SCOUTING THRILLS

Captain G. B. McKean

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SCOUTING THRILLS

BY

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14TH BATTALION CANADIAN INFANTRY

Royal Montreal Regt.

WITH FOREWORD BY

LIEUT.-GEN. SIR R. E. W. TURNER

V.C., K.C.B., K.C.M.G., D.S.O.

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FOREWORD

By Lieut.-Gen. Sir R. E. W. Turner, V.C., K.C.B., K.C.M.G., D.S.O. Chief of General Staff, Canadian Forces

THE initiative, and individual bravery of the Battalion Scouts have been outstanding in the Canadian Army since the beginning of the Campaign.

It can be truthfully said, the Canadians on their front owned "No Man's Land."

This ascendancy over the Boche was gained not by reckless bravery, but by the superior intellect and resourcefulness of our men, developed by studied training.

The lessons gained on their dangerous patrols in the face of an enemy, by our gallant scouts will be invaluable in helping the Scout movement so happily revived in Canada by H. R. H. the Duke of Connaught during his term as Governor General.

This book, written by a Scout officer who has gained the most coveted decoration of the British Army in the execution of his duty, depicts in simple language the necessity for Scouts to at all times live up to their motto " Be prepared."

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTORY

THE purpose of this book is to set forth, in as attractive a form as possible, the interesting and important work performed by scouts in the Great War, now happily brought to a successful and triumphant conclusion. It is necessarily limited to personal experiences, but, as similar experiences were common to the work of all scouts, it is really more than a personal narrative. It is not written to instruct in methods of scouting, for doubtless, to the highly trained, expert scout, many of the things we did in carrying out our duties would appear to be clumsy and inexperienced—methods to be avoided, not copied. The stories are written to entertain and possibly to thrill, but certainly not to instruct. To the boy who loves stories of adventure (and what boy is there who does not?) this book will, I trust, make an appeal. The stories are plain, unvarnished, truthful records of incidents

that actually happened. There are no fictitious characters introduced; I have not even attempted to camouflage names. In doing this, I sincerely hope that I have not given offence to any one, that those who unexpectedly find themselves figuring in these stories will pardon me for having, without their consent, introduced them into print.

For more than four years we have been entertained, thrilled, and instructed by highly coloured accounts, written by war correspondents, of the important decisive actions of the war. They were continuously on the fringe of the battle and excellently placed for giving a broad, general description of events as they were happening. It is the privilege of humble participants, such as myself, to give the more intimate account of these same historic events. I have attempted to do this from the scouts' standpoint, for I think it can safely be claimed that of all the participants in the war, there were none who enjoyed more unique opportunities for viewing it from, as it were, 'a front seat,' than did the scout. We were forever scraping up a lively acquaintance with the Hun. We

found, as I hope these stories prove, that he was woefully lacking in the spirit of adventure. Our mastery over No Man's Land was very seldom challenged, and on behalf of all scouts, I do not hesitate to claim our overwhelming superiority over the Hun in this interesting and adventurous work.

It was pure love of adventure that attracted me to scouting, a love which, if not exactly born in me, was at least developed in me, through my association with the Boy Scout movement; and it was the principles of this organisation which, more than anything else, underlay all our training. I remember very vividly, when I was acting as an instructor at a school for training scouts that, at the beginning of each class, we were addressed by a colonel under whose supervision we worked. His first question to the class was:—

'Now, boys, what is it most important that a scout should have?' The replies were many and varied, but seldom correct. 'Good eyesight'; 'good hearing'; 'good physique'; 'be a good shot'; 'a knowledge of map reading'; were some of the many replies.

'No, you are all wrong,' the colonel would reply; 'a scout's *honour* is the most important thing of all. If a scout isn't to be trusted then he's no good to me, and he will be no good to his commanding officer.'

It was to develop this sense of honour that was the chief end and aim of our training. For no matter how clever and expert a scout might be, if he could not be trusted to carry out his commission, then he was no good as a scout. The scouts worked alone, it was seldom any check could be kept on their work; they either said they had carried out an order *and had;* or else they said they had carried out an order *and hadn't.* The importance of having scouts who, no matter what difficulties or dangers were involved, would carry out orders and return with the information required, can easily be understood.

The work of the scout in France was full of interest, excitement and danger. Each patrol was an adventure. That narrow strip of land separating armies and known as No Man's Land was our hunting ground. It was a strangely lonely place, friendless and menacing, a land of darkness and

mystery, but possessing a fascination all its own. The object of our patrols was to obtain information about the enemy—to locate definitely his outposts, to report upon his defences, such as the condition of his wire, et cetera.

Our work was chiefly done under the cover of darkness—the time when we could best approach his defences without being observed. Occasionally, during the last few months of the war, when attacks were an almost daily occurrence and the situation was frequently obscure, daylight patrols were sent out. But a daylight patrol, unless the conditions were favourable to it (such as, for example, working along an old trench), was never very satisfactory. The difficulties of approaching closely to the enemy positions were usually too great to be successfully overcome.

Associated with the scouts were observers and snipers, the three sections being grouped together and known generally as the Intelligence section. This was a separate unit in a battalion, and was under the command of an Intelligence Officer who, in most battalions, had associated with him in his work a Scout Officer. All members

of this unit were known as specialists, and did special training during the period when the battalion was resting. They were billeted together, messed together, and generally were a very happy, sociable family of about thirty men. During the training periods the scouts were instructed in map-reading; the use of the prismatic compass; marching on compass bearings by day and by night; sketching and making reports; signalling (semaphore and Morse); methods of crawling; practice in bomb-throwing, and revolver practice. The two latter were probably the most popular branches of training. We were usually most happy when we could get in amongst some old trenches and practise bombing raids, using live bombs. Eight or ten of us would throw bombs together and make a most terrific noise. We once got hold of a box of salvaged German bombs, which had a much louder detonation than ours, but were not nearly so dangerous. We thought it a good idea to get used to German bombs exploding within a few yards of us, so gaily scattered salvos of them around, to the great alarm of the inhabitants of an adjoining village who,

hearing these loud explosions and finding that the windows of their houses rattled and shook, rushed out of their houses in dismay, thinking that the hated Boche was bombing them! By an unhappy coincidence, on our very first night in the line following this, we made an altogether too intimate acquaintance with German bombs and one of the most popular members of our section was killed.[1] These practices did not lack the element of danger; on two occasions we had scouts wounded. In addition to the work of patrolling, there was the work of guiding reliefs in and out of the line. This demanded an intimate acquaintance with all the routes in the back and forward areas, which could only be obtained by diligent and painstaking reconnaissance work.

The above gives a fairly detailed account of the different duties of the scout in France. It will perhaps serve to give an added interest to the stories that follow.

I joined the Intelligence section first as a sniper but, a few days later, I was made an observer, and a few weeks later still,

[1] The incident is described in the story *Lost in No Man's Land.*

became a scout. I afterwards became scout corporal, and finally scout officer.

The sequence of the stories is exactly as they happened. Between the first and second there is a gap of some months. The scene of the first is in the Ypres salient, and that of the second is Vimy Ridge. During the interval between, we took part in what was, as far as my experience goes, the bloodiest fighting of the whole war. I refer to the Battle of the Somme in 1916. The memories of it are too gruesome for me ever to include any incident of my experiences in a book of, I trust, fairly cheerful war stories. It was a period which, to me, was entirely lacking in the glamour and romance which we all associate with the war. The last two stories are not scouting stories, but I trust the interest in them will not be lessened on that account. Apart from conveying some idea of the conditions prevailing in the final stages of the war, and the new and changed conditions under which scouts were working, they describe two that were (to me at any rate) rather thrilling incidents, and so should be of interest to all readers.

Although the book is written primarily

for boys, I trust that the stories will prove of sufficient interest to entertain 'grown-ups' also.

Some of the characters in this book have paid the supreme sacrifice. Truer comrades, or braver soldiers, it would be difficult to find. I count it a privilege to give public expression to my unbounded and warmly affectionate admiration of their sterling worth as soldiers and men—the type that has brought immortal fame and glory to Canada's citizen army. To have fought with them side by side will be for ever a proud memory. The example of patriotism and sacrifice which they have set—these scouts of the Great War—should be copied and practised by every boy who belongs to the great Boy Scout organisation.

I

AN AMBUSCADE

THIS is not going to be a story about myself, though I might come into it occasionally. It is about the boys who taught me scouting, particularly about one boy known familiarly as Tommy. He was scout sergeant when I first made his acquaintance, and afterwards became scout officer at the time when I was a corporal in the scout section.

My acquaintance began from the moment when I joined the battalion in the spring of 1916. My imagination had been well fed at the Base upon stories of hair-raising escapes and ghastly mutilation, so it was with very mixed feelings that I looked forward to my participation in the Great War. My interest in scouting led me to seek out the boys engaged in this adventurous work, and it was then that I met Tommy.

The battalion was out for a few days' rest in a camp of tents in a grove of trees in Flanders. As I approached the tent, sounds of revelry came from it, music and voices singing. I pulled the flap over the opening to one side and entered. Tommy was seated on a little box pulling away at an old melodeon. He was playing the music of many popular songs, the rest of the boys in the tent were all singing lustily. It was a happy, hilarious gathering. There was many a night afterwards when I made one of similar merry gatherings, times too when there were, through casualties, occasional blanks in our choruses. Hardships and dangers and longings were quickly and completely forgotten under the spell of the music from Tommy's old melodeon.

During the two or three days the battalion was resting after I joined it, I cultivated the companionship of the scouts and was always eager to hear the stories of their adventures. When we went up the line I went up 'in the company,' which means that I was just one of the common or garden type of Tommy, doing sentry duty and working-parties and cultivating an eye for a 'Minnie."[1]

[1] 'Minnie,' a German minenwerfer shell, corresponding to our trench mortar shell.

I shall not forget the first night when I looked out over the parapet into that land of mystery and wonder—No Man's Land. Somewhere out there was the enemy! Occasionally I saw the flash of a rifle as a German sentry fired, and heard the sing of the bullet. Merely to look out over there seemed to me an act of courage! I tingled with the excitement of my new experience. At last I was *in* the war, not merely dressed up as a soldier, but actually facing the enemy—not more than a hundred yards away! And it was that little strip of land bestrewn with wire and obstacles, that unknown disputed piece of ground called 'No Man's Land'—that most readily and quickly appealed to my imagination. I looked out into it and pondered over its mystery. As if in answer to my unspoken question an N.C.O. hopped on to the firing step alongside of me and asked:

'Did you hear anybody in the wire?'

As a matter of fact I had been doing nothing else but hearing and seeing things! Like every land of mystery it seemed to be peopled with shadowy forms.

'Yes,' I whispered back earnestly, 'I think I *saw* somebody too.'

'Where?' he asked.

'There,' I replied, indicating the direction.

After a few moments the N.C.O. turned to me.

'Did you ever see a fence post?' he asked.

'Scores of them,' I replied.

'Well, you must have forgotten what they look like, for that's what your man is out there—a fence post.'

It was rather discouraging and humiliating, but it taught me a lesson—that a little imagination on a dark night is a very dangerous thing.

'Keep a good look out,' said the N.C.O. as he left me; 'A fellow a little further along the trench swears he heard some one in the wire.'

A few minutes later I felt a tug on my arm—it was the N.C.O. back again.

'A patrol is going out on the left—five scouts; they 'll be out for about two hours. If you see or hear anybody out there, be sure to challenge before you shoot.'

Five scouts going out into No Man's Land! My imagination immediately got busy—five scouts roaming around out there

in that land of mystery and darkness! My imaginings were interrupted by the relief coming along to take my place, but my curiosity was not lessened, and I was glad and relieved when I heard the word being passed along that 'the patrol was in.' A few minutes later they passed along the trench. The next morning when off duty I went down to headquarters and sought out the scouts. Tommy, at my request, gave me an account of the patrol of the previous night. I was full of curiosity. One scout had been fired at, the bullet passing through his cap. When he had finished, I asked:

'Do you think I could get into your section?'

'Yes, sure; next time you are out of the line, ask to be transferred.'

I did so and was transferred. As I had some knowledge of map reading I went into the line as an observer and not as a scout. My duty as an observer was to sit in a specially constructed Observation Post from which a good view of a particular section of the German trench was available. The O.P. (as it was popularly called) was equipped with a telescope and a map. I

shan't ever forget the excitement and shock of seeing my first German. The telescope was a good one and the German trench a bare hundred yards away. It was a sunny morning and I was sitting with my eye glued to the telescope when the top of a German service cap (the soft peakless kind) came into my field of view. Very slowly it moved upwards, then I saw a pair of eyebrows, then the eyes underneath these, and finally the fat, full face of a German! He was stealing a look across No Man's Land! But this was nothing to the excitement of the following morning when, about two thousand yards behind the German front line, there appeared a party of about fifty Germans—carrying picks and shovels. I watched them until they halted, then spread out and commenced digging. Rapidly I figured out just about where they would be *on the map,* and making a note of the location, rushed back to headquarters and reported it. I was told the artillery would fire a few rounds into them so rushed back to the O.P. to see what would happen. In a few minutes I heard the scream of shells passing overhead. I saw a few white puffs not many feet above the heads of

the working-party: it was shrapnel. Immediately there was the wildest confusion —picks and shovels were thrown down and men ran wildly in all directions! I was fairly dancing with excitement and satisfaction! After some minutes they returned in one's and two's; those who had been hit were carried away; picks and shovels were collected and the party straggled back, leaving the work unfinished. But, interesting as all this was, my chief longing was to go out on patrol, and, that night, I went to where the scouts were staying.

'Hullo,' said Tommy, 'how do you like observing?'

'Fine,' I replied, and proceeded to give him an account of the discomfiture of the Huns. When I had finished I remarked:

'I suppose you are going out to-night?'

'Yes; two or three of us.'

'What are the chances of going out with you?'

'Why, d'you want to come?'

'Yes, I'm very keen.'

'All right, come along about nine o'clock, we'll get a revolver for you.'

'Thanks very much,' I said, 'I'll be along at nine.'

I was there before nine.

'Before you go out,' Tommy remarked to me, 'you must take all your badges off and leave all letters and papers behind.'

'Why is that?' I asked.

'Well, in case you were taken prisoner or were killed and had to be left out there. If they found letters and papers on you they would secure identification. Also the badges show up bright when a flare light is shot up, and would perhaps give away our position at the time.'

So I very seriously and soberly began to remove all badges and letters. These precautions impressed me with the seriousness of this game of scouting. A few minutes afterwards the Scout Officer came in and we went up to the front line. It was a very dark night, but quite mild and dry. We moved up and down the trench warning the sentries. At last we came to the place where it had been decided we should go out. The officer was not going—Tommy, another scout, and myself were to make up the patrol. The place where it had been decided we should go out at was one of our Listening Posts. Now, of all the unpopular duties that fell to the lot of the suffering Tommy,

that of Listening Post was perhaps the most detestable. It was usually made up of two men who, as an extra defensive precaution, were sent out in front of the front line trench. The distance out from our trench varied, sometimes not more than twenty yards, sometimes fifty to seventy-five yards. The men usually established themselves in some commodious shell-hole and were in communication with the front line trench by means of a wire. One pull on the wire signified O.K., two pulls (from the trench) was a signal to the men in the Listening Post that some one (probably the relief) was coming out from the trench, three pulls (from the Listening Post) was a call for the N.C.O., four pulls (from the Listening Post) was an alarm, five pulls (from the trench) was the signal to the men in the Listening Post to return to the trench. It was a dirty, dangerous job, and thoroughly disliked. The miseries of it on a cold wet night can easily be imagined, often lying in a shell-hole half filled with water. Sometimes a little wire was strung out in front as protection against attack, but more often the post was unprotected. Occasionally there was a tragedy out there:

a rifle fired or a bomb thrown, and frantic signals out to the Listening Post unanswered. A party goes out to find maybe one man lying dead and one missing, or perhaps both missing. The Listening Post we passed was perhaps twenty to thirty yards out from our trench, just inside of our wire. After a few whispered words to the two men in it, we crawled through our wire and out into the land of my imaginative wonderings—No Man's Land! Tommy led the way while I brought up the rear. Just as I was in the act of raising myself over a twisted wire stake, a flare light was shot up from the German trench.

