

slowly travelled through each one of us, up and down the table, adorned with the remnants of many bottles, the half-finished glasses of many drinks. Just then the Town-Major took a step forward; he was a palish green, with an under-tinge of yellow.

"What is the meaning of—" said the General, in a voice tinged with the iciest breath of the far distant Pole, but he got no further.

There was a sudden rending, ear-splitting roar, the lights went out, the walls of the chateau seemed to sway, and the plaster fell in great lumps from the frescoed ceiling.

That (as we afterwards discovered) no one was hurt was a marvel. It is the one and only time when we of this regiment have thanked Fritz for shelling us. In the pale light of early dawn the last member of the party slunk into the bivouac ground. The General, where was he? We knew not, neither did we care.

But it was the first and last time that "A" Company rustled a Corps Commander's Chateau!

## Bombs

WE counted them as they came up the communication trench, and the Commander of "AK" Company paled; yet he was a brave man. He cast a despairing glance around him, and then looked at me.

"George," he said (you may not believe it, but there can be a world of pathos put into that simple name). "George, we are Goners."

By this time they had reached the front line.

My thoughts flew to the Vermoral sprayer, last time it had been the Vermoral sprayer. Was the V. S. filled, or was it not. . . .?

They came from scent to view, and pulling himself together with a click of the heels closely imitated by the S. I. C., the O. C. "AK" Coy. saluted.

"Good morning, sir!"

The General acknowledged the salute, but the ends of his moustache quivered. G. S. O. one, directly in rear, frowned. The Colonel looked apprehensive, and glared at both of us. The Brigadier was glum, the Brigade Major very red in the face. Two of those beastly supercilious Aides looked at each other, smiled, glanced affectionately at their red tabs and smiled again.

It was exactly 2.29 "pip emma" when the mine went up.

"Discipline, sir," said the General, "discipline is lacking in your company! You have a sentry on duty at the head of Chelwyn Road. A sentry! What does he do when he sees me? Not a damn thing, sir! Not a damn thing!"

Of course the O. C. "AK" made a bad break; one always does under such circumstances.

"He may not have seen you, sir."

G. S. O. one moved forward in support, so that if overcome the General could fall back on his centre.

A whizz-bang burst in 94—we were in 98—and the Staff ducked, taking the time from the front. The Aides carried out the movement particularly smartly, resuming the upright position in strict rotation.

The General fixed us with a twin Flammenwerfer gaze.

"What's that? Not see me? What the devil is he there for, sir? I shall

remember this, Captain—ah, Roberts—I shall remember this!"

Pause.

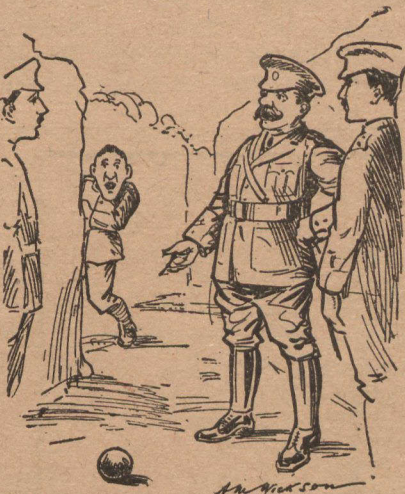
"Where is your Vermoral sprayer?"

Like lambkins followed by voracious lions, we lead them to the Vermoral sprayer.

I was at the retaking of Hill 60, at Ypres, long months ago, at Festubert and Givenchy, but never was I so inspired with dread as now.

Praise be to Zeus, the V.S. was full!

We passed on, until we reached a bomber cleaning bombs. The General paused. The bomber, stood to attention, firmly grasping a bomb in the right hand, knuckles down, fore-arm straight.



"A frightened face appeared around the corner."

"Ha!" said the General. "Ha! Bombs, what?"

The bomber remained apparently petrified.

"What I always say about these bombs," the General continued, turning to the Brigadier, "is that they're so damn simple, what? A child can use them. You can throw them about, and, provided the pin is in, no harm will come of it. But"—looking sternly at me—"always make sure the pin is safely imbedded in the base of the bomb. That is the first duty of a man handling bombs."

We all murmured assent, faintly or otherwise, according to rank.

"Give me that bomb," said the General to the bomber, waxing enthusiastic. The man hesitated. The General glared, the bomb became his.

We stood motionless around him. "You see, gentlemen," the General continued, jocularly. "I take this bomb, and I throw it on the ground—so! It does not explode, it cannot explode, the fuse is not lit, for the pin—"

Just then the bomber leapt like a fleeting deer round the corner, but the General was too engrossed to notice him.

"As I say, the pin—"

A frightened face appeared round the bay, and a small, shaky voice broke in:

"Please, sir, it's a five-second fuse—an' I 'ad took HOUT the pin!"

After all the General reached the traverse in time and we were not shot at dawn. But G. S. O. one has gone to England "Wounded and shell-shock."

## "S. R. D."

WHEN the days shorten, and the rain never ceases; when the sky is ever grey, the nights chill, and the trenches thigh deep in mud and water; when the front is altogether a beastly place, in fact, we have one consolation. It comes in gallon jars, marked simply "S. R. D." It does not matter how wearied the ration party may be, or how many sacks of coke, biscuits, or other rations may be left by the wayside, the rum always arrives.

Once, very long ago, one of a new draft broke a bottle on the way up to Coy. H. Q. (The rum, by the way, always goes to Coy. H. Q.) For a week his life was not worth living. The only thing that saved him from annihilation was the odour of S. R. D., which clung to him for days. The men would take a whiff before going on a working party, and on any occasion

when they felt low and depressed.

There are those who would deny Tommy his three spoonfuls of rum in the trenches; those who declare that a man soaked to the skin, covered with mud, and bitterly cold, is better with a cayenne pepper lozenge. Let such people take any ordinary night of sentry duty on the Western front in mid-winter, and their ideas will change. There are not one, but numberless occasions, on which a tot of rum has saved a man from sickness, possibly from a serious illness. Many a life-long teetotaler has conformed to S. R. D. and taken the first drink of his life on the battle-fields of France, not because he wanted to, but because he had to. Only those who have suffered from bitter cold and wet, only those who have been actually "all-in" know what a debt of gratitude is owing to those wise men who ordered a small ration of rum for every soldier—officer, N. C. O., and man—on the Western front in winter.

The effect of rum is wonderful, morally as well as physically. In the pelting rain, through acres of mud, a working party of fifty men plough their weary way to the Engineers' dump, and get shovels and picks. In single file they trudge several kilometres to the work in hand, possibly the clearing out of a fallen-in trench, which is mud literally to the knees. They work in the mud, slosh, and rain, for at least four hours. Four hours of misery—during which any self-respecting Italian labourer would lose his job rather than work—and then they traipse back again to a damp, musty billet, distant five or six kilometres. To them, that little tot of rum is not simply alcohol. It is a God-send. Promise it to them before they set out, and those men will work like Trojans. Deny it to them, and more than half will parade sick in the morning.

It is no use, if the rum ration is short, to water it down. The men know it is watered, and their remarks are "frequent and painful, and free!" Woe betide the officer who, through



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