house had been bombarded and battered until now there was standing only bare walls, when indeed they had been spared.

"There's the moon," whispered Earl suddenly. "I saw it over my right shoulder. That means good luck."

"We'll need it," said Leon grimly.

Down the ruined village street the march continued and then another trench swallowed them up. Straight ahead they went and then turned sharply to the right. A short distance and they swung to the left. Finally the advance ceased and the men came to rest.

"We're in the first line trench," whispered Jacques.

"You don't have to tell me that," exclaimed Leon.

"Look here," cried Earl who was peering cautiously through one of the holes

made for the rifles.

Following his instructions Jacques and Leon could see the French shells exploding in the opposing trenches. Big and little they were, and had somewhat the appearance of a great display of fireworks. The noise was beyond description. So fast did the shells burst that they seemed all to be part of one continuous explosion. The German return fire only added to the din.

"They say," shouted Jacques after a consultation with the man next to him, "that only the German long range guns are doing any damage."

"I hope they don't find us here," said Leon grimly. "I want to live long enough to get into this fight to-morrow anyway."

"How big are those long-range cannon of the Germans?" asked Earl.

"Ten-inch," said Leon. "They're good ones too."

"Can't they use the 42-centimeter guns out here?"

"No, they're for smashing forts. They're mortars, you know."

"None of them compare with our 75's," exclaimed Jacques proudly.

"That is, for field work, you mean," said Leon.

"Yes. And no gunners can compare with the French, either."

"That's been proved to every one's satisfaction, I guess," Leon agreed.

It seemed remarkable that these three boys could stand in the front line trenches of the greatest battlefield the world has ever known and calmly discuss the merits of the rival artillery. Such is the effect of war, however. It seems as if a man can become accustomed to almost anything, and after weeks and months on the battle-line the artillery duels and the ever-present death become matters of unconcern to the ordinary soldier.

"We ought to get some sleep," Jacques announced finally.

"Can any one sleep here?" demanded Earl.

"I think I can," said Jacques. "I'm healthy and I'm tired."

"We can lie right down here in the trench," suggested Leon. "We can use our knapsacks for pillows and maybe get a little sleep."

"This is no place for a man who's nervous," laughed Jacques as a German shell whistled over their heads and exploded with a roar a short distance behind their position.

"I should think not," exclaimed Earl. "Still I don't suppose it will do us any good to keep thinking about it. I suppose we might as well try to get a little rest as Jacques advises."

"Jacques won't be able to lie down," laughed Leon. "He's too tall."

"Not at all," protested the young Frenchman quickly, taking this remark literally. "I am but six feet two; you and Earl are at least six feet."

"Not quite," said Leon. "At any rate I was only fooling."

"I see," said Jacques soberly. He did not always catch the drift of some of the sallies his young American friends made.

"How about sleep?" exclaimed Earl. "We can get some little rest anyway."

The three young soldiers followed the example of most of their companions in the trench and lay down, with their knapsacks under their heads. Still the artillery roared. Incessant explosions shattered the night air, predicting the struggle to take place on the morrow.

CHAPTER III

THE ATTACK

"The cannonade is worse than it was last night."

"I think you're right, Leon," Jacques agreed. "That is quite natural though."

"As a final effort I suppose," said Leon.

"Exactly."

"Here's breakfast," shouted Earl, trying to make himself heard above the roar of the artillery. "That coffee looks good."

Hot coffee was furnished to every man and a meal was made of bread, sardines and cheese.

"What's the time?" asked Jacques.

"Eight-thirty," replied Earl.

"Three quarters of an hour more," sighed Jacques. "I wish it was time to start."

"Look here," cried Leon beckoning to his two companions. He was peering out from one of the low places in the parapet and Jacques and Earl quickly took their places beside him.

"You can see the German barbed wire in front of their trenches," said Leon excitedly. "Do you suppose we'll ever reach that?"

"We'll go right on over it," said Jacques confidently. "Don't you worry about that."

The scene was fascinating to the three boys. So it was also to their comrades in the regiment. As far as one could see in either direction along the trench men were lined up, waiting for the word to advance and now and then stealing a glance, out across the field that stretched between them and their goal.

"We are to keep in line with those two big trees on the hill yonder," said Jacques, pointing to a spot behind the German positions. "As long as we keep headed for them we will be all right."

"That ought to be easy enough," exclaimed Leon.

Suddenly the command was passed down the line for every man to be ready. Leon glanced at his watch; it was just nine o'clock. Every knapsack was hoisted to its owner's back and guns in hand the men began to file along the trench.

Thicker and ever faster the shells rained down. The French guns roared continuously, doing their utmost to clear the way for the infantry which was to sally forth so soon.

All at once a whistle sounded. The long line halted abruptly. A sharp command followed and with a rattle the bayonets were fixed to the rifles. Once again the whistle sounded; this time twice. Every man made the final adjustment of his equipment and glanced at his neighbor's to see if it too was in order.

"Good luck," said Jacques and he extended his right hand to Leon and Earl in turn. They shook hands solemnly and the twin brothers standing side by side gripped each other's hand without a word.

Leon looked along the line. Many of the men were grinning. Most of them were white and their faces were drawn. The young American felt queer; somehow he did not feel real. Everything about him seemed to be taking place as in a dream. He could not realize it all.

"What are we waiting for?" he asked of Jacques and his voice sounded faint and far away.

Before he could receive an answer a German shell suddenly burst close at hand. A whisper ran along the line that a corporal and four men were hit. Another shell burst close to the same spot. Evidently the Germans had found the range.

"What are we waiting for?" Leon repeated anxiously. He glanced over Earl's shoulder at his watch. It was exactly quarter past nine.

Two blasts on the whistle sounded. That was the signal. Every man clenched his jaws and dashed at the trench wall in an effort to be the first one to climb out. A moment later and all were out. The gaps in the barbed wire that had been prepared now came into view and the men wormed their way through.

Once past this and the line was formed again. Still together, Jacques, Leon, and Earl took their places. The command was quickly given and at double-quick

the troops moved straight towards the German lines.

"Forward!" shouted the captain in a loud, clear voice that could be heard even above the din of the cannonade. "Vive la France!"

With a shout the troops swept forward. From the German trenches came the sharp rattle of the rapid-fire guns and the noise of the rifles. Shells were bursting on every side. The air was full of dirt and dust thrown up by the explosives. All along the line gaps in the advancing line appeared, only to be closed up quickly and automatically.

The enemy's trenches were outlined by a long row of bursting shells. From them arose a thick pall of smoke, obscuring the German positions. At the bottom appeared red and green flames, but above all was darkness. Out of the cloud came a ceaseless rain of metal, rifles, dirt, cartridges, and even human flesh. The whole world seemed to have been suddenly transformed into a roaring, flaming cauldron.

Leon gazed about him. Many of his comrades were down; he could scarcely recognize Earl and Jacques, their faces were so blackened by smoke and dirt. Holes appeared in the line on both sides of him. Not for long, however; almost instantly the spaces filled up and the advance was continued. He looked at the captain who was leading the charge. Not one word of orders could be heard in that terrible uproar and the officers had to make signs to their men.

Sometimes the captain lay down; his men immediately did the same. If he pointed to the right the troops veered to the right. If he pointed to the left they swung to the left. Blindly they followed on. Closer and closer they came to the spot where their own shells were falling. It seemed as if the leaders must be struck down by their own artillery.

Suddenly the curtain of fire lifted and moved forward to the next line of trenches. The German trench that had been the object of the furious bombardment appeared. In many cases it had been simply blown to pieces and no trace of it could be discovered.

Leon, Earl, and Jacques had been appointed "trench-cleaners." That is, they were among those who had been detailed to clear the enemy out of all the captured trenches so that there would be no danger of the troops being attacked from the rear.

Into the battered trench the three young soldiers sprang. With them were a dozen more of their men. With bayonets affixed they made their way along. The trench seemed to have numerous spurs and it branched out in many directions. On the bottom lay many dead Germans. Protruding from one side was the leg of some luckless infantryman who had been buried alive by the explosion of a giant projectile.

"This way," urged Jacques as he turned from the main trench and darted down a long passage-way.

"Careful, Jacques," warned Leon. "Don't go too fast."

"They're all dead in here," cried the young Frenchman exultantly. He was taking an active part in ridding his country of the invaders and like anyone in those circumstances he reveled in the task.

"Don't be so sure they're all dead," cried Earl. "You never can tell."

Scarcely had he spoken when they came face to face with three Germans. With rifle grasped tightly in his hands Jacques was preparing to run the first of them through when all three of them suddenly threw up their hands. "*Kameraden! Kameraden!*" they cried eagerly.

"Don't touch them, Jacques," shouted Leon. "They're surrendering."

It was but the work of a moment to disarm the three Germans and they were turned over to one of the French soldiers who was directed to lead them back to his lines.

"That was easy enough," exclaimed Jacques triumphantly.

"Those fellows were dazed," cried Leon. "They didn't know what they were doing."

"Who would?" demanded Earl. "If you'd been under that bombardment for the last twenty-four hours the way they have been I guess you'd be dazed yourself."

"Well, I hope they'll all be that way," said Jacques. "It won't take us long in here if they are."

"How big is this place anyway?" said Earl. "We must be careful going around corners and places like that. We can't see what is waiting for us."

The three boys were by themselves now. They were many yards underground and it was difficult for them to see their way distinctly. They had just emerged into an underground room which was furnished with a bedstead, washstand, table and chairs. The light was dim and the three young soldiers could not make out their surroundings clearly. Suddenly they heard a hoarse cry and the sound of a heavy blow. Jacques, who was in the lead, fell to the ground with a groan.

CHAPTER IV

UNDERGROUND

"Look out, Leon!" cried Earl sharply. "Look out for that fellow."

Leon whirled swiftly in time to see a big-helmeted German with the butt end of his rifle upraised preparing to strike. He ducked almost without thinking and the blow fell harmlessly on the back of one of the chairs in the little room. Before the gun could be raised again Earl sprang upon their foe and grappled with him.

Leon whirled swiftly in time to see a big-helmeted German with the butt end of his rifle upraised preparing to strike.

Leon whirled swiftly in time to see a big-helmeted German with the butt end of his rifle upraised preparing to strike.

He had his bayonet in his hands but somehow it did not occur to him to use it. Like most Americans he preferred to fight with his fists, and unconsciously he had discarded his rifle. With one hand he seized the German by the throat and with the other he rained blow after blow upon his great broad face.

The German however was a powerful man. He outweighed the young American by at least thirty pounds and far outmatched him in strength. With an oath he turned upon the plucky boy and a moment later held him by the throat

with both hands. Earl's breath was shut off short and everything began to turn black before his eyes. He felt himself being shaken as a terrier shakes a rat and consciousness began to slip away from him. He decided that it was all over.

Suddenly the terrible strangle hold on his throat relaxed and with a supreme effort he wrenched himself free and rose to his feet. There stood Leon gazing down at the German lying on the floor of the little subterranean apartment. One glance was enough to show Earl what had taken place.

"You saved my life, Leon," he muttered weakly.

"Huh," snorted Leon. "I hated to stab him like that but it was the only thing to do."

"He wouldn't have hesitated to fix us I guess," exclaimed Earl. "Where's Jacques?"

"On the floor there."

"Is he dead?"

"I don't know. I haven't had a chance to look at him."

As they advanced towards their companion he moved slightly and tried to get up.

"How do you feel, Jacques? Where did he hit you?" demanded Leon.

"He just grazed my head," murmured the young Frenchman weakly.

"Lucky for you," muttered Earl. "If he'd ever caught you squarely you'd be dead now, sure enough."

"Let me see where you're hurt," exclaimed Leon bending over his friend.

"It's not much of a wound," said Jacques. "He just stunned me; I'll be all right in a minute."

"Bring some water and a towel from that washstand over there, Earl," Leon directed his brother.

This was quickly done and the wound was bathed. The skin had been broken and the blood flowed freely, but it was nothing serious. The cold compress soon revived Jacques and a few moments later he was apparently as well as ever.

"Feel all right, Jacques?" asked Earl.

"Never better."

"You'd better lie down here on this bed for a little while."

"I should say not," exclaimed Jacques warmly. "We were sent in here to rout out the enemy and that's what we must do. There are surely more of them than we have seen."

"Next time we must be more careful going into rooms like this," advised Leon. "It doesn't pay just to go ahead blindly."

"Come," urged Jacques, and he led the way out of the little room down the narrow passageway leading they knew not where.

Cautiously they slunk along, their eyes strained to see through the dim light of the underground passage. The noise of the great cannonade above came to their ears but faintly here. A hoarse rumbling and a trembling of the earth was the sole evidence that over their heads the opposing armies were hurling tons of metal at each other.

"There's a turn just ahead," whispered Jacques cautiously. "Be ready."

Every sense alert the three young soldiers proceeded slowly. Soon they came to the spot where the passage led off to the left. Jacques peered cautiously around the corner and quickly drew back his head.

"Come," he whispered, beckoning to his two companions. "Have your grenades ready."

All three boys took hand grenades in their right hands and prepared for instant action.

"Lean your rifles against the wall here," Jacques directed.

This done, they crept stealthily forward, the grenades in their right hands and their automatic revolvers in their left. Making almost no sounds, they walked gingerly around the corner of the passage and there before their eyes they saw what had caused Jacques to draw back so speedily a few moments before. Standing in the center of a little room similar to the one they had just left were six Germans.

Their plan had been to steal upon their foes, taking them by surprise and forcing them to surrender. This plan was unexpectedly thrown awry however. One of the rifles leaned against the wall of the passage slipped; it fell to the ground carrying the others with it and a loud clatter was the result.

"Hein!" exclaimed one of the Germans wheeling quickly in the direction whence the noise came. Seeing three French soldiers stealing towards him he instantly whipped out his revolver and fired.

Leon, Jacques and Earl ducked quickly and instinctively.

"Let 'em have it!" shouted Leon and he let fly his hand grenade.

Straight down the passageway it sped and a tremendous explosion instantly occurred. The little room was filled with smoke and the three young soldiers could not see what was taking place in front of them. Earl too hurled his deadly handbomb into the chamber and a second explosion instantly took place.

"That's the way!" shouted Jacques. "That'll fix them I guess!"

All of the Germans had not been disposed of however. A moment later the sharp crack of a revolver sounded from behind the wall of smoke and a bullet winging its way through the half-light tore Jacques's hat from his head. Another and still another shot followed the first.

"That's enough of that," muttered the young Frenchman grimly and his hand-grenade took the same course that the two others had followed. A deafening concussion ensued and then all was still.

"Keep back against the wall," warned Leon. "Have your pistols ready."

Crouching low and keeping as far away from the center of the passage as possible the three boys awaited developments. Every boy grasped his revolver

firmly in his right hand and peered eagerly in the direction of their enemies. Not a sound came from the room where the Germans had been assembled.

"They're all dead I guess," whispered Earl at length.

"Don't be so sure," cautioned Leon. "Wait a minute longer."

With muscles tense and every nerve alert the three young soldiers waited. It seemed as if the smoke from the three explosions would never lift and the three boys felt as if hours had elapsed before they could catch a glimpse of the room. Finally however the atmosphere cleared away and they saw the results of their work.

"Let's go in there," exclaimed Jacques.

"Go slow," warned Leon. "It may be a trap."

"We'll be ready for them," said Jacques. "Come along."

Prepared for instant action, the three boys cautiously approached the tiny room. They were fearful of a surprise attack but their fears proved to be groundless. On the floor lay the bodies of six dead Germans. The hand-grenades had done their work well.

"A man doesn't stand much chance against these grenades, does he?" exclaimed Leon. "They're certainly deadly."

"Lucky for us they are," said Jacques shortly. "Now for a souvenir."

He drew his knife and bending low he quickly cut the buttons from the jacket of one of the dead soldiers at his feet.

"What are you going to do with them?" demanded Earl curiously.

"Make rings," said Jacques calmly slipping the buttons into his pocket. "These men belonged to the Imperial Guard."

"How do you know?"

"Look at the eagle on the buttons here; that proves it," and, as he spoke,

Jacques drew forth one of his trophies to show his comrades.

"We'd better move on," exclaimed Leon a moment later. "Go pick up your hat, Jacques, and we'll get the rifles."

"My poor hat," laughed Jacques. "It will have a window in it now."

"You'd better be glad it isn't your head that has the window," said Leon grimly. "I don't see that you have anything to complain about."

"I'm not complaining," smiled Jacques. "I agree that I am fortunate."

"Come along," urged Leon. "We may run into some more of the Boches any minute."

"Boches" was what the French soldiers always called the Germans.

"I'm ready," exclaimed Jacques, and they returned to the spot where their guns had been left. The young Frenchman rescued his hat which had a hole cut cleanly through the crown. "It will give good ventilation," he remarked laughingly.

They picked up their guns and were preparing to move on when Earl suddenly held up his hand. "Listen," he whispered tensely. "I hear someone coming."

CHAPTER V

HAND TO HAND

Instantly the three boys were all attention. They shrank back into the shadow of the passage and with guns raised to their shoulders and their fingers on the triggers they waited. Undoubtedly some one was approaching. There was more than one, for low-voiced words could be heard. Were they friends or foes?

Immovable the young soldiers waited. Closer and closer came the sound of

those who were coming in their direction. All at once they appeared.

"Halt," cried Leon sharply.

"Ah, is it you, my friend Leon?"

"Who's that?" demanded Leon greatly surprised to hear his name spoken.

"It is I; Pierre Garemont," replied a pleasant voice.

The three young soldiers immediately lowered their rifles. Pierre was an old friend of theirs, one of their company, and with him there was Jean Luqueur, another one of their comrades.

"Where have you been, Pierre?" demanded Leon eagerly.

"Searching for the Boches," he answered. "But alas I have had but poor luck; I have found nothing but dead ones."

"Where are you going now?" asked Jacques.

"Back to the battlefield to rejoin our men."

"Is the work all done down here?"

"I see no more to be done. Let us go."

"You two were making a lot of noise coming through that passage," remarked Jacques severely. "It would have been easy for anyone to ambush you."

"Ha, ha," laughed Pierre loudly. "The Boches, they are too stunned by our bombardment to do anything."

"Don't you believe it!" cried Leon seriously. "If we go with you you'll have to be quiet, that's sure."

"Very well," Pierre agreed glibly. He was in excellent spirits however for he felt that his country was on the threshold of a great victory over its hated enemy and he was happy.

"Do you know the way out?" inquired Earl.

"We are not sure," said Jean. "We were looking for it when you so rudely pointed your guns at our heads."

"We won't do it again," promised Jacques. "You lead the way, Pierre, and we'll follow."

They proceeded in silence now. The story the three boys told of their two encounters with the Germans had a quieting effect upon Pierre and Jean. They realized that perhaps all the enemy had not been cleared from this great labyrinth after all.

Twisting and turning in their course they tramped along. Numberless passages led off in all directions but the five soldiers kept to the one in which they had started. It seemed larger than the others and they decided it must be the principal one. Consequently they thought it would eventually lead them out of the bewildering underground maze.

Suddenly a patch of light appeared far ahead of them. It was sunlight and they quickened their pace, eager to join in the battle once more. That they were approaching an exit was proved by the fact that the roar of the guns increased as they proceeded. The artillery had not ceased its activity in the slightest.

A shadow crossed the patch of sunlight ahead and Pierre held up his hand. Immediately the little company halted.

A moment later a tall Prussian stepped into the trench and peered cautiously all about him. The five French soldiers shrank back into the shadow and watched. Evidently the German saw nothing, for a moment later he turned and beckoned and straightway four more helmeted Germans appeared. They stood together in the little spot of light, evidently debating what to do next.

They did not stand that way long however. Pierre quickly raised his rifle and fired at the little group. His shot went wild however. Like a flash the Germans turned and after one hasty glance in the direction of the shot, they darted down some adjoining passage and disappeared.

"After them!" cried Pierre. He dashed off in mad pursuit, closely followed by the four other members of the squad. At top speed they rushed along the passageway. Soon they came to the spot where the patch of sunlight showed.

"This way," shouted Pierre, and he turned sharply to the left and sped along after the fleeing Germans.

"Don't run into a trap," shouted Jacques, but Pierre gave no heed to him. His one idea was to come up with his foes and he forgot everything else. He led the others by at least five yards, followed by Jacques, Earl, Jean, and Leon in the order named.

Thus far they had seen no fresh signs of the Germans but there had been no branches to this passage as yet, and consequently they were convinced that they were upon the right track.

Suddenly a man stepped out of a niche in the wall directly in front of Pierre. He held his rifle out in front of him and before the racing Frenchman could check himself he had run full upon the long keen bayonet. Clear through him it went and down went Pierre.

Close behind him, however, was Jacques, and before the German could do any more execution he gave him the same treatment that Pierre had received. Without a sound he sank to the ground and lay limply stretched out upon the prostrate body of Pierre.

"Is Pierre dead?" gasped Earl.

"He is," said Jacques simply.

"Too bad," murmured Earl.

"That's part of the game," said Jacques in a matter-of-fact tone. "We can do no more for him. Let's move on."

France had lost a brave soldier in this simple peasant. He had given his life for his country and no man, peasant or king, can do more than that. He loved France and he died for her gladly. He did not like war and he had had no quarrel with anyone. When his country was in peril, however, he had but one thought and that was to do all he could for her. He had done his best and served her well. There were thousands more just like him and it was impossible to mourn over any one of them long. Consequently his four comrades soon left him to attend to the business in hand.

"The fellow that killed him won't do any damage again anyway," remarked Earl. "You fixed him all right, Jacques."

"Come," urged Jacques shortly.

