

McMud's Escape.

IT was one of those nothing-to-do evenings. A group of officers sat lolling on their bunks in a large, rather draughty and bare-looking billet, while in our corner a friendly game of "three-handed" was going on by the dim and flickering light of an issue candle. Outside, the rain still continued to fall in that steady, methodical manner so well known and regretted by all who have had the misfortune to winter in Flanders, and at regular intervals the odd drop filtered through the roof to land with unerring precision on somebody's bed.

Conversation, as is so often the case unfortunately, had drifted to stories of the line, each in turn a little more hair-raising and miraculous than the last, till a newcomer might well have wondered that anyone could live through such experiences. Such things as getting through impassable barrages, having 4.1's bounce off your tin hat, and being buried by a "Minnie" and dug up some 36 hours later were common.

After a particularly awe-inspiring, sweat-producing yarn by the "Stuttering Officer," there was a moment's silence, while many brains were rapidly passing over the varied stages of the war from 2nd Ypres to Passchendaele, in vain endeavour to hit upon something equally blood-curdling.

Suddenly Captain McMud, one of the old-timers, sat up and began to speak. He hadn't figured much in the conversation up to now, having heard these and still worse stories many times before, and everyone naturally turned towards him expecting something pretty good—to say the least, something to put that aforesaid lying, stuttering officer well in the back ground.

Nonchalantly producing a perfectly good Havana from his left breast, he lit up, and after sprinkling a few de-

licious puffs amongst the now hostile audience, he began:—

"Well," he said, "your experiences are not so bad, but for a plain narrow escape from being murdered in cold blood, I think I've got you all beat." The old grunt of doubt could be heard at this point, but it didn't seem to worry Mac any, and he kept going.

"It was one of those cold, pitch-black, rainy nights last winter when we went in to relieve the —th Battalion. It was a brand-new area—hadn't even had the chance to look it over beforehand—no moon, and so dark you could hardly see your own hand stretched out before you.

"Things went alright at first. The whole company strung along behind me in single file. We'd picked up our guide, and there wasn't more than the average amount of grousing going on in rear that would be expected on such a night. Unfortunately, it wasn't long before things took a turn for the bad. We entered one of those long, winding communication trenches that seem to have no end. It had been bath-matted in the dim, distant past and never repaired since. We felt our way slowly forward, slipping, sliding and tripping at every step, and plunging up to our knees in liquid mud at intervals. The cursing in rear grew loud and hostile, mingled with the usual shouts of 'Step short in front . . . disconnected in rear . . . why don't we have a halt?' etc., and I automatically slackened my pace from half-a-mile an hour to anything between one-quarter of a mile an hour and nothing at all. To make matters worse, Fritz started to pop the odd shell over by way of adding to our misery.

"Well, to make a long story short, after plunging along like this for five or six hours, after that tragic moment when the guide turned round and admitted he was lost,



THE ONLY WAY.