'Stay where you are,' came back the sharp whispered command from Tommy.

As the light broke and fell I felt myself to be assuming gigantic proportions; I felt as if the eyes of the whole German army were being riveted upon me and a thousand rifles were levelled at me! It was my first experience of being in the lime-light of No Man's Land. The light flickered and slowly died out, and the darkness seemed more intense than ever. With a sigh of relief and thankfulness, I completed my progress over the obstacle and followed on

the heels of the scout in front of me. After crawling along for some time the heels suddenly disappeared. With palpitating heart I continued to crawl and came to the edge of a huge shell-hole. I looked down into it but failed to distinguish anything, then I heard somebody whisper:

'Come on down into this shell-hole.'

I did so, and found Tommy and the other scout contentedly sitting in the bottom of it. We did not stop to examine it closely, but crawled out of it and forward into another one not quite so large. Tommy came alongside of me.

'Can you see the German wire?'

I looked and saw a shadowy mass not many yards in front of me. We lay listening for some time.

'I'm going to wake 'em up,' whispered Tommy.

'What are you going to do?' I asked.

'Throw a bomb into his trench if I can.'

I thrilled with anticipation. This was the real thing, I thought. Tommy stood up in the bottom of the shell-hole, grasped the bomb in his hand, pulled the pin and stood ready to throw it. I trembled with

the excitement of the moment. At last I heard the click of the released lever as the bomb flew over my head. A few seconds later there is a flash and a crash as the bomb explodes. Instantly three flare lights are shot up, breaking almost simultaneously, and the bullets from a machine gun swish over our heads. More lights go up—the German parapet is easily visible. We stay there perfectly still. After a few minutes the excitement dies down and we start back for our own trench. My first impulse was to get up and walk, but I recognised that caution in returning was every bit as necessary as caution in going out. The amazing thing to me was the directness with which Tommy, despite the black darkness, went out and came back in again. Not many minutes after we had started on our return journey I heard voices in front of me—it was Tommy talking to the men in the Listening Post. A few minutes afterwards we were back in the protection and friendliness of our own trench. I was filled with a feeling of exhilaration. No Man's Land became more fascinating than ever to me—it was a place of thrills and adventure!

The next morning I was on duty in the

O.P.—in fact most of the day was spent there. That night I was feeling too tired to try another midnight excursion between the lines. However, I went along to see the scouts before they went out.

'Did you notice that big hole we were in last night,' Tommy asked.

'All I noticed was that it was a pretty big one,' I answered.

'I intended having another look at it when we were coming back, but missed it,' continued Tommy. 'It seemed to me to be smooth, as though it was being used as a Listening Post or something of the sort. I intend having another look at it to-night.'

I stayed till they had gone, then went along to my own bit of a shelter, rolled myself up in my greatcoat, and was soon fast asleep. At daylight I was again sitting in the O.P. scanning the German trenches for signs of movement or new work. I had not been there long before I saw a German periscope pushed up, the interesting thing about it being that, as I could plainly see the glass reflector, I could also see the face of the German sentry who occasionally looked into it. He looked frankly bored with the war

and his particular part in it. I had an inspiration. I climbed out of the O.P. and went along the trench until I found one of our snipers. We went back to the O.P. and I pointed out to him the periscope. We then went along to a sniping post from which a view of the periscope was obtainable. I left him there, asking him to wait a couple of minutes until I could get back into the O.P. to see the fun. The Hun sentry was looking into the periscope when I got my glass on to it again. I had only a few seconds to wait when a bullet went right into the centre of the reflector, smashing it to smithereens. I was satisfied that we had brought the war home to the Hun in a very effective way. A few minutes afterwards I was joined by the sniper. I congratulated him on his shooting.

'Oh, by the way,' he said, 'did you hear about the scouts having a big scrap in No Man's Land last night?'

'No,' I replied, 'what happened?'

'Oh, they got into a German Listening Post or something of the sort.'

'I must find out about this when I go back.'

In the afternoon when off duty for an

hour or two I went along to the scouts' dug-out.

'Hullo, Tommy,' I said. 'Heard you had a fight out on patrol last night.'

'Yes,' he answered; 'sit down and I'll tell you about it. You remember that big hole we were in the night before last?'

'Yes,' I replied.

'Well, that was the place where we had all the fun. Four of us went out at the same place—the Listening Post. We passed that shell-hole, so I thought we would examine it when coming back. We crawled around for a while, getting close up to the German wire. In coming back we went into that shell-hole—it was even bigger than I thought it was. In examining it I found a big hole in the side nearest to the German trench. Covering this hole or entrance were four thick, rough boards laid loosely against it. While I was looking at these I heard the click of a rifle bolt just inside the entrance. Keeping an eye on the entrance, I motioned a scout to take up a position in a clump of bushes on top of the opposite side of the shell-hole, another one to lie on top of the entrance looking down into it, while the other one came alongside of me. When we were all

in position I pushed my revolver in the crack between two of the loose boards, and fired. Immediately there was a rush and the boards were sent flying in all directions. A bayonet flashed past my ear and a Hun almost fell on top of me. I pulled the trigger and he collapsed. Inside the entrance was a crowd of struggling, shrieking Huns. Three of us, including the scout lying on top of the entrance, emptied our revolvers into them and then scattered. A few seconds afterwards bombs were thrown from the shell-hole, but we were well clear of it by then—at least I was. We got separated and returned singly into the trench.'

'Say, but you were lucky to get out of it so easily. But what were the Huns doing packed in there?'

'We 've been talking it over. It was likely that they heard us there the night before last and then, hearing us pass there again last night, they had decided to get a big party together to cut us off so that we couldn't get back to our own trench. That was a tunnel they were packed in, which connected the Listening Post with the German trench. They were evidently all ready in there to come out when we slipped down into

the hole. In other words, we got there ahead of them.'

'Well, you certainly spoiled their little game, didn't you?'

'Yes, we certainly did, and I guess we messed up a few of them too.'

A few days later we were all singing lustily again to the tune of Tommy's old melodeon, the perils and thrills of No Man's Land forgotten. It was hard to tell in which Tommy excelled most, his intrepidity as a scout or his skill as a musician. After being scout officer with us for some months he was selected, on account of his special qualities of daring and initiative, to be one of a secret mission sent to the East. But we shall meet with Tommy again.

II

A FIND

WE sat coughing and spluttering over a smouldering wood fire which Sharkum, the Russian, claimed the credit for lighting.

'You ought to be shot at dawn for calling this bunch of smoke a fire, Sharkum,' coughed Louis.

'Dat's a good fire,' responded Sharkum; 'you are lazy, want other peoples mak a fire while you do noding else but sit over it so that other peoples can't get near.'

'Never mind, Sharkum,' interrupted Jack the scout sergeant, 'you can stay in to-night and look after your fire. Louis can go with us on patrol. Try and have some warm tea ready for us when we get back.'

'That's right, Sharkum,' I chipped in, 'you keep the home fires burning while we go and look for one of those terrible Huns. Be sure to have the sheets aired for us when

we get back and sprinkle them well with Keatings'. I love the taste of Keatings' when I wake up in the morning.'

'Yes, Sharkum,' said the irrepressible Louis, 'you see, that's what we keep you in the section for while we men go out and do the work.' (Sharkum would easily have made two of Louis.) 'Besides, it's safer in the dug-out, and you can keep your feet warm down here.'

Sharkum's eyes began to gleam angrily; he was neither a coward nor a slacker. Then he saw Louis wasn't in earnest, so began to help us into our crawling suits. Only three of us were going out. The trenches were close, and it was inadvisable to send out large patrols. Clouds were drifting across a bright moon. We waited for the clouds to hide it, for Fritz was only seventy-five yards away. Jack crawled carefully over the parapet and through the wire, and I followed. I was lying partly suspended over the parapet, when a cloud hurried past the moon and it shone down clear and bright. There was nothing to do but wait for the next cloud, and, suspended there, it seemed like an eternity before another cloud came along. Louis followed

a few minutes later. We were now out in the land of mine craters; huge holes, some of them forty and fifty feet deep in the centre and from fifty to a hundred yards across, with probably a post of ours on the lip, and, immediately opposite, a post of the Germans. The possession of these mine craters was often fiercely disputed, and every night at the slightest suspicion of a noise bombs would be dropped into these yawning holes. No Man's Land on Vimy Ridge was pitted with them—large and small; and our patrols consisted chiefly in crawling into and around them, trying to establish definitely the location of the German posts. At day-time the mine craters were very lightly held; but at night-time, as soon as men could move around unseen, they came crawling out to the different points of vantage on the lip—bombers and machine gunners all determined to hang on grimly to their particular piece of crater! And so, facing each other across that yawning hole were perhaps a score or more of men. We never entered the mine crater from any of our posts on the lip; that would give away, if seen, the location of our own posts; and also, if seen,

the wily Hun would wait until we had got well down into the crater. Then over would come his bombs, exploding with a deafening reverberating crash. So, knowing all this, we usually crawled out into No Man's Land and approached these craters in about the centre part. Our own men, if they saw us, knew who we were, for they had been warned to expect to see us there. In our patrol of the night of this story we had planned to go into one of these craters, intending, as usual, to approach it in the centre. So we crawled on towards it, knowing it to be some fifty to sixty yards from where we had left our trench. It was while we were crawling towards it that I had the greatest fright I ever had. I had moved forward a few yards and lay listening, when what appeared to me to be a huge dark object moved swiftly across my face about an inch from my nose. My heart gave a great bound and I partly sprang to my feet, when I saw, moving swiftly away from me, a huge rat! Ever after that, when on patrol, I always kept one eye on the look-out for rats straying around. A few minutes later we reached the mine crater and lay looking down into

it. Even in the moonlight the bottom of it was not discernible. After listening for some time, Jack and myself crawled quietly down into it, leaving Louis on the look-out on top. We crawled up to have a look at everything that appeared suspicious. A German sentry coughed and we looked up. We could see the top of his steel helmet glistening in the moonlight. We spent nearly an hour crawling around in that weird place without anything eventful happening. I went back for Louis, and the three of us then crawled out at the other side. It was a relief to get out of that dismal hole. After resting for a few minutes (for crawling is hard, tiring work) we made off in the direction of the German trench. We carefully wriggled our way into the German wire and lay there listening. In the trench, not many yards to our right, we could plainly hear a German working party. We could hear a succession of dull thuds as they knocked some timbers into the ground, apparently repairing a trench. We carefully noted the location, so that, as soon as we returned to our trench, we could notify the trench mortar men, and they would lob a few rounds over, to the

discomfiture of the working party. We wriggled out of the wire and continued our wanderings. We were nearing another mine crater when Jack—who was in front—made a warning signal with his foot. Then another signal—I crawled alongside of him. He indicated a trench in front of him running out from the German front line (we were then about forty yards from the German trench). We crawled forward until we were looking down into it. It was a good trench, and, despite the mud prevailing everywhere, was clean and in good condition. Jack dropped down into it. After a few moments he looked up.

'Somebody has been in here, Mac,' he said. 'You watch for any one coming from that direction (indicating the German lines) while I have a look down here.'

He went off in the direction of our own lines, while I lay with my revolver pointing in the direction of the German lines. In a very few moments he returned.

'Just come along here, Mac, and have a look at this,' he said.

I followed him a few yards along the trench. At the end of it there was a little shelter reaching almost to the top. Piled

carefully into this shelter, in neat rows, were about a score of German minenwerfer shells! These were of medium size and must have been placed there recently. What was the idea?

'What do you think it is, Jack; some kind of a trap where, if you touch one, the whole thing goes up?' I suggested.

'No, I don't think so,' he replied. 'Shall we take one of them back with us?'

'Yes, we might as well.'

I watched him as he reached to get one, not having entirely got rid of my idea that it was some kind of a trap, and half expecting the whole thing to go up. But nothing happened. He handed the shell to me: it weighed about sixty pounds.

'Not much chance to do any crawling with this in your arms,' I remarked.

'No, we can't crawl with it; it's a case of getting up and walking.'

'How far do you think we are from our nearest post?'

'Probably fifty to sixty yards.'

'Could you go to it in a straight line from here?'

'Yes, easily.'

'All right, you start off. Get into that

post and I'll follow behind with this' (lovingly hugging the Minnie).

'Righto,' he said, climbed out of the trench and made off in the direction of our post. When he had got about half way I laid the Minnie shell carefully on the outside of the trench (we weren't sure whether or not it was detonated), climbed out, picked up the shell, and followed in the direction Jack was going. The shell was heavy and the mud knee-deep and indescribably sticky. I had intended to go quickly but struggled along, experiencing that nice creeping nightmare feeling where, try as you will, you cannot escape from the horrible fate overtaking you. I reached our post. Jack was standing waiting for me, and I handed him the shell before jumping down into the trench. The two or three men in the post crowded around to see what we had got.

'A Minnie shell that we found out there,' explained Jack; 'there's a small dug-out full of them piled neatly up in rows.'

'Is it detonated?' queried one interested youth.

'Don't know,' answered Jack. 'I expect it is.'

'Punch it on the nose with the butt of

your rifle,' suggested Louis, 'that 's the best way to find out. If it explodes, it is detonated—if it doesn't, it isn't detonated. Quite simple.'

But nobody showed any enthusiasm for Louis' method.

'I 'll carry it part of the way, Jack,' I offered.

'All right, Mac,' he replied, 'we'll spell each other off; it's a pretty heavy thing to carry.'

I hoisted the shell on to my shoulder, but, as it had been raining recently and the duckboards were wet and slippery, I stumbled forward. There was a rush—half a dozen pairs of hands seized hold of me to steady me! Nobody seemed disposed to take a chance with that shell. It might not be detonated, and then again it *might!* Preceded by Jack and followed by Louis, I staggered along on my adventurous journey back to headquarters. Every time I slipped, Louis rushed alongside of me. We came to a narrow part of the trench where it was impossible for two men to pass. Our passage was stubbornly disputed by two husky Canucks.

'Gangway there,' shouted Jack, 'make way for a party.'

'Gangway yourself, we were here before you chaps,' came back the quick reply.

'Whoever goes back, we don't,' announced Jack, and started pushing his way past.

I followed, staggering along under the burden of the Minnie shell. But our two friends were as determined as we were, and so we all got jammed tight in the trench. My hold upon the Minnie shell became loosened—it wobbled dangerously around on my shoulder.

'For God's sake watch that you don't drop that shell, Mac,' spoke up Louis, the diplomat, from behind; 'if that nose-cap hits the ground it will blow us all to blazes for sure.'

'What d'you mean?' asked one of the men, 'what shell is this?'

'The shell right in front of your nose there,' replied Louis; 'it's a German Minnie shell we found in a dug-out in No Man's Land. The fuse is so instantaneous that if you stroke the nose-cap with a feather the whole crowd of us would be blown sky-high.'

'Is that right?'

'Sure thing,' chorused the three of us.