"Go slowly from now on," urged Leon. This advice was followed and the little squad moved forward again. They had no desire that Pierre's fate should overtake them.

A few moments later they came to a spot where several passages all seemed to meet. It was like the hub of a wheel, only there were not so many passages as there are spokes in most wheels.

"Now what?" exclaimed Earl when they had reached this spot.

"Where did they go?" demanded Leon. "We'd better not stand here any longer though. Some one will take a shot at us if we're not careful."

"Right you are," agreed Jacques heartily. "Let's follow this passage and see where it leads us." He plunged into one of the dimly lighted aisles and proceeded cautiously along it, closely followed by his three companions.

They had gone but a short distance when the passage suddenly opened up into the main trench and the four soldiers found themselves in the daylight again. Over their heads the bullets whistled and the projectiles screamed but none of them fell in that particular trench. The French charge had carried far beyond this spot and the Germans were interested in that, while the French guns were still busy hammering the opposing trenches to pieces.

"Look," cried Earl. "There are the Germans we were chasing."

A squad of French soldiers passed with five German prisoners, one of them easily recognizable as the tall Prussian they had seen only a short time before. The man in charge of the squad halted the little band and a most interesting event took place.

All the buttons were cut off the prisoners' trousers; suspenders and belts were cut in two and the laces were slashed from their shoes. A moment later the five Germans slopped away, their hands in their pockets to keep their trousers from falling off and shuffling their feet to keep their shoes on. One Frenchman

accompanied them to direct rather than guard them. They were harmless enough now.

"That's certainly a funny sight," laughed Leon. "Those Germans couldn't run away or do any damage now to save their lives."

"A great way to send prisoners back to the lines," said Jacques.

The three boys and Jean now joined the other men in the squad and together the eleven soldiers started across the battlefield. All of them were of the same regiment but from different companies. Far ahead they could see the curtain of fire and behind it the advancing line of French troops.

"That's where we belong," cried Jacques eagerly.

"Here come reinforcements!" shouted Earl, and from their own lines they could see a fresh battalion of infantry pouring out of the trenches and starting across that field of death.

Corpses lay on every side, French and German together. The ground was covered with the dead and wounded, some of the latter desperately in need of attention. They had to be left for the Red Cross, however. The soldiers had their orders and they were to advance.

"Shall we wait and go forward with the reinforcements?" asked one of the men in the squad which the four soldiers had encountered.

"I should say not," cried Jacques. "Our regiment is ahead there and that's where we ought to be."

With a shout he dashed forward and close at his heels followed his ten comrades all eager to be in the fray once more.

CHAPTER VI

UNDER FIRE

Ahead of them was a small wooded ridge and towards this they made their way. The field was littered with corpses and it was necessary to exercise great care to prevent stepping on the dead bodies.

A few moments later the eleven soldiers reached the ridge and there came up with their battalion; at least what was left of it, for it had suffered heavily during the charge. The three boys were very glad indeed to rejoin their company and were soon in their accustomed places.

"We're pretty well protected here," remarked Earl when they were in the abandoned German trench under the shelter of the ridge.

"Yes," agreed Jacques. "Those scrubby little pine trees hide us from the sight of the German observation posts. Their artillery won't bother us much here."

"We don't want it to," said Leon grimly. "It has done enough of that already."

"And it will do a whole lot more," added Jacques.

As he finished speaking the order to advance came and once more the troops moved on. They followed the zig-zag course of the German trench they occupied. It was filled with dead soldiers for it was through this trench that the Germans had tried to rush reinforcements when the attack started. The French guns, however, had had the range and inflicted cruel losses on their opponents.

"This trench leads right over the top of the ridge," remarked Jacques. "Wait until we get there and we'll catch it."

"Not if we stay in the trench," objected Leon.

"But I don't think we will."

"Do you know for sure?"

"No, I don't, but I imagine we'll have a chance in the open again."

His guess proved to be correct. Arriving at the summit of the hill the battalion halted. The men were formed in sections about fifty yards apart.

"What's the idea?" asked Earl.

"When we leave the trench each section will charge in Indian file," answered Jacques. "Instead of being abreast we'll be one behind another. In that way we'll offer a much smaller target."

"True enough," exclaimed Earl. "That's a great scheme."

A moment later the order came. The soldiers debouched from the trench and in long lines advanced down the hill. From the German positions the French formation gave more or less the impression of one man every fifty yards charging at them.

Almost immediately, however, their appearance was greeted by a storm of shot and shell. Guns of all caliber belched their deadly missiles at the charging French. The attackers quickened their pace and breaking into a run, raced down the hill.

At the bottom of the incline were numberless great pits blasted out of the ground by the prodigious explosions. Into these the attackers dove pell-mell and a halt was called for a few moments' rest.

Leon, Jacques and Earl found themselves in one of these, along with five other men of their company.

"Look at those two big howitzers," exclaimed Leon pointing to two big German guns lying half-imbedded in the earth.

"Where are the men to attend to them?" queried Earl.

"Ask our gunners," advised Jacques grimly. "Perhaps they can tell you."

"What do you mean?" demanded Earl somewhat puzzled by this remark.

"Simply this," said the young Frenchman. "One or two of our big shells made direct hits on this battery and the gunners are not in existence anymore."

"I see," said Earl simply.

As these eight soldiers sat in the pit and waited, their spirits began to rise and they seemed to forget the horrors they had been through and their present danger. They even began to make jokes and laugh over certain incidents of the fight. The

thing that amused them most was the recollection of the German prisoners shuffling off with their hands in their pockets to keep up their trousers. One of the men had even had time to pick one German's pocket of a package of cigarettes.

He passed them around with great glee and soon every one was smoking except Earl, Leon and Jacques. They had never acquired the habit and knowing that they were better off without it had no desire to start. Their main desire was to keep themselves in perfect physical trim.

As they sat there talking the shells flew over their heads in a steady stream. In the great crater, however, they were comparatively safe unless some stray shell should chance to land directly in the hollow where they were seated.

"And if one ever does," exclaimed Jacques, "it's good-by to us."

"Why so?" demanded Earl. "In a hole as large as this we might get nothing worse than a spattering of dirt."

"Yes," said Jacques, "but don't you know that there are probably several thousand rounds of ammunition buried under here? If there should happen to be an explosion, what do you think would happen to us?"

"Well there wouldn't be enough to make much of a fuss over, I guess," remarked Leon with a grim smile.

A man suddenly appeared on the rim of the pit and slid over the edge.

"Ho, Coudert," one of the soldiers greeted him.

"Got orders?" asked another.

"Yes," said Coudert who acted as order-bearer in the battalion.

The men crowded about him, eager to learn what their next move was to be. Coudert spoke rapidly in French and Jacques translated his message to Earl and Leon. The two young Americans spoke that language fairly well but when it came to a question of orders they always had Jacques interpret them if possible, so that there should be no mistake.

"We are to leave here," said Jacques, "and go on down to the bottom of the hill where we are to dig shelters for ourselves. We cannot go forward until our artillery has had a chance to do a little more execution."

"Then we'll probably have to stay out all night," remarked Leon.

"I should not be surprised," said Jacques simply.

"That'll be nice," exclaimed Leon with a wry smile.

"Coudert says," continued Jacques, "that that trench we just left back there on the hill is half full of reinforcements for us."

"We can use them," said Earl shortly.

"Ready," came the order, and with a final adjustment of his equipment every man prepared himself for the dash that was to come.

The men scrambled up the sides of the giant crater. From the pits on both sides of them the other sections were doing the same thing.

"Spread out," was the order. "Advance in open formation."

With several feet between them the French dashed down the hill. The German machine-guns barked at them angrily and the spiteful crack of the rifles could be heard now and then above the din of the cannonade. Two hundred yards from the enemy's positions they flung themselves down upon the ground and began digging furiously. Every man had a shovel in his equipment and he made the dirt fly.

In an incredibly short time a parapet a little over a foot high was thrown up and every man's knapsack was placed to keep the dirt in position so that they were fairly safe against infantry and machine-gun fire. This done, every soldier then began to dig a little individual ditch for himself. Three feet deep and two feet wide and long enough to lie down in they furnished excellent protection against anything but a direct hit by one of the enemy's shells.

"Hello, Jacques," called Leon. "How do you feel?"

"Fine. Do you know our section didn't lose a man on the way down the hill?"

"That so? Good for us."

"Where's Earl?"

"The other side of you, I think. Yell at him."

"Hey, Earl," called Jacques.

"Hello," came the answer. "What do you want?"

"I just wanted to know if you were all right."

"Surely. I don't see the point in these piles of dirt in between the ditches though. It seems to me that the dirt would do more good in front."

"We've got enough in front," said Jacques. "You'll see the use in that dirt in between us if a shell should ever land squarely in one of the ditches."

Scarcely had he spoken when a 105-millimeter shell dropped directly into the ditch next to Earl's. It was occupied by a man named Dumont and he, poor fellow, was blown to atoms. Earl, however, thanks to the "dirt" he despised so much was untouched.

"Their fire is slackening," remarked Jacques.

"Yes," agreed Leon. "There seems to be only one battery firing at us now."

"That shows how good our artillery is," said Jacques proudly. "That one battery that's left would have been silenced long ago too if it hadn't been hidden pretty well."

"How do you know it's hidden?"

"Because they'd have located it before this time if it wasn't."

The French aeroplanes which had been soaring overhead for a long time now began to swoop lower. Evidently the aviators were searching for the battery in question. A swift biplane swept past, barely two hundred and fifty yards above the trenches. Amid a perfect storm of shot it returned safely to its lines.

"Dig the trenches deeper," came the order.

"Hear that?" demanded Jacques. "That means we stay out here all night, I guess."

CHAPTER VII

IN THE DITCH

The time passed slowly. The cannonade slackened in intensity and at times almost ceased entirely. The men spent their time in improving their positions and enlarging the ditches in which they were lying.

"What are you doing, Jacques?" demanded Leon suddenly.

"Watch me," was the young Frenchman's only reply.

He placed his steel helmet on the end of his bayonet and raised it cautiously above the edge of the parapet. Almost immediately a storm of German bullets struck all around the spot.

"You're crazy, Jacques," exclaimed Leon. "Stop that."

"Not at all," chuckled Jacques. "I love to fool them."

"You'll get fooled yourself if you're not careful."

"No, I won't either."

He repeated the move and again the bullets rained all about him. He soon tired of the game, however, and for a time lapsed into silence.

"How big is your ditch, Leon?" called Jacques.

"I don't know; it's pretty good size."

"Large enough for two?"

"It might hold two I guess."

"All right then," exclaimed Jacques. "I'm coming over to see you."

With two quick jumps he was out of his ditch and alongside Leon. Little spurts of earth flew up from the parapet in front as he took his place.

"You were too slow that time, my friends," chuckled Jacques addressing his remarks to the Germans.

"That was a risky thing to do," exclaimed Leon reprovingly.

"I know it," admitted Jacques. "All war is risky."

"Just for that reason there is no use in taking unnecessary chances."

"That was not unnecessary," grinned Jacques. "I understand that you have some bread and cheese still left and I am hungry."

"That's true," admitted Leon and from his knapsack he produced both articles in question. Lying side by side in that shallow ditch the two young soldiers ate their luncheon.

"I wonder what some of my friends would say if they could see me now," mused Leon. "I guess they'd be surprised."

"Because you are fighting here?" asked Jacques.

"Yes. They probably couldn't understand why I should want to enlist in some other country's army and go to war for strangers."

"But you are fighting for liberty," exclaimed Jacques. "America stands for liberty, does it not?"

"It certainly does," cried Leon. "Still some people would probably wonder why I should want to fight for another country's liberty."

"But," protested Jacques, "did not France aid your country in your struggle for independence in the war of the Revolution? Why then is it strange that

Americans should help France when she is fighting for her very existence and life?"

"I don't think it's strange," said Leon. "I think it's only right. What I said was, that some of my friends might not understand it."

"America and France both stand for liberty," said Jacques. "They both had to fight hard to get it and now they should help each other keep what they have won so dearly."

"The two nations have always been good friends," said Leon.

"Yes," agreed Jacques simply, "and I hope they always will be."

The young Frenchman rolled over on his side and suddenly jumped almost to his feet. He clasped both hands to his face and tried to rise but could not. His head seemed to weigh tons and he simply could not get up.

"Jacques! Jacques!" cried Leon in alarm, kneeling beside his companion. "What is the matter?"

Blood was oozing between the fingers of the young Frenchman.

"Let me see," begged Leon. "Take your hands away from your face."

Jacques made no answer but continued his vain efforts to rise.

With difficulty Leon forced his hands from his face. Jacques was now bespattered with blood which spurted from a long gash running from his left eye to the corner of his mouth.

"Lie down, Jacques," begged Leon anxiously.

Without a word the wounded boy stretched himself out upon his back in the ditch. Leon reached for his emergency dressing and began to do what he could for the young Frenchman.

"A steel splinter hit me, I guess," murmured Jacques.

"I should say it did," agreed Leon soberly. "It's a lucky thing it didn't hit your

eye. How do you feel?"

"All right. Pretty weak though."

"A doctor ought to dress that wound," said Leon. "You can't leave this place before dark though; it would be sure death to try."

"Oh, I'm all right enough," said Jacques. "This is only a scratch."

"A pretty deep scratch I should say," replied Leon grimly. "It'll leave a scar as long as you live."

"What of it?"

"It won't help your looks any."

"What do I care? That scar will always remind me that I did something for France. I shall be proud of it."

"Do you feel any better?" asked Leon.

"A little. I'd like my canteen though."

Leon reached for the article in question which was lying on the edge of the little ditch. As he turned he felt a blow in the shoulder.

"What's the matter?" demanded Jacques as he saw his companion sink back.

"I'm hit," said Leon simply.

"Where is it?"

"In the shoulder."

"Unbutton your coat and shirt and look at it."

Leon quickly complied and a moment later picked a rifle-ball out of his shoulder. It had barely broken the skin and the wound bled but little.

"That's funny," mused Leon. "How do you suppose its force became spent so soon?"

"It must have struck something else first."

Leon looked about him. "I should say it did," he exclaimed. "Look here."

He picked up Jacques' gun which was lying on the parapet. The bullet had struck the magazine of the rifle, knocked out one cartridge and torn a hole through the wooden stock.

"Pretty lucky for you," said Jacques. "If it hadn't been for that gun you'd have been done for now."

The afternoon dragged slowly along and the bombardment began to increase in severity once more. Evidently the way was being prepared for a further advance of the infantry that night.

"I'd better leave you now I guess," remarked Leon as dusk began to creep over the battlefield. "You stay here and I'll go back to your ditch."

"Be careful," warned Jacques. "Keep low."

With a quick jump Leon sprang out of the ditch and over into the one Jacques had formerly occupied. His appearance was greeted by a volley of bullets from one of the German machine-guns but the aim was too high and he reached his goal in safety.

As night fell half the section remained on the alert while the other half slept. The cannonade was now furious but the men managed to get some rest. At midnight Leon was relieved from his watch and prepared himself for sleep. One of the men furnished him with two overcoats stripped from dead Germans and with these he made a fairly comfortable bed.

In spite of the terrific din made by the guns he at last dozed off to sleep. How long he slept he did not know, but suddenly he awoke to find himself in complete darkness. He felt suffocated. He tried to rise but was unable to move. Something seemed to be holding him down and choking him at the same time. There was no air to breathe.

He set himself for a strong muscular effort. He drew in his breath and his mouth filled with dirt. Suddenly the awful truth flashed through his mind. He was buried alive.

CHAPTER VIII

A MIDNIGHT SALLY

"To die like this!" thought Leon. "What a terrible end."

He had always planned that if he should be stricken in this war it would be with his gun in his hand and his face set toward the enemy. To perish, buried under a heap of earth, was not a soldier's death.

He worked the dirt out of his mouth with the tip of his tongue and set himself for a supreme effort. A quick breath and more dirt filled his mouth. He could not move a muscle in his body. He tried to shout and more earth entered his mouth. It grittied its way down his throat.

So this was the end. The young soldier grew calm and waited for it to come. After all it was not so bad. He had done his best and now it was all over. That was the chance a soldier was compelled to take. The pain left him and the whole world turned black.

"Ouch," cried somebody suddenly. "He bit my finger."

"Never mind that," said another voice. "Get the dirt out of his mouth."

Leon felt a finger enter his throat and he coughed. Some one was working his arms up and down and his wounded shoulder pained him. He struggled up but sank back to his knees and began coughing up dirt.

"Spit that dirt out on your parapet," said a voice which Leon recognized as belonging to Dubois, one of his mates. "You'll need it all there."

Dubois was the joker of the regiment and everybody laughed. Even Leon smiled. He was feeling much better now and all the men except Earl returned to their holes. Jacques had been taken to the rear by the Red Cross to have his wound dressed.

"What hit me, Earl?" asked Leon.

"Dirt hit you," said Earl. "A shell exploded just the other side of you."

"It must have been a big one."

"It was; 250-millimeter."

"That's a ten-inch, isn't it? Did it do much damage?"

"Well we've got two men less in our company than we had a few minutes ago."

"I guess I was lucky," exclaimed Leon soberly.

"You certainly were," agreed Earl. "That shell tore a hole in the ground about six feet deep and spilled about ten cubic yards of dirt on top of you."

At this moment two stretcher-bearers arrived on the spot to take Leon back to the rear, but he refused to go.

"I'm all right," he exclaimed. "I only had a lot of dirt piled on me and that didn't do me any harm. Besides there is too much going on and I don't want to miss any of it."

The bearers withdrew and Leon went back to his ditch. He was rapidly recovering his strength and began to dig his two German overcoats out from under the pile of dirt. He bedded them down in the crater made by the shell and made himself quite comfortable.

"Come over here, Earl," he shouted a moment later. "This crater is much larger and safer than your ditch and lightning never strikes twice in the same place you know."

Earl soon joined his brother and with him came Dubois the man who had helped to dig out Leon. There was plenty of room for all three and for a time they felt quite secure. Soon however the shells began to fall thicker and faster all about them.

"What did you say about lightning?" demanded Dubois at length.

"The shells are getting pretty close, aren't they?" said Leon anxiously.

"Yes," said Dubois, "and to my mind it's only a question of time before one lands on us. This isn't old-fashioned lightning you know."

"They certainly seem to be getting the range all right," exclaimed Earl. "I don't see what we can do though. We can't leave our post."

"No," agreed Leon. "We certainly can't go back."

"We can go ahead though," said Dubois.

"What do you mean?" demanded Leon puzzled by his comrade's remark.

"Do you remember that little German trench about forty yards ahead of us out here?"

"Yes."

"Well why can't we go out and take possession of that?"

"Just the three of us?" demanded Earl.

"Why, yes," replied Dubois. "You will remember that there has been no firing from that spot all day. It is probably empty."

"Do you think we can reach it?" exclaimed Leon eagerly.

"Why not? It is very close and yet we'll not be fired upon by the Boches. If we remain here it is but a question of time before we are entirely wiped out. What do you say?"

"I say to go," replied Leon at once.

"And I too," echoed Earl.

"Come then," urged Dubois and without waiting another moment he crawled up out of the crater and started across the space intervening between them and the German trench. One on each side, Leon and Earl accompanied him.

These two boys were typical twins in every respect. Strangers could hardly

ever tell them apart and even their intimate friends became confused at times. They looked alike, their voices were alike, and they even seemed to think alike. The only distinguishing mark was a small mole under Earl's right eye.

"Don't let any German clip that mole off, Earl," warned Dubois. "If that should happen I don't know how we could ever tell which was which."

"It's impossible to see anything to-night anyway," said Leon. "I have never seen such blackness."

Crawling three abreast they proceeded across the shell-swept battlefield. The cannonade made an infernal noise now and it seemed as if bedlam had been let loose. Closer and closer they came to their goal. Indistinctly outlined against the night they could see the pile of earth thrown up in front of the German trench.

A few moments later they came to it. Dubois did not try to enter here however but, still followed by Earl and Leon, he crawled around the end of it. Then he continued until he came to the center of the trench so that it was between them and the French lines.

Suddenly a wild yell split the darkness.

"Die Franzosen! Die Franzosen!" (The French! The French!)

It was impossible to distinguish one object from another. There might have been a regiment of Germans in the trench for all that Dubois and his two comrades could tell. For that matter the Germans might easily have imagined they were beset by a regiment of French. The night was inky black.

It was a great surprise to the three adventurers to hear this yell of fear coming out of a trench they had supposed to be vacant, but they were undaunted. Dubois immediately jumped down into the trench, closely followed by Leon and Earl.

"Hände hoch!" (Hands up) shrieked Dubois, calling upon the small amount of German with which he was familiar.

"Hände hoch!" he shouted again and Leon and Earl added their voices.

It was a tense moment. Probably they were far outnumbered by the Germans and should this fact be discovered it would go hard with them. It was a strange

sensation for two American boys to experience. There they were standing in a deep trench somewhere in France, in the middle of the night, with they did not know how many Germans who would have liked nothing better than to kill them then and there.

"*Hände hoch!*" repeated Dubois threateningly and the three comrades held their breath in suspense.

"*Kameraden! Kameraden!*" came the familiar reply and Dubois chuckled audibly. He and two companions had forced the occupants of a German trench to surrender, solely through bluff.

In his broken German the intrepid Frenchman ordered their prisoners to leave the trench and with their hands held high above their heads to march towards the French lines. One by one they stepped out and as the three friends saw them outlined indistinctly against the sky they counted six Germans. Three of them had taken double their number of the enemy prisoners.

