

## HAMMERING SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE AT GERMAN

Somewhere in France—They're hammering away now for three nights," said the major. "You've just got to find out what they're doing in that hollow."

"Right sir," answered the junior subaltern, and sent off his orderly for the platoon sergeant.

It was a tricky bit of line. The Boche held a triangle, the apex of which came to within thirty yards of our line. At the nearest point in our line was a shell crater, one lip of which was held by us and one by him. On our left of the crater was a hollow in the ground, which was quite out of our line of sight.

From that hollow had come, for three nights, a mysterious hammering and other sounds that indicated great activity on the part of a working party; but whether Fritz was simply doing some elaborate wiring, or sapping out, or digging a mine, we had no means of knowing—save only by patrol. The lip of the crater was white chalk, so that nobody could go over it without serious risk of being seen by the enemy, and any patrol party would have to make a detour.

### In the Triangle

At ten o'clock that night, the junior subaltern, with his platoon sergeant and one man, crept over the parapet two hundred yards to the left of the crater, and they began to make their way towards a point from which they might look down into the hollow. The triangle had seen some stiff fighting, and No Man's Land was one succession of shell holes and broken wire. It is no sort of joke whatever to crawl on your hands and knees over ground that is full of shell holes and broken wire, but that was what the patrol had to do. There was a good moon, and patrols do not generally welcome a good moon. Not only it likely to give one away, but it is a deceptive luminary, turning tree-stumps into sinister men, and clusters of wire into working parties.

The junior subaltern had not been out often. He was very, very new to the work, and it is work that sometimes breaks the nerve of seasoned warriors, but he had plenty of heart. Heart is not everything, though, and in No Man's Land there are snares and delusions which only experience can deal with.

To make it worse, his sergeant was also inexperienced. Once they made a detour of several hundred yards, scarcely daring to breathe, crawling from shell-hole to shell-hole with the skill and cunning of an Indian tracker; only to find at the end, that what they were tracking was one of our own working parties.

Fritz was not idle all this time. His machine guns were rattling out death at the rate of knots, and the tap-tap of them as they smacked the air above him woke in the junior subaltern a great desire to hug dear old mother earth very close indeed. One does not give way to such desires, however, on active service; and presently there came to him that realization which breeds indeed a mighty contempt for the flying lead—that machine guns always fire high at night. Also, those shell holes which so impeded his progress gave him excellent cover from anything of the sort. Soon he acquired that marvellous sense of security that is one of the strangest things in the psychology of No Man's Land; and when a stray strand of wire tore the knee out of his breeches he swore loudly, as one should not swear in close proximity to Fritz.

### The Danger Spot

By the time he got to within reasonably measurable distance of his objective he had become so used to it all that he was inclined to take risks, and when he saw that the easiest and quickest way to what looked like a point of vantage was across the glaring white of the crater lip he hesitated not a moment. He only cursed himself for not taking the lip in the first instance instead of crawling a quarter of a mile and losing one knee of his breeches. He felt pleased that he could think of his breeches at such a moment. It argued the coolness of an old hand.

He and the sergeant crept quickly enough across the danger-spot. Just at that point our wire and the Boche's met, and there was a distinct gap, too exposed for either side to wire it, so that, once over the chalk, he found himself within the enemy's entanglements.

He lay very quiet for a few minutes, and would see into the hollow now, but quite far enough in. A light went up, and as it fell he saw distinctly the burly figure of the Bavarian—he could make out the red and blue of the cap, so near was he!—who had fired it. He felt a craving to borrow the sergeant's rifle, a pot-shot at that critter silhouetted Boche, who was resting on his rifle and peering out to see what his light would show up, but he remembered in time that the duty of a patrol is secrecy, not fight.

### Bombed!

The working party in the hollow were still busy. As he listened to them, the desire to see what they were doing became overwhelming in its intensity. Up to that time, it had been merely a duty that had to be done. He forced himself forward on his elbows, and slowly made down the bank. He was very close to the enemy now, and caution was necessary even if he felt as safe as in his own dugout.

He smelt the explosion. Bits of earth and stone fell on him as he lay, still now. They had seen him. Bombed him from the right, from the occupied lip of the crater, which he had absolutely forgotten. First he tried to turn and crawl back, but the thought of the wire and the shell holes held him. It took him half an hour to crawl back, but a bold dash would do it under the minute. Also, if he were going to make a dash, he might just as well take the extra risk and see what the working party were doing.

He got on his feet, and ran for it—towards the Boche sentry. Five yards, and he could see plainly what the working party were doing. Then he was dashed for our lip of the

the chicken? There were no signs of our little brown friend. A little while passed, and then suddenly we heard a pleased cackling. It came from near a shell-hole stump right in the centre of the firing field. I pulled out my glasses.

"There was the little hen running delightedly back and forth. A little snow-bird thing was lying on the ground beside her—she had laid an egg."

In another letter the same officer tells the following story about a goose:

"One of our captains saw a goose strutting around in a farmyard. He offered to buy it from the old housewife, but she said, 'It is the pet of the family.' The captain was insistent, and he paid her a good price. The cook cooked it for two days, and still he couldn't run a fork into it. We then tried to chew it, but it was as tough as leather. We gave it to the dogs, and they thought it was a bone. Then the old farmer told us that the goose was twenty-five years old."

Fire investigation.  
The Bullock fire investigation will be continued on Monday.

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