'Just a minute, fellows; we 'll go back and make way for you,' one of them earnestly and genially assured us.

'Thanks,' said Louis, 'we want to get rid of this thing as soon as we can.'

We passed on without any further trouble. Our next obstacle was a working party cleaning out the trench where it had been almost levelled during the day by Minnies.

'Gangway,' called out Jack.

But the man swinging the pick failed to take any notice.

'Gangway for a party,' called out Jack again.

The man stopped and looked up. Like most members of a working party, he wasn't a bit inclined to be genial and obliging.

'What party?' he growled.

'Scouts.'

'Well, you can wait; we 'd be here all night if we let everybody pass that comes along. Wait until a crowd collects and then we let you pass.'

'Yes, but I can't wait,' I called out.

'Why can't you?—afraid you 'll be late for the second house or something?'

'Well, I don't feel like dangling this Minnie on my shoulder much longer, and

if I drop the cursed thing it will blow us all to kingdom come.'

'What fairy tale is this about a Minnie?'

'No fairy tale at all. We found a dug-out full of Minnie shells out in No Man's Land and brought one in to be examined. Now, if you don't get out of the way I 'll throw the thing at you.'

'Gangway for a carrying party,' he yelled.

The cry was taken up and passed on, and we soon were clear of the working party. Nothing further eventful happened until we reached headquarters. Jack, who was carrying the shell now, staggered into head-quarters, while I remained discreetly on the outside of the blanket screening the C.O.'s compartment.

'Well, Jackson,' I heard the C.O. genially remark, 'and what 's this you 've got with you.'

'A Minnie shell, sir,' replied Jack.

'A Minnie shell!' inquired the C.O. with interest, 'where on earth did you get it from?'

'Found it in No Man's Land, sir,' replied Jack, and then proceeded to give him the history of our discovery.

'Um: most interesting, most interesting.' And then, suspiciously, 'Is it detonated?'

'Don't know, sir,' replied Jack.

'What's that—you don't know!' he roared; 'then how dare you bring that cursed thing in here! take it out! take it out at once!'

I heard Jack getting ready to obey, then the C.O. again:

'I suppose you 're cold and wet, Jackson,' he said relentingly.

'Yes, sir,' said Jack, 'it's wet and muddy out to-night.'

'Well, you 'd better have a drink of something warm, and then take that thing to somebody who knows something about it.'

I listened enviously as Jack rather noisily (for my benefit) partook of the C.O.'s hospitality. He came out, still carrying the Minnie.

'The C.O. doesn't want it,' he remarked to me.

'So I understood from his remarks,' I replied. 'Where are we going to take it now?'

'I think we had better find the heavy trench mortar people; they might know something about it.'

'Yes, but do you know where they are?'

'I know where the signallers' dug-out is at,' he replied.

'All right, let Louis carry it now;' so it was passed on to Louis.

A few minutes later I felt my way down the steps of the dug-out mentioned.

'This the heavy trench mortars?'

'Yes, anything you want?'

'Do you know anything about Minnie shells?'

'Yes, a little.'

'Well, we have one here that we found in a dug-out in No Man's Land. There were about a score of them neatly piled in rows. We want to find out if it is detonated. Can you help us out?'

Just then Louis lurched in, and was preparing to drop the shell on to the ground when a corporal hastily interrupted:

'Go easy, we have no desire to hit the roof in a hurry,' he said.

So Louis carefully deposited the shell on a bench in the dug-out.

Nobody present had seen a similar shell, and there was a very marked lack of curiosity about it. We began to feel uncomfortable; it was apparent that, for an

obvious reason, we were not particularly wanted. Personally I was beginning to hate the sight of that shell; we had been carrying it around for nearly two hours. Then I had a bright idea.

'I suppose you fellows would like to keep this shell to examine it in your spare time. Besides, brigade will want a report on it and we can refer them to you.'

'Oh no, we don't know anything about Boche Minnie shells; we think you had better take it away. We 're busy and the dug-out is crowded.'

Then we began to get stubborn.

'Look here,' said Louis, 'we don't deal in these things and we were told to bring it to you. Now you 've got it, we 'll be getting on back to our headquarters.'

'No; I 'll tell you what to do with it,' began one smooth-tongued youth, 'take it over to the officer, he knows all about these things.'

'We don't know where the officer is at,' interrupted Jack, 'and we are not going to look for him either.'

'That 's all right,' continued the youth, 'I 'll take you over there.'

We were defeated; there was nothing

else for it but to pick up our shell and go! Eager willing hands assisted me to get it on to my shoulder. The cold unfriendly atmosphere of the dug-out vanished, it became permeated with a genial warmth and good fellowship! A man preceded me up the steps with a light and two more followed close behind, in case I stumbled and fell. Once outside the dug-out we followed in the wake of our guide.

'Look here,' began Louis, 'let 's throw the cursed thing away. Nobody wants it, and we 're 'all in' with carrying it around.'

'We can't do that,' argued Jack, 'the C.O. will send us out to get another if we throw this one away.'

After some minutes we arrived at the officer's dug-out, which our guide indicated and then vanished. Jack went in to interview him, and soon reappeared bringing the officer with him.

'That 's all right, boys; just throw the shell down outside and come on in, you must be cold and wet.'

What a relief it was to find some one who really said '*throw* the shell down and *leave* it there!' We did so.

As we were disappearing into the dug-out,

I heard Louis saying—partly to himself, 'Well, I don't care what it is we find in No Man's Land again, if it weighs more than four ounces it stays right where it is at. I 've had enough of carting munitions around to-night to satisfy me for the rest of the war.'

III

EXPLODING A MINE

'HALLO, old man, what are you looking so serious about—aren't you getting enough fun out of the war?'

'Keep quiet, I 'm listening.'

'Listening! really, you are almost at the point of making a joke! Of all the faults to be found with the war the lack of noise isn't one of them.'

'Keep quiet, you fool, I think I can hear tapping.'

'Oh!' then I became serious, too.

'There 's no doubt about it, he 's mining under here.'

'How thrilling! I hope he gives me time to clear out before he explodes it.'

'Oh, it 's not a new discovery by any means. It has been reported before, and we 've been warned to expect a mine to go up here.'

This is typical of the days when the 'war

of movement' was *upwards* instead of *onwards*. Of all the weird and hair-raising experiences, the exploding of a mine had them all beaten. Suspense is said to be the most terrible and distressing of all human emotions, and the suspense of daily and hourly expecting a mine to go up could very properly be spelt with a big capital S. The winter of 1916 was a very active period for mining and counter-mining. Any one caring to look up the British Official reports for that period will frequently come across the words: 'The enemy exploded a mine last night in the Ypres sector, our troops hold the crater'; or 'We exploded a mine last night in the Hulluch sector, causing considerable damage to the enemy trenches; during the night we repulsed three enemy attempts to seize the crater.'

As soon as it was definitely established that the enemy were mining under a particular sector of trench, then a counter-mine was promptly started, and it was usually a race as to who could get ready first. Often the mere fact of a counter-mine underneath the Boche mine galleries was sufficient to discourage the Boche and compel him to quit. Sometimes a tunnel

was bored into the Boche galleries, and some strange and thrilling stories are told. But this could not beat the thrill (often accompanied by a chill!) that the garrison holding the sector of trench under which the mining was going on, usually experienced. The anxious moments came when all sounds of working stopped, then it was a fair guess that the Boche had all ready to explode his mine. Elaborate plans were made for seizing the crater in case the mine should be exploded. What were known as ' crater parties ' were detailed. As soon as the mine was exploded these parties would rush forward and fight for the crater. The trench that was mined would be very lightly garrisoned, and the job of the garrison was a most hated and unenviable one. Did the mine go up they inevitably went with it. At other times the trench would be evacuated and ' flying sentries ' (men, usually in pairs) patrolled that piece of trench. Mining was really a most hateful and diabolical thing. Every new crater promptly received a name—' The Duke,' ' The Prince,' ' The Twins,' and, most appropriate of all, ' The Surprise ' crater. Their name was literally legion—they were named after towns, individuals, and regiments.

This particular story deals with the exploding of one of these diabolical mines, and the sequel to it.

It was in the winter of '16–17 on the famous Vimy Ridge. It was touch and go as to whether the Hun or ourselves got his mine finished first. The whole ridge was mined and counter-mined, but the chief interest for the moment was centred upon the sector we were holding. Each night, when on patrol, we received several rude jars as we crawled around on our stomachs. There would be a thud underneath us and the sensation that some one had given us a punch in the stomach. It was the miners blasting —whose, we could not say. The first time I felt it I thought it was the preliminary to the upheaval of earth, and my heart gave a great bound. I had a lightning vision of a rapid ascent, and bumping my head against the stars. But nothing sensational followed. In the present instance our miners guaranteed us an easy first. However, I had a decided dislike to ' sticking around ' that piece of trench, underneath which we could distinctly hear the mining activities going on. At last definite rumours began to circulate.

'Did you hear they were going to put up a mine to-morrow night?' was whispered around. Of course, everything had to happen the following day to give it a claim to our interest. Two or three days passed, so that the rumour became thoroughly discredited. Then it became more than a rumour; it became a certainty. Men were detailed to mysterious parties known by letters A, B, C, and so on. Headquarters buzzed with excitement, and large quantities of wire, picks, and shovels began to arrive.

'The mine was ready!' everybody swore to that. 'To-morrow night,' became the popular rumour again, and this time it proved to be correct. The exact time was now the mystery. To-morrow came and with it bits of information—real genuine information—began to leak out. One party had been detailed to rush and hold the crater; another party was to string out wire from the lip of the crater back to our front line trench; other parties were to clear away the débris that would fall into the trenches; others were to rush up with bombs and ammunition to the crater party. The scouts were not allotted any definite

task in the scheme of things: 'ours *not* to do or die,' but simply to await for what might turn up. Rumours as to the amazing quantities of explosive carefully packed in the mine began to float around. The size of the crater was speculated upon. Then information of a raid by the battalion on our right, which was to co-ordinate with the exploding of the mine, reached our ears. We were all properly worked up, and excitement ran high. There was prevailing satisfaction and jubilation that our mine was ready first, and that the Hun was going to get the mauling. There was many a fervently expressed hope that it would blow them all sky-high out of the trenches. Scores of men swarmed around that afternoon, and everything was ready for the big show. At last the exact time was whispered around 'Three minutes to ten!' The mine, of course, was to be exploded by electricity; some one would touch a button, then up would go the Hun and several thousand tons of Vimy Ridge would be propelled into the air. It appealed to the imagination. Down in the scouts' dug-out we discussed and rediscussed the matter.

'I suppose the old Hun will think

it 's the end of the world,' commented Louis.

' I should tink so,' said Sharkum the Russian, ' his peoples won't know where to look for him.'

It was a quiet, clear night, and the war went on as usual. Soon after dark rations came up, and we sat around and read the letters that arrived. There was a paper two days old, and there was a scramble for the latest news of the war. Our own ' big show ' suffered a temporary eclipse; it appeared so relatively insignificant alongside of the many big things reported. But it soon came back into its own. We talked of the time when a mine had unexpectedly gone up and we sat, wild-eyed and startled, until the dug-out ceased its swaying motion.

About a quarter to ten Jack said, ' Who 's going outside to see the fun? '

' I am,' I replied.

So we went outside and waited. We could picture the boys waiting back in the support and communication trenches, ready to rush forward on the separate jobs. We speculated who would get there first, the Hun's crater party or ours—we were willing to bet on our boys. The front line trenches

had, of course, been cleared of men, the danger from falling débris being almost as great as that from exploding shells and 'Minnies.' For an hour it would probably be touch and go as to who held the crater. The exploding of the mine wasn't *the* fun: it was what would happen afterwards, and it was in this that we got the comforting thought that we would get a chance to do our bit.

We looked at our watches—it wanted only a minute! In sixty seconds from now the ground would rock and shake as if in the throes of a violent earthquake! We strain our eyes in the direction where the fun is going to take place. Somewhere there is a man standing with his finger on an electric button, watch in his hand; the second hand steals around—forty—thirty—twenty—ten—five seconds! Then he presses the button. Standing there we see the result. There is a great blinding flash, a muffled noise, and the ground sways and trembles beneath our feet.

'There it goes!' we whisper breathlessly. A pause, and then our shells come screaming over our heads—it is our artillery. To add to the dismay, confusion, and panic in

the Boche lines, we send, crashing over, shrapnel and high explosive. It will give our men an advantage. We can picture them struggling forward in the darkness over the débris. They reached the lip of the crater and string themselves out on each side of it. They are there first and they are going to hold on.

In the darkness of No Man's Land on our right, men are stumbling forward to surprise the Hun in his trench. It is a night of surprises for him. Right and left of the crater the Hun signals frantically for his artillery. Shells come shrieking over, exploding with a deafening roar. We have to sidestep once or twice as they come crashing alongside. He pours them over into Zouave Valley just behind us. The noise is deafening, terrific! To the right we see an immense blinding flash.

'What can it be?' we ask. It is for all the world like the explosion of another mine. Later on we find that a Boche shell landed in the midst of nearly two score of our trench-mortar shells and exploded them all.

After a time things quieten down and we return to our dug-out.

'Well, Louis, did you feel anything down here?' I asked.

'Feel anything! I should say so— almost pushed in the side of the dug-out.'

'The old Hun didn't take it *all* lying down. His artillery must have had their sleeves rolled up for a few minutes; he bounced a few shells pretty close to us.'

'I guess the mine also bounced a few of the Huns,' said Louis; 'some of *them* would get the shock of *their* lives to-night!' And so we carried on the conversation for another half hour, occasionally calling Sharkum's attention to the smoky, smouldering fire, to which he good-naturedly replied.

'Well, if there's any peoples here can do better let him haf a try.'

We were speculating upon our chances of getting a look at the new mine crater, when 'Tommy' (now our officer) came into the dug-out. He was excited.

'That was a good show to-night! We are holding the crater and have already beaten off one Hun attempt. They gave them an awful beating up. I 've been out a little way. It is a huge crater, bigger than any around here. It has blown up

part of the Hun front line. We could hear some of them trying to dig themselves out of a dug-out. Let everybody get ready and we 'll go up at once and wait for them coming out.'

Immediately there was a hustle and bustle as we dived into our crawling suits, loaded our revolvers, and got a couple of bombs each. Soon afterwards we were hurrying up to the front line. We met a prisoner coming down; he had been blown up into the air when the mine exploded, and when he came down he had got twisted in his direction. He had been seen wandering around just outside of our wire, and some good-natured Tommy went out and led him in by the hand. He was dazed and trembling, as he had every reason to be.

We arrived at the crater, on the lip of which two or three posts had already been established. Looking down into the crater we could only see a yawning black hole, but the lips, several feet high, showed up white and distinct—the chalky earth of Vimy Ridge.

While Tommy had been away there had been another attempt to rush the crater,

and after a sharp fight with rifle and bomb, the Hun had again been beaten off. Seven of us started off on a patrol, crawling along the right side of the lip of the crater. We hoped, first of all, to get around to the Hun side to see what was happening there, and then to visit the entombed Huns, to see how they were getting on with their digging. Three of us went abreast—Tommy nearest the crater, Jack in the centre, and myself on the outside. Behind us came four other scouts. We could only move very slowly, for the Hun kept the place alight with flares. We had crawled forward to a point almost level with the Hun front line trench on our right. The trench which should have been there on our left had been blown up. We lay listening to the weird muffled knockings and scrapings that came from the imprisoned Huns, who were working hard to get out of their dug-out. Then we heard other significant sounds on our right, the *squish! squish!* of men dragging their feet through soft mud. It was the sound of Huns coming along their front line towards the crater! I moved over to Jack and touched his arm.