"You and Earl take them back," said Dubois to Leon. "I'll stay here in this trench and you'd better tell the rest of the fellows in our section to move up here. It's much safer."

"All right," said Leon readily, and with his revolver in his hand to guard against any attempts to escape he and Earl set out to conduct their captives back to the French lines.

CHAPTER IX

A CAPTURED TRENCH

A short time later the two young Americans entered the French trenches and turned their prisoners over to the guard. Congratulations and praise for their exploit were heaped upon them and it was in vain that they protested that Dubois should receive all the credit. Leon, especially, for he had been in the regiment longer than Earl, had performed too many daring feats to be able to shift the

praise to some one else. All his comrades were aware of his worth.

"Too bad Jacques could not be with you," said one of the men. "He will be furious when he hears what he missed."

"He doesn't miss many things in that line," laughed Leon. "It's a good thing for him to get some rest."

"Was he wounded badly?" inquired another soldier.

"No," said Leon. "A cut across his face merely."

"He will be back here to-morrow then," laughed the man. "You cannot keep that dare-devil away from the front for long."

At this moment Captain Le Blanc approached and stepping up to the two brothers shook each heartily by the hand. The informality and comradeship among the French troops is one thing that makes the army of France so wonderful. They are all working together for one common cause, and officers and men both have the same object. The men never take advantage of their superiors however and discipline is not interfered with.

"Fine work, boys," said Captain Le Blanc cordially. "That was a splendid and nervy thing you did."

The two boys muttered their thanks, too much embarrassed to say anything.

"I shall see to it that you are mentioned in the dispatches," continued the captain.

"And Dubois," exclaimed Leon quickly.

"Yes," laughed the captain. "And Dubois."

Captain Le Blanc passed on, leaving two very happy boys behind him. It was a great honor to be mentioned in the official dispatches and naturally the two brothers were proud.

"Jacques will be jealous of you," remarked the soldier who had been talking about the young Frenchman a few moments before.

"Jacques is jealous of nobody," exclaimed Leon warmly. "He never has been and he never will be. He is too fine a fellow and has too much sense."

"That's right," agreed another soldier nearby. "He is not the sort ever to begrudge another man an honor."

"Dubois is still out in that trench, Leon," Earl reminded his brother. "I think we'd better go out to him, don't you?"

"I certainly do," exclaimed Leon readily. "All you men are coming too, aren't you?"

The little gathering thus addressed were very eager to go, and soon the process of shifting their position was under way. One by one the men crept forward to the captured trench and before many moments had elapsed Leon, Earl and Dubois were ensconced in their position with nine more of their companions.

"This is the safest place I've struck yet," exclaimed Dubois. "All the German shells go over our heads here. We're just as safe here as we would be ten miles behind the firing line."

"You wouldn't be absolutely safe that far away," said Earl.

"Well pretty nearly so anyway," said Dubois.

"How about Dunkirk?" demanded Earl. "See what they did there."

"What did they do?" asked one of the men.

"They dropped a shell in the town from a distance of twenty-two miles. What good would ten miles do you against a gun like that?"

"The Germans certainly have some wonderful guns all right," said Dubois. "They won't touch us here though I guess."

"We're sort of between the fires, aren't we?" remarked Leon.

"Yes," said one of the men, "and I'm afraid it is going to be tiresome here after awhile."

"Tiresome!" exclaimed Earl. "It seems to me there is enough going on around here to suit anybody."

"Not for me," said the man, Armande by name. "I think I'll go out and take a look around."

"You're crazy," exclaimed Dubois. "What's the use in doing a thing like that? You'll only get killed and what good will it do?"

"I won't be killed," laughed Armande. "Those Boches, they cannot shoot."

"Don't you fool yourself," said Dubois seriously. "Of course they can shoot and shoot well too. You are foolish, Armande."

"Perhaps," Armande admitted with a shrug. "At any rate I shall now crawl over and have a look at the German trenches while it is yet dark. I shall be back before long."

"I hope so," muttered Dubois soberly.

Armande crept out of the trench and disappeared into the night. It is one of the remarkable things about war that men soon seem to lose all fear of death. The noise of the big guns and the shell fire terrifies them at first, but they rapidly become accustomed to it and it makes but small impression on them. Life in the trenches becomes very dull and the men do all kinds of foolhardy things just to experience a thrill. They laugh at death and even play with it.

Such a man was Armande and though Dubois had tried to prevent his leaving the trench, the fact that he insisted upon going did not make much impression upon him. Many others had done things equally foolish.

"He may get back," remarked Leon.

"Oh, yes," said Dubois lightly. "The night is dark and he may not be seen."

"How far is it to the German trenches from here?" asked Earl.

"A hundred yards I guess," said Dubois. "I'm not quite sure though."

"About that," said Leon. "What's he going to do?"

"He said he was going to go over and take a look at the German trenches," said Earl. "I suppose that's where he's gone."

Many moments passed and Armande did not return. The roar of the cannonade seemed to be slackening as time went on but it was still violent. No orders had come to the men as to what they were expected to do and consequently they surmised that they were not to attack again that morning. Before a charge the soldiers were usually notified so that they could have full opportunity for preparation.

"What's that?" demanded Earl suddenly, during a slight lull in the artillery duel. Armande had been gone about an hour.

"What's what?" asked Leon.

"I thought I heard a bell ring."

"A bell! What kind of a bell?"

"It sounded like a cow-bell to me."

"How could that be? What would a cow-bell be doing out here on the battlefield? I suppose the Germans are grazing their cattle out there."

"Don't be silly, Leon," exclaimed Earl.

Suddenly the bell sounded again; there was no mistaking it this time and all the men heard it. It was immediately followed by a burst of violent machine-gun fire from the German trenches.

"What do you suppose it is?" demanded Leon excitedly.

"It's a bell," said Earl. "I told you that before."

"It's very strange," muttered Dubois. "I cannot understand it."

The men were all alert now, however, and on the watch for any trick that the Germans might try to play on them. Every one was mystified and at a complete loss to understand the strange occurrence. A half-hour passed and the performance was not repeated.

"Where can Armande be I wonder," said Earl.

"It certainly seems as if he ought to be back by this time, doesn't it?" exclaimed Leon anxiously.

"He's dead," said Dubois shortly.

"What makes you think so?" asked Earl.

"Well he hasn't come back yet, has he?"

"No."

"Then he must be dead and I believe that bell ringing had something to do with it too."

"In what way?" asked Leon.

"I don't know," said Dubois. "That's what I think though."

Armande was not dead however. A moment later Dubois heard his name called and the missing soldier slid over the parapet and into the trench once more. "Slid," expresses what he did exactly, for he shot forward head-first and fell in a heap on the bottom of the trench. He lay there moaning.

"Armande," cried Dubois bending over him. "What happened?"

"They got me," said the wounded soldier simply.

"Where? How?"

"In the leg. A machine-gun bullet."

"Where have you been?"

"Over to the German trenches. They shot me about half an hour ago and it has taken me all this time to get back here."

"Send word to the Red Cross," said Dubois to one of the men. "I wish I could do something for you," he added to his wounded comrade. "It is so dark here I cannot see a thing. Are you badly hurt?"

"No; just above the knee. It is painful and it was hard to walk but I doubt if it is serious."

"I hope not," exclaimed Leon heartily. "How did they happen to see you?"

"Did you hear a bell?" asked Armande.

"We certainly did," exclaimed Leon. "What was it?"

"It was my finish," said Armande. "It was a clever ruse on the part of the Boches however and I must give them credit for it."

"What was it?" asked Earl eagerly. "Can you tell us about it?"

"It was like this," said Armande. "I crawled out of the trench here and began to creep over towards the German positions. It was so very dark that I could see practically nothing, but I knew the general direction and so kept on. I traveled very slowly and no incident of importance took place for some time.

"Finally I could see the German barbed wire flickering faintly just ahead of me. I crept closer. I did not make a sound, and unnoticed I came directly up to the wire entanglements. I was so near I could hear the Boches talking to one another in their trenches."

He paused and uttered a low groan.

"What is it?" cried Dubois anxiously. "Can't I help you, Armande?"

"Will you tie something around my leg? It throbs badly."

"Perhaps you'd better not try to talk," suggested Leon.

"It is not that," exclaimed Armande. "It is just my leg. Ah, that is better," he sighed as Dubois wrapped the wound tightly with a long bandage produced by one of the men.

"Well, as I was saying or was about to say," he continued after a moment, "I could hear them talking. I crouched there and listened for a few moments trying to make out what they were saying. I know but little German however and I could only catch a word here and there and as they made no sense I quickly

became tired of listening.

"It struck me as a fine chance to give the Boches a good scare however. I determined to wake them up with a hand-grenade. I took one in my hand and prepared to hurl it. I raised myself slightly from the ground and took hold of a strand of the barked wire to steady my aim. No sooner had I touched the wire than a bell rang."

"I heard it," cried Earl eagerly.

"I had touched the wire but lightly," continued Armande, "and the bell did not ring loudly. It startled me however and I drew back quickly. I also noticed that the Germans immediately ceased talking. It did not occur to me that my touching the wire had made the bell ring however. I thought it a mere coincidence.

"For some moments I lay there quietly and presently the Boches began to talk again. I waited what seemed to me a long time. Then once more I took the hand-grenade in my right hand and raised myself on one elbow. I determined to act quickly this time. Again I seized the wire with my left hand and hurled the grenade.

"Squarely into the trench it landed and I have the satisfaction of knowing that it did good work. I had not caught them napping however. I had seized the wire much more firmly the second time and at the same instant when I threw my missile the bell rang violently; much more so than formerly.

"It was probably hanging on the wire," exclaimed Earl.

"Exactly," agreed Armande. "As soon as anyone touched the wire the bell would ring. It warned the Germans and I must admit it was a clever trick."

"It surely was," agreed Leon. "What happened then?"

"I jumped to my feet and started to run," exclaimed Armande. "I had gone but a few steps however when they cut loose with their rapid-firers. A second later I was down, shot through the leg. I guess the Boches thought a whole regiment was making a surprise attack on them. They certainly used enough ammunition to wipe out two regiments."

"Funny no more bullets struck you, Armande," said Dubois. "How do you

account for that? Was their aim poor?"

"When I fell I rolled into a shell-hole," said the wounded man. "That afforded me good protection from their bullets. After awhile, when they discovered that they were not being attacked, they ceased firing and I crawled back here. It was hard going I can tell you."

"I should think it might be," exclaimed Leon grimly. "I hope your wound won't prove to be serious, Armande."

At this moment two of the Red Cross men arrived with a stretcher and carried the wounded soldier away.

"Well," said Earl when they had gone, "I should say that Armande ought to be pretty glad that he got nothing worse than a bullet in his leg. I think he's lucky to be alive."

"I think so too," agreed Leon. "That was a great stunt for the Germans to hang that bell on the wire like that, wasn't it?"

"It was indeed," said Dubois. "I know what we can do to them though."

CHAPTER X

A BALL OF TWINE

"What can we do to the Germans, Dubois?" asked Leon curiously.

"We can play a trick on them. What's the use in allowing them to have all the fun?"

"But what do you intend to do?"

"I will show you presently. First of all I want a long piece of stout twine. I shall need a whole ball of it I guess."

"What are you going to do with it?" demanded Leon.

"You will see very soon," said Dubois evasively. "I must get the twine before we do anything else."

He made his way along the trench to the spot where the field telephone had been installed and had a message sent back for the next courier who came out to their position to bring with him a ball of strong string.

"I wish you'd tell us what your plans are," said Earl when Dubois had rejoined him and his twin brother.

"You will know in good time," said Dubois. "If I were to tell you now you would try to restrain me. You would say I was foolish."

"Are you going over to the German trenches?" demanded Leon.

"Wait and see," smiled Dubois.

"Well all I can say is that if you try a thing like that you are crazy," exclaimed Leon warmly. "You saw how much good Armande's expedition did and what happened to him."

"I knew you'd object to my plan," said Dubois.

"Then you admit that you are going over to their trenches?"

"I didn't say so. Let's not talk about it any more."

Although both boys tried hard they were unable to draw Dubois into further conversation concerning his project. The talk finally drifted into other channels and the Frenchman's plans, whatever they were, were finally forgotten.

"Who was looking for a ball of twine?" asked a voice about a half-hour later. "Who was it that wanted the string?"

The voice seemed strangely familiar to the ears of both Leon and Earl. They peered eagerly through the darkness to see if they could discover the identity of the speaker. All they could see was the faint outline of some soldier's figure. The man, whoever it was, had a bandage tied around his face.

"Did anyone here want twine?" he asked again.

"Jacques!" cried Leon eagerly. "What are you doing here?"

"Leon, is it you?" demanded Jacques, for it was the daring young Frenchman who had returned. "Where is Earl?"

"Right here," exclaimed that individual briskly. "But what are you doing back here so soon?"

"Why shouldn't I come back?"

"But you were wounded."

"Merely a scratch. The silly old doctors wanted me to remain in the base hospital for a day or two but that is ridiculous."

"You are reckless, Jacques," said Leon reprovingly. "Still I am awfully glad to see you again."

"Who wants this twine?" asked Jacques. "When I started back they gave it to me to bring out to some one in this trench who had telephoned in for it."

"I want it."

"Who are you?"

"Dubois."

"Ah, Dubois. What use can you have for string?"

"Let me have it and I'll soon show you."

Jacques handed the twine over to Dubois, who immediately unwound a small section of it and tested its strength.

"That is fine," he murmured approvingly. "Now for the fun."

Without waiting a moment longer he placed the ball of string in his pocket and climbed out of the trench. He did not even take his gun with him. His companions were too surprised by his strange actions to offer any objection and

he had disappeared into the darkness almost before they were aware of it.

"Well," exclaimed Leon. "What do you think of that crazy man?"

"Where's he going?" asked Jacques, puzzled by the actions of his friend.

"Over to the German trenches I think."

"What for?"

"To get killed I guess," said Leon. "I don't see what else it can be."

"He must have some object I should think," said Jacques. "Wouldn't he tell you what it was?"

"No, he wouldn't," answered Earl. "It has something to do with a bell though I'm sure," and he related the story of Armande's adventure.

"Perhaps he's going to try to fix it so it won't ring any more," suggested Jacques. "He's not afraid of anything you know."

"It's not a question of being afraid," said Leon warmly. "It's a question of using good common sense."

The three boys waited anxiously for the return of their comrade but the moments passed and he did not reappear. The firing had been fitful all through the night; the steady booming of the big cannon being broken by an occasional burst of machine-gun fire.

"He'll never come back I'm afraid," said Earl slowly after the lapse of half an hour.

"Don't give up yet," exclaimed Jacques. "He may return."

"I'd like to know why he went," said Leon. "Why was he so mysterious?"

At this moment, however, Dubois suddenly reappeared and clambered back into the trench.

"Dubois!" cried Leon eagerly. "Where have you been?"

"Over to see Fritzie," chuckled Dubois gayly. "Fritzie" was the name by which the French and English sometimes referred to the Germans.

"Are you hurt?" demanded Leon.

"Hurt?" echoed Dubois. "I never felt better."

"What have you been doing?"

"I'll show you in just a moment," and Dubois busied himself with something he held in his hands. It was too dark for his companions to make out just what he was doing.

After a few moments the reckless Frenchman turned to his friends. His preparations, whatever they were, evidently were complete.

"Now for the fun," he exclaimed. "Listen!"

He made a quick motion with his right arm as though he were jerking something. From across the battlefield came the faint sound of a bell. Almost instantly followed the sharp rattle of many machine-guns being fired at once.

"Hear that?" demanded Dubois enthusiastically. "Isn't that great?"

"What are you doing?" asked Leon curiously. "You don't mean to say that you made that bell ring."

"Oh, is that so?" exclaimed Dubois gleefully. "I'll show you again as soon as they stop that noise over there."

Gradually the fire from the German trenches died down and the front regained its former state of comparative quiet. Once again Dubois jerked his arm and again came the sound of the bell, followed by the sudden burst of machine-gun and rifle fire.

"Dubois! What have you got there?" demanded Earl.

"A string," said Dubois almost beside himself with laughter.

"That ball of twine I brought out?" asked Earl.

"Yes," said Dubois. "That's the one."

"And you sneaked out and tied it to that bell?" demanded Leon.

"Well not exactly to the bell," replied Dubois. "I tied it to the wire right along side the bell though; it serves the same purpose."

Again he pulled the string and the previous performance instantly was repeated. The bell rang and the Germans fired violently. Dubois was delighted beyond all comprehension with his exploit, and the evident nervousness of the enemy every time the bell sounded amused him immensely.

"You're a dare-devil," exclaimed Leon. "You took an awful chance just to have a little fun with the Germans."

"It's not a little fun," Dubois corrected him. "It's a lot of fun."

Many of their comrades gathered around him to see the performance and at intervals all through the remainder of the night the men amused themselves by ringing the bell and startling the Germans. Along towards morning Leon gave the string a vicious tug but no bell sounded and the twine seemed not to be attached to anything.

"One of their bullets has cut the string," said Dubois ruefully. "Our fun is over for the present I'm afraid."

CHAPTER XI

RELIEVED

The following day the French did not try to push their advantage any farther nor did the Germans launch an attack to recover their lost positions. Both sides seemed worn out by their great exertions and were apparently content to allow matters to remain as they were, for the present at least.

The big gun duel still continued but it had lost its intensity and the infantry

fighting came almost to a standstill. The men complained of the inaction, for the life in the trenches was monotonous with but little to vary it. They were constantly on the alert and always prepared to meet any surprise attack of the enemy but there was but little for the men to do.

"I don't like it," said Dubois peevishly one day. "It is getting on my nerves."

"This quiet life I suppose you mean?" laughed Leon sarcastically.

"Exactly."

"I don't call that very quiet," exclaimed Leon as one of the German's huge shells sped over their heads with the roar and rattle of an express train. They could hear it explode several miles away with a sound as if some one had dropped a large plank upon a pile of lumber.

"But we're not doing anything," objected Dubois.

"We're alive anyway," said Earl. "That's something."

"But why don't they launch a great big offensive and drive these Germans out of our country?" demanded Dubois. "Just sitting here in the trenches is not going to free France."

"Remember this, Dubois," Jacques reminded his impulsive countryman. "It takes thousands of guns and millions of shells to make the kind of an attack you are talking about."

"Haven't we got them?"

"Not yet, I'm afraid. General Joffre won't send his men out until he has sufficient backing for them either."

"Well if we haven't got enough guns and ammunition," persisted Dubois, "why don't we hurry up and get them?"

"It takes time," smiled Leon. "You can't build factories and teach people how to manufacture powder and shells over night, you know."

"Germany seems to have enough," said Dubois.

"Yes," agreed Leon, "but they have been preparing for this war for a long time. Russia, France and England were caught napping."

"What would they have done if it had not been for the United States?" demanded Earl breaking into the conversation. "We've sent millions of dollars' worth of stuff to the Allies."

"Tell me about that," exclaimed Dubois. "Is America sending supplies to Germany too?"

"Practically none, I guess," said Earl.

"But why not? Is it neutral for a country to sell to one side and not to the other?"

"America would sell to Germany just the same as to Russia, France, and England," said Earl. "The trouble is that Germany can't get the stuff into her country."

"Because of the English fleet?"

"Exactly. The English fleet has swept the German navy off the ocean. The only place left for them is the Baltic."

"That's wonderful, isn't it?" exclaimed Dubois.

"Yes, it is, and most people don't give England half the credit she deserves for that. Just because her fleet doesn't fight a battle every day and do a lot of grandstand work people think it isn't doing anything important. In my opinion it has won the biggest victory of the whole war so far."

"By keeping the German fleet bottled up you mean?" asked Jacques.

"That's it," said Earl decidedly. "Take the English fleet away and let the German warships come out of their hole and see what would happen to the Allies!"

"What would happen?" inquired Dubois.

"Well first of all they'd stop the shipment of all supplies for us from America.

Think what that would mean. Then again they'd soon starve out England and she wouldn't be able to send any more soldiers over here to France."

"They haven't sent so many anyway," muttered Dubois.

"Yes," agreed Earl, "but they're sending them now all right. England only had a small army at the beginning of the war and it takes time to make a good soldier just as it takes time to make a good anything else. They'll send plenty of men, don't you worry, and I feel sure there are a good many more here right now than you have any idea of."

"Probably," agreed Dubois. "At any rate they helped us a lot at the beginning of the war when the Boches were driving us on the run back towards Paris."

"Then you think it's all right for the United States to sell supplies to the Allies and not to Germany?" asked Jacques. "I must say that I am glad that is what they are doing anyway."

"Certainly it is all right," exclaimed Earl. "It is permitted by international law and every nation in the world has done the same thing at some time or another. Just because this happens to be the biggest war in the history of the world and because as a result the United States is selling more supplies, doesn't change the facts, does it? As I said, we'd sell to Germany just as quickly as to the Allies. Because they can't get the stuff isn't our fault."

"Yea, Earl, you're quite a speechmaker," cried his brother gleefully.

"Isn't what I said true?" demanded Earl.

"Of course it is. Why if we refused to sell to the Allies now that would mean that we were actively on the side of Germany and nothing we could do would be of greater help to her just now."

The order was passed along the trench that the regiment was to retire and their places were to be taken by fresh troops. The prospect of reaching a place where the enemy's shells would not be roaring around their ears was a pleasant one to many of the men; the strain of the first line trenches is a heavy one for any man. Others however were displeased, for they had no wish to be absent during any possible fighting.

"The idea of being able to take a bath appeals to me," exclaimed Leon eagerly when he heard of the order. "I am certainly dirty."

