

Lost—B' gum !

A SHORT STORY WITH A VERY UNCOMMON VILLAIN

By Frank Giolma

CHAPTER I.—THE S.M. TELLS WHY.

After "Orderly Corporals," "Orderly Sergeants" and "Company Sergeant Majors." followed imperatively by "On the Double" had been shrilled twice by the bugler, all the N.C.O.'s on the staff and personnel of the Cliff Hospital began gravitating towards the Sergeant Major's Office. In less than three minutes the tiny room was filled, leaving the large majority outside the door.

"Come with me to the Recreation Room" the S.M. said.

When they got there and a Lance-Corporal—acting Sergeant Major of the bed linen—had arranged the chairs in a circle and placed a particularly comfortable one deferentially in the middle the S.M. sat down on it.

"Say, Major, can we smoke?" the Q.M.S. asked.

"Certainly," came the answer.

"Who says gum?" queried an acting lance-corporal of police. Much to his joy the S.M. himself accepted a small but odorous slab of Tutti-Frutti. Having placed the gum where he wanted it he said:—"The Colonel inspects to day! I've been in this dump for more than seven months—that means twenty-eight inspections—and every time he's caught us on something new. One week he won't have eyes for anything but windows, another week he'll never raised his optics from the floor. Another day he flashed his flashlight into every locker; on the next inspection he fairly rummaged about round every stove. He's looked for and found cobwebs in corners and specks of grease on clean plates and wrinkles in the bed spreads. But to day we're going to beat him to it. He's not going to find a speck of dust, no not even on the roof. We've just got to get a clean sheet to day and I'll tell you why. Yesterday I met the Sergeant Major of the Red House Hospital and bet him two pounds that we'd get past the old man to day, and if we don't, now mark my words, there's going to be trouble right here." As he uttered the last words he took the gum from his mouth and waved it between two admonitory fingers at his audience, "Now then boys, hop to it!"

CHAPTER 2.—THE VILLAIN'S DEADLY WORK.

The Colonel, as becoming his position, stepped from the automobile exactly as a nearby Church clock chimed the half-hour and the Sergeant Major having stepped up to him, saluted smartly and handed him deferentially the official electric torch.

Followed by a platoon of officers and a company of N.C.O.'s and led by the Sergeant Major the Colonel walked slowly through the spotless wards and snow white corridors scrutinising everything