'Did you hear that, Jack?'

'Yes, Mac, I heard; just stay quiet and watch.'

Almost opposite the point where we were lying there was another trench—a communication trench, leading into the front line and at right angles to it. Huns were also moving up along this. The sounds became more distinct, and presently we could see the steel helmets of the Huns.

While we lay breathless watching them, the leading man stopped at the junction of the communication trench with the front line. The others following him closed up, until there was an interval of no more than two feet between them. Then very deliberately (for I was not more than twenty yards from the nearest Hun, and therefore could plainly see them by the frequent flickering lights of the flares) each man carefully raised his rifle, and sighted it in our direction! A queer, creepy sensation ran through me—it was for all the world like facing a firing squad!

'Throw your bombs!' rang out Tommy's voice.

The scouts in the rear promptly threw their bombs, while I let blaze with my revolver. Almost simultaneously nearly

thirty rifles rang out and the bullets *pinged* in around us. Then four bombs viciously exploded amongst and around the Huns, one bomb neatly dropping into the trench amongst them. The Huns disappeared from view, and then bobbed up again. Several of them promptly threw bombs back at us. I felt a rap on the head as if a mule had kicked me, and then the warm blood began trickling down the side of my face and into my right eye. I blinked and pulled the trigger of my revolver again. Then more of our bombs came singing over my head and burst amongst the Huns. This time it was too much for them. Again they disappeared and remained out of sight. I was lying there, dazed and stunned, when I felt Jack crawl up alongside of me.

'We 'd better be getting back in, Mac, the rest of them have gone back for more bombs.'

'All right,' I replied, 'you lead the way; I 'm hit and feel a bit shaky.'

'All right, Mac, when I give the word get up and run for the crater and roll into that.'

I waited a few seconds and then heard Jack whisper, 'Come on, Mac, run for it!'

I scrambled to my feet, swayed a little

from dizziness, and then started off after Jack. Then, horror of horrors, a flare light was shot up from a few yards behind us. It broke into a bright white light—as bright as noon-day. There was nothing for it but to keep on heading for the crater, which was only a few strides away.

Ping! ping! came the bullets after us. I saw Jack disappear in front of me, as he tumbled headlong into the crater. I dived after him, and down I went into the blackness, it seemed ages before I hit the bottom with a terrible crash. Jack was immediately alongside of me helping me to my feet.

'How d'you feel, Mac?' he asked.

'Oh! just a bit dizzy, thanks; rather close shave, eh?'

'Yes, it was. I didn't realise for a minute or two that we were out there alone, though I heard Tommy giving the word to go back for more bombs.'

The blood continued to run down my face, almost blinding me.

'Oh, I wouldn't half like to take a crack at the Hun that did this,' I said, as we proceeded to climb out of the crater. When we climbed out Tommy was there.

He at once ordered me to report to the dressing station and sent a scout back with me.

Twelve hours later I was at the casualty clearing station. The M.O. came around to the cot I was in.

'Hello! you one of the boys wounded at the ridge last night?'

'Yes, sir, I was there.'

'You must have got an awful jar when the mine went up?'

'Oh, it wasn't too bad, sir.'

'Well, it nearly shook the windows out here, and this is twenty miles back.'

So that was another of the rumours come true: there *had* been a lot of explosives in that mine. I rather thought so myself when I tumbled into the hole it made!

IV

RAID RECONNAISSANCES

WE were all excited and indignant. News had just arrived that the Hun had plucked up enough courage to raid the battalion on our right and had got a prisoner. Of course he had not had things all his own way. After killing some and wounding the remainder of a Lewis gun team, he had made off with the gun, only to be chased across No Man's Land and compelled to drop the gun and run to safety. He had got his prisoner by his favourite trick of speaking in English. A German officer and two men had got into a quiet part of the trench which had been evacuated owing to the severity of the meinenwerfer fire in that sector. They had waylaid a sergeant coming along this part and had taken him off his guard by speaking a few words of good English. He realised—too late—who they were, but

in time enough to fire his Verry light pistol in the face of one of his would-be captors, thereby greatly damaging the Hun's features and bringing his life to a sudden and untimely end. (This German's body was found in the trench the following morning.) The sergeant was, however, taken prisoner.

I was corporal in charge of the scouts at that time, and, as the officer and scout sergeant were away, the C.O. sent for me.

'I have a nice little job for you to-night, corporal,' he said when I reported at headquarters. 'I suppose you have heard what happened last night.'

'Yes, sir,' I replied.

'Well, just come and look over this latest map of No Man's Land which has arrived from brigade, and I 'll show you what I want your scouts to do to-night.'

I did so, and he pointed out to me a place on the map where a German listening post had been definitely located.

'Now, I want you to find out to-night if you can get through his wire and into that post. Don't go in yourself; just report to me the chances of getting in and we 'll arrange details later on. We want to do some little stunt in retaliation for what he

did last night to the battalion on our right.'

'We 'll do the best we can, sir,' I replied, saluted and left headquarters. I went back to our dug-out, and explained to the rest of the scouts what the night's work was to be. Everybody was whole-heartedly glad that something was to be done in retaliation for the temerity of the Hun on the previous night.

About ten o'clock that night six of us left our trench, crawled through the maze of wire in front of it, and made off in the direction of the unsuspecting German listening-post. It had been raining heavily recently and the ground was wet and muddy. It was cold and very disagreeable and 'Heinie' was nervous; he kept the place continually alight with numerous Verry lights. His machine-guns were active and constantly swept across No Man's Land—the bullets whizzing over our heads or plunking into the ground near to us. In approaching the listening-post we had to crawl down a slight dip in the ground immediately in front of it. His usual tactics in providing ample protection for his outposts was never better exemplified than in

the present instance. Three machine guns alternately swept the ground in front of his listening-post, and I can tell you that we had enough thrills in half an hour then to satisfy any one for a lifetime. It was plunk! plunk! all the time. He simply sprinkled the ground with machine-gun bullets. We got up to his wire, and could distinctly hear the sentry in the listening-post. He was in a bit of a trench leading out from the front line, and we could hear him stamping his feet and clapping his hands together to keep himself warm. He was protected by a mass of wire at least forty feet in depth, and the prospect of ever getting near enough to grab him was very remote. We carefully withdrew and returned into our own trench and back to headquarters. I immediately reported to the C.O. and gave him a full account of what we had both seen and heard.

'Well, that doesn't look very promising, corporal; we 'll have to think out something better for to-morrow night.'

I returned to the scouts' dug-out, rolled into my blanket, and was soon fast asleep. A few hours later I was awakened by one of the scouts.

'Say, corp, did you hear the latest?'

'No, haven't heard anything for several hours; what *is* the latest?' I inquired sleepily.

'Heinie grabbed one of our listening-posts last night, and got away with two of our men.'

I was wide awake now. This was adding insult to injury.

'How on earth did he do it?' I asked.

'Made a raid just before daybreak.'

'What post did he get?'

'The one nearest to the Double Crassier."[1]

'Well, we must go up and find out all we can about it. If I know anything, 'Heinie' has let himself in for a lot of trouble this time.'

But before we were ready to go a runner came with a message for me to report to headquarters at once. When I arrived there I found the C.O. in a towering rage.

'The blighters put one over on us last night, corporal, and we are going to make him pay for it.' He emphasised this with a resounding whack on the table. There

[1] Two slag-heaps made famous by the fierce fighting for them at the battle of Loos.

was no mistaking his feelings about the matter.

'This time we are going to organise something big. The Hun has got to be taught a lesson for this. I 'll have plenty of work for you and your scouts to do to-night. In the meantime you had better go up to the front line and get all the particulars you can, and report to me as soon as you get back.'

I replied that I was just about to go up to the front line for this purpose when he had sent for me. I then left headquarters and soon afterwards, in the company of another scout, I went up to the front line to find out all that I could about the raid. We had posts on the Double Crassier—so had the Hun, his nearest being about thirty yards from ours. From our posts we had a splendid view of No Man's Land and of his trenches. It appeared that in the dim light of dawn there had been a sharp and heavy bombardment which had isolated the listening-post; then a party of what was roughly estimated to be about thirty Huns had rushed it. There had been a sharp skirmish, a few rifle shots, and the Huns then disappeared. By the time assistance

had been sent to the listening-post, the raiders had gone. One of the sentry group had been killed, one wounded and two (one of them wounded) had been taken prisoners. From the Crassier we could see tapes stretching from the German trench to within a few yards of the listening-post. Probably one or two men had laid the tapes an hour or two previous to the raid, and the raiding party had crawled along them, concealing themselves in shell holes several minutes before the bombardment started. If, in our patrol of the previous night, we had gone about a hundred yards further north we should have probably met these tape-layers. We felt like kicking ourselves when we thought of it. Soon after we had returned to headquarters the C.O. sent for me. He had been to brigade, and there a definite and quite ambitious plan for a raid had been evolved. A party from the battalion on our right, who had lost the sergeant, and a party from our battalion, were going to raid the German trenches. The artillery had already received orders to cut the wire on a fairly large frontage.

'Your work,' said the C.O. to me, 'will be to go out each night and examine the

enemy wire for gaps, reporting on what has been accomplished by the artillery in their wire-cutting operations. The artillery have already started this afternoon, and before taking your patrol out to-night you will report to me and I will show you on the map where I want you to go.'

I went back to my dug-out, had a bit of supper, and waited for the mail to arrive. After the excitement of receiving letters had died down, six of us got ready for our patrol. I reported at headquarters, received my instructions, and, as the trenches were knee-deep in mud, we went overland to the front line. After warning the sentries that a patrol was going out, we climbed out of our trench and over the exceedingly thick wire in front of it and out into No Man's Land. As was our custom, we lay quiet for several minutes listening. Except for an occasional shell whistling overhead, everything was perfectly quiet. The wire we had to examine was about three hundred yards from our trench, so we pushed on fairly rapidly, for we knew what a slow and difficult job it was to crawl around amongst the enemy wire. We were making good progress, and had reached to within about thirty yards of

the German wire when some one caught his foot in some old wire. The sound was unmistakable—so also was the Huns' reply to it. Cutting wire invariably means one thing —a raid, and the German, if never very brave, was always exceedingly wise. The volley of bombs that fell into the wire on our left told us that our coming was neither unexpected nor unprepared for. Immediately his S.O.S. lights went up—beautifully coloured, significant lights. His artillery replied with amazing and disconcerting promptitude, and soon we were in the midst of screaming, bursting shells.[1] We began to withdraw out of range of the Boche artillery fire, when the battalion on our right, apparently thinking that the Boche had serious intentions of attempting to repeat his former successes, sent up a call for our artillery, and our artillery were no slackers. They promptly came down with a bang. Imagine how happy we were! Shells in front of us, shells behind us, shells all around us! A screaming, deafening din and noise! We crawled into a shell-hole

[1] A protective barrage, such as the S. O. S. signal calls for, was usually laid down about one hundred yards in front of the first-line trench.

and waited. We splendidly illustrated Bairnsfather's picture: 'If you can find a better 'ole, go to it!' The sky was a blaze of light; S.O.S.'s were going up along the whole front. We could see them spreading to the right as far as Vimy, and to the left as far as Loos. On the whole length of this front both our own and the Boche artillery blazed away, and all because a scout had caught his foot in some wire!

In the meantime our own position was most unenviable—it was useless to move, and all we could do was to crouch in a shell-hole. Ten times in a minute we ducked; figuratively speaking we died several hundred deaths that night, for each screaming shell passing so closely overhead had the menace of death in it. After half an hour's deafening din things began to quieten down and we began to breathe more freely. At last there was perfect stillness. Not one of us hit! It was useless to continue our reconnaissance for an hour or two, so we returned to our own trench. Everybody was amazed to see us all returning with a whole skin. They had heard the bombing and, of course, the subsequent artillery fire,

with scores of shells exploding in No Man's Land.

After resting for a while we started out again, moving cautiously and quietly until we got up to the German wire. We moved along the outside of it, frequently stopping and waiting for a flare light to give us an opportunity for a good look at the wire. It was damaged, but there were no gaps. It was almost daylight when we got back into our own trench, and quite daylight by the time we got to headquarters. I reported at once to the C.O., told him of the difficulties we had had, and the information we had eventually secured.

'We 'll try to get more artillery on to that wire to-day, my boy; you 'll find some gaps in it to-night, I hope. I want a written report of your patrol at once, I want to send a copy of it to brigade—it will induce them to get more artillery on to that wire.'

I went back to my dug-out, wrote the report, handed it in to headquarters, and then had some breakfast, followed by three to four hours' sleep. In the afternoon we went up to our best O.P., and from there watched the artillery and trench-mortar

shells bursting in the German wire. They were ripping it up beautifully, gaily blowing it sky-high in places.

The orders for the patrol were the same as the previous night. The artillery had concentrated on one gap, the location of which the C.O. gave me. We were going to see if there was a clean road through. We worked slowly and cautiously, reached the Boche wire, saw a good clean gap several yards wide, crawled up through it and back out again. The patrol was a laborious and satisfying one: it lasted for several hours. I reported back to the C.O.

'There is a good clean gap for the party on the right, sir.'

'Good, we 'll have the other one attended to to-day.'

We were dog-tired. We had crawled for hours over wet, muddy ground, and it was a cold night. The next afternoon we again watched the shells dropping into the German wire, and at night went out to examine the gap for the left party. We again worked slowly and with the most extreme caution. The wire here had been a good deal thicker and heavier, and while a gap had been made there were several fairly large bundles of

wire lying around, blown clean out of the ground. It was awfully difficult to work up through the gap, the bundles of wire in front of us that were obstacles to our progress, having to be carefully moved over to one side. I had almost got through the gap, but a big roll of loose wire lay in front of me. Slowly and patiently I pushed it to one side, and was passing it when my foot caught it, making a very slight noise. Not more than twelve feet away I could see, quite distinctly, the parapet of the German trench. I moved forward a few feet into the protection of a shell-hole, and waited. Had I been heard? I did not wait long in suspense. I heard sounds of movement in the trench in front of me, and soon afterwards the head and shoulders of a German appeared. He paused a moment to listen. He had in his hand what appeared to me to be a pistol. He raised it carefully and fired! There was a blinding flash—a loud report—it was a flare light! As it broke into a bright white light, I felt as though a hundred searchlights were being concentrated upon me. I had ample time to study the typical German face of the flare-pistol man. It was smooth, fat and round,

the roundness being emphasised by the small peakless cloth cap he was wearing. He would be a man close upon forty years of age. He looked apprehensively around. I felt an almost irrepressible desire to say Boo! I am sure he would have fainted! The light slowly flickered out and he disappeared into the trench. I backed out through the gap, and when clear of the German wire, we got up and walked back across No Man's Land into our own trench. Another tedious patrol of several hours was finished. We were cold and shivering when we dropped into our own trench. When we got back to headquarters I wrote my report and sent it in to the C.O. A few hours later he sent for me.

'You are quite sure those gaps are there, corporal, and that the parties will have no trouble getting through them?'

'Quite sure, sir, we have been through both of them.'

'Very good, then. Now the zero hour for this raid is two o'clock to-morrow morning. I have a lot of work for your scouts which must be done to-night. You will report here at six o'clock, and you will be supplied with wire-cutters—to cut gaps

through our own wire—and with rolls of white tape which you will take out to the assembly positions before the parties go out. It will act as a guide to them. Then at the zero hour two scouts with each party will go forward with the tapes as far as the German trench, being closely followed by the raiding party. However, you will get fuller written instructions later on.'