"We all are that," laughed Jacques, "but what do you expect? A man can't roll around in the smoke and dirt the way we have the last few days and not get dirty."

"We haven't had our clothes off either," said Earl.

"Just suppose the people at home could see what we look like," chuckled Leon. "They'd disown us, I'm afraid."

Many of the soldiers in the trench with these three young soldiers—for Dubois was considerably older than they—had grown beards. These were caked with mud and the long unkempt hair and soiled uniforms of the men gave them a very ferocious appearance. Many of us have thought of most Frenchmen as little fellows but these men were great strapping, brawny giants. As to size and strength they compared equally if not favorably with the Germans.

A short time later the relief regiment arrived and the men who had won and held the new French front gave way to the newcomers. They filed out of the first-line trench and entering the communicating trench made their way back. Several miles they walked, and many a man had long thoughts as he recalled their last march through these trenches when they were headed the other way.

Finally they emerged from the trenches into the open road. It seemed good to feel the solid earth under their feet once more and to be able to walk along across the fields. What a relief after being shut in by the steep sides of the trenches for so long.

The roads were crowded with troops and vehicles of all descriptions. Great motor-trucks rolled by in an endless procession. Both sides of the road were crowded with them. On one side they went towards the trenches, loaded to their utmost capacity with shot and shell with which to feed the hungry cannon. Across the road they were returning empty.

A regiment of hussars passed, looking very smart in their uniforms and plumed hats. Their mounts were newly groomed and sleek. A great cloud of dust arose from the horses' hoofs and the infantry drew aside to let them pass. Close behind the cavalry came a swift motor-car. Everything on the highway drew

back to furnish a lane for the speeding automobile which fairly seemed to fly along the ground.

As it passed, Jacques suddenly grasped Leon by the arm.

"Did you see who was in that car?" he demanded.

"No. Who was it?"

"That was President Poincaré, president of France."

CHAPTER XII

IN REVIEW

The speeding car was lost in a cloud of dust and soon disappeared.

"Are you sure that was President Poincaré?" asked Leon.

"I am sure of it," replied Jacques. "I have seen him several times before."

"What do you suppose he is doing here?"

"On a tour of inspection probably. He visits the front frequently."

The tired soldiers swung along the road, their ranks thinner than they had been a few days before. Many a brave son of France had marched to his death when the *douzième* had filed down into the trenches to lead the offensive a short time previous. That the regiment was held in high esteem, however, was proved by the fact that many a cheer went up as soon as its battle-scarred standard was recognized.

At length they reached the village where their headquarters had been established and every man was assigned a place in which he was to live. Leon, Jacques, Earl, and Dubois found themselves together in the loft of a barn. Five rude cots, with mattresses far from soft, were placed there for them to sleep on.

"Five bunks and only four of us," remarked Earl. "I wonder who is going to use the extra bed."

"Don't call that thing a bed," laughed Leon. "I wouldn't insult a bed."

"That's all right," exclaimed Earl. "It looks pretty good to me after the trenches. At any rate I can sleep on anything."

"So can I," agreed Leon quickly. "Don't think I'm complaining. I'd like to know who is going to use the other bunk though."

"Turn around and you'll see," said Dubois.

His three companions followed his bidding and a shout of welcome went up to the newcomer. He limped slightly but there was a grin on his face and he appeared to be very happy.

"Armande!" cried Dubois joyfully. "I am glad to see you."

He rushed up to his comrade and following the French custom, kissed him on both cheeks.

Jacques did the same but Leon and Earl, though they were not less glad to see their friend, contented themselves with welcoming him with a hearty handshake.

"How is your leg?" inquired Jacques solicitously.

"As sound as ever," exclaimed Armande quickly. He tried to execute a few dance steps to show his friends how well his wound had healed, but his leg sank under him and a shadow of pain crossed his face.

"Be careful," said Leon anxiously. "Don't try anything like that yet."

"I guess it is not as well as I thought," admitted Armande with a wry smile. "It will be sound soon though."

The five soldiers soon made themselves perfectly at home in their rude quarters and enjoyed themselves thoroughly. A few days of rest worked wonders with them and with all the others in their regiment. At the end of a week the men were clamoring to be sent back into the trenches.

Daily drills were held to keep the troops in good physical condition and the men indulged in all kinds of sports during their leisure hours. Thousands and thousands of soldiers were concentrated in and around this town and so wonderful was the French organization that they could be shifted to any part of the long battle line almost at a moment's notice. There seemed to be an endless supply of equipment as well as of men and no longer could France say that she was unprepared. The whole question now was whether she was prepared enough to undertake the great offensive the soldiers knew was coming some time.

One day, at noontime, came the word that that afternoon there was to be a review of all the troops stationed thereabouts.

"Who is going to review us, do you suppose?" asked Earl of Armande who now had recovered entirely from his bullet wound.

"I don't know," replied Armande. "I don't like these reviews anyway. For my part I'd much rather do some actual fighting."

"I guess you'd rather fight than anything else, wouldn't you?" said Earl laughingly.

"I certainly would," exclaimed Armande. "At least I would as long as these Boches are in France. When they are driven out I want to go back to my little farm and never hear the sound of another gun as long as I live."

"I hope you may be able to do that soon," said Earl fervently.

"If I am still alive."

"We'll hope for the best," said Earl simply.

"Suppose I am killed," exclaimed Armande. "What difference will it make? I shall die for my country and what happier death is there than to die for France?"

"If everyone else feels the same way I don't see how France can be beaten," remarked Earl, much impressed by the fervor of the impulsive Frenchman.

"Of course she can't be beaten," cried Armande, "and of course everyone feels as I do. Just as surely as the sun will rise to-morrow France is going to come out victorious in this war. They can hold some of our land for a time but

they can't kill our spirit. The spirit of France will live forever and it is spirit that wins; it is unconquerable and it will never give in until justice and right rule once more in Europe."

"Vive la France!" cried Jacques lustily. He had been sitting on the edge of one of the bunks attentively listening to the foregoing conversation.

"Vive la France!" echoed Earl and the rafters of the ramshackle old barn shook with the violence of the cheer.

"Inspection is at two and the review at three," Dubois reminded his comrades when they had settled down to a normal state again.

"Then we haven't much time, have we?" exclaimed Leon. "Let's get ready."

At two o'clock, to the second, the *douzième* infantry was lined up for inspection. Every man's uniform had been cleaned, his shoes polished and his rifle oiled and rubbed. They all wore the steel helmets adopted by the army since the outbreak of the war; these light metal head coverings had saved many a life and prevented many a wound. In the trench warfare the majority of the wounds are apt to be in the head, for that is all that shows to the enemy; consequently the steel helmets had proved themselves most useful.

A short time later the regiment marched off down the road towards the large open plain where the review was to be held. From all directions came other troops all heading towards the same spot. Bands played and the scene was indeed a gala one. Few dress uniforms were to be seen however. Occasionally some high officer, resplendent in gold lace, whirled past in his motor-car, but as a rule the troops all wore their service uniforms.

On one edge of the plain the *douzième* halted. Regiments filed by, some on foot and some on horseback; batteries of field artillery rattled past. A murmur of approval swept along the line as the men recognized the famous 75-millimeter guns, the best field artillery in the world. These guns were the pride of the French army.

At length the *douzième* swung into place and preceded by thousands and followed by thousands it swept along. As far as the eye could see in front and behind appeared a forest of rifles, the keen-edged bayonets gleaming in the sun. It was a most impressive sight and one to inspire confidence. The grim-visaged

men were not soldiers in name only but warriors in every sense of the word.

Far across the field marched the *douzième* and passed along in front of those who were there to review it. The troops all held their guns at attention as they passed and were unable to catch a very clear glimpse of the little group of men who stood there. Five men stood out in front of the others however and from the corner of his eye Leon did his best to see who they were.

"That little man in the khaki suit was King George of England," he said to Jacques after the review was over and they had returned to their quarters. "I also recognized General Joffre, but who was the man with the brown mustache who stood next to King George?"

"Why that was Lord Kitchener," exclaimed Jacques.

"Who was the big man next to him? He was certainly fine looking."

"King Albert of Belgium," said Jacques in a surprised tone. "I should think you'd recognize him."

"It was stupid of me not to," admitted Leon. "Who was the short man in the frock coat and silk hat? He didn't look like a soldier to me."

"He isn't," laughed Jacques. "That was President Poincaré; the man who passed us in the automobile the other day."

"Of course it was," exclaimed Leon. "Quite a distinguished gathering I should say."

At this moment Dubois entered the loft. He was evidently excited.

"Some of these fellows have been wanting excitement," he exclaimed, "and I guess they'll get it soon enough all right."

"What do you mean?" demanded Leon.

"Come with me and I'll soon show you," said Dubois.

CHAPTER XIII

A VOLUNTEER

The five soldiers hurried outdoors and cautioned by Dubois they stood together in a little group and listened intently.

"Guns," exclaimed Jacques.

"Guns?" echoed Dubois. "I should say there were; thousands of men. Just listen to that cannonade."

A steady roar came to the ears of the soldiers. Now and again it rose angrily only to sink down again to a low muttering. It did not cease for a moment however and the most inexperienced recruit could have told that a furious bombardment was taking place.

"That must be over ten miles away," said Dubois, "and yet just see how plainly we can hear it. We'll be in that soon."

"You think so?" asked Leon.

"I'm sure of it; they'll begin to move up reserves pretty quick."

"Who's doing all that firing, do you think?"

"The Germans. They are going to counter-attack and try to win back the positions we took away from them ten days ago."

"Do you know that for sure?"

"No, that's just my guess," said Dubois. "Of course I'm not sure."

"Well I don't believe that German guns are the only ones busy," exclaimed Earl with a grim smile.

"No, indeed," agreed Dubois quickly. "We wouldn't just sit still and let them pound us to pieces."

At this moment a bugle sounded. Everyone stopped talking and listened intently; then they turned and hurried into their lodgings. From all directions men could be seen running in answer to the call and the camp was immediately all bustle and excitement. There was no confusion however; every man knew what he was to do and he did it.

"I told you!" exclaimed Dubois triumphantly. "I knew they'd have us out before much time had passed."

"It must be a terrible fight," remarked Leon, who was busily engaged in packing his equipment and taking a last look at his rifle.

"We'll make it so," said Armande fiercely. "Just let them try to get those positions away from us; we'll show them."

A few moments later the regiment was formed in line and without any delay the march was begun. Night was just falling as they set out. The men laughed and joked and sang, seemingly regardless of the danger into which they were going and the thought of possible death was apparently far from their minds.

As they proceeded the noise of the bombardment grew steadily louder. The very earth shook with the fury of it and far ahead could be seen an occasional flash from one of the star shells used to search out the enemy's positions.

"Do you suppose the infantry have attacked yet?" asked Earl of Jacques.

"I don't know how long the bombardment has been going on."

"They'll try to smash our trenches with their big guns before they send their infantry out, won't they?"

"Oh, I suppose so," said Jacques. "That's the usual way."

"Probably we'll arrive just in time to bear the whole weight of the attack," remarked Earl grimly.

They entered the trenches and mile after mile they progressed. The noise of the artillery made it almost impossible to talk now and but few attempts at conversation were made. Nearer and nearer to the front they came until presently they could distinguish the sharp rattle of the machine-guns above the roar of the

cannon. At length they reached one of the large communicating trenches and there they halted.

"We're to be held as reserves," shouted Jacques in Leon's ear.

"What's that?" demanded Leon.

"We're to be held as reserves."

Leon nodded his head. No one made much of an attempt to talk. The men huddled together in the trench and listened to the furious artillery duel going on around them. Now and again a big shell would burst near the spot where they were stationed and once the five friends were spattered with dirt thrown up by a nearby explosion. The earth rocked and it seemed as if no man could endure the awful tumult that was going on.

The Germans were deluging the French trenches with a deadly hail of high explosive shells. They tried to cover every inch of the allied first line and even behind the front trenches they dropped a steady stream of giant projectiles.

Suddenly the artillery fire slackened.

"Now the infantry will charge," exclaimed Jacques.

"Poor fellows," muttered Leon.

"Yes," agreed Jacques; "not many of them will ever get past our rifles and machine guns."

"Or the seventy-fives," added Earl.

As they stood talking an officer approached.

"I want a man to volunteer for a very dangerous mission," he announced as he drew near. "Who will go?"

Immediately he was besieged on all sides by an excited crowd of men, every one of them eager and anxious to be the one selected. Needless to say Leon, Earl, Jacques, Armande and Dubois were among the first to offer themselves. The officer smiled as he saw how the men responded.

"I want only one," he said. "I can't use you all."

"Take me; take me," begged every man eagerly.

"I will select you," he said, and as he spoke he laid his hand on Jacques' shoulder. The rest of the men shrank back disappointedly.

"Come with me," directed the officer and he and Jacques walked rapidly away. Jacques had no conception what his mission was to be, but he was not particularly curious; he knew that he was to do something for France and he was satisfied.

Through the winding trenches they preceded until they reached the first line. Here the effects of the German bombardment were especially noticeable. In many places the parapets had been blown in and dead and wounded men were lying all about. Jacques and his conductor paid no attention to these things, however. They hurried along until they finally came to a portion of the trench which projected beyond the remainder of it. Jacques recalled it as the section which he and his companions had occupied when Dubois had tied the string to the Germans' bell.

Here they halted; the guns were roaring now as never before and it was with great difficulty that one made his voice heard.

"The Germans came out of their trenches once but we drove them back with our fire curtain," explained the officer.

"They'll try again though," remarked Jacques.

"Of course they will and that is why I want you here. Do you see that little mound out ahead there?"

"Yes," replied Jacques peering intently through the darkness.

"That is a shelter," said the officer.

"And you want me to go out there."

"Yes. You will find inside of it an electric switchboard; there is only one switch so you cannot possibly go wrong. When that switch is pushed down it

connects with wires attached to a mine field. You are to go out to that shelter and wait until the German infantry reaches a spot one hundred feet in front of you; then you are to throw the switch. The mines will all explode and there'll be several less of the enemy left to attack us."

Jacques saluted and immediately began to crawl forward. A long narrow tunnel had been dug from the trenches to this position and through it the young soldier made his way without mishap.

Arriving at his goal he produced the flashlight the officer had slipped into his hands and looked about him. Sure enough, there was the switchboard and he felt no doubts about being able to carry out a part at least of his task. In the front of the shelter was a narrow slit. He pulled himself along to this and peered out.

Far ahead appeared the German trenches. The French shells were bursting all around them and the whole battlefield was a seething cauldron of flame. All at once he spied the German infantry. They emerged from their positions in good order and made ready to advance. Evidently they had decided that their bombardment had sufficiently devastated the French trenches and that the time to advance had arrived.

"Huh," snorted Jacques to himself. "If they only knew that our men are digging new trenches every minute and that every shell-hole has a machine-gun in it they wouldn't be in such a hurry to show themselves."

Such was indeed the case, but the Germans could not see the hidden peril. On they came. Spell-bound Jacques watched them. He had his hand on the switch but he was so nervous he decided to withdraw it for fear he should set it off too soon. A hundred feet away from him the officer had said the mines were planted. The Germans were over two hundred yards distant now.

Still they advanced. The French allowed them to come forward with but slight opposition until they reached a spot some two hundred yards away; then the rifles and machine-guns opened fire. The Germans were taken by surprise; Jacques could see them crouch low to the ground. He chuckled softly to himself at the sight.

They did not hesitate long, however. The order was passed along for them to advance and on they came. They began to sing, "The Watch on the Rhine," and dashed forward. The French guns of every caliber began to pour a perfect deluge of lead and steel upon the solid masses of the attackers.

"Why do they still use that massed formation?" muttered Jacques. "You might think they had men to waste."

Great gaps appeared in the German lines. Always they were closed up immediately, however. Like waves the Germans came on, line after line. Should a man fall, there was someone ready to step into his place and continue the advance. The slaughter was horrible, but still onward they pushed. It seemed as if they must succeed by sheer weight of numbers. Could they possibly be stopped?

Nearer and nearer they came. Jacques' heart was beating like a trip hammer. It seemed to him it must be heard even above the roar of the cannonade. He flashed his light on the switchboard. "Not yet," he told himself.

They were a hundred yards away now, but the mine field was only a hundred feet distant. He must wait. It was hard work, however, and brave as he was, the young soldier had all he could do to restrain himself. The bullets whined and whistled past his shelter; the big shells exploded with a deafening noise and still the Germans came on.

They seemed to falter once. The punishment being meted out to them by the French guns was cruel. They rallied instantly, however, and once more pushed forward. They were almost over the spot where the mines were buried now and Jacques set himself.

CHAPTER XIV

IN THE CHATEAU

Jacques' hand shook violently as he took hold of the switch. He peered out through the narrow slit in his shelter and saw the Germans through the opening, almost as if he was looking behind the curtain of a theater. Was now the time to set off the mine field? Not quite yet, he decided. Behind him he knew his comrades were expecting him to do his work right and he must not disappoint them.

It was a great responsibility that had been placed upon the shoulders of this young soldier. Jacques realized that fact and was determined to be true to his trust. Perhaps the safety of all that portion of the French line depended upon him alone.

Nearer came the Germans. Losses, appalling though they were, did not seem to hold them in check. They were almost over the spot now. Jacques set his jaw firmly and steeled himself to do his duty. It was for France he told himself. He had selected with his eye a spot which he had determined to be one hundred feet distant; when the Germans reached it he would throw the switch.

A few paces more and they would be over the mine field. On they came. The first rank had now reached the spot, but still Jacques waited. They were so near to him now that he could hear the hoarse shouts of the officers urging their men forward. The second line stepped upon the ground underneath which the mines were laid. Jacques threw the switch.

An infernal fountain seemed to shoot up in the midst of the mass of men in gray. A deafening explosion shook the ground and the air was filled with a great whirl of smoke. Men and parts of men flew high into the air as if they had been shot from the crater of some huge volcano.

Spellbound Jacques gazed upon the scene of awful destruction. As the smoke cleared away he saw the ground littered with the dead and dying. Those that still remained standing seemed bewildered. In vain their officers tried to rally them; pleadings and threats alike were of no avail. Their nerves were shattered and they turned and fled.

The attack was stopped. Jacques forgot the slaughter and remembered only that the French positions had been saved. He turned and began to crawl back towards his own lines. He had gone only a short distance, however, when he heard a shout. Glancing up he spied the French infantry climbing out of their

trenches. Evidently they were not content with merely having stopped the German charge; they were determined to follow up their advantage with a gain on their own account.

With a wild yell they dashed forward. Rifles in hand and the long wicked-looking bayonets gleaming they rushed ahead. The Germans were demoralized and now was the time to strike. One glance told Jacques what was taking place and he did not hesitate an instant as to what course to pursue. With one bound he joined his comrades and a moment later was making for the opposing trenches as fast as any one of them.

Across the shell-swept field they raced. The ground was covered with the dead and dying, but no one hesitated. Great holes had been dug out of the earth by the giant shells; consequently the footing was dangerous and more than one man came to grief from this cause.

The German reserves and artillery were busy now. They had not been dispersed and in spite of the tremendous battering by the French guns a furious hail of bullets was poured into the advancing troops. The French charge was irresistible, however, and with a rush it swept up to and into the German first-line trench.

Here a furious hand-to-hand combat took place. Using bayonets or the butts of their rifles the men stabbed and clubbed at one another. Like demons the French fought; they were there to win and they meant to win. Their dash and spirit were simply invincible.

As Jacques sprang over the parapet a huge German advanced upon him with a cry of rage. The young Frenchman had partly fallen when he landed in the trench so that for the moment his balance was nearly destroyed. Consequently he was at a disadvantage and seeing his enemy making towards him he realized that before he could do anything he would be killed. Already the German had his rifle upraised preparatory to bringing it down upon the head of the young soldier.

It's all over, thought Jacques and he half closed his eyes. The expected blow never fell, however. Before the German could bring his gun down, a Frenchman standing just behind him suddenly pierced him through and through with his bayonet. The huge German sank to the ground without a sound.

"Armande!" cried Jacques, suddenly recognizing his rescuer. "You saved my

life."

"It is part of the day's work," said Armande lightly, for it was indeed the daring Frenchman who had aided Jacques so opportunely.

Every German in the trench had by this time either been killed or captured and already the prisoners were being led back to the French lines.

"The next trench now," shouted someone. "Why stop here?"

A cheer greeted this remark and immediately the soldiers began to scramble out of the captured position. The second line of German trenches ran through a little wood on one border of which appeared the tower of a château which had so far escaped destruction in some miraculous way.

"Let's make for that," shouted Armande in Jacques' ear. "If we can reach that château we can defend ourselves indefinitely."

"Get some more men and we'll go," answered Jacques.

"This way! This way!" cried Armande, and immediately a dozen or fifteen men turned aside and followed his lead.

At top speed the little company dashed forward. The German rifles and machine-guns raked them with a galling fire, but still they kept on. Four of their number fell, but undaunted the others still continued the mad race. Closer and closer to the half-ruined château they came.

"They're firing from the tower," shouted Jacques. "The place is occupied."

"What of it?" demanded Armande. "So much the better."

An occasional flash from the narrow windows of the tower told that the Germans were using the place for defense. How many of them might be in there at present no one could tell. Not one of the attackers faltered on this account, however. Apparently they did not care whether four or forty men might be waiting for them.

Straight up to the front door Armande dashed. It was open and he rushed inside. Close at his heels followed the rest of the daring little company. A

fusillade of bullets sang about their ears but no one was touched.

Up the winding stairs ahead of them three German soldiers could be seen fleeing. Their escape cut off below they had made for the only safe place left, the tower of the château. Armande was for following right after them, but Jacques restrained him.

