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THE STORY OF A WOUND

WHEN he was a little chap, not much more than the height of a two-foot rule, I have watched him jump off the end of a wharf into deep water and squatter to shore, somehow, anyhow,—for he could not swim a stroke,—and repeat the performance as long as the bathing party lasted. That he could or would stay out of the war was, in the nature of things, impossible. He “joined up” at the beginning of the game and now he is invalided home.

What he has seen and suffered in the interval would fill several volumes. He ought to write a book; but he is more intent on recovering his old form in golf; he is succeeding well, though he has to go around the course with a cane. Certainly he has earned the right to rest and a little play. He does not mind talking over his experiences with an old friend, and this is the tale he told me on the club verandah, after a round, as he drank his tea and smoked half a dozen cigarettes.

“It was at Courcellette on the fifteenth of last September, that I ‘got mine.’ I had been scouting at the front all day and picking out a road for the battalion by such marks as a dead nigger in one place and a wounded Hun at another. On my way back, I met the regiment coming up in artillery order about six o’clock in the afternoon. They had got their orders most unexpectedly only a short time before; and they had no notion what line they should take up, or how they were to reach it. Courcellette, you know, was Canada’s battle. Canadian battalions had reached their objectives early in the day and had done so well that Headquarters thought it was a good time to go on and gain more ground. The Germans saw what we intended to do, and laid down three lines of barrage through which we had to advance. The colonel said: ‘You tell them where to go.’ So I would tell one bunch of five or six men, ‘You go here,’ and another ‘You run along there,’ and they would double out into the shell fire and simply disappear, by groups at a time. But others took their places and somehow or other the battalion got into line and went forward. We went over the first trench, taking it in our stride, and leaving the moppers-up to secure the position: Then the second line. I was hurrying up a communication trench when I glanced over my shoulder and saw the nose of a machine-gun that we had missed, in a recess. It was too late. The same instant I was hit in the thigh and knocked to the ground. I felt as if a big Irishman had struck me with a sledgehammer. I did not think anything could hit so hard. The men behind me bayoneted the machine-gun crew and swept on.

“There was a shell-hole only a few inches away and I managed, by great exertions, to crawl into it. It was only a shallow hole made by a whizz-bang, and only a very short distance away, but I thought I should never get there. When I did, I found I had left my right leg behind me. It was lying outside the shell-hole at a very queer angle, perfectly useless, for the machine-gun bullets had chewed up the bone, though luckily they had missed the femoral artery. I reached over and lifted my leg with both hands into the hole.”

He stopped, felt in his waistcoat pocket, and handed me a little piece of crumpled metal. It

GRIM as it may be, it's one of those thousands of incredible stories lived by Canadians at the Front.



By ARCHIBALD MacMECHAN

looked as if it were made of copper, steel and aluminum. “They dug that out of my leg this morning,” he said. “It was in about an inch and a half. It’s the nose of a machine-gun bullet. It was smashed by those following. They’re always getting bits like that out of me.

“A Highlander saw me lying there bleeding and gave me first aid. He cut away my clothing, unbuttoned my tunic, broke open my bottle of iodine, poured the whole of it into my wound and tied it up roughly with my field dressing. The next minute I heard ‘pin-g-g’ and he dropped dead. The German snipers had found us, and the bullets came thick. I managed to pull his body over and wrap it round my head for protection. In that position, I heard six or seven bullets hit the corpse; but none touched me. He had saved my life.

“There I lay for more than an hour, from about seven in the evening till a quarter past eight. It seemed a long time. I saw some Highlanders running back through the shell-fire, and I was afraid that the attack had failed and that we had been driven back by the German counter-attack. I thought what I would do if the Huns came up to me. I had my rifle loaded and my revolver, that meant eleven shots in all, and I debated with myself what I would do,—fight, or surrender, or play possum. Then I realized that the Highlanders were wounded,—walking cases, on their way to the dressing station, and that there was no immediate danger to myself from the Huns breaking through.

“**T**HEN a Red Cross man saw me. This was O—n, who had been a First Year Medical at McGill before the war. He was a slight little fellow, delicate-looking, with big blue eyes like a girl. I don’t believe he had muscle enough to drive a bayonet through a tunic, let alone a Hun. He never carried any weapon into action, not even a bomb in his pocket, nothing but his field-dressings. He had his stretcher under his arm. He unwound

my puttees and bandaged my broken leg to my rifle with them. Then he whistled to another Red Cross man; they got me on the stretcher and carried me off.

“**T**HE Huns had put up their usual lines of barrage, on their own front line trenches, which we had taken, four lines in all of shell and shrapnel, ‘whizz-bangs,’ and ‘crumps.’ We had to pass through them all. I put my steel helmet over my face and trusted to my blanket for the rest of me. At the field dressing-station, a party of four stretcher-bearers met me. The second-in-command had heard that I was wounded and had sent them for me, specially. There O—n left me. He got the D.C.M. and the Military Medal for his work that day. He was killed at Vimy.

“When I got back to the field hospital, I was an inch and a half deep in mud. You see when a shell bursts beside the bearers, they drop you and throw themselves on the ground. Three out of the four that were carrying me were killed. Once they dumped me into a shell-hole and once into a deep trench; they could not help it. But I got through without another wound, and at long last I saw Blighty.”

There he stopped and flicked the ash from his cigarette.

I looked at the handsome, soft-voiced, well-mannered lad, and thought of all he had learned in the last two years, an experience denied me. He is the best known man in the whole C.E.F. Daredevil courage, nerves of tempered steel, red Indian cunning, grafted on a highly educated intelligence, made him the most renowned scout officer on the western front. “He lived in No Man’s Land”; “He spent his time killing Germans”—these were common sayings of him. On three separate occasions he made his way right into the German trenches, mingled with the Huns to secure the information he wanted and got safely away. Once he peered through a loophole in the German parapet and found it empty. He thought the trench was unoccupied, and continued his investigations in the dark, crawling like a serpent. Later he returned to the loophole, for the scientific purpose of verifying his first impressions, and found himself looking into the muzzle of a Mauser. The startled German fired point-blank and the bullet plowed through the “Boy’s” thick hair. A second shot at thirty-five yards also missed.

His hairbreadth escapes were endless. At another time, he and his sergeant had ended their patrol and were coming back to their own lines. As they came close, “Boy’s” quick ear caught the faint sound of the safety-pin being drawn from a Mill’s bomb, the deadly British hand-grenade that bursts in five seconds after the spring is released. He realized that his own men had mistaken him and his sergeant for Germans, and that before he could count five, the bomb would explode. He flung himself to the ground and dragged his sergeant with him. The bomb was flung with a true aim. It struck him on the shoulder and exploded, blinding and stunning him, but doing no further harm; but the flying fragment bounding over, struck the other man and killed him. He only lived until he was got into the trench.

And these are only two incidents in his career.
(Concluded on page 24.)