When I left headquarters, I called at the dressing station to see if I could get something from the medical officer to take away the wretched dizzy feeling I was suffering from. A medical orderly took my temperature and found it to be 102°. The M.O. gave me some tablets, and I was hoping I would be feeling a little fitter for the night's work. At night we got our wire-cutters and cut the necessary 'lanes' in the wire, cutting them in zig-zag fashion. We also went out on a quick patrol to see if the Germans were working to repair the damage done to the wire. We found everything quiet. I was feeling wretchedly ill and feverish when I reported back to headquarters. I stood waiting while the second-in-command (and C.O. of the raid) read over to me the operation order for the raid,

before giving me a copy for the information of the scouts. The heat added the final touch to my physical exhaustion. Just as I reached out to take my copy of the operation order, I felt myself reeling, everything became a blank, and when I woke up again, I was lying on the floor with several people solicitously attending to me. To my bitter disappointment the C.O. forbade my taking any further part in the operations. I was taken to the dressing-station, wrapped up in a blanket, and told to go to sleep. About 3.30 the following morning one of the boys woke me up to tell me of the success of the raid.

A thick mist had come up about midnight which had proved of great advantage to the raiding parties. They had been able to assemble without having been seen or heard. Our artillery barrage had been perfect. The scouts had gone forward with the tapes, followed by the raiders, who had got into the enemy trench without meeting with much opposition. The speed of the raiders had completely taken the Boche by surprise. They were in and out of his trench in five minutes, and brought back twelve husky prisoners. The mist had pre-

vented the German artillery observers from seeing the S.O.S. lights sent up, and the raid was over and every one back in our trenches before a shell came over.

We were all delighted with the results. The scouts received special mention in orders for the work they did, and we went back to the rest billets with the satisfied feeling that the Hun had been taught his lesson.

V

PULLING THE STRING

THIS story is written chiefly to show the humour that was frequently introduced into the game of making war. It made the life not only bearable but hugely enjoyable. Many a joke was practised on the Hun to test his sense of humour, in which, by the way, he was found wanting. One could never picture him with the cheerful, spontaneous grin of the Tommy—he was either servile or surly. It was this well-known lack of a sense of humour that made a joke practised upon him all the more enjoyable—his discomfiture was guaranteed beforehand.

Though this incident was actually the work of the scouts, it is not a scouting episode. It emphasises the co-operation between the scouts and observers. The observer collected his information in the

daylight, while the scout collected his information in the dark. Frequently, the scout was sent out to confirm the report of the observer, and often our patrols were decided upon after the observers had handed in their reports.

They enjoyed, from their specially sited and constructed O.P.'s, unique opportunities for studying the movements and habits of the Boche. Wonderful and ingenious subterfuges were employed to spy out the movements of the ever-active Hun, the most popular of which was the dummy tree. A tree, standing so that, from its branches (if it was lucky enough to have any), one commanded an extensive view of the enemy lines, would be carefully sketched in its every detail. A few days later an exact replica of it would arrive. At night the real tree would be dug out and the dummy, having inside of its innocent looking bark a steel frame, supporting a seat for an observer and a ladder leading up to it, would take its place.

The Hun never guessed what a faithful history of his every movement was being daily sent up to our Intelligence Staff. Ruined buildings were a godsend to the

energetic observer. From these places the comings in and goings out of the Hun were daily taken note of, to his eventual discomfort and sorrow. A road was known to be in frequent and continual use, and a report would come in:

'Much individual movement along the Lens-Douai Road.'

This information would finally reach artillery headquarters, and harassing fire (a few rounds every fifteen minutes or so) would be directed on that road at night—for a road used by a few men during the day would be used by scores of men at night. Carrying parties, ration parties, transport, reliefs coming in and going out, all would find this attention both demoralising and destructive.

Then again,

'An overland route is in use from Potsdam Trench to Hohenzollern Redoubt.'

The machine gunners would have this information turned over to them, and would fire bursts at intervals—disconcerting to the night-travelling Hun.

The camouflaged O.P. was always a powerful factor in the successful waging of war. To see your enemy is one of the most

interesting and thrilling of all war experiences. To be able to sit and calmly watch his movements was always an enjoyable way of spending a few hours.

The incident of this story happened in the winter time when the snow—deep, crisp, and hard—lay on the ground. At such times patrolling was next to impossible, especially when, as in the present instance, the nights were brilliantly moonlight. Occasionally white crawling suits would be used to tone with the surrounding whiteness. There is at least one instance where an enterprising battalion clothed its raiding party in white and completely surprised the Boche. But patrolling, unless for very special reasons, was very seldom done on a moonlight night with the snow on the ground.

Two nights before the incident of this story we had had a rather exciting time. An artillery officer, anxious to have a piece of Boche wire for a souvenir, had appealed to Tommy, and Tommy had arranged to take him out to get it. In all, four of us went out. It was bitterly cold, and the snow glistened in the brilliancy of the moonlight. The Boche wire was nearly

two hundred and fifty yards away. We walked for some considerable distance and then approached the wire more cautiously. Tommy whispered to me:

'Stay here while the artillery officer and myself go forward.'

So two of us remained behind, waiting. Several minutes passed. I got impatient and announced my intention to go in search of Tommy. I crawled forward and came up to them lying close to the German wire. The artillery officer had had his wish realised, for he had broken off a piece of Hun wire. I crawled up to where Tommy was lying. He touched my arm.

'Do you see the Boche listening-post, just inside of that wire?'

I looked in the direction indicated, and there was the Boche—thirty yards away—his steel helmet glistening in the moonlight. He was moving his head from side to side, I could also hear him alternately stamping his right and then his left foot as he endeavored to keep warm. Tommy touched my arm again.

'Do you see that bent iron stake? I 'm going to break that off and take it back with me.'

'Why?' I asked.

'Oh, only for the fun of the thing.'

He crawled over to it, grasped hold of it and tried to break it off. He didn't succeed, so stood up to do it. He bent his whole weight to it but it still resisted. He became still more energetic and wrestled with the thing. I became alarmed. The Hun sentry had heard, the movement of his head had stopped. Tommy made a final desperate effort, lost his balance, swung round, and went crashing into the Hun wire! Away went the Hun sentry pattering down the duck-boards in a mighty haste to give the alarm. Tommy quickly disentangled himself.

'Quick,' he said, 'run for it before he can give the alarm.'

I got up and ran, and had only gone a few yards when I went crashing into some loose wire, getting myself hopelessly entangled. Tommy and the artillery officer were speeding away ahead of me. I obtained my release at the expense of a perfectly good pair of slacks, and went racing after them. I had almost reached them when they both went crashing down in front of me. I had no time to pull up,

so piled in on top of them. We were all quickly on our feet, and a few yards further on the black mass of our wire showed up. It was thick and heavy; 'over the top' was the best way to negotiate this, so giving a whoop we made a spring at it. Some got over and some didn't; I didn't! I landed on top of it! More ripping of good clothes and then I tumbled into our trench. It was a most amusing time, and we were all laughing heartily when the Hun, now thoroughly alarmed, opened up with three machine guns—sweeping across No Man's Land.

The next day the observers handed in a report:

'A beaten path observed across the snow leading from the German support line to the Double Crassier.' That was the advantage of a snowfall; it yielded information of the enemy routes. (He, of course, got the same information about us.) Aeroplane photographs, taken while the snow was on the ground, yielded a mass of information.

We pondered over the observers' report, and decided, instead of a patrol, to go up and find out if anything was to be seen from the Double Crassier. The Double Crassier

was a twin slag-heap, part of which, at that time, was held by us and part by the Boche. It provided excellent observation, and for that reason was usually a most unhealthy spot. Twenty-five yards from our most forward post was a Boche bombing-post; it was an occasional early morning form of recreation for these bombing-posts to exchange bombs. The Boche had a very ingenious device for protecting his bombing-post. Over the top of it he had spread ordinary chicken wire so that bombs, dropping on top of this, bounced off and rolled to one side before exploding. He had one small opening through which he could throw his bombs, but too small for even an expert thrower, at that distance, and under these conditions, to even hope to drop a bomb through. A small trench, dug into the side of the Crassier, led up to this post. At the bottom of the Crassier he had another post, a night post. The one on the Crassier was both a day and night post.

Shortly after the Vimy Ridge attack, when our line was carried forward several thousand yards, I got an opportunity to examine this Crassier post of his. Deep

down into the slag-heap he had dug a tunnel, fairly commodious, so that his men could comfortably man the post and have good protection in case of a heavy bombardment.

We arrived at the Crassier shortly before eight o'clock that night—it was brilliantly moonlight. We spoke to the sentry on duty in our bombing-post.

'Have you seen any Huns moving about down there?' indicating the Boche lines at the bottom of the Crassier.

'Yes,' he answered eagerly, 'we noticed them last night for the first time. About every two hours seven of them (we counted them) came overland from a trench; three of them got down into the trench at the bottom of the Crassier, while four of them went on towards the Crassier. We lost sight of them, but soon afterwards saw four Huns coming away from there; they were then joined by three Huns who climbed out of the trench and the seven of them, in single file, went back to the support trench.'

'Well,' said Jack, 'this certainly sounds interesting; we 'll stick around and see if the same thing happens to-night.'

We waited for a few minutes, and then Jack whispered excitedly:

'Here they are, Mac, you can see them easily. They are coming towards the Crassier.'

I looked, and had no difficulty in seeing them. They came unconcernedly on until they reached their front line. The first three dropped into the trench, while the remainder went on—disappearing into the trench that led up to the Crassier post. A few minutes later four of them appeared coming from the Crassier; they were joined by three from the trench, and the seven continued their journey back to the support line. It was all exactly as the sentry described it.

'What time is it, Mac?' asked Jack.

'Nearly ten minutes past eight,' I replied.

'Well, we 'll wait here for a couple of hours or so to see if the same thing happens again. There 's no doubt about what it is; it is the relief for his two outposts. I 'll bet anything this kind of thing is going on all night.'

'No doubt about it,' I agreed.

'If we could only get some machine guns

on to him we couldn't half give him a lively time,' said Jack.

'Yes, but I don't suppose we could use any of the guns around here.'

'No,' said Jack, 'they don't want to fire except in the case of a raid or an attack. If he spots their emplacements he 'll drop 'Minnies' into them. But I 'll see Tommy and we 'll try to work out some scheme for giving these blighters a warm time.'

The Hun very thoughtfully enlivened our period of waiting by planting three 'Minnies' so close to us that we almost got underneath them. When the excitement and noise had died down Jack turned to me:

'What 's the time now, Mac?' he asked.

'Ten minutes to ten.'

'They 'll be bringing along another relief soon.'

Promptly at ten (for the Hun loved to be methodical) seven men reappeared, coming overland towards the Crassier. The same proceeding followed as took place two hours earlier.

Jack turned to the sentry.

'Will you tell whoever relieves you to watch out for these reliefs so that we can

find out if this kind of thing goes on all night?'

The sentry promised to do so, so we went back to headquarters.

'If we can fix up something, Mac,' said Jack as we were returning, 'we can give them a warm time to-morrow night.'

Tommy, upon learning from Jack the details of the Hun activity, waxed enthusiastic over the possibilities of giving the Hun 'a warm time.'

A scheme was outlined, and Jack gave me the details of it in the early hours of the morning.

'Well, Mac,' he said, 'if this little game works, we are going to see some fun. Tommy is going to arrange for the assistance of the brigade machine gunners, who have gun emplacements in that slag-heap about five hundred yards behind our front line. We are going to fix up a signalling lamp near the foot of the Crassier. This lamp will be sited so as to face the machine gunners. A signaller will be on duty at the lamp, and he will have a scout with him who will have one end of a long piece of signalling wire in his hand. The other end will be in the bombing-post on the

Crassier, and we will have that. *One pull* on the wire is the signal to the man at the lamp to flash his lamp *once*. This is the signal to the machine gunners to open up (they know where to fire) with their guns. *Two pulls* (two flashes) is the signal to elevate (we shall be able to see how they are shooting); *three pulls*—the signal to depress; *four pulls*—"cease fire." What do you think about it?'

'Sounds good to me—if only the machine gunners don't shoot all over the place.'

'Oh, I don't think that will happen. The machine-gun officer is coming along to-day and they will work the thing out exactly; in any case, we should, by our signals, soon get them on to the target.'

'I don't suppose the Hun will stop coming after his first fright?' I queried.

'I guess not; he 's likely been using that route for ages. He 'll stick to it for a little while anyway.'

We had a busy time the next day getting our apparatus in working order. We found that we should have to relay our signals back to avoid any possibility of the wire getting caught and failing to act. No time must be lost if we wanted our scheme to

be a success, for our target was only visible for two or three minutes. So, half-way down from the bombing-post to the lamp we decided to place Sharkum. He would get our signal and pass it on to the scout on duty with the signaller. When we had our apparatus set up we tested it and found it worked smoothly, the machine gunners being easily able, even in the daylight, to see the flash of the Lucas lamp.

At 7.30 that night, Jack, Louis, and myself were standing in our bombing-post impatiently waiting for eight o'clock to arrive. Jack and I were to watch, and Louis was to do the signalling. Eight o'clock found Jack and myself straining our eyes to catch a glimpse of the Huns.

'Here they come, Mac,' whispered Jack.

'One pull, Louis,' I whispered back. Louis put his back into it—I'm sure he must have pulled Sharkum off his feet! The Huns came sauntering forward, while we fairly danced with excitement and glee. Had the gunners got the signal? When would they fire? It seemed ages, though in reality it was only a few seconds, before we heard the rattle of the machine gun.

Down went the Huns! Had we got them all? Surely not! The machine gun finished its burst. A pause, and up jumped seven lively Huns!

'Too high,' whispered Jack in disgust.

'Three pulls, Louis,' I whispered back. On came the Huns in a most unseemly haste that gave us the greatest enjoyment. They were going to reach the trench! They just finished a wild successful rush towards it when the machine gun rattled out again. The disappointment of it! Ten seconds sooner and we would have got some of them. Jack growled out his disgust.

'Four pulls, Louis,' I murmured. 'Cheer up, Jack,' I said, 'the night is young and the fun is only beginning.'

Five minutes passed and the Hun, on the return trip, reappeared.

'One pull, Louis!' I almost shouted.

The reply was prompt; the machine gun rattled out and claimed the last Hun as a victim. He fell, then got up and limped back into the trench. The six ahead continued their wild stampede. Then the Hun became vicious and ugly and began to bounce the 'Minnies' around us, but we

stuck it out for the next reappearance of the relief.

'There 's one way they could fool us, Mac,' said Jack, 'if only they had wits enough.'

'How 's that?'

'If they came over singly, at intervals.'

'Yes, they could do that, but even then we could give them a few thrills. What they are likely to do is to use the trench.'

But promptly at ten o'clock they reappeared, and even more promptly and vigorously Louis gave a pull on the wire; the result proved most disconcerting to the Huns—they scattered and dropped into shell-holes.

'Don't alter the elevation, Jack,' I whispered, 'let them keep on firing;' and then we watched the antics of the individual Huns until we simply rocked with laughter. First one would cautiously and hesitatingly get up and make a wild dash forward—a burst of fire from the machine gun, and he would disappear, head and heels, into the nearest shell-hole. This would be repeated by every Hun in the party. A journey of three minutes occupied fully fifteen minutes. The wild scrambles

and frantic dashes forward were hugely amusing to us. The same thing happened on the return journey—every man for himself. We were simply weak with laughing, when the last of them disappeared.

'Do you think they 'll come back again, Mac?' asked Jack.