"Wait," he cautioned. "They're above you and have us at a disadvantage."

"But they may escape us," protested Armande.

"How can they? They can't leave that tower by any other means than these stairs. They can't possibly escape."

"We must drive them out of there," insisted Armande.

"We will," exclaimed Jacques. "We want to plan the best way to do it though."

"You stand guard at the door," Armande directed one of the men. "Let us know if you see any sign of a German out there."

The soldier took his place and Armande advanced cautiously towards the foot of the stairway. The men were huddled together on the ground floor, irresolute as to what course they should now pursue.

Suddenly a hand-grenade came flying down the stairs, bumped along on the last two steps and then came to rest in the center of the little group gathered there. It was plain to be seen that it was about to explode and that if it did so, practically the entire band would be killed.

Quick as a flash one of the men threw himself down upon the deadly bomb. Hardly had he done so when it exploded. There was an ear-splitting roar and the soldier, Fisché by name, was literally blown to pieces. No one else was harmed.

"He saved our lives," exclaimed Jacques feelingly. "Who was that?"

"Fisché," replied one of the men.

"Well, we'd all be dead now if it hadn't been for his nerve and quick action.

What a brave man he was!"

"That mustn't happen again," exclaimed Armande. "We must clean those rats out of the tower before it will be safe for us here."

"How are you going to do it?" inquired Jacques.

"Go up after them of course. Who will go with me!"

"I will, I will," cried a half-dozen voices eagerly.

"Come along then," exclaimed Armande, and advancing to the stairway he placed one foot on the bottom step and glanced up.

CHAPTER XV

THE FIGHT FOR THE TOWER

As Armande's foot touched the stairs, a bullet from above struck his steel helmet a glancing blow. The helmet was knocked from his head and he staggered back against the wall. Jacques sprang to his side at once.

"I'm all right," exclaimed Armande quickly.

"Are you hurt?" demanded Jacques.

"Not at all; it merely stunned me for a second," and Armande rubbed his head dazedly. "I'll be all right directly."

"You musn't try to go up those stairs again," exclaimed Jacques, as he spoke handing Armande back his helmet, which he had picked up from the floor.

"But we must get them out of that tower," insisted Armande.

"I know," agreed Jacques, "but we'll have to find some other way to do it."

"But how?"

"I think I know how," said one of the men stepping forward.

"What is your scheme, Lippen?" asked Jacques eagerly.

"If we only had a machine-gun we could soon bring them down."

"But how could we carry a machine-gun up those stairs?" demanded Jacques. "They'd shoot us down at their leisure."

"We won't take it upstairs," said Lippen quietly.

"What is your plan?"

"Send two men for a machine-gun. When they have brought it back we will set it up here and point it at the ceiling. When we have sent a few thousand bullets through the floor the Boches will come down fast enough."

"Why will they?" demanded Jacques. "I don't see just what you mean."

"They'll come down because they won't be able to help it," said Lippen grimly. "We'll blow a hole through the floor and they'll fall down."

"I believe you're right," exclaimed Jacques suddenly. "Who will go after a machine-gun?"

Several men immediately offered their services and two were quickly dispatched on the quest. It was a dangerous mission, as the Germans from their position in the tower could shoot from the windows and have anyone below almost at their mercy. In order to divert their attention from the two messengers the men in the château started a lively demonstration. A half-dozen hand-grenades were hurled up the stairs by the daring soldiers and a fusillade of rifle and pistol shots was directed towards the same spot.

Under cover of this bombardment the messengers slipped out of the château and in safety gained the shelter of the woods. The French attack had now carried the second line of German trenches so that the château was in territory held by them. The Germans, trapped in the tower, were cut off from their troops.

"They got away safely," Jacques, who had been watching the two messengers, reported to Armande.

"Good," exclaimed Armande. "I hope the scheme will work."

"What else could we do?"

"I should like to rush the stairs," said Armande. "We can do it."

"You saw what happened to you a moment ago when you tried it," Jacques reminded him. "Probably we could do it but what's the use in getting a lot of men killed when we can accomplish the same result in some other way?"

"Probably you 're right," Armande agreed. "I hate to wait though."

The men had now withdrawn to an alcove off the main hall. This new position afforded them control of the stairway without exposing them to the fire of their enemies. The piano was dragged over to their place of refuge and a barricade built in front of it in case the Germans should try to rush them.

"How many of the Boches do you think are up there?" asked Armande.

"No matter," laughed Lippen. "They'll all be down pretty soon and then we can count them."

At this moment the guard who had been set to watch for the return of the two men with the machine-gun signalled that they were in sight.

"Good," exclaimed Jacques. "Now let's let them have a few more grenades upstairs there just to show them that we're still alive."

This plan was carried out and a series of violent explosions from the room above showed that the grenades were effective. At the same time the sentry signalled the two messengers to advance. One of them carried the tripod of the gun and the other the barrel. At top speed they set out from the shelter of the trees and started across the open space leading up to the entrance of the château.

They crouched low to the ground as they ran, endeavoring to present as small a mark as possible. Little spurts of dust all around them showed that the Germans were firing at them from above. The demonstration by the French

inside the château was increased in intensity and one reckless man even ran halfway up the stairs to the landing before he threw his hand-grenade. Having hurled it, he sped down again, slipping, sliding and falling. However he was unhurt.

In spite of all these efforts the fire directed at the two messengers did not cease. So far, however, they were untouched and were only fifty or sixty feet distant from their goal. Suddenly the man carrying the barrel staggered. He reeled drunkenly for a moment and then sank to the ground. His companion, who was in the lead, was not aware of this and it was not until he had gained the protection of the château that he realized that his comrade was missing.

Of course the machine-gun was useless with one part gone. Someone would have to retrieve the other half and Armande instantly took it upon himself to be that one. Without waiting to see whether anyone else was going he dashed out of the doorway and raced towards the spot where the lost barrel lay. His appearance was greeted with a storm of bullets from the tower.

Untouched, however, he reached his goal. The barrel was lying on the ground beside the prostrate form of the soldier who had carried it that far; the soldier was dead, however, with a bullet through his heart.

Armande bent over and seizing the missing part of the gun he turned and ran for the château. All about him the bullets whined and sang; it seemed impossible that he should ever cover those few yards alive. The evening before, however, he had remarked to Jacques that having seen the new moon over his right shoulder he would be lucky. Whether or not that was the reason the fact remains that he gained the doorway and handed the barrel over to Jacques. His uniform had been torn on one shoulder and blood was oozing from the wound, which although deep, was not serious.

"Your life is charmed, Armande," exclaimed Lippen in admiration.

"I hope so," said Armande grimly. "Set up the gun."

No time was lost in this operation, and in less than two minutes the machine-gun was ready for action. The man who had carried the tripod had also brought the necessary ammunition.

"Train it on one spot," Lippen directed. "As soon as we get a hole through the

floor we'll send a few hand-grenades through it."

Careful aim was taken and a moment later the gun was spitting an almost continuous stream of bullets into a space about a yard square on the ceiling. The plaster began to fly and some candelabra came to the floor with a crash. The noise of the machine-gun was almost ear-splitting inside the château but the men were all delighted at the promise of early results.

Jacques fed the long strips of bullets to the hungry gun, while all except his helper stood around in different parts of the room, their rifles held ready for instant use. All eyes were fixed upon the spot on the ceiling.

Suddenly a ray of light shone through from above. The air was filled with smoke and dust from the crumbling plaster.

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The air was filled with smoke and dust from the crumbling plaster.

"Keep it up!" shouted Armande.

The bullets were spraying all around the edge of the hole which grew rapidly larger. Several of the men opened fire with their rifles. The machine-gun then ceased firing.

"You can see where the beams run now," said Jacques to the gunner. "Loosen them up a little."

Once more the withering fire was continued and soon a yawning hole appeared above the heads of the Frenchmen. A table came crashing through; a chair followed close behind and a huge lamp next spun through the air and smashed into a thousand pieces on the floor below.

It must not be supposed, however, that the Germans in the tower were idle all this time. Bullets went through the opening in both directions and already two of the Frenchmen had been killed; two more were wounded. The fight was desperate.

All at once a hand-grenade, dropped from above, landed squarely in front of the spot where Jacques was stationed. It was not four feet distant from the young

Frenchman. Almost without thinking he acted. Springing forward he seized the deadly missile and hurled it at the ever-spreading opening in the ceiling. He had not been a second too soon. Just as the grenade was passing through the hole it exploded.

CHAPTER XVI

THE DUG-OUT

Jacques immediately sprang back to his former position in the alcove beside the machine-gun. Lucky it was for him that he did so. The hand-grenade exploded and the ceiling which already was greatly weakened speedily collapsed.

Plaster, furniture, rafters and men poured down in a mass. The force of the explosion had literally torn the ceiling to pieces and, the supports gone, it collapsed at once.

"Anyone left up there?" shouted Armande.

"Not a soul," replied Jacques quickly. "Watch out below though."

Many of the Germans were buried deep under the mass of débris on the floor. Here and there an arm appeared and the French were busily engaged in extricating their enemies from the heap. Seven men were taken out alive, suffering only from bruises; four more were captured badly wounded and six were found dead.

"Well I guess the fight's over," sighed Armande when the Germans had been deprived of their weapons and the pile had been thoroughly searched for any more bodies.

"Seems to be," agreed Jacques. "How about these men?" he asked, as he spoke, indicating the prisoners that had been taken.

"We'll take them back to our trenches of course," said Armande.

A few moments later the little band had left the ruined château and were on their way back to their lines. The struggle was still continuing violently and both sides were fighting desperately for possession of the disputed positions.

Arriving in the trenches Armande, Jacques, Lippen and the others soon found their regiment and having turned over their prisoners were quickly in the fighting again. Leon, Earl and Dubois were posted side by side and Armande and Jacques joined them at once.

"We thought you were dead, Jacques," cried Leon, delighted to see his comrade once more. "Where did you come from?"

The story was quickly told and just as it was completed the officer who had directed Jacques to set off the mine-field approached the place in which the boys were standing.

"Young man!" he exclaimed heartily, catching sight of Jacques, "you did splendid work. You saved our lines and made possible this counter-attack. You disappeared though and I feared you had been lost."

"I saw our men coming forward and I could not resist the temptation to join them, sir," said Jacques modestly.

"Well, I'm glad to see you again," said the officer. "We need men like you."

"They're all as good if not better," exclaimed Jacques earnestly.

"That's right too," agreed the officer. "Every Frenchman is a hero in these days of trouble."

He passed on and Jacques turned again to his comrades.

"Tell me," he exclaimed, "what has happened here?"

"Everything," said Earl grimly. "They certainly did pepper us and it was only a few minutes before you came back that they let up at all."

"They're still fairly busy I should say," remarked Jacques.

The shells were bursting all around in endless succession but fortunately the fire of the German batteries was directed mostly upon the positions to the right and left of those occupied by the *douzième*.

"They'll hit us before long," remarked Dubois.

"What do you mean?" asked Earl. "A counter-attack?"

"I think so. They may not try it to-day but they surely will some time to-night; the Boches are getting so they like to fight in the dark now."

"Perhaps it's because they can't see the bayonets so well," laughed Armande. "They don't care much about cold steel, do they?"

"I should say not," agreed Dubois. "It's funny too for they are certainly brave enough when it comes to facing shells and machine-guns."

"Hand-to-hand work isn't suited to Germans, I guess," said Leon. "You never heard of a German being a good boxer either; they don't seem to be much good at things that need quick thinking and action."

"Germans are good athletes though," exclaimed Earl.

"In certain sports they are," Leon agreed. "They're good wrestlers and gymnasts and that sort of thing. I say that they're strong but they're not athletic. The strongest fellows aren't always the best athletes, you know."

Meanwhile the guns boomed constantly. The shells from the French guns were exploding far in advance of the positions the *douzième* now occupied.

"They're probably shelling the ground where the Germans are trying to dig new trenches," said Dubois.

"I hope they hit 'em," exclaimed Leon fervently.

There were many dug-outs along the line of the trench. Some of them were shell-proof and were fifteen to twenty feet below the surface of the ground; the entrance to these was through a door, level with the floor of the trench. A stairway, just wide enough to permit one man to pass, led down to them. The roofs were reinforced with huge timbers and so strongly were they constructed

that most of them were intact, despite the heavy bombardment to which they had been subjected.

"Have you seen these dug-outs?" Leon inquired of Jacques.

"No, I haven't."

"Come along then and I'll show them to you," exclaimed Leon. "Some of them are regular palaces."

"I doubt that," laughed Jacques as the two boys set out together.

They inspected a dug-out similar to the one described above. Then they discovered others, larger but only slightly lower than the trenches.

"Look at them," exclaimed Leon. "They must have used these for living quarters when things were quiet."

"I guess they did," agreed Jacques. "If they're all like this they're pretty good size too; this one must be six feet wide and nearly thirty feet long."

"See those logs on the ceiling; they're a foot in diameter at least."

"Yes, but they're not shell-proof. They have to be deeper in the ground than this to be safe from high explosive shells."

The two young soldiers continued along the trench. Many of the dug-outs, similar to that they had just left, were in ruins. Jacques was correct when he said they were not proof against the big shells. Most of them were destroyed, the logs splintered to kindling-wood and strewn far and wide over the ground.

"Where does this lead, do you suppose?" demanded Leon suddenly.

"Let's follow it and see," exclaimed Jacques readily.

A blind alley ran off from the main trench and it was this that the two boys were following. There was a narrow doorway at the end of the alley and through this they advanced.

"Another dug-out, I suppose," said Jacques.

"Looks like a real one," exclaimed Leon. "Whew!" he whistled in amazement as he descended the stairs and stepped out into the underground room.

"Say," said Jacques warmly, "some general must have lived here."

"I should think as much," agreed Leon. "Just look around you; rugs on the floor, pictures and mirrors on the wall."

"And a wonderful stove; let's make some tea," cried Jacques eagerly.

"Where's the tea?"

"There must be some here; there seems to be everything else."

A short search soon produced tea and crackers; a fire was started in the stove and water was put on to boil. Tea was always in demand by the soldiers; it was their favorite beverage in the trenches.

"Isn't this great?" exclaimed Leon. "War wouldn't be so bad if we only had places like this to live in."

"Did you notice that there were two entrances?" asked Jacques.

"Yes, one at each end. I suppose that's in case the trench should cave in and block up one passage-way you could still get out the other side."

"Pull up a chair, Leon," exclaimed Jacques. "We might as well be comfortable as long as we can."

The two soldiers sat by the fire and sipped their tea and chatted. Now and again a dull roar told them that the Germans were still busy and that they still had their opponents, the French, in mind.

"Do you suppose we could be hurt down here?" remarked Leon.

"If one of those big German shells happened to strike squarely over us I guess we'd be hurt all right," said Jacques.

"It would have to be a direct hit though."

"That's true and I don't believe there is much chance of its happening. This

seems to me about the safest spot I've seen."

"Too bad the others don't know about it," said Leon.

"Listen," warned Jacques. "Here comes somebody now."

A moment later six soldiers filed into the dug-out. They were men from the *douzième*, but belonged to a different company from that of which Leon and Jacques were members.

"Come in," cried Jacques cordially. "Have some tea."

No second invitation was needed and the eight soldiers were soon grouped around the fire, sipping canteens of hot tea. Everyone was as enthusiastic as Leon and Jacques had been and life seemed worth while once more. The time was short, however; it soon became necessary for our two young friends to leave and go back to their post.

They said good-by to their comrades and made their way outside. Coming to the little alley that led to the dug-out they stopped and listened to the artillery duel.

"The Germans are tuning up again," remarked Jacques.

"They certainly are," agreed Leon. "Did you ever notice how you can tell from the sound a shell makes going through the air just what kind it is?"

"Yes, and you can judge their direction and where they're going to fall too."

Suddenly Jacques grasped Leon fiercely by the arm. "Look out," he cried in terror, and threw himself and his companion prone upon the floor of the trench.

He had heard a sound which he knew meant danger and possibly death; the awful whistling roar of a high explosive.

CHAPTER XVII

LIPPEN BREAKS

A terrific explosion shook the earth. Dirt was mixed with logs and stones and showered everything nearby. The deadly lyddite blackened the faces of the two young soldiers and half blinded them. For some moments they were too stunned to move.

Finally they recovered somewhat from the shock and rose to their feet.

"Look at that dug-out, Jacques," exclaimed Leon. "It's blown to pieces."

"How about the men inside?" cried Jacques. "There are six of them."

As he finished speaking one of the trapped soldiers crawled out. He pulled himself along with one arm, for the other was terribly shattered; one of his legs hung only by a tendon and a few shreds of flesh.

"Quick, Leon!" cried Jacques. "Cut the cord from your bandolier; you tie up his arm and I'll attend to his leg. We must stop this flow of blood or he'll die."

The wounded soldier was a fine, healthy boy; a few minutes before he had been telling what he planned to do when he went home on a furlough. Now his face was white with agony; his voice grew weaker and weaker and he died while Jacques and Leon were working over him.

"This is awful," cried Leon fiercely.

"This is war," said Jacques.

High explosive shells were now bursting all along the line; tons of earth were thrown high into the air and the very ground rocked beneath their feet. Men hurried from one spot to another trying to find protection where there was none; oftentimes masses of earth were blown in on top of them.

"Picks and shovels!" came the cry, and "Stretcher bearers! Stretcher bearers!" resounded on all sides.

"The rest of those men in the dug-out are dead, Leon," said Jacques calmly. "We can do nothing for them and the thing for us to do is to rejoin our company."

"Think of it," exclaimed Leon as they hurried along. "If we'd stayed in that dug-out two minutes longer we'd been dead now."

"Death comes quickly in war," remarked Jacques. "It hangs by a thread and you never can tell when it is going to strike you."

They soon reached the spot where their company was located and along with the rest of those who were off duty were immediately ordered into the deepest of the shell-proof dug-outs, where they were really quite safe.

"We're in for it, I guess," remarked Dubois laconically, as Jacques and Leon entered the dug-out. Earl and Armande were also there.

"Sure we are," exclaimed the latter brightly. "What of it?"

"There'll be a lot of our men killed."

"Not half as many as there will be Boches," said Armande. "Just wait until they send their infantry out; our machine-guns will make them wish they were back in their trenches."

"You're an optimist, Armande," said Earl. "Just listen to those shells up there."

"The Boches will come out about dark," said Armande. "We might just as well sleep until then."

"Not with that going on," exclaimed Leon. "At least not for me."

An hour later they were all ordered out. Every man had on a mask to guard against the poisonous gas that the Germans used so frequently just before they launched their attacks. Oftentimes too they would shower the opposing trenches with shells, causing irritation and smarting of the eyes so that the men could not see to shoot. Now and again they used liquid fire which shot out half a hundred feet from especially made machines somewhat resembling the nozzle of a hose.

The surprising thing is that the French could withstand all those terrible engines of destruction. Sheer courage had helped them the first time they were used and after that they were always provided with some good means of defense. The French are remarkably quick to learn.

It was dark as the men came up out of the dug-out. They had scarcely taken their places when there was a sudden hurricane of rifle and machine-gun fire. Almost instantly the whole battered landscape became lighted up under the flare of innumerable trench-rockets. Far ahead, the enemy, in irregular lines, could be seen advancing to the attack.

"Here they come," cried Armande. "Let 'em have it!"

A pitiless infantry fire was turned upon the Germans. An almost solid sheet of flame issuing from the French rifles marked the curve of their trenches. Almost at once the French artillery caught the range of the advancing troops; the air was filled with the roar of the bursting shells and the sad-sounding *whing-g-g* of flying shrapnel.

"No one can possibly come across that space alive," cried Leon incredulously.

"Yes, they can too," exclaimed Armande and a moment later the sharp staccato of a hand-grenade bursting nearby warned them that some of the enemy at least were already within striking distance.

The men worked feverishly. Rifles became hot they were fired so fast and so constantly. Hand-grenades were popping all around now and the noise became deafening. Like gray ghosts the Germans appeared under the flare of the guns and the weird light of the trench-rockets.

The French machine-guns mowed the Germans down like grass and the fact that they still came on was a high tribute to their bravery. Gradually the firing died down and the noise lessened. Broken and beaten back the Germans turned and fled. A cheer went up from the French line, while a farewell volley was poured into the mass of retreating Germans.

"What did I tell you?" demanded Armande triumphantly. "I knew they couldn't touch us and I'd just like to see them try it again."

"It cost us something," said Earl.

"Yes, but not one-quarter of what it did them."

"I hope not," agreed Earl. "It always costs the attacker more."

The strain of the fight let down and a reaction set in. The ground was strewn with the dead and dying and the moans of the wounded were anything but pleasant to hear. During the fight every man nerves himself to face whatever comes; afterwards there is sometimes a complete swing to the other extreme.

Arms and legs stuck out from heaps of earth. Dead men lay all around; blood was on everything. Nauseating odors filled the air. Suddenly from a spot directly behind Earl came a sound that made his blood run cold.

Lippen, the soldier who had fought so valiantly in the château, suddenly sprang to his feet. He uttered a wild, hideous, hysterical laugh and seizing an arm that protruded from the trench in front of him he hurled it far out over the battlefield.

He shrieked raucously and then suddenly sat down and began to sob. His companions gazed at him a moment in surprise and then in pity.

"What is it, Jacques?" demanded Earl. "What ails him?"

"He's crazy," said Jacques quietly.

"What do you mean?"

"He's gone insane; his nerves are shattered."

Lippen sat and sobbed; now and again he raised his head and gazed about him and the look in his eyes showed that all his reason had departed.

"How awful!" exclaimed Earl with a shudder. "Do you suppose he'll ever get well again?"

"It's hard to say," replied Jacques. "Sometimes they do and sometimes they don't."

"I've heard about these things happening in the trenches," remarked Leon. "This is the first case I've seen."

"There are a good many made the same way," said Jacques soberly. "The terrible strain and the awful slaughter affect men's nerves so that they sometimes go entirely to pieces. It is very sad."

"It's horrible!" muttered Earl with a shudder.

"For my part I'd rather be killed," said Leon.

Attendants came and led poor Lippen away. Perhaps with constant care and prolonged quiet his shattered nerves might mend. At any rate he was but one small part of the army and the war must go on whether he was gone or not. Of course all would be done for him that was possible, but after all one man more or less is a very tiny part of a big army. If sympathy was expended on every pitiful case there would not be much time left for fighting.

As the soldiers crouched behind the parapet Captain Le Blanc approached the spot where Jacques was seated.

"Private Dineau," he said, "I understand that you are an aviator."

"Yes, sir," exclaimed Jacques, quickly springing to his feet and saluting.

"You were once attached to the flying corps?"

"Yes, sir."

"You think you can still drive an aeroplane?"

"I am sure of it, sir."

"Very good," said the captain. "Come with me."

CHAPTER XVIII

AN ASSIGNMENT

"Well what do you suppose he's going to do?" exclaimed Earl after Jacques and Captain Le Blanc had disappeared.

"He's going flying, I suppose," said Dubois.

"Say," cried Earl enviously, "I wish we were."

"That's the best part of the service all right," said Leon. "Jacques and I were in it together once and I know what I'm talking about."

"Why did you ever leave it?" inquired Dubois.

"I don't know," said Leon. "We thought it would be more exciting with the infantry and so we got transferred."

"Flying's not as safe as it was at the beginning of the war," remarked Dubois.

"I know it isn't," said Leon. "There are ten times as many machines now as there were then and ten times as many flyers. Then again, scouting over trenches is much more dangerous than over the open country. Here you are fired at constantly by the anti-aircraft guns and you meet so many more machines; they're all concentrated in one spot."

"Just the same I'd like to try it," exclaimed Earl eagerly. "Do you suppose that if Jacques is given a machine he could take us along as observers?"

"No such luck I'm afraid," laughed Leon grimly. "We may never see him again."

"Let's hope it will not be as bad as that," said Dubois. "Jacques is certainly a fine boy."

"He's a good friend of mine all right," said Leon warmly.

After a time the two brothers and Dubois were relieved from duty and retired to their dug-out for rest and recuperation. They were soon asleep, for the experiences of the past few hours had been exhausting. Heavy and regular breathing soon testified that the other occupants of the underground room were also deep in slumber.

Leon suddenly opened his eyes with the vague impression in his mind that someone was shaking him. He awoke to find himself staring into the flare of a flashlight. Some soldier held it in one hand while with the other he tugged at Leon's sleeve.

The young soldier was awake instantly and on his feet. Men who live in constant danger do not waste any time waking up.

"What is it?" he demanded.

"Come with me," said the man whom Leon recognized as Captain Le Blanc's orderly. "Also bring your brother."

"Wake up, Earl," whispered Leon eagerly in his brother's ear.

A moment later the twins and their guide were making their way along the trenches towards the captain's quarters. It was very dark and difficult to see. Vague, shadowy forms crouching low behind the parapets, however, testified that France's children were still guarding her. Day after day and night after night the constant vigil was kept up; never for one moment did these human machines relax their caution. Everywhere throughout the length of the long battle-line, sharp eyes kept watch.

Winding through the numerous trenches the three soldiers finally came to their destination. A moment's delay and they were ushered into the dug-out which served as Captain Le Blanc's quarters. A short time before, this same shelter had served a corresponding purpose for some German official.

Seated at a table were three men. One of them the brothers immediately recognized as Captain Le Blanc but the other two were strangers. The officer on the captain's right turned to him.

"Are these the two young men of whom you spoke?" he inquired.

Captain Le Blanc turned and glanced questioningly at Jacques who stood nearby. The young Frenchman nodded his head slightly.

"These are the ones, General," said the captain, facing again the man who had questioned him.

"Very good," exclaimed the general, a keen-eyed soldier with white hair and a white mustache. "They are friends of yours I take it?" he remarked to Jacques.

"Yes, sir," replied Jacques with a prompt salute.

"Young men," said the general now addressing Leon and Earl, "I have a mission to be performed; it requires the services of an experienced aviator and we have decided that it is best for him to be accompanied by two men. It is dangerous but it is necessary. We have chosen you three young men from among many and we rely on you to carry the enterprise through to a successful conclusion.

"You will start at dawn; Private Dineau will be the aviator and he will have as aides the brothers Platt. You will be conducted to the machine you are to use and as dawn is not far distant I advise you to prepare yourselves at once. Good luck to you."

He turned away and the three boys, realizing that they were dismissed, immediately withdrew. Captain Le Blanc's orderly followed them.

"I will conduct you to your machine," he announced and set out at once, closely followed by the three young soldiers. Back from the front they walked, proceeding through the winding maze of communicating trenches. Few words were spoken until they emerged from the trenches entirely and came to the open road.

A small motor-car with a chauffeur seated at the wheel stood near the entrance to the trench.

"For us," announced the orderly and straightway climbed aboard.

His companions were not slow to follow his example and a moment later they were whizzing at breakneck speed along the highway.

"Where are we being sent?" demanded Earl, who all this time had been consumed with intense curiosity.

Jacques merely shrugged his shoulders. "I do not know," he said.

"Say," exclaimed Leon suddenly, "what's this driver trying to do; kill us? Personally I'd rather be killed in battle if I must die. An automobile accident seems out of place in war."

"He's going some all right, isn't he?" cried Earl. "I'd like it th——"

His words were suddenly cut short. The driver swung the car sharply to the right to avoid a huge shell-hole blown in the middle of the highway; he did not slacken his speed one bit, however. Earl was thrown off the seat violently and found himself on the floor of the car; Jacques landed there beside him at the same time.

"This is pretty bad," exclaimed Earl. "I agree with you, Leon; he ought to stop it."

"But he won't," announced Jacques. "They all go like this."

"Well, I'll certainly be glad when it's over," said Earl grimly. "I can't get up onto the seat again."

"Don't try," advised Jacques. "We'll soon be there."

"If we're not all dead," murmured Earl.

Presently, however, the speed slackened and the machine came to a stop. An aviation field with hangars all around appeared some half mile distant.

"Here we are," announced the orderly, stepping from the car.

"How fast were we going there, Leon?" inquired Earl as they hastened to follow their guide.

"Seventy miles an hour," said Leon. "Did you like it?"

"I did *not*," said Earl warmly. "That's too fast for me."

"Wait until we get into our aeroplane," warned Jacques. "We'll travel a hundred miles an hour easily."

"There are no shell-holes in the air anyway," said Earl. "We can't be wrecked that way as we nearly were back there on the road."

"Don't you believe it," exclaimed Jacques. "When they begin firing at us from the German trenches you'll find there are plenty of shell-holes in the air all right."

"By the way, haven't you any idea where we're going?"

"None at all. All I know is that this orderly is instructed to take us somewhere over here where we'll get our orders."

"Who was that man who talked to us?" asked Leon. "They called him 'general.'"

"That was General Petain," said Jacques. "Didn't you know him?"

"I never saw him before. Was that really he?"

General Petain was the man made famous by his splendid defense of Verdun and he was a popular hero with the soldiers.

"Who was the third man?" asked Earl.

"I don't know who he was."

The first faint streaks of dawn were just beginning to color the eastern sky as the little party stopped in front of a vine-covered cottage, just to one side of the aviation field.

"Here I leave you," announced their guide. "You are to report to Major Villier." He immediately turned on his heel and walked away.

Jacques led the way inside. The young soldiers were evidently expected for they were led without delay into the presence of an officer seated under a lamp, intently studying a map. He looked up as the three boys entered the room.

"Which one of you is Private Dineau?" he inquired.

"I am," announced Jacques stepping forward.

"Good," exclaimed the major. "Here are dispatches which you are to deliver to Colonel Erhard. He is in command at the village of Flambeau in the Vosges Mountains. The dispatches are important and should reach him at the earliest possible moment." As he spoke he handed a small packet to Jacques.

"Your aeroplane is waiting for you," he continued. "It will contain everything

you will have need of and I wish you a good trip and a safe return, I would suggest that your two aides who look so very much alike go and see that everything is in readiness. Meanwhile I will point out Flambeau to you on the map and the best route for you to follow."

The major smiled at the two brothers who immediately departed, and guided by a soldier hastened across the aviation field to the spot where a big armored monoplane was just being trundled out of its hangar. A machine-gun was mounted on board and several bombs were also to be carried.

"Here are coats for you," said one of the men as the two brothers approached the machine. "You will find it cold up among the clouds today."

"How about food?" inquired Earl. He was always particular about that.

"Two days' rations for three men," said the soldier. "That is more than you'll need if all goes well but it's a good plan to be prepared."

"I think so too," agreed Earl. "What horsepower is this machine?"

"One hundred."

"Whew!" whistled Earl. "She ought to be able to make time."

"She can," said the soldier confidently. "Just wait until young Dineau gets hold of her. He'll make her sail; he's a wonder, that boy. It's a shame he ever got out of the aviation corps."

"He was good all right, wasn't he?" demanded Leon.

"Good?" exclaimed the man. "I should say he was good. Why I'll bet that if he had stuck to the flying corps he'd have bagged a dozen Boche machines by this time."

"He's reckless though," said Leon.

"Not reckless, but daring," insisted the soldier. "He doesn't know fear."

"Here he comes now," observed Earl.

CHAPTER XIX

OVER THE TRENCHES

A few moments later Jacques was in the driver's seat and Leon and Earl had taken their places on board. Every boy was dressed in a heavy coat and an aviator's hood, with protection for the ears and face; warm gloves were on their hands, for it promised to be biting cold in the high air that day.

The top rim of the sun was just appearing over the edge of the trees as Jacques pressed the button which set the self-starter whirring. The engine roared and the pilot listened intently for any sound of defect to come to his well-trained ear. An aviator must know by the sound just what is wrong with his motor; there is no chance to search for the cause of the trouble when you are a mile or two above ground.

Apparently Jacques was satisfied for he throttled the motor down until it merely purred. "All ready?" he demanded.

"Got your dispatches, have you?" asked Leon.

"Yes," said Jacques, feeling of his breast pocket.

"I guess we're off then," cried Leon eagerly. "Let 'er go."

The monoplane began to move forward slowly. The little knot of men gathered around called good-bys as the great mechanical bird ran out across the field. Faster and faster it went; finally Jacques pulled a lever and gracefully and easily it rose from the ground. Up, up, up it soared, swiftly and steadily.

"Say," almost shouted Earl, "this is wonderful. I've never been in an aeroplane before, you know."

"Well you keep your eye out for other machines and for people shooting at us from below," advised Leon. "That's your job and mine."

"It's such a wonderful sensation flying like this," cried Earl. "Just look down below us there. The roads look like white ribbons and the trees like bouquets. Don't the houses seem small?"

Earl was enchanted. Leon and Jacques too, although they were experienced hands at this game, once more felt the thrill of soaring swiftly through space. Jacques particularly was pleased to be in the driver's seat of an aeroplane again; his face plainly showed his keen enjoyment.

Higher and higher they mounted; below them the earth seemed miles away and the buildings and fields appeared to be of toy size. It was cold, however, bitterly cold, and all three of the boys were profoundly thankful for their warm wraps.

"You know it feels as if we were standing still," exclaimed Earl.

"I know it," agreed his brother. "The higher you go the more it seems that way too."

"Yes, sir," cried Earl, "if I didn't know better I should say that we were absolutely stationary and that it was the earth below that moved."

"Isn't the machine steady?"

"Feels as steady as a rock. You know I haven't felt the least bit nervous since we started."

"Why should you?" demanded Leon. "We're a good deal safer here than we are in the trenches."

"I suppose that's true," mused Earl. "You wouldn't think so, though, would you?"

"I don't know. The way the machines are perfected nowadays there is practically no danger from accident and with a good aviator you are as safe as any one can be in war. Of course plenty of machines are destroyed and the pilots and observers killed, but I believe the proportion is smaller than in any other branch of the service."

"Say," called Jacques from the pilot's seat.

"What is it?" demanded Leon.

"I've got a question to ask you. There are two ways of reaching Flambeau and I want your advice as to which to take. One way we can go around back of the firing line and be practically safe all the way."

"Go that way then," exclaimed Leon quickly.

"But," objected Jacques, "that course is much longer."

"Major Villier and General Petain both said that the dispatches should be delivered as soon as possible, didn't they?"

"'At the earliest possible moment,' was the way they expressed it," said Jacques.

"Then," said Leon, "we ought to take the shortest route."

"It crosses the battle line twice," said Jacques. "You know the trenches make a big loop below here and we will have to cut straight across that loop."

"Never mind," exclaimed Leon. "If they said to deliver the dispatches at the earliest possible moment it's for us to take the shortest possible course in order to do that."

"I think so too," agreed Earl. "We'll have to run our chances, that's all."

"There are the trenches below us now," cried Leon suddenly. "See them up ahead there?"

"Sure enough," exclaimed Earl. "Don't they look funny from here? They look just like a series of deep scars running in all directions."

"You can't see the first line trenches yet," said Leon. "You can easily tell them for they'll run exactly parallel to one another and the space in between them will be the only place where you see no trenches. Behind both the French and German first lines there are any number of other trenches running in all directions and all connected. But in between the two front ones there is nothing; 'no-man's land' they call it."

"'Dead-man's land' would be better I should think."

"See them firing," exclaimed Leon suddenly.

"At us?" queried Earl.

"No. You can see those puffs of smoke down below there though; those are bursting shells."

"There are the first line trenches too," said Earl abruptly. "You can tell them easily, can't you, just as you said."

"How high are we, Jacques?" inquired Leon.

The young aviator consulted his indicator. "Two thousand meters," he replied.

"Let's see," said Leon, trying to figure it out in his head, "there are a little over three feet in a meter and that would make two thousand meters about six thousand feet or over. There are five thousand two hundred and forty feet in a mile; that makes us a little over a mile high."

"Can they hit us at this distance?" asked Earl.

"They can, but I hope they don't," said Leon grimly.

"Funny we haven't seen any other machines," remarked Earl.

"Well we're right over the front trenches now and I guess plenty of people see us and are looking at us right this minute."

As he spoke a puff of white smoke suddenly appeared ahead of them but some distance below.

"They're firing at us," exclaimed Jacques.

"Shall we drop a bomb on them?" cried Earl eagerly. "We want them to know that we're alive, you know."

"Don't do it," cautioned Jacques. "It would probably be wasted here."

"There's another shot," cried Leon. "Behind us this time."

"Let's hope their aim continues as poor as that," said Jacques. "We want to get those dispatches to Colonel Erhard at Flambeau before anything happens to us."

"We'll be over hostile territory all the way, won't we?" asked Earl.

"We will," replied Jacques, "and we'll be fired at all the way too. If they should send a couple of machines up after us we might have to run for it."

"I don't know where we'd run to," said Leon grimly.

"Nor I," admitted Jacques. "Let's hope that we can out-distance any machines that start to chase us."

"Do you think this machine is faster than the German ones?" asked Earl.

"Faster than most of them," replied Jacques. "Probably not as speedy as those new *fokkers* though; they go like the wind, but they are too light and I doubt if one of them could do us a great deal of harm."

They passed over many towns and hamlets; the green fields of France lay spread out beneath them like some soft green carpet. It all appeared very beautiful and peaceful now that they were some miles back of the firing line. An occasional puff of smoke around them, however, showed that they still traversed hostile territory; at least it was land held by the invader.

Once a German machine rose from its hangar far below and set out in pursuit of the speeding monoplane; it was quickly out-distanced, however, and soon abandoned the chase. Without any special incident the three young friends progressed until far ahead of them they could make out the faint outlines of the Vosges.

"There are the mountains," cried Jacques.

"Sure enough," exclaimed Earl. "Well we've had a pretty easy trip of it, haven't we? It has been a regular pleasure jaunt."

"We're not there yet," warned Leon.

CHAPTER XX

AT FLAMBEAU

Closer and closer they came to the mountains. Presently it was possible to make out the different summits, all of them wrapped in a blue haze.

"Do you know where Flambeau is, Jacques?" queried Earl.

"I do."

"We'll have to cross the firing line again, won't we?"

"Yes; pretty soon now too, I think."

"Do you know where it runs here?" asked Leon. "If it should follow the top of some of these mountains we'd have to ascend much higher than we are now to be out of range, wouldn't we?"

"We certainly would. Keep your eyes open and see if you can see any signs of trenches; we ought to be pretty close now."

The foothills were below them now. The wooded slopes were cut and gashed by gullies and ravines and now and then a fertile valley appeared. The hills grew in size rapidly, however, and it was not long before the mountains themselves were underneath them. Once or twice a cloud wrapped them in its damp folds and it was with a feeling of relief when they emerged into the sunlight again.

"Whew, it's cold," exclaimed Leon slapping his hands together.

"My hands are cold too," said Jacques. "You have the best of me though for I can't warm them the way you are doing."

"Please don't try," laughed Earl. "I'd rather that you should have cold hands than we should all go spinning down to earth."

"Well I'll—" Jacques began when Leon suddenly interrupted him.

"There are the trenches," he exclaimed. "See them? They run right across that valley."

"That's right," agreed Jacques. "Let's see; we must be fairly close to our destination by now." He consulted his map.

"I hope so," exclaimed Earl. "I'm cold and hungry."

"Right over that next summit," said Jacques. "If our luck only holds out a few minutes longer we're all right."

They crossed the firing line which appeared very far away in the distant valley. They passed over the summit of the mountain Jacques had indicated and far below them they saw a tiny hamlet; a white church with its pointed steeple stood in the center of the little cluster of houses.

"There's Flambeau," announced Jacques.

"Good," cried Earl. "Where do we land? In that big field behind the church?"

"That seems to be the only place, doesn't it?"

"As far as I can see it is," remarked Leon.

"All right," said Jacques. "Here we go."

The monoplane dipped and began to descend in great circles. The young pilot shut off the motor and in silence, except for the noise of the air rushing through the wings, it swooped downward.

Earl did not enjoy this as much as he had the previous flying. As they came nearer and nearer to earth he could see the trees and fields rushing past beneath them and the sensation of speed was very great. He felt slightly nauseated and clung tightly to the sides of his seat.

Jacques was most skillful, however. He maneuvered the monoplane until they were directly over the field where they intended to make a landing. Then he suddenly shot downward until they were but a few yards above the ground; suddenly he straightened out the machine and they came to earth gracefully and without a jar. The monoplane ran along the ground for a short distance and came

to a stop.

A squad of soldiers in the blue uniform of France came hurrying forward to greet the aviators.

"Is this Flambeau?" demanded Jacques of the corporal.

"It is," replied the man addressed.

"And Colonel Erhard is here?"

"He is. Do you wish to see him?"

"I have some most important dispatches for him."

"Of course you wish to deliver them to him in person?"

"Yes," said Jacques.

"If you will come with me," said the corporal, "I will conduct you to him at once."

Jacques climbed out of the monoplane and set out across the field with the corporal.

"We'll wait right here for you, Jacques," called Leon, as he and Earl also stepped out of the machine and began to stretch their legs.

"Anglais?" queried one of the soldiers, hearing Leon speak in English.

"Américain," smiled Leon.

"Bon," exclaimed the man. "*Parlez-vous Francais? Je ne parle pas l'Anglaise.*" (Good. Do you speak French? I do not speak English.)

"*Un peu*" (a little), said Leon and he and his brother did their best to carry on a conversation in French with their new friends.

It seemed that there had been spirited fighting for the last week along that portion of the front. The men were of the opinion that the attacks and counter-attacks thus far had been in the nature of feelers and that both sides were

searching for a weak spot in their opponent's line. They all seemed to feel that a general offensive was about to be undertaken and every man was convinced that the dispatches the three young friends had brought were in some way connected with this movement.

The sun was warm in the field and the twin brothers spent a most enjoyable hour talking with their new comrades. Like all the French troops they were talkative, enthusiastic and hospitable. They were eager for news; they were certain that France and her allies would be victorious; they also brought hot coffee and sweet chocolate for the young Americans. They were delighted to think that people from a land so distant should think enough of France to fight for her in her struggle for freedom and justice.

Leon and Earl were particularly interested to learn that large forces of Russian troops were now fighting side by side with their allies on the western front. They had not heard that there were Russian soldiers in France, although such reports had often been freely circulated. A soldier knows little about the war in which he fights; he sees what takes place on the ground in the immediate vicinity of the place where he is located but the general outcome or fortunes of battles he knows nothing about. People at home or in neutral countries know much more about the actual trend of the war than does the soldier who fights its battles.

Finally Jacques went back to the monoplane and preparations for an immediate return were made.

"All ready to go back?" he inquired cheerily.

"Yes," said Leon. "Did you deliver your dispatches all right?"

"Yes, indeed, and now we have nothing to think about except getting back home to the *douzième* once more."

"I'd hardly call it home," laughed Earl. "I hope there aren't as many bullets and shells flying around our homes as there are around the *douzième*. Home wouldn't be very comfortable under those circumstances."

"Well we'd better start anyway," said Jacques. "All aboard!"

The boys quickly scrambled back to their places. The little group of soldiers

they were leaving wished them the best of luck and then the machine started.