'No, I don't; I 'd like to bet any money they don't.'

Midnight came, but no Huns; fifteen minutes after midnight, and still no Huns! Thirty minutes after, and still no Huns!

'I think we may as well pack up and go,' said Jack.

'Yes, the Hun has got wise at last.'

So we packed up and went back to headquarters. But we had had a very merry demonstration of the old saying:—'Pull the string and the figure will move!'

VI

HUN RAIDS

IT was our first trip in the line after the severe fighting — under indescribably ghastly conditions—at Paaschendaele. We were in the Lens sector, and part of the line we took over ran through the village of Avion.

Two days before we went in I was with a party of officers who were ' looking over ' the line preparatory to the battalion going in. I got into touch with the scout officer.

' Well, what kind of a tour are you having —anything exciting happening? '

' Nothing much, though he seems to be particularly lively with his " Minnies "— got a party of fifteen last night—knocked the whole crowd out with one shell.'

' Have you got a " line " on any of them yet? '

' Well, it 's so hard to do anything of

the kind. He seems to have all his "Minnie" gun emplacements behind the railroad embankment. Probably he has a truck and runs them up, firing a few rounds each time from different locations.'

'How about patrols, anything much doing?'

'No, nothing exciting.'

'Well, I 'll go up and have a look around.'

'I 'll go with you, if you like.'

'No, thanks,' I replied, 'I have a scout with me, and we 'll go around together; we can find our way around all right.'

We reached the front line—to find it absolutely levelled in places. There was no mistaking the Hun's malicious interest in the place! We had not been there long before our necks were getting stiff watching for the 'Minnie' shells as they came hurtling through the air; then came the swift hissing noise, followed by the tremendous explosion that fairly shook your teeth loose, apart from the horrible jar it gave your heart!

'Say, this is no picnic around here, is it?' I remarked to the scout who was with me.

'No, sir,' he replied; 'unless you really

want to stay to watch the fun, I think we might as well go.'

'Fun! I don't call this fun! and I think your advice is about the best I 've heard to-day, so let us *get.*' And we '*got.*'

The line we took over was most peculiar. The right sector was at right angles to the left. No Man's Land on the left was simply a mass of ruined houses, and the German trench was about a hundred and fifty yards from ours. On the extreme right, No Man's Land was as much as eight hundred yards across, and all open country. I decided, for the first night, to take a stroll across the open country and, with such a wide No Man's Land, decided to take out a fairly large patrol.

The light was good when nine of us, making up the patrol, climbed out of our trench and started on our way across to the German lines.

'I think we might as well walk for two or three hundred yards, corporal, don't you?'

'Yes, sir,' he replied. 'Our patrol is a fairly strong one, and we can afford to take a few risks. Besides, the grass is very wet from the rain we had to-night; we would

soon be soaking wet if we got down at all.'

So, keeping formation, we continued to walk slowly forward, pausing occasionally, getting down on one knee and listening. The wet grass made me loathe to do any crawling until absolutely necessary, so that we had really gone some hundreds of yards when Pete came up to me and touched my shoulder.

'The German wire is only about fifty yards in front of us, sir,' he whispered.

I immediately gave the signal to get down and looked hard in front of me. Pete was right—it was as he had said. I waited for a few moments and then began to crawl forward, the corporal being alongside of me. When about ten yards from the wire I indicated to the corporal a gap in the Hun wire.

'Wait here,' I whispered, 'while I crawl forward into that gap.'

I reached the gap and was pushing my way through it when something hit my foot —a piece of mud. I turned around in time to see the corporal making frantic signals for me to return. I lost no time in crawling back. Pete was with the corporal, his eyes shining with excitement.

'What is it, corporal?' I whispered.

Pete answered. 'A bunch of Fritzes, sir; can't you see them inside the wire.'

I looked, and sure enough there were several shadowy forms almost opposite the gap—a Hun wire patrol! If I had continued crawling—as I most likely would have done but for the warning, my view being strictly limited to what lay immediately ahead of me—the Huns would probably have almost walked over me! It might be asked, why didn't we throw our bombs or use our rifles? The reasons were excellent ones. In the first place we were several hundreds of yards from our own trench. If there had been retaliation and we had suffered casualties the difficulties of getting them back were really enormous. Then we were new to the ground; should one or two men become separated from the party there would be the danger of their getting lost and maybe captured. With the information we now had we could return to this place and lie in wait for them. This was our intention when we left there, but subsequent exciting events caused us to quite forget these wire

patrollers. We returned to our trench about three o'clock in the morning. The moon disappeared about five o'clock and there was an hour of darkness before daylight. That was the hour chosen by the Hun to raid our trenches. He had assembled two parties in shell-holes in No Man's Land, parties (we afterwards discovered) of twenty-five men each.

Shortly before dawn, following a period unusually quiet, there was a sharp, sudden, heavy bombardment; a score of big 'Minnies' came crashing over, uprooting the earth and levelling the trenches. Those of the garrison who were not killed or wounded, were left dazed by the noise and concussion. This was followed by two separate attempts to force an entry into our trenches, but these were gallantly beaten off by what was left of the garrison. The Hun raid had failed.

As soon as the news of the raid reached us we went up to get all particulars. The Hun was viciously lobbing his 'Minnies' over, and the front line trench was in an indescribable condition. The garrison, worn out with their weary vigil and trying experiences of the previous night, were un-

able to snatch even an hour's sleep amidst the deafening noise and destruction of the bombardment. There was one particular post which was, as we thought, being significantly left alone. On either side the big 'Minnies' burst with distressing and disturbing regularity. After several hair-raising escapes we reached this post. Just as we reached it a 'Minnie' crashed into the wire in front of it, blowing the entanglements sky-high.

'Well, that just about clinches the matter, corporal,' I remarked to the scout corporal who was with me.

'No doubt about it, sir, he 's going to try his luck at this post to-night.'

The signs all pointed to it, and they were confirmed by the company commander's report to headquarters, in which he said he strongly suspected a raid on what was known as No. 7 Post. Accordingly, all defensive precautions were taken. A conference at headquarters resulted in a requisition for the necessary amount of artillery retaliation and machine-gun fire. The signal for this retaliation was to be a *green* flare fired from the front line. When this signal went up, *crash* would come down

our artillery and the machine guns would rattle out, swishing across No Man's Land, making any venturesome Hun keep as close to Mother Earth as he could. When I heard of all these defensive arrangements I decided that the scouts could very usefully take a hand in them. I went along to the scouts' dug-out.

'What about making up a little reception committee for the Huns to-night, boys?'

The proposal was favourably received, so I expounded my idea to them.

'We 'll go out between four and five o'clock in the morning, and lie in wait for the Hun some distance in front of the post we believe he is going to attack. He's bound to assemble somewhere, and if we can catch him assembling we can spoil his party.'

So we made our plans for the part we intended to play in this little drama. Seeing that we might probably have a lively early-morning encounter, we abandoned all previous plans for patrols that night.

Shortly after four o'clock nine shadowy figures might have been seen stealing out of our trench and across No Man's Land. In order not to confuse the garrisons of

other posts to the left of the one in front of which we proposed to assemble (No. 7 Post), we agreed not, under any circumstances, to go to the left of this post. This left the garrisons of the two posts attacked the previous morning (Nos. 9 and 10 Posts) free to deal with any one seen out in No Man's Land.

I took my patrol out about seventy-five yards in front of No. 7 Post, and, by the time we had got into a good defensive position, the moon had disappeared. About a hundred yards in front of us was the German trench. There was the distinct sound of something metallic striking against the Hun wire.

'Did you hear that, corporal?' I whispered.

'Yes, sir, somebody in the wire,' he replied.

'I think it is a little to the left, don't you?'

'Yes, it is over in that direction, sir.'

'He may be taking another crack at No. 10 Post. Perhaps he was only trying to bluff us when he began isolating No. 7 Post?'

'Yes, he may; he's a tricky old devil.'

'Well, in any case he 'll get a hot re-

ception if he goes back there again. The boys are right on their toes waiting for him.'

The minutes dragged wearily on, and there was not another sound to arouse our suspicions. It was the lack of sound now that made us suspicious. Not a shell was coming over, not a flare was going up.

'There 'll be something doing soon, corporal,' I whispered.

'Yes, sir, I feel like that too,' he replied.

It was uncanny, for though we could neither hear nor see any one, we *knew* that men were moving around, and that soon some one would be locked in a death-grip with them. Were they out there in front of *us?* We strained our eyes into the darkness until they ached. Breathless we listened, with bombs ready to throw at the first sign of an attacking Hun. They were moments of tense excitement.

'Look, sir,' whispered the corporal, tugging excitedly at my arm.

I looked up. There were eight of them —flaming-tailed 'Minnies.' They were all a little to our left. There was a tremendous crash and concussion as they hit the ground almost simultaneously. A few seconds later

we watched the flight of eight more. Then another eight. Our hearts were beating wildly with excitement. Then from the German trench in front of us a *green* flare shot up—the signal to the raiding party to rush our posts! By a marvellous coincidence it was the same signal as our local S.O.S.—the signal for our artillery and machine guns to open up. And they did! A perfect hail of machine-gun bullets swished over our heads, making even *us* bite the grass! And the raiders? Well, they were caught in the storm. From several directions we heard the cries and moans of wounded and dying men. We also heard the rattle of one of our Lewis guns from the direction of No. 10 Post. Our shells were crashing into the Boche wire and making the return trip of the raiders decidedly warm and unhealthy. I was filled with an overpowering desire to go off in the direction the cries came from —a wounded prisoner was always worth bagging—but could not move, as all the cries were coming from our left and I had arranged to keep away from there so as to give the garrison a free field. If we had gone over there and had been seen, then

we should have been shot up too. The noise and din was indescribable, and those agonised cries of wounded men made the whole experience inexpressibly weird.

'They 've had another try after No. 10 Post, corporal,' I whispered; 'as soon as we can get back we 'll go along and find out.'

A few minutes later we were back in our own trench.

'Send the rest of the patrol back to headquarters, corporal, and you come along with me.'

We were soon rushing along our trench in the direction of No. 10 Post. We passed a prisoner who had been found, a few minutes after the raid, trying to get through our wire. He was one of the 'sturmtruppen' or 'storm troops,' who, having lost all sense of direction, thought he had arrived back at his own trench. He was soon disillusioned. A husky stretcher-bearer, hearing the noise, climbed out of the trench and found him struggling in the wire. At first he began jabbering in German, but was rudely interrupted by the stretcher-bearer, who seized him by the collar and conferred upon him the noble Order of the

Boot—landing him squarely into our trench. For a 'storm-trooper' he was a bit of a paradox, his height being barely five feet, and he was very slim and weakly-looking. He wore the ribbon of the Iron Cross. After giving him the 'once over,' we arrived at No. 10 Post. We did not wait to make any inquiries, but hopped over the parapet. Not many yards away there was a wounded German crying out loudly in his agony. Two of our officers were lying in a shell-hole just outside our trench. I spoke to them.

'You must have been punishing the Hun to-night,' I said.

'Yes,' replied one of them, 'one of our Lewis guns caught them just as they got to our wire.'

'I'm going out to have a look at the Hun raising the noise; perhaps we can get him in. Come on, corporal,' I said. 'We'll see what 's wrong with him.'

We crossed over our wire, and a few yards beyond it we found the wounded German. He was making a most unearthly noise. 'Beine! Beine!' he was shouting. I took that to mean his leg, so bent down and got hold of his right leg. It was hang-

ing by the skin, having practically been severed by machine gun fire. Upon further examination we found him to have several wounds in the stomach and head. He was well-equipped for a fight—strapped across his chest and under the armpits was what was known as an apron for carrying bombs. In this he was carrying six bombs of the type popularly known amongst us as 'potato-mashers'—because of the resemblance to one. His pockets were filled with cartridge clips for his rifle, and dangling on his belt was an evil-looking dagger. We unstrapped his bomb-apron and took off his equipment. During all this time he was groaning and shouting in pain. We endeavored to get him out of the shell-hole, but he was a big, heavy man, and moving him seemed to cause intense pain. We were joined by one of our officers, and just as the three of us were preparing to move him he died. We took the papers, including letters and postcards, from his pockets, and then had a look around. We saw a tape stretching across No Man's Land and leading into a gap in our wire. We followed the tape in the direction of our own trench, and came to

a shell-hole in which were lying three dead Huns. The leader, a sergeant-major, was clutching one end of the tape in his hand. His revolver lay on the side of the shell-hole nearest our trench. He had apparently just raised himself preparatory to jumping out of the shell-hole and making a dash for our trench, when a burst from the Lewis gun caught him square in the face. The other two had also been hit in the head, and killed instantly. We were full of praise for the boy at the gun; he had been wonderfully cool and brave. After removing all papers and valuables from the pockets of the dead Huns we returned into our own trench. It was then almost dawn. The prisoner taken had, upon examination, told us of the intention of the German staff to carry out raids until they had secured a prisoner. The specially trained troops known as 'sturm-truppen,' had been given orders to raid each night until they were successful, so it seemed likely that we could expect more attempts. Two unsuccessful attempts had now been made on No. 10 Post. The post to the left of that (about one hundred yards of trench between these posts had been evacu-

ated owing to the heavy meinenwerfer fire) had been attacked once, so we decided to patrol in front of it. The trenches were closer here, so it was not necessary to have quite as large a patrol, and only five of us went out. After getting clear of our wire, we crawled forward (it was moonlight) in the direction of the nearest German post, about seventy-five yards away. During our progress towards it we found several indications of the presence of the raiders there two nights ago. 'Potato-mashers' were lying scattered around in different shell-holes. Meeting with opposition, the raiders had doubtless scurried off in various directions. I crawled down into a shell-hole filled with wire. There was also wire running back from it towards the German lines. I made several futile attempts to get underneath the wire to see what lay beyond, but the strands were cunningly woven, and I had to give it up. I crawled out of the shell-hole and was moving over the left, when bang went a rifle not more than thirty or forty yards away, and a bullet plunked into the ground a few inches from my head. The four scouts were scattered around in shell-holes close be-

hind me. One of them, a few yards away from me, beckoned to me, and I lost no time in getting into the protection of the shell-hole. Shortly afterwards two Huns stood up (head and shoulders showing) at a point about twenty yards from the wire I had attempted to get through. Pete, who was in a shell-hole on my right, saw them, and having a rifle, promptly fired and got one of them. Apparently frantic signals were sent back for reinforcements for, not more than a couple of minutes later, we saw five Huns, about seventy-five yards away, climb out of one trench and drop in quick succession into another leading out to the advanced post. We lay waiting and watching for several minutes, but nothing further happened. We continued with our patrol, remaining out until almost dawn. For one night at least, the Hun 'sturm-truppen' had a rest.

The following night, shortly after dark, and while we were eating dinner, the noise of a terrific bombardment reached us. We rushed up the dug-out steps, and the scream of our own shells passing overhead was what we heard most. Upon inquiry from

the sentry on duty we found that the green flare, our local S.O.S., had gone up. I rushed along to the scouts' dug-out.

'Come on, boys, everybody ready at once; there 's something doing up the line.'

A few minutes later we were tearing up the communication trench to the front line. By the time we reached there things had almost quietened down. I met an officer on duty.

'What 's the trouble now?' I enquired.

'Oh, Heinie has another crack at No. 10 Post,' he replied.

'Did he get into it?' I asked.

'No, he was easily beaten off, but we have had a good many casualties from his Minnies.'

We went along to No. 10 Post and got the story from the corporal in charge.

'It was soon after dark, sir. He threw over a bunch of "Minnies" but none of them came very close to us. We saw one man get up, run forward and throw a bomb, which landed on the outside of the parapet. I fired my rifle and one of the men in the post threw a bomb. That was all that happened, sir.'

'You 've apparently got them pretty well scared, corporal; they don't seem to have much heart for their work. Point out where you saw the man that threw the bomb, and we 'll go out to have a look around.'

The corporal did so, and taking four scouts with me, I started out on patrol. The moon was just rising when we went out. We got through the wire and crawled along the outside of it until we came to the tape we had seen there after the last attempt. We found it pinned into the ground with a pair of large Boche wire-cutters. I followed the tape along until I came to a huge shell-hole at the end of a piece of shallow, disused trench. It was smooth with use, and had no doubt been used for assembling the main body of the raiders; it was not more than forty-five yards from our trench. I crawled into this and beckoned to the corporal to follow me.

'No doubt about this, is there?' I whispered.

'No, sir, this is the place where they have assembled. They must have been here pretty often.'

'You can also see the path they have come along.'

In the moonlight it was unmistakable, standing out like a bright broad ribbon stretched across No Man's Land. After indicating it to the corporal, I told him to wait there while I followed it along to the Boche trench. Owing to the bright moonlight it was unwise for more than one man to move along it; so, keeping a little to one side of it, I crawled fairly quickly until I came to the Boche wire fifty yards further on. Looking up, I could even see the smooth part of the parapet, the particular place where the raiders were accustomed to crawl out over. It was all most interesting. Party after party, patrol after patrol, must have moved along this pathway. There was no doubt about thorough preparation, and it would explain the repeated efforts to enter No. 10 Post—despite the many failures. Fritz had really set his heart upon this undertaking. I returned to the corporal.

'There must have been crowds of men coming and going along this pathway,' I remarked when I got back into the shell-hole with him.

'Yes, sir, they certainly intended to make a success of their raid.'

'Well, I only hope he returns to-morrow night, he 'll probably find us waiting for him.'

As the moon was up now until dawn, there was very little probability of another attempt being made, so we returned to headquarters.

The next morning I went along to the scouts' dug-out and we talked things over. The result was that we decided to take out a fighting patrol, including a Lewis gun and crew, and wait for the raiders near their assembly position. I went to the C.O. and explained what we intended to do.

'That seems a very good plan, M'Kean,' he said, 'you ought to take him by surprise if he makes another attempt to-night.'

'Yes, sir,' I replied, 'we rather hope he *will* come back to-night.'

'How long do you intend to remain out there?'

'Until the moon comes up, sir; we 'll be out between two and three hours.'

'Pretty cold job for your scouts, M'Kean.'

'Yes, sir, it will be, but they are all very keen about it.'

'You want a Lewis gun crew to report to you at 4.30?'

'Yes, sir; we 'd like men who are keen on this kind of thing.'

'All right, I 'll see you get good men.'

The patrol was to consist of nine scouts and four Lewis gunners with their gun.

Shortly before dark we arrived at No. 10 Post. The Lewis gun team was there, and I explained what they would have to do.

'Now, corporal,' I said to the N.C.O. in charge of the gun, 'I am going to place you in position a few yards in the rear of and to the left of the scouts, so that if the Huns come into their old assembly position you will be able to fire into them from the flank —but don't fire until you get the word from myself or the scout corporal. If they come, we are going to throw bombs into them and then rush them, and get as many prisoners as we can. Now, you understand, don't you?'

'Yes, sir,' replied the corporal.

As soon as it was dark we went out, moving quietly and cautiously until we were all in position, which took several minutes. I left two of the scouts with the Lewis gun, the other seven I took forward with myself. About twenty yards from, and overlooking the Hun raiders' assembly position, were

three fairly large shell-holes. Three of the scouts, including the corporal, remained with me in the centre shell-hole; two scouts were in the one on the left, and two in that on the right. We all had bombs ready to throw. In a couple of seconds seven Mills' bombs could be dropped in amongst the Huns.

It was a very dark night, misty, wet and cold. We strained our eyes into the darkness, every man being eager to catch the first glimpse of the Huns. More than once I felt a light touch on my arm—it was a scout ready to swear he had seen something move. We would all concentrate on the suspected object, sometimes hearts beating high with hope, but we always had finally to admit that it couldn't have been a Hun. We were looking right into the huge shell-hole that the Huns had previously used for assembling, so a man moving into that could not possibly escape us. We listened as intently as we looked, and so the minutes dragged on into hours. I could feel the scouts next to me trembling with the cold, and I was trembling with it also. It was a wearying, exhausting vigil, yet all the time we were keyed up to the highest pitch of ex-

pectation and excitement. The conduct of the scouts was admirable; not a man moved though I knew their feet, like mine, must have been as cold as lead, and the longing to knock them together to bring a little warmth into them was well-nigh irresistible. I looked at my watch—we had been lying there two hours and a half. There was a perceptible brightening; objects that had looked shadowy and blurred became distinct—the moon was coming up. Fifteen minutes more and it was quite bright. No use waiting any longer—the Huns would not come now. I turned to the corporal.

'Tell the men to crawl back in, corporal. I 'll wait here until they are all clear of the wire.'

This took a few minutes, and when the corporal came back to me I got up, cold and stiffened, and walked back into our trench. It was then that I realised just how cold I was. My teeth chattered so that I simply could not speak.

The following night we were relieved. The relief came in as soon as it was dark. In order to discourage the Hun in any idea he might have of raiding, we had machine-guns fire 'bursts' into the gap in his wire

through which he came out into No Man's Land. Also the corporal and myself, before coming in the previous night, picked up the end of the tape and took it out into No Man's Land, so that if he followed the tape he would move in a semicircle and carry out a successful raid upon his own trench!

VII

THE MYSTERIOUS TUNNEL

'DID you hear the strange story of the mysterious tunnel in No Man's Land in the sector we have just taken over?' the brigade intelligence officer asked when I called in at brigade headquarters for some maps.

'No,' I replied. 'What is the story?'

'Well, if you will just come over here and have a look at this map I will point out to you the location of the tunnel. You see there—*that* in No Man's Land is a big railway siding in front of Lens. There is apparently a cutting of ten to fifteen feet deep. In the side of this cutting, about a hundred and fifty yards out from our trench, there is this tunnel which I have marked on the map. You will see that these sidings run diagonally across our front, and that they cut through the extreme right flank of

the right battalion. The right battalion have a post which looks down the sidings. It was from this post that an officer of one of the battalions of the brigade we have just relieved went out, with a sergeant and another man, to have a look around. They were going cautiously along, being anxious to see what was in an apparently old log building, when they were stopped dead by the sound of a cough coming from a few yards in front of them. They hugged the ground closely and waited. A few minutes later they heard men talking, and soon afterwards some one came around from behind this log building. It was a German soldier, carrying a rifle. He stood and looked around for a while, and then disappeared around the corner of the old building. This small party then returned to their own trench. The following night one of our battalions relieved them, and the officer who had seen all this took the scout officer of our relieving battalion out for a short distance and pointed out to him the location of the place.'

'It does seem rather mysterious,' I said when he had finished his story, 'for this location marked on the map is quite as far

from the Hun lines as it is from ours. I cannot think for a moment what on earth he is doing with men so far out; it isn't usual for him to do anything like this.'

'No, that is what makes it so mysterious. The Hun is not in the habit of roaming so far from home.'

'Are there any theories at all about it, any explanations for this unusual conduct?'

'Division have one. It is well known that in Lens and the Green Crassier not one hundred yards from this tunnel or whatever it is, there is a perfect labyrinth of tunnels,[1] and it is thought that there is probably a tunnel running under the railway from the Green Crassier. With such a tunnel he could easily assemble troops along the cutting for a raid or for a local attack upon our line.'

'What action do Division wish to have taken against it?'

'At present the orders are to make a thorough and complete reconnaissance of the place, and to report upon the possibility of being able to destroy it.'

[1] This was quite true. Even from the very best observation posts giving direct observation into Lens it was very seldom that you would see a single soldier moving about, though there were scores of German troops in the place.

'Well, I suppose the battalion in the line are doing that now?'

'Yes, they were out last night. They did not actually get up to the place, so have nothing new to report.'

The next morning I received instructions to report to the headquarters of the battalion in the line (we were in support) with a view to relieving them the following day. When I arrived there I immediately got into touch with the scout officer, an old friend of mine.

'What's this yarn about a tunnel in No Man's Land?' I asked. He laughed.

'I guess it is something of the kind, though we haven't seen any one there yet. We got fairly close to it last night, and some of the boys swore they heard voices.'

'Have you seen the entrance yet?'

'No, we are going to try to get a look at that to-night.'

'What about the log building I heard about—do you think they use that at night?'

'I don't know; I'm not sure whether that is a log building. We expect to settle all these things to-night. When are you going to relieve us?'

'To-morrow night. We didn't expect it would be so soon, but the rumour is that the division will be out of the line for Christmas; suppose that accounts for it. Are you too busy or too tired to take me over the line?'

'No, not a bit. I want you to see where this log building is; probably you 'll have to worry over this thing.'

We left headquarters and went up to the front line, arriving just in time to be greeted with a salvo of 'pine-apples' (a cross between a rifle grenade and a meinenwerfer shell). We safely weathered this storm and looked over the different posts. At last we arrived at the extreme right flank. We moved a little to the right of the last bombing-post, stood up and looked over across at the German line. We couldn't see the log building because of its being in the cutting, but my companion indicated a crooked telegraph pole.

'Do you see the shell-shocked telegraph pole over there?'

'Yes, I know the one you mean.'

'Well, that is right alongside of this so-called log building.'

'How do you get out to it?'

'We go out from this post here, get through the wire—it isn't very heavy—slide down the side of the cutting and go along the railway, hugging the side of the cutting pretty much the whole of the way. It 's rather a rotten way to go, for there is a fence along the top of the cutting, and any Hun patrol that might happen to be up there have you entirely at their mercy. They could roll bombs down on top of you. But to-night I am taking a couple of extra men to move along the top of the cutting at the same time as we go along the track.'

'Well, I hope you have good luck to-night and find out all there is to know.'

The next day the C.O. sent for me.

'You 'll have to go up a little earlier to-night than was arranged; brigade have sent a message to say that the scout officer of the battalion in the line will take you out to look at this dug-out or tunnel or whatever it is. It seems that they have a scheme on to blow the whole thing up, and it will be up to us to carry the scheme out. You had better get up there in plenty of time to get a good look around.'

I saluted and went out. Shortly before dark I reported at the headquarters of the

battalion we were relieving, and was soon chatting with the scout officer.

'Well, I 'm to take you out to look at our little wooden hut to-night, I understand?'

'Yes, I believe we are supposed to do a patrol together to-night. I have two of my scouts here who will go out with us. Did you find out much about the mystery last night?'

'Yes, a little more. There is apparently somebody in what looks like a dug-out entrance. We didn't see any one, though we waited around for fully fifteen minutes.'

'Did you hear anything?'

'Well, that is rather doubtful. Some of the boys with me thought they heard sounds coming from the dug-out, and I also thought I heard something of the kind, though I would not like to swear to it.'

'Well, if you will take me out and show me the jolly old hut, I 'll carry on the good work of investigation.'

'Yes, we 'll go in a few minutes; it 's a long walk up to the front line, and, as the relief will be coming in, we shall find it slow going.'

We *did* find it slow going, and it was after

eleven o'clock before we got out. As we could only be seen from one post, and we were in a hurry, we warned only the men in this post. We also asked them if they could spare us a couple of bombs. They handed them to us and we quickly disappeared into the darkness of No Man's Land. We climbed over the wire and slid down the steep cutting. After travelling for about a hundred yards I saw the log building (as it was then understood to be) about fifty yards away. Leaving the two men in a shell-hole we pushed on to within twenty yards of it. We waited for a few minutes, listening intently. There were unmistakable sounds of movement on the side of the building farthest away from us. We waited a few minutes longer, but no one appeared, so we rejoined the two men and made our way back towards our own trench. After a great deal of difficulty we climbed up the cutting and were stepping carefully over our wire when a peremptory 'Halt, who goes there?' made us pause suddenly and look up in surprise. To explain this unexpected challenge I must go back to the time when we left our outpost. We had paused there for a few seconds,

merely to say we were going out on a patrol and would be back in a little over an hour. Apparently we had not been sufficiently lucid for the two men in the post, who were comparatively new to trench warfare. We had walked overland to the outpost, which was in a bit of a trench running out from the front line. The two men, having been in the post only a few minutes, had a very hazy idea of where we had come from, but they made up for this by vivid and active imaginations. This was the story they told the officer who visited them a few minutes later. A party of four men *dressed as Canadians* had visited the outposts, and asked them a lot of questions about the different machine-gun and bombing-posts in the vicinity, and also the whereabouts of company headquarters (I myself had asked them a few casual questions), and had then disappeared in the direction of the German lines. The officer naturally became highly suspicious, brought up reinforcements, including a Lewis gun, and it was his voice that I recognised calling out the challenge. I disentangled myself from the wire and sauntered over in the direction of the post. Again that sharp challenge.

'It 's all right,' I shouted back jokingly, 'don't riddle me with bullets or begin planting bombs at my feet.' But he didn't think it *was* a joke.

'Halt!' he yelled back; 'advance one and give the pass-word.' Then I was woefully at fault! I knew it was the name of some bird or other.

'Sparrow!' I yelled, but no response. 'Crane'; no reply. I thought furiously, and then joyfully shouted,

'Lark!' That did it!

'Come on in, Mac, you old reprobate,' he shouted. 'You haven't half put the wind up us to-night.'

I advanced, and was rather shocked to see one Lewis gun and four rifles pointed at me and behind them two men standing with bombs ready to throw! We dropped into the trench and went back to company headquarters. The officer who had taken me out was anxious to rejoin his battalion, so left us here. His parting words were:

'Hope you blow Heinie sky-high out of the tunnel.'

Enticing smells of cooking were coming up from the dug-out, and I gratefully and promptly responded to the invitation to have

a meal. I asked if it included the scout who had remained with me, and he said it did, so we were soon enjoying a hot appetising meal in a dug-out that went partly beyond our own front line out underneath No Man's Land.

'Where 's your box respirator, Mac?' some one asked me.

I looked at the place on my chest where it should have been. It wasn't there! My horrible absent-mindedness again.

'It would be a rotten joke on me if they put gas over to-night,' I said. Soon afterwards I left and went along the front line, visiting the outposts as was our custom the first night in the line. I was with two men in a listening post about thirty yards out from the front-line trench. I lay alongside of them talking to them in whispers and asking a few questions, when a series of pops from the German lines followed by the sight of several flaming-tailed 'Minnies,' making a rapid descent upon our trenches, took up the whole of our attention.

In place of the crashing explosions we expected to hear there were several significant muffled noises. 'Gas!' we whispered simultaneously. I hurried back to the front

line in time to hear the word ' gas ' passed along. Men hurriedly dived into their respirators. The smell of gas was unmistakable! Another salvo of Minnies filled with gas dropped just behind the front-line trench. What a delightful position I was in! The nearest dug-out with a gas blanket on the entrance was about a hundred yards down the trench. With my hand pressed tightly over my mouth and nose, I made a wild rush along the trench, bumping into weird-looking, groping figures who gave out muffled peculiar sounds, indicating their disapproval of the rough knocks I gave them as I passed. I dare not laugh in case I opened my mouth, and for the same reason I could not stop to apologise. At last I reached the dug-out and made a wild dash through the entrance. Only my heels touched the top step. I shot down the twenty odd steps with the velocity of a 5.9, landing at the bottom with a bang and a clatter, overturning the cook's brazier (and also the cook, who sat at the bottom of the steps and who immediately set up a gurgling protestation as he struggled to express himself in the limitations of a gas respirator), and his collection of pots, pans, and dishes. In the

dim light of the flickering candles I saw several solemn-looking figures in various attitudes, all wearing their strange-looking gas masks. The dug-out was as silent as the grave.