"Do you suppose we'll have as easy a trip home as we did coming?" asked Earl as they began to soar higher and higher.

"We can go the long way if you want to," said Jacques.

"What do you think, Leon?" demanded Earl. "Don't you think we might as well take the longer but the safer route on the return trip?"

"I don't see why not," exclaimed Leon. "We can fly just behind the battle-line all the way back. I'd like to see what it looks like."

"So should I," agreed Jacques. "We'll do it then, only we'll have to keep a mile or so behind the front."

"That's all right," exclaimed Earl. "We can see if we're a mile or so high."

They had covered scarcely two miles from the village of Flambeau when Leon suddenly spied another aeroplane.

"Look!" he cried excitedly. "There's another monoplane!"

"Where?" demanded Jacques.

"To your right."

One glance was enough for Jacques. His experienced eye immediately identified the stranger and he turned to his two aides.

"That's a German flier," he remarked. "Get the machine-gun ready."

"What are you going to do?" demanded Earl eagerly.

"Chase him of course," said Jacques.

CHAPTER XXI

DISABLED

"Now you fellows will have to do all the work with the machine-gun," exclaimed Jacques as he shifted the course of the big monoplane and started in pursuit of their enemy.

"Leave that to us," cried Leon.

"I'll have to; maneuvering this machine will keep me busy."

Higher and higher Jacques steered the monoplane. His desire was to rise above their opponent if possible and thus take him at a disadvantage.

"Do you suppose he sees us?" demanded Earl.

"Certainly he does," said Leon.

"And he's ready to fight?"

"If he wasn't he'd turn and run."

"How soon shall we open fire?"

"I don't know yet; he's two miles away now, anyway."

Speeding through the sky the two great mechanical birds rushed at each other. With jaw set and a cool calculating eye Jacques sat in the pilot's seat and directed the course of his flier. Earl and Leon held the machine-gun ready for instant action.

"We're almost over the battle-line," announced Earl suddenly. "I can see the trenches below."

"Never mind them," exclaimed Leon. "Watch that machine."

"He's smaller than we are," said Earl.

"There are only two men in it too," added Leon.

"Get ready," ordered Jacques suddenly.

As the two machines approached each other Jacques all at once elevated his front plane and the big French flier rose swiftly higher and higher. The

opponents were scarcely a half-mile apart now and as the monoplane in which the three young soldiers of France were seated rose above its adversary Leon and Earl opened fire with the machine-gun.

The Germans replied but the aim of each was poor and the two fliers swept past each other unharmed.

"Turn around, Jacques, and go back after him," cried Leon excitedly. "We'll get him next time."

With a wide graceful sweep Jacques turned the big monoplane and advanced again to the attack. The German also had wheeled and once again the two machines approached each other, maneuvering for position.

"Be careful now," warned Jacques. "We can't afford to miss many times for you may be sure he won't."

"Get above him, Jacques," cried Earl. "That's our best chance."

They were high above the summits of the Vosges now: the air was bitterly cold, but the three young aviators did not notice that fact. Neither did they notice that in their maneuvers they had crossed the battle line and were now flying over territory occupied by their foes. Their one object was the German aeroplane and everything else had been forgotten in their desire to accomplish its downfall.

Around and around the two machines flew, each one trying to force its opponent into a position of disadvantage.

"We're faster than he is, Jacques," cried Leon. "Follow him up from behind and go higher than he does."

"I don't believe we can do that," exclaimed Jacques doubtfully.

"Try it," urged Leon eagerly.

"I'll try it."

Jacques skillfully wheeled the machine and describing a great loop, doubled on his course. Meanwhile he rose to greater and greater heights. The earth was now many thousand feet below; even the clouds were beneath them in many

instances.

"He's running away," cried Earl suddenly.

"After him, Jacques! After him!" shouted Leon.

The German, perceiving Jacques' purpose had turned and was now fleeing at full speed. No more did he circle and maneuver for position; his course was straightened out and he raced for safety.

"We'll get him," shouted Leon. "We're gaining fast."

Closer and closer they came to their enemy. Little by little the distance between the two racing machines decreased. The three boys leaned forward tensely as if to urge their flier on; Leon and Earl sat ready to open fire with the machine-gun the moment Jacques should give the word.

Suddenly the German machine shot downward; it was a ruse to throw off the pursuer who followed so relentlessly, but it was of no avail. Jacques did the same thing and earthward the big monoplane rushed at breakneck speed.

The German flier turned and started back; Jacques followed. All the time the three boys were gaining on their foe. They were almost within range now and the twin brothers prepared to carry out their part of the task in hand.

"Get ready," warned Jacques when they were only a few hundred yards behind their opponent and some distance above him.

"We're ready," answered Leon quickly.

"Let 'em have it then," cried Jacques.

The sharp rattling fire of the machine-gun answered his words and even the roar of the motor was unheard in the tumult. Below, the Germans could be seen aiming their quick-firers skyward at their French pursuer.

Jacques had been successful in gaining the better position, however, and they had their foe at a distinct disadvantage. Leon and Earl poured a deadly stream of bullets at their adversary. "He's hit," cried Earl suddenly.

"So are we," exclaimed Jacques.

"Where?" demanded Leon in alarm.

"A bullet has cut one of the supports for our wings."

"Is it dangerous?" asked Earl anxiously.

"I'm afraid so; I can't tell yet."

The fire from the German machine had ceased. It floated through the air as though the pilot had lost control and its speed had decreased greatly.

"Give him another volley, Leon," urged Jacques.

They were directly above their opponent now. Pointing the machine-gun straight downward the two brothers sent another hail of bullets whistling towards their foe.

The German machine fluttered for a moment like a wounded bird. Suddenly a blaze appeared from a spot near the gasoline tank; a moment later there was a burst of flame enveloping nearly the whole machine. It reeled drunkenly for a moment and then fell.

Fascinated, the two brothers watched its descent. Like some great flaming meteor it hurtled earthward. Down, down, down it plunged into the distant valley below. A sheet of fire trailed behind until finally it struck the earth with a crash; there was a burst of smoke and with a start the young Americans came to themselves again.

The horror and the awfulness of their opponent's death had had a profound effect upon them and for the moment they had forgotten everything else. Still, this was war and death is part of the game.

Jacques, however, had paid no attention to the fate of the German flier. All he knew was that his own machine was disabled and that he and his companions were in deadly peril.

"What do you think, Jacques?" demanded Leon. "Will that wing hold up?"

"I do not think so," replied Jacques soberly. "I think we must land."

"Where are we?"

"Inside the German lines."

"But if we land here we will all be taken prisoners."

"Our lines must be ten miles away," said Jacques. "What can we do?"

"It won't hold us that far you think?" asked Earl anxiously.

"I am sure it won't."

"Can't we try it?"

"It would be foolish," said Jacques firmly. "Unless we land at once that wing may collapse and then we shall go spinning towards the earth just as fast as did those Germans."

"You know best," exclaimed Leon. "I hate to think of being taken to some German prison camp though."

"Perhaps we can make repairs," said Jacques. Carefully he descended, now and then casting an anxious look towards the weakened support. Below was a heavily wooded valley with only an occasional small clearing where a tiny farm appeared.

"Can we land all right?" inquired Earl.

"We can with luck," replied Jacques grimly.

The big monoplane wobbled badly at times and the young aviator had to call upon all of his skill to prevent the machine from capsizing. As they neared the ground the three boys maintained a strict silence and with anxious hearts awaited the outcome.

A wide forest stretched beneath them. The waving tree-tops appeared soft and feathery from above, but the three boys knew that unless they could avoid the trees their doom was sealed. The open space in which Jacques was trying to

effect a landing seemed pitifully small.

The young Frenchman was a past master of aviation, however. With the greatest skill he directed the disabled machine until they were directly above the clearing. He shut off the engine, which had been running at only half speed lately; one final short turn and he brought the aeroplane safely to earth.

The landing was in a plowed field and as a result not as smooth as it would have been on the aviation grounds, but they were safe; that was the principal thing.

"Good work, Jacques!" cried Leon enthusiastically.

"We're safe from the air but how about the Germans?" demanded Jacques anxiously.

"Well they won't take us without an argument anyway," exclaimed Leon. He drew his automatic revolver from its case and gazed apprehensively at the little white house which stood in one corner of the clearing.

"See if you can't repair that wing, Jacques," urged Earl. "We may be able to fix it and get back without any trouble at all."

"No Germans are apt to be around here anyway," exclaimed Leon. "Why we are miles and miles behind the front and in the middle of a big forest. We could hide in these woods for weeks and never be discovered."

"German observers have undoubtedly seen our machine descend," said Jacques. "They are probably searching for us already."

"Look there!" cried Earl suddenly.

CHAPTER XXII

IN THE CLEARING

High in the air above the spot where the three boys were standing appeared an aeroplane.

"A German machine," exclaimed Leon.

"And looking for us," added Jacques grimly.

"Do you suppose he sees us?" asked Earl.

"No doubt of it," said Jacques confidently. "There'll be German soldiers here before you know it."

"Can't you repair the machine?"

"I think I could if I had some wire."

"I'll run over to the house and see if I can't find some."

"There may be Germans living there," objected Jacques. "You'd better be careful."

"He dropped a bomb," suddenly cried Leon who had not once removed his gaze from the flier high above their heads.

A tiny speck appeared under the aeroplane and rapidly approached the earth.

"Lie down," shouted Jacques, immediately suiting his action to the word. The two brothers instantly did likewise.

A moment later there was a sharp explosion. From the sound it was certain that the bomb had struck only a short distance away. A moment after hearing the report, however, the three young soldiers were on their feet.

"Where did it land?" demanded Earl.

"On that barn," exclaimed Leon. "Just look at it."

The roof had been partly blown off the little barn and already the structure was in flames.

"I hope he doesn't try it again," said Earl gazing skyward.

"I guess he won't," said Jacques. "He seems to be flying away."

"Yes," exclaimed Leon. "I suppose he's gone to tell where we are and to send somebody after us."

"If I only had some wire," said Jacques examining the broken support.

"Well I'm going over to see if we can't find something in that house," said Earl firmly. "It's funny there doesn't seem to be anybody around."

"The house must be empty," said Leon. "That bomb and the fire would certainly have brought any one out if the place was occupied."

At that moment, however, the door of the house opened and two men in priest's robes appeared. They glanced once in the direction of the damaged monoplane and then rushed towards the burning barn.

"They can't do much to stop that fire now," remarked Leon grimly. "By the way the barn burns it must be full of hay."

"I'll go speak to them," exclaimed Earl. "They may be able to give us some wire."

"I'd better go, I guess," said Jacques. "As my French is better than yours I can probably talk to them easier than you can."

"That's true," agreed Earl readily. "Why don't we all go?"

"You two stay here and guard this monoplane," exclaimed Jacques. "They may arrive here after us at any minute." He set off at a run across the field.

"If that aviator who threw the bomb has landed yet," remarked Leon, "he has undoubtedly telephoned to the post nearest this place and soldiers are probably on their way here already."

"They've got to go through a lot of woods to reach this spot," said Earl. "Perhaps they won't be able to find it."

"Don't you worry about that; they'll come straight here without the least bit of trouble."

"The minute any Germans appear it seems to me the thing for us to do is to take to the woods. We might be able to escape that way."

"Our chance of escape depends on whether Jacques can get any wire or not," said Leon. "I wish he could hurry."

"He'll do his best," remarked Earl. "You may be sure of that."

"What's he doing over there anyway?"

"Talking with the priests as far as I can see," said Earl. "I guess they decided there was no use in trying to save their barn."

"I should say not. It's too bad though and as a matter of fact we are the ones who are really to blame for it."

"How so?"

"Well, if we hadn't landed in this clearing that German flier would not have dropped any bombs down here."

"That's true," agreed Earl. "Where's that priest going?"

He had turned and was walking swiftly towards the house. Jacques stood talking with the other priest for a moment and then he too started in the direction of the dwelling.

"Do you think those priests are French?" asked Earl.

"I don't know; I suppose so though."

"Well if they are they'll help us, won't they?"

"They'd probably like to but I don't know whether they'd dare or not."

"The Germans would do something to them if they were caught aiding us in any way I suppose."

"They certainly would," exclaimed Leon.

"Shoot them?"

"Probably."

Jacques and the priest were now inside the house and it seemed to the two brothers who waited so impatiently that they were gone a very long time. The remaining priest stood and sadly watched the eager flames destroy the barn as if it were made of paper.

At length, however, the door of the house opened once more and Jacques and the priest reappeared.

"What has Jacques under his arm?" demanded Earl.

"I can't see," said Leon.

"It's a roll of wire," cried Earl suddenly. "We'll soon be off now."

"If the Germans don't reach here first we will."

"Don't be so gloomy," Earl protested. "Of course we'll get away."

"It'll be dark soon."

"All the better. They won't be able to see us in the dark."

"And we won't be able to see our way."

"You're an old pessimist," exclaimed Earl lightly. "Good boy, Jacques," he cried as the young Frenchman came within hearing. "I knew you'd fix us up all right."

"We must hurry," panted Jacques, his breath almost gone after his quick trip across the field. "We haven't much time."

"Can't I help?" inquired Earl eagerly.

"No, thanks; I can probably work faster alone."

He set to work immediately and without wasting a moment or making a false move began the work of repairing the weakened support. Meanwhile Earl and Leon kept a sharp lookout on all sides for any sign of their enemies.

"Who were those priests?" asked Earl finally.

"Frenchmen," replied Jacques keeping right on with his work.

"How do they happen to be living here inside the German lines?"

"This place is a sort of monastery or home and they are allowed to stay here for some reason. Every day one or the other of them has to report at the nearest German post though; that is five miles away."

"How do they reach it?" inquired Leon.

"They have a bicycle they use in good weather and in bad they have to walk."

"Is there a good road through the forest?"

"Fairly so, they said."

"That's a pretty tough job, isn't it?" exclaimed Leon. "Still I suppose they'd rather do that than leave their home."

Jacques still toiled earnestly at his task. The sun was fading in the west and the shadows of the forest trees began to lengthen. It would be dark presently.

"How soon can we start?" asked Leon anxiously.

"I don't know," replied Jacques. "In about ten minutes, I hope."

"Well we've been lucky so far not to have been discovered," exclaimed Earl. "I hope our luck keeps up."

"We've been discovered all right," said Leon. "Don't worry about that; they haven't reached here yet, that's all."

"And we certainly hope they won't," muttered Jacques fervently.

With anxious eyes the two brothers scanned the forest edges all around the clearing. The barn still blazed brightly, though now but one wall remained standing; one by one the others had collapsed.

Five minutes more and they would be safe. Jacques was putting the finishing

touches on his work and was almost ready to start. He was an excellent and speedy workman but the time spent seemed dreadfully long to his two companions. They stood first on one foot and then on the other. Would he never finish?

"All ready," cried Jacques at last.

"Can we get in?" demanded Earl eagerly.

"Certainly. Jump aboard and I'll join you in a second, just as soon as I get this wire out of our way."

The two brothers needed no second invitation and made haste to do as Jacques had directed them. Earl was just about to climb into his seat with Leon close behind him when there was a rifle shot and a bullet, whistling through the air, passed close above their heads.

CHAPTER XXIII

IN THE DARK

"Look out!" shouted Jacques. "Here come the Germans!"

"Jump in!" cried Leon. "We can get away before they reach us."

"No chance," said Jacques positively. "Get out of there as fast as you can."

More bullets followed the first, until the air seemed alive with them. A small detachment of German cavalry now appeared from the shelter of the forest and began to gallop swiftly across the field. As they approached they shouted and fired their revolvers rapidly.

"They think we'll surrender," exclaimed Leon. "We'll fool them."

He and Earl quickly scrambled out from the monoplane and in company with Jacques rushed around behind it. All three of the boys held drawn revolvers in

their hands.

"Let 'em have it!" cried Leon and the three automatic guns spoke almost as if they were one piece.

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One of the Germans reeled slightly in his saddle and sliding from his seat fell to the ground in a limp heap. One of the horses also went down, hurling his rider violently over his head. A shout of rage came from the astonished horsemen who had not dreamed of resistance. There were eight in their party, while the stranded aviators numbered but three.

"Two of them gone," cried Jacques. "See if we can't wing two more and then we'll have to run for it."

"Make it sure," exclaimed Leon and again came the sharp bark of the three automatics. Down went another horse and another rider was thrown violently to the ground. Again the three revolvers spoke. The leader of the little band of horsemen slid limply from his seat.

The Germans were scarcely fifty yards distant now. They pumped a continual stream of bullets at the three daring youths who were taking refuge behind the monoplane, but so far their aim was wild.

"Now for the woods," cried Jacques and he turned and ran at top speed for the shelter of the forest which was not more than thirty feet away from the spot where they had been standing. Close at his heels followed Leon and Earl. It was now almost dark, but a hail of bullets swarmed after the three retreating figures.

Suddenly Jacques went down. He pitched headlong upon his face and with a gasp of fear the two brothers bent over him. If Jacques were lost to them their case was indeed desperate.

"Where are you hit?" demanded Leon breathlessly.

"I'm not hit; I stumbled over that furrow."

He scrambled quickly to his feet and hurried on. A moment later and the three boys gained the shelter of the forest and plunged into it. A few scattering shots followed them and then all was still. It was now too dark to shoot with any good chance of success.

"Wait here," panted Jacques drawing his two companions down behind a clump of bushes. Guns in hand the three young soldiers crouched and peered eagerly back over the course they had come.

"Do you think they'll follow us in here?" demanded Earl in a whisper.

"I doubt it," replied Jacques. "There are only four of them now you know."

"Only two of them were hit," objected Leon. "I don't believe that those two who were thrown from their horses were hurt."

"Not badly perhaps," agreed Jacques. "They got an awful jolt just the same. At any rate it's only six to three now."

"What do you think they'll do?" asked Earl.

"I wish I knew."

"Can't we crawl up to the edge of the woods and look at them?"

"That would be pretty risky."

"But we want our monoplane back again."

"Isn't there a full moon to-night?" exclaimed Leon suddenly.

"I believe there is," said Jacques. "Why do you ask?"

"Just as soon as the moon comes up we can sneak up to the border of the forest and everything in the clearing will be lighted up; we will hide in the shadow of the trees and can pick off the Boches at our leisure. Isn't that a good scheme?"

"Fine," said Jacques, "all except for one thing."

"What's that?" demanded Leon.

"You don't think the Germans are going to sit out there all this time, do you? Undoubtedly they have sent for help already."

"Then," exclaimed Leon, "our chance is to attack them at once. There can't be more than five of them at the most left now."

"That's right," cried Earl eagerly. "It's our only chance and we must be quick about it too."

"Don't you think so, Jacques?" insisted Leon. "Come along."

"It's an awful chance," mused Jacques.

"I know," exclaimed Leon, "but it's our only one. You know as well as I do that if we don't get away before their reënforcements arrive we're done for. Why, after we've killed a couple of their men they'll spend a year if necessary to hunt us out."

"That's true," Jacques agreed. "I guess you're right; we'd better try it now."

Crouching low and making as little sound as possible the three young soldiers crept forward. Jacques led the way, with Leon and Earl close behind him. Every boy held his pistol gripped tightly in his right hand. Night had now fallen and pitchy darkness had taken possession of the forest.

The clearing was but a short distance away and presently Jacques stopped. All three of the boys stood still and listened intently for some moments. Not a sound came to their ears and in a brief time the advance was continued.

Slowly and carefully they picked their way. They practically felt out every step before they took it; the snap of a dried twig or stick might spell their doom. A few moments later Jacques spied the open sky through a vault in the tree-tops; they were almost upon the clearing and again the little band halted.

"We'd better separate," he whispered. "Fire the moment I do."

They dropped to their hands and knees and again the stealthy advance was resumed. Every boy selected a large tree behind which to take his position. The white wings of the monoplane glistened and a clump of dark figures could be seen nearby. Whether they were horses or men it was impossible to distinguish.

Suddenly, above the rim of the forest appeared the moon. It had appeared much sooner than the young soldiers had expected, or was it that they had consumed more time than they had realized? If the latter was the case they had need of haste. Leon and Earl waited impatiently for Jacques to open fire but as a matter of fact he did not know at what to aim. Killing the horses would do no good and the flash of the revolver shots would only serve to disclose their positions to the Germans.

Higher and higher rose the moon. It was soon half above the tops of the trees and the whole clearing began to be suffused with its soft light. The monoplane could be distinctly seen now and the dark clump proved to be horses as the boys had surmised. Where were the Germans? Surely they would not go away and leave their mounts.

All at once something moved near one end of the monoplane. Instantly there was a sharp report; Jacques had found his target. Four flashes in rapid succession disclosed the location of the remaining Germans. Leon and Earl immediately opened fire. Another shot from the position Jacques had selected showed that so far he had been untouched.

The fight became general and the firing increased. The three young soldiers of France had a distinct advantage over their enemies, however. The moment the Germans had fired they had revealed their locations and now it was possible to make out the forms of the Teuton horsemen in the moonlight; the three boys were hidden in the shadow of the woods.

The bullets rained about them, cutting through the branches of the trees and rattling through the bushes. As quickly as they fired, however, the boys shifted their positions and the Germans having nothing to guide their aim save the flash of the pistols, were unable to locate their adversaries.

The frightened horses snorted and jumped at every shot; they tugged violently at their tethers and danced madly about. The moon, now risen completely above the crest of the forest, shone down upon a strange scene. The great aeroplane still stood silently by, a mute witness to the desperate struggle waged for its possession. Three dark forms lying nearby showed how effective the boys' fire had been. Only two Germans seemed to be left to dispute their escape.

"Charge them, Jacques! Come on, Earl!" shouted Leon and he sprang to his feet and dashed forward.

The two remaining Germans had taken refuge behind the protection of the monoplane and toward this spot Leon rushed. A shot struck his steel helmet a glancing blow and he stumbled; a moment later he had regained his balance, however, and pushed on. Coming around the wing of the flying machine he stood face to face with one of the Germans; there was a flash and he felt a burning sensation through the muscles of his left arm. He discharged his pistol point blank at his enemy.

Suddenly he was seized violently from behind. Powerful fingers closed about his throat, shutting off his wind. Gasping, choking and fighting desperately he was borne to the ground.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE RETURN

Leon opened his eyes. He had an indistinct remembrance of the fight but that was all. His last recollection had been of shouts and shots and a violent struggle for breath.

Where was he? There was a great roaring in his ears and a sense of confusion all about him. Perhaps he was in the trenches again and the roar he heard was the drum-fire of the Germans. Undoubtedly the Boches were attacking and they must be repulsed at all costs. He struggled to get up. His head ached painfully and a sharp twinge in his left arm caused him to utter a slight groan.

It was dark all around him and he could not see distinctly. The roaring continued and he stretched out his hand. He felt something smooth; probably it was the barricade in the front of the trench. Where was his gun? If he only had a hand-grenade: the Germans would pay dearly for any advance in that position. Again he tried to struggle to his feet and he heard above the roar a familiar voice speaking in his ear.

"How do you feel, Leon?" inquired Earl.

"Where are we?"

"We're on our way home."

"To America?"

"No, to the *douzième*. We'll be there before long."

"How are we going?" demanded Leon greatly puzzled. He was having a hard time understanding what was taking place. His brain was still stunned and worked slowly.

"We're in the monoplane," explained Earl.

"Where's Jacques?"

"He's right here."

"But the Germans?"

"Those that attacked us aren't going to bother us any more. Don't let the thought of them worry you."

"But I don't understand," Leon persisted. "What happened?"

"When we rushed out from the woods," said Earl, "we thought there were only two of the Germans left. You accounted for one of them yourself when you came around in back of the machine there. The other one Jacques took care of. We thought we had killed three of them before we charged, but one of those three was 'playing possum.' As soon as we passed the spot where he was lying he jumped up and grabbed you around the neck. It was a pretty clever trick on his part and he was a powerful fellow too; I thought you were done for for a while there."

"So did I," agreed Leon; ruefully passing his hand over his sore and bruised throat. "Tell me though; how did you pry him off?"

"Well we had a terrible time. Jacques finally cracked him over the head with

the butt of his revolver; that finished old Mr. Boche."

"Did it kill him?"

"No," exclaimed Earl, "it merely stunned him. That was enough for us though and we got away as fast as we could."

"How did you manage it?"

"Why we just dumped you into the monoplane here and then got aboard ourselves and off we went."

"Before the reënforcements arrived I suppose?"

"Just before. As we left the ground and began to rise a whole troop of cavalry came racing into the clearing. They fired at us all right but they didn't touch us and here we are."

"It seems queer to me," said Leon, "that the Germans didn't do something to disable the engine or some part of the machine so we couldn't use it again."

"That's what I told Jacques," exclaimed Earl, "but he said they probably thought we wouldn't give them any more trouble and that they had captured a perfectly good monoplane and could use it themselves."

"Not with this paint on it."

"No, but it wouldn't take much trouble to put the distinguishing mark of the German machines on it."

"I guess we got after them just in time," said Leon gleefully.

"We surely did," agreed Earl. "We've been pretty lucky so far."

"How do you feel, Leon?" inquired Jacques from the driver's seat.

"Only fair," admitted Leon. "My head buzzes some."

"You've got a bullet wound in your left arm too," said Earl.

"I know it. It stings a little but it isn't bad."

"I guess not," said Earl. "As soon as we get back you can have it attended to and it'll soon heal."

"Yes," agreed Leon. "I want it cleaned for I can tell you I have no desire to get blood poisoning."

"No danger of that if you have it looked after soon enough."

"I suppose they think we're lost back at headquarters," said Leon.

"I wonder if they do," mused Earl. "We've been away quite a while, haven't we?"

"It seems like months to me."

"The moon has set."

"Has it? I can't see anything from here. How about helping me back into my seat?"

With a great deal of effort and not without some pain and a few groans on the part of the battered young soldier he finally was able, with his brother's help, to resume his proper place. The night wind blowing full in his face was most refreshing and served to clear his head and revive his tired brain.

"Are we still behind the German lines?" he inquired.

"Leon wants to know if we are still behind the German lines," Earl shouted to Jacques.

"We are," said Jacques, "and if you'll look down below you'll see something interesting. Up ahead there."

Both brothers peered eagerly down through the darkness and in the direction Jacques had indicated. At first they saw nothing, not even a light of any sort, but after a moment they discovered what it was that their pilot had in mind.

Far below and some distance in front of them they saw something that at first they were unable to understand. Every moment or so a spark or a shower of sparks shot into the air and then quickly faded.

"What is it?" demanded Leon.

"Rockets, I guess," said Earl.

"What is it, Jacques?" inquired Leon,

"A train."

"A German train?"

"Yes. Can't you see the sparks from the smoke stack?"

"I couldn't make out what it is."

"It's a train all right and it is undoubtedly carrying either troops or ammunition."

"To be used against our men?" exclaimed Earl. "If we could only stop it."

"We can and we will."

"But how?"

"Haven't we bombs with us?"

Lower and lower Jacques guided the speeding monoplane. Nearer and ever nearer they approached to the fast rushing train beneath them. It was directly ahead of them now and the young French pilot dogged its course closely.

"Get your bombs ready and make 'em sure," he directed. "I'm going down pretty low and we won't be able to waste any time."

Underneath, the dark outline of the train could be faintly seen as it glided along its steel track bringing its load of human or mechanical food to the hungry battle-line. Swiftly but with great care the two brothers made ready the deadly missiles with which they hoped to foil the plans of their enemies below.

CHAPTER XXV

BACK AGAIN

"Yell when you want us to drop the bombs, Jacques," said Leon.

"All right."

"That's the best plan I think," said Leon to his brother. "Jacques can see better than we can and is able to tell just when we ought to let them go."

"If we could only blow up that train," exclaimed Earl eagerly.

"Perhaps we can."

The train was only a short distance in front of them now and the monoplane was much nearer the ground than it had been previously.

"Get ready," warned Jacques.

"Whenever you say," returned Leon heartily.

There was a moment of tense silence, with every boy's nerves set in preparation for their deed. Every sense was alert.

"Let 'em go!" cried Jacques.

Instantly the two bombs were released. Silently they sped down through the darkness on their mission of death and destruction.

"Two more now," shouted Jacques sharply and the brothers hastened to obey.

Suddenly the sound of a violent explosion came to their ears from below and the daring young aviators peered down to see if they could discover the results of their efforts.

"Look at that!" cried Leon excitedly.

"I should say so!" shouted Earl. "A perfect hit!"

One at least of the four missiles dispatched had gone straight to its mark and had evidently struck directly in front of the locomotive. A great mass of sparks shot skyward and lighted up an appalling scene of destruction.

The engine had been derailed and had overturned. The remaining cars had piled up one on top of the other until the whole train lay in a tangled mass of wreckage alongside the track. The bombs had done their work to perfection.

"Now for home," cried Jacques, immediately directing the course of the monoplane higher and higher from the earth.

"Yes, I think we've done a night's work all right," said Leon.

"That bomb certainly landed in the right spot," exclaimed Earl warmly.

"What was on that train?" asked Leon.

"Munitions," said Jacques quickly. "Listen to that."

From below came the sound of heavy explosions and the flash of bursting shells could be distinctly seen.

"Is that the train?" demanded Earl in amazement.

"It certainly is," exclaimed Jacques. "I guess the most of the shells on that train will never do the Allies much harm."

Under the bright starlit sky the giant monoplane winged its way back to its hangar. Unerringly the skillful young pilot guided the great flier; never for a moment did he appear to be at a loss as to what course to pursue. He flew at a great height, and though an occasional shot was directed at the phantom machine so high above their heads, the Germans were unable to do it any damage.

Finally they crossed the battle-line. Apparently a night attack was in progress and the path of the trenches could be followed from the flame of bursting projectiles.

"Think what those fellows down below are going through now," exclaimed Earl feelingly.

"I don't envy them," said Leon.

"Nor I," agreed Jacques. "We've all been through that though and I suppose we will soon again."

"Perhaps to-morrow even," exclaimed Earl. "I wonder where the *douzième* is now."

"Probably in the thick of that fight," said Leon.

"They are if they have anything to say about it," agreed Jacques warmly.

"What a crowd they are," exclaimed Earl.

"Think how many are gone," Jacques reminded him.

"And how many are going to go too," added Leon.

"Perhaps we three right here," said Earl soberly.

"Perhaps so," agreed Jacques. "For me there could be no finer death though than to die with my face to the enemy; to die for my country, fighting for France."

"Let's hope you may live for France," said Leon.

"She has lost so many of her young men," said Earl. "She needs all she has and she'll need them after the war too."

"That's true," agreed Jacques. "Have you noticed lately that the regiments are made up of older men than they were before? The soldiers now are mostly between thirty and forty, where they used to be between twenty and thirty."

"The young armies are gone," said Earl. "Armies of little wooden crosses everywhere along the battle-line show where they have gone, too."

"We're going down now," announced Jacques suddenly. "That is our hangar below there."

"How can you see?" demanded Leon. "I never can see anything at night."

"I have always been very good in the dark," said Jacques. "Here we go."

Down, down, down the big battle-plane sped. Describing great circles it soared nearer and nearer to its resting place until at length it alighted gently on the aviation field and running along the smooth ground for a few yards came to a full stop.

"Well done, Jacques," exclaimed Earl warmly. "You're a wonder."

"And I'm stiff and cold," added Jacques.

"And so am I," echoed Leon.

"You're wounded," said Earl.

"Scratched you mean," Leon corrected him.

"At any rate you must be attended to at once."

"We must make our report first," said Leon. "Isn't that right, Jacques?"

"It is, but I don't think it is necessary for you to be there."

"But I want to be."

"All right then, we'll all go together."

"Major Villier won't be awake at this time of night I'm afraid," said Earl doubtfully.

"Oh, yes, he will," said Jacques. "He'll be just as anxious for our report as we are to give it."

As soon as the aeroplane had alighted on the field several soldiers had come running out from their quarters and the young aviators now turned the machine over to them.

"We have a man here who is slightly wounded," remarked Jacques to one of the men. "Is there any one around here now who can look after him?"

"Right this way," spoke up a soldier quickly. "I will care for him."

With difficulty Leon stepped from the monoplane. The experiences of the past day had been hard and wearing; he had lost more blood than he had realized, slight as was his wound; then too the mauling he had received at the hands of the big German had jarred him greatly. He was dizzy as he stepped out upon the solid ground again and he reeled slightly. His soldier friend immediately sprang to his assistance.

"I'm all right," Leon maintained stoutly. "I don't know what made me stumble; I guess I must be stiff."

"You're weak, Leon," said his brother. "What you need is rest."

"I guess that's so; a little sleep and I'll be all right again."

"Come with me," urged the soldier. "I will fix your wound."

"You won't report without me, will you?" asked Leon eagerly of Jacques and Earl as he was led away.

"We'll stop for you surely," said Jacques. "Hurry along now."

A short time later Leon was seated beside a table in one of the nearby houses. He had removed his coat and blouse and was down to his undershirt. His wounded arm was stretched out upon the top of the table and by the light of a lamp the kind-hearted soldier worked over it.

First the wound, which proved to be a deep flesh cut, was carefully bathed and cleansed. Next a powerful antiseptic was applied and then fresh white bandages were bound around the injured spot. Although Leon protested vigorously the soldier also insisted upon making a sling in which the young soldier should carry his arm.

"That certainly feels better," sighed Leon. "I am very much obliged to you."

"It is nothing," exclaimed the soldier with a shrug of his shoulders.

"It is a great deal to me," said Leon. "I wonder where the others are."

"You had better sit down," said the soldier as Leon tried to rise from his seat. "You are tired and your two comrades said they would call for you."

"I know it," exclaimed Leon. "I'm all right though," and he rose to his feet. Immediately, however, everything turned black before his eyes and he lost consciousness.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE BIG WAR

The next thing that Leon knew was when he opened his eyes to find himself lying in a clean white cot with both Jacques and Earl standing by the bedside.

"What happened?" inquired Leon dazedly.

"Nothing," laughed Earl, "except that you've been asleep for about fifteen hours or so."

"How about our report?"

"That was made just about fifteen hours ago; just after you went to sleep."

"But you said you'd stop for me."

"We did," smiled Earl. "We stopped for you all right, but you'd gone and fainted and then you went to sleep and we thought we'd better not wait."

"Did you make your report?" asked Leon eagerly. He was now sitting up in bed and had almost forgotten his slightly wounded arm; in fact he would have been entirely unconscious of it had it not been for the fact that it was bandaged.

"We certainly did," said Jacques. "Major Villier seemed very much pleased with what we had done and he said he would see to it that we were mentioned at headquarters."

"Were they worried about us at all?"

"They were a little; they had expected us back sooner than we actually did

arrive."

"What did the major think of our blowing up that train?"

"It seemed to please him greatly," said Jacques. "In fact he was almost as pleased about that as he was about our having delivered the dispatches safely at Flambeau."

"I should think he'd been more glad about the train than the dispatches," exclaimed Leon.

"We don't know what they were," Jacques reminded him. "Evidently they were even more important than blowing up a munition-train."

"At any rate I'm glad Major Villier approved of what we did."

"He said we got into too many scrapes," laughed Earl. "He said that unless we were careful we might get hurt."

"He was joking, wasn't he?"

"Of course he was; as though we went around looking for trouble."

"I want to get up," exclaimed Leon suddenly. "I want something to eat, too, and I want it quick and I want an awful lot of it."

"Whew!" whistled Jacques smilingly. "You must be feeling better."

"I never felt so well in my life," cried Leon. "I feel like a king."

"Well, I wouldn't care to feel that way," laughed Earl. "As far as I can see there aren't very many kings who are very well off these days."

"Well, then I feel the way kings used to feel," said Leon. "Have it any way you want, but give me something to eat."

"How would you like to go automobiling after you eat?" inquired Jacques. "Earl and I are going."

"What do you mean?"

"I've got to run an ambulance up to the front and we are to start in about fifteen minutes. I need two helpers and if you feel strong enough you may come along."

"Of course I'll go," exclaimed Leon. "What are they doing with you anyway, Jacques? It seems to me you have a new job about every day."

"He's general utility man," laughed Earl, "and we're his assistants."

"It looks so," Leon agreed. "At any rate I don't mind it. I'm rather fond of variety."

"Did you hear about the *douzième*?" asked Jacques.

"Tell me what has happened to them," demanded Leon quickly. "Where are they?"

"There are not many of them left," said Jacques soberly. "Do you remember that bombardment we saw as we flew over the firing line last night?"

"I do. I remember we wondered if our regiment was in it."

"Well they were all right," said Jacques. "They bore the brunt of the whole attack and if it hadn't been for them I don't know what would have happened."

"Tell me about it," urged Leon eagerly.

"The Boches launched a terrible bombardment on that portion of the line held by the *douzième*," continued Jacques. "Then they turned loose one of those massed infantry attacks on our trenches and though the *douzième* was outnumbered nearly four to one they held fast. Not without paying the price though and half of our comrades were either killed or wounded so that they are out of it."

"Did the Germans take the trench?"

"They reached it at some points and even entered it; just as things looked blackest, reinforcements arrived and drove them out and saved the trench."

"Good!" cried Leon heartily. "It must have been splendid!"

"More bloody than splendid I guess," said Earl grimly. "I think we were pretty lucky to have missed it."

"So do I," agreed Jacques. "Still I hate to be absent when the rest of our regiment is fighting."

"Weren't you fighting all that time?" demanded Earl.

"Oh, yes, but somehow I feel so much safer up in the air than I do in the trenches."

"There aren't many safe spots left in Europe now anyway, I guess," remarked Earl.

"Nor any other place in the world, for that matter," added Leon. "Just stop a minute and think where there have been battles fought in this war."

"Pretty nearly every place you can think of," said Earl.

"I know it; in France, Germany, Belgium, Russia, Austria, Italy, Serbia, Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria, China—"

"What was in China?" demanded Earl.

"Kiao Chau. Don't you know that port the Japanese and English took from the Germans?"

"That's right. Then there is or has been fighting in Armenia, Persia, Mesopotamia, Africa, the Marshall Islands and all those islands down around Australia; Zeppelins have raided England."

"Yes," exclaimed Leon, "and sea fights in the Atlantic and Pacific, the Mediterranean, in the North Sea and the Baltic, the Indian Ocean and the Carribean Sea and I don't know where else."

"It's awful, isn't it?" said Earl. "And right at home in America the Germans have been blowing up factories that were making arms for the Allies; they've also been putting bombs on ships."

"Why doesn't your country stop that?" asked Jacques.

"Don't ask me," exclaimed Earl. "I wish they would; if they'd deal with some of those plotters the way any European government would, I think all that trouble would end. We're too good to people in the United States."

"That's right," agreed Leon. "We offer them our hospitality and give them a chance to earn a good living and then they turn on us."

"Some day the people of the United States will turn on them," said Jacques solemnly.

"That's just what will happen," exclaimed Earl. "They will stand for a lot over there and they don't get angry easily; people like that are the worst kind when they do lose their tempers. One of these days they'll all get mad and those trouble makers will wake up to find that they've been playing with fire."

"There's our ambulance," said Jacques suddenly. "Come along."

CHAPTER XXVII

CONCLUSION

"A gas attack," said a soldier to Jacques as he and his two companions hastened out of the cottage and started to climb into the ambulance.

"The Boches using gas again?" exclaimed Jacques. "That's bad."

"That means work for the ambulances and hospitals," remarked Leon soberly. "That's the worst death of all."

"But we all have masks," said Earl.

"Thank goodness we have!" muttered Jacques. "All ready?"

"Go ahead," cried Leon and Earl together, and the big ambulance shot forward with a rush as Jacques let in the clutch and pressed his foot upon the accelerator.

A moment later they swung out into the broad highway and sped down the road towards their destination. They were headed for one of the small receiving points a short distance behind the lines where the wounded were brought by the Red Cross units. From these places the ambulances picked up the men and transported them to the base hospitals; from there they were moved, if possible, to different hospitals throughout France and England.

Night and day the doctors, nurses, ambulance drivers and the Red Cross work. Often they are under fire and they exhibit marvelous nerve and courage in every conceivable emergency. There are many heroes of the war who never fired a gun.

At top speed Jacques urged the ambulance down the road. The night was still dark, and, with the scanty lights permitted them, it was almost impossible to see the road clearly. Jacques seemed to take it for granted that conditions were all right, for not once did he slacken his pace.

The roads behind the battle-lines are marvels of construction and usually as smooth as the top of a table. Over these roads travel the trucks that are the life-blood of the armies, for they supply the material with which to fight. Consequently it is no cause for surprise that the highways are well cared for.

"I suppose we'll be busy for a long while now," said Earl as they bowled along the road.

"Yes, there'll be plenty who'll need attention after, this attack," said Jacques.

"We're safe for a while anyway," remarked Leon. "I wonder why they sent us to do this instead of making us fight?"

"The *douzième* will have to be reorganized now," said Jacques. "The men remaining will need rest and a chance to recover; that is probably why we were detailed to this ambulance."

"We're comparatively safe here anyway," said Leon. "That is some consolation, though I'd just about as soon be fighting."

"We're safe unless a shell happens to—" began Jacques, when he was suddenly cut short.

There was a violent jar; the steering wheel was torn from Jacques' grasp; the big ambulance rocked crazily and then pitched forward. The three boys were thrown headlong from their seats.

Earl looked about him. He was in a long room with high ceilings and his surroundings seemed very unfamiliar to him. He was lying flat on his back and he tried to rise; a heavy weight seemed to hold him down and he felt a dull pain in his leg. He discovered that he was lying in a bed.

He turned his head to one side and spied another bed; in fact the room was filled with them. He was in a hospital, but how had he been wounded? He had no recollection of it. Every bed had an occupant; Earl looked the other way and the same sight met his eye. In the bed to his left, much to his amazement, he discovered Jacques. So he too was wounded. How had it all happened? Suddenly he remembered the ambulance and the violent jar they had received; that must have been it.

A white-clad nurse approached his bed.

"Are you comfortable?" she inquired gently.

"Yes," said Earl, "but how did I get here? What happened?"

"You and your brother and your friend were in an ambulance and ran into a shell hole. You were all thrown out and your leg was broken."

"Is my brother here?" demanded Earl eagerly. "Where is he?"

"In this next bed."

Leon looked to his right. "That fellow with the bandages all around his head?" he exclaimed in alarm. "What is the matter with him?"

"He has concussion of the brain; his head is also cut."

"Is it dangerous?"

"I think not now."

"Thank goodness!" said Earl fervently. "How about Jacques?"

"He is only badly bruised," smiled the nurse. "He is asleep now."

"What do you think of us?" demanded Earl disgustedly. "We fight in the first line trenches for months, in the biggest war in the history of the world, and we go up in monoplanes and fight battles in the air. In fact we do about everything dangerous there is to do and no harm comes to us at all. Then we go out in an automobile and get all smashed up; that's a fine way to be wounded in war. It makes me sick!"

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