'Anybody got a spare respirator?' I shouted.

They turned their owl-like eye-pieces in my direction and let it go at that. I repeated my question. A man removed his mouth-piece long enough to shout a muffled 'No, sir,' and then hurriedly replaced it. I hunted around and found a dirty old P.H. helmet, and soon became the weirdest looking figure in that solemn throng! After a few minutes the taste of that old P.H. became infinitely more detestable than any amount of gas. If I had to be poisoned I preferred pure gas poisoning, so I took off the helmet. There was only a very faint smell of gas, and soon afterwards the gas sentry reported, 'All clear.' A fairly strong breeze was blowing, and the gas didn't hang around long. I hopped up out of the dug-out as soon as I saw the cook taking off his respirator, and went back to headquarters, firmly resolved that I wouldn't again forget my respirator.

The following day I discussed the ' tunnel mystery ' with the scouts, and we decided that four of us would go out that night and get into that entrance if possible; also that we would see what was in the reported log building. Before going out that night a message came from Division to report on the possibilities of blowing up the entrance to the tunnel. We were all most eager for this patrol, but did not forget to carefully warn all the outposts that we were going out. I for one did not wish to be received back into our own trench with quite as much ceremony as on the previous night.

It was a clear starlight night when we left our trench. Two of us slid quietly down the side of the cutting, the other two remaining on top as a protection to us. Crouching close to the side of the cutting, we moved quietly along to within thirty yards of the supposed log building, and dropped into a huge shell-hole in the centre of the railway track. We waited here for a few minutes, listening intently for sounds of movement. We then crawled forward on our stomachs towards the log building. It was rough and difficult ground to crawl over, with broken rails and uprooted ' ties ' lying around.

The least clink on the metal would have given the game away had any one been within hearing distance. With my heart beating a little faster than usual, I reached the rough walls of the frequently mentioned log building, crawled along the side farthest from the cutting, cautiously poked my head around the corner, and found myself looking into the entrance of this tunnel or dug-out. I listened for a few seconds, not even breathing during the time. Not a sound. I crawled over to the entrance, then stood up to look at the building—which wasn't a building after all. It was a rough palisade of logs let into the ground and bound together with wrought iron bands. They formed three sides of a square, the side of the cutting forming the fourth. The whole thing, which was filled in with ballast, formed a square of roughly about twelve feet, the height of it being a little over five feet; and standing behind it you had an excellent view along the railway in the direction of our lines. I then proceeded cautiously to descend the steps of the tunnel entrance. They were in good repair and there were signs that some one had been there quite recently. I had got down as far

as the fifth step when I clearly heard sounds of movement below. If the night is at all bright any one coming down the steps of a dug-out is clearly visible to those at the bottom. Such being the case, I would present an excellent target, and I therefore 'backed up,' reached the entrance and stood at one side of it. The sounds of movement continued; I also distinctly heard voices. They were coming up the steps. I slipped around the side of the barricade and dropped into a shell-hole alongside of the scout who had accompanied me. Soon afterwards three Germans appeared, two of them carrying rifles. They talked in low tones for a while, looked around, and went back. It would have been quite easy to throw a bomb and get the three of them, but we should never have got near that entrance again without a fight for it. Whatever the Hun was premeditating, it would spoil his plans if we could only blow up that entrance. After this we returned to our own lines. Soon after my report had gone in, a message came from brigade saying that Division wished to have this entrance blown up without any further delay. It also stated that a twenty

pound mobile charge would reach headquarters that night to be used for this purpose. It arrived shortly after six o'clock, while I was having dinner. Two men from the engineers had brought it, but, apparently thinking that we knew all there was to know about mobile charges, they had not left any instructions about exploding it, and to experiment for such information was a rather dangerous pastime. I had seen heaps of mobile charges—long tin cylinders filled with ammonal, with a small tin handle attached which enabled you to carry them as you would a suit case, but I had very hazy ideas as to how they should be handled. There was a prompt chorus of disapproval and protest from the other occupants of the dug-out when I suggested that we should look at the thing and see how it worked. I sent for the bombing sergeant; he had not seen one just like it before, but was confident he could quickly find out how it worked. We were proceeding with our investigations when I became aware of the very noticeable and unusual silence in the dug-out. I looked around—everybody had quietly slipped out. In a few minutes we had everything adjusted, cutting down the fuse

to a thirty second one. I understood exactly how to work the patent fuse lighter.

I had arranged that six of us should go out, two along the top of the cutting and four along the railway track. Before going out we explained to all the sentries what we proposed doing, and warned them to be prepared for a lively time if the Hun became alarmed and annoyed. A slight fall of snow promised to add to our difficulties. We went out the usual way. I went ahead, and one of the scouts carrying the mobile charge followed close behind. I confess I was in a constant state of trepidation about that mobile charge. I thought, 'If a machine-gun bullet hits it, will it explode?' If so, then I had a disturbing vision of the swift disintegration of my humble self!

'Whatever you do,' I whispered to the scout carrying it, 'if anything starts up, throw that thing as far away from you as you can.'

'Yes, sir,' he replied, and I knew by the tone of his voice that he was every bit as anxious about it as I was. We reached the big shell-hole about thirty yards from the barricade. I signalled to the scouts on the top of the cutting to remain where they

were at, left two men in the shell-hole, and, accompanied by the scout carrying the mobile charge, started crawling towards the barricade. A delicious thrill of anticipation shot through me as I pushed my head around the corner of the barricade and looked into the entrance of the tunnel. The snow around the entrance was disturbed: some one had been up again! I got up, tip-toed to the entrance and listened. There was no mistaking it, there were men down there. I signalled to the scout—he handed me the mobile charge. I removed the lid and pulled the pin of the patent lighter. It made a sound as loud as the report of a revolver. I heaved the long cylinder down the steps and promptly ran. We reached the big shell-hole where the two scouts we had left behind had remained, and waited for developments. We hadn't long to wait. There was a muffled explosion, and we could feel the ground underneath us distinctly tremble—our mobile charge had been a success! A few seconds later a dozen flare lights shot up from the German lines, and there was some desultory bombing and machine-gun fire. They were evidently puzzled as to what had happened. We

waited a few minutes, then started to steal back homewards, feeling considerably elated over our success. A single rifle shot rang out, and the bullet *plunked* into the side of the cutting a few feet behind us. We were spotted! The light snow covering on the side of the cutting—which was our background—had brought into relief our dark figures. A burst of machine-gun bullets hit the rails—we flopped. Again the flare lights shot up, and one machine gun viciously swept up and down the track. We got up again and the same thing happened. It was a slow and exciting trip back, a fifteen-minute journey was lengthened out into one of an hour and a half. We were very thankful to find ourselves at last in the protection of our own trench. We were satisfied to know that the troublesome entrance had at least been effectively closed. I have never been able to account for the activity of the Hun around that entrance. There was no doubt but what he was contemplating some mischief. If so, then the scouts had the satisfaction of frustrating him.

VIII

LOST IN NO MAN'S LAND

'WHAT about a raid this tour,' was one of the queries of the cheery Scout Officer of the battalion we were relieving.

'Oh, I guess we 'll do the odd one,' I replied, 'seeing that it is now the order of the day, and most especially the order of the night. What have you been doing in that line this trip?' I asked.

'Oh, we 've done nothing this time; the battalion in support are putting on one to-night, though.'

'Many in it?'

'No, only a small party.'

'A stealth raid?'

'Yes, they expect to grab the odd sentry. But stay and have dinner with us to-night.'

'Righto! I expected to dine with you to-night. I 'm staying up until the battalion arrives to relieve you to-morrow night. I

hope there 's a corner in your dug-out unoccupied.'

' Sure, we 'll find a place for you to crawl in.'

The dug-out was a crowded but cheery place.

' Come in,' called out the C.O., and pretty soon I was feeling quite at home. A signaller brought in a message which he handed to the adjutant, who in turn passed it on to the C.O.

' Zero hour for the raid to-night is eight o'clock,' he announced casually; ' good luck to them! Hope they bag a prisoner—it will save other people a lot of trouble if they do.'

But they didn't. Just as they were cautiously approaching the gap the artillery had made in the wire they were spotted! ' Heinie ' was standing-to waiting for them, machine guns spat viciously, bombs began to fly promiscuously around, and the party, owing to casualties, was forced to withdraw. The C.O. commented on this information, which reached us about ten o'clock.

' Was just a bit afraid that was what would happen to-night. You cannot blow gaps into his wire without putting him wise

to what you intend doing, and you cannot possibly get into his trench unless you do blow his wire up—he has a regular forest of it in front of his line.' He then turned and addressed his remarks to me.

'I suppose it will be up to you people to put on a raid now?'

'Yes, sir,' I replied, 'I understand we are doing something in that line this tour in.'

The next day I spent several hours looking over the line, visiting every O.P. around, trying to get a view of that gap in the Hun wire from every angle. I had already decided to see for myself just what kind of a gap it was, and if we could possibly use it for forcing an entry into the German trenches.

All the arrangements were complete for the relief, and soon after dusk elements of our battalion began to arrive. It was very dark and the relief was rather slow. After headquarters had arrived the C.O. sent for me.

'What do you propose doing with your scouts to-night, M'Kean?'

'I should like to look at that gap in the German wire, sir.'

'Which gap is this, M'Kean?'

'The one the raiding party tried to get through into the German trench last night, sir.'

'Why? Do you think it will be of any use to us?'

'It may, sir—if it is a good one; and I want to see for myself if it *is* any good.'

'All right, M'Kean; report to me as soon as you get back.'

'Very good, sir,' I said, saluted, and went to my own corner of the dug-out and prepared to go out. I examined my Webley, saw that it was in good order; made sure that I had my compass with me; carefully studied my map; and then went out to collect my scouts. It was intensely dark as I stumbled along the duck-boards to where their dug-out was at. Arrived there, I found them waiting for me.

'Everybody ready, sergeant?'

'Yes, sir; could you give us the pass-word before we go?'

'Oh, yes, I 'd almost forgotten. GIN is the pass-word to-night.'

'Hope it will be RUM when we come back, sir!' called out Billie, one of the boys, and everybody laughed.

It was quite a long walk up to the front line, and the trenches were a little crowded, for the relief wasn't quite completed. I was anxious to get out as soon as possible, for it would be bright moonlight at one o'clock, and it was now nearly eleven. At last we got into the front line. The communication trench we had just come up hit the front line about three hundred yards to the right of the place where I had decided to go out at. I had my prismatic compass already set at a bearing that would take us in a fairly direct line for the gap I was so curious about, so decided to move along the trench to the left until I came to that particular spot. Then I started to do what I was always most particular about—to give complete information to every sentry as to the strength of the patrol; where we were going out at; the direction we would be going in, and approximately the time we intended to return.

To-night this was done rather hurriedly, for I wanted to get to the gap before the moon came up. I hadn't gone many yards along the trench when I met one of our officers.

'Say, old man, would you mind warning

the sentries to the right of that C.T.? I 'm in a bit of a hurry to get out.'

'Righto!' he replied. Unfortunately he was wounded shortly after I left him, and with consequences to us that made our return altogether too exciting and difficult for our comfort.

As I went along the trench I climbed up on to the firing step and whispered into the ear of each sentry:

'A patrol of nine men is going out in a few minutes. It will move straight out towards the German line and will be back in about two hours.'

We arrived at the place I had marked on the map and prepared to go out, replacing our steel helmets with woollen 'Bacaclavas' ('Old Bill' headgear).

'You and the corporal will keep close behind me, sergeant. We 'll move out in the inverted V formation.'

'Very good, sir,' replied the sergeant.

I then climbed up on to the parapet and got close to the ground to look at the wire. I spotted a place where it was a little thin, and in a few minutes was outside of our own wire and sitting comfortably in a huge shell-hole. I could hear the rest of the

patrol cautiously following, and one by one they crawled quietly into the shell-hole after me. It was rather cold, and the ground was frozen a little, sufficient to make it difficult to move quietly. When we were all assembled in the shell-hole, and I had set my compass so that the luminous patch on the cover pointed out to me the direction we had planned to go, we moved forward in the formation agreed upon. The ground was new to us and simply pitted with shell-holes, some of them immense ones; this, added to the darkness, made our progress slow. I knew the distance between the lines at this point to be about two hundred and fifty yards, and that about one hundred yards out there was a disused trench running diagonally across our front. It was no joke trying to keep direction across that rough ground, and equally difficult to keep in your head an accurate idea of the distance you had travelled. As I wriggled along towards the German line I looked up and saw what I could have sworn were the heads of five Germans, about thirty yards in front of me. 'An enemy patrol,' I thought; 'what luck!' A few whispered instructions, and the men in the rear came

up on either side and began to move forward, the whole of the patrol converging on the suspected enemy patrol. They were still there, and I was enjoying a nice thrill of excitement, when a horrible suspicion gripped me—I got up quickly and ran forward. It was as I suspected—five baulks of round timber which, upon examination, proved to be some of the remains of a destroyed emplacement in the disused trench we were looking for! We silently reformed and pushed on again for another seventy-five yards. I then went forward with three men, leaving the remainder behind to cover our approach to the gap we expected to find. It was noticeably brighter than when we first started out—the moon was coming up. We crawled quietly forward, and in the dim light of the rising moon we could faintly discern the outlines of the German wire entanglements.

We continued to move cautiously forward from shell-hole to shell-hole until only a few yards from the German wire. The four of us were in an especially large shell-hole, and I had decided to wait for a few moments in the hope of a flare-light going up and giving us an opportunity to get a good view of the

German wire, when I thought I heard sounds of movement on the right. Billy, the boy on my right, also apparently heard and raised himself to have a look. I reached out my hand to pull him down, but too late! At the same moment a hand-grenade landed and exploded at the edge of the shell-hole and about a foot from his head. He gave a gasp and rolled back dead. A fusilade of bombs followed, and machine guns spat viciously. Myriads of lights went up, making the night as bright as day. I could see a party of Germans just inside of our own wire; they had apparently been expecting another attempt to raid. It became frightfully warm, and the noise was deafening. To get back the dead body of our comrade was, for the time being, out of the question. Bombs were exploding on all sides. I was expecting one to drop in amongst us at any moment. I whispered to the other two to follow me, and we made a dash back out of the range of the bombs and rejoined the rest of the party. In a few minutes things began to quieten down. Not one of us ever dreamed of leaving our dead comrade out there; a scout always brings back the dead and

wounded—it is a code of honour. Then it was Billy, one of the most popular boys in our section, always willing, always bright and cheery, the star player in our battalion base-ball team. We had scores of sentimental reasons for getting his body and, added to this, there was an important military reason. It was ten to one that, if left alone for a few minutes, the Hun would be out to search his body and would obtain identification. Their Intelligence Staff would consider this most important and satisfactory information, while ours would be correspondingly annoyed.

'I want two volunteers to go back with me to bring in Billy,' I whispered. Everybody was most eager to go with me. I picked two and gave instructions to the remainder. 'Three will go to that shell-hole to the left, and cover us with your rifles; the other two will stay here and be ready to move forward if we get into a scrap.' When the three had moved over to the shell-hole and were in position, we went forward; but we were seen, and the row started again. But we persisted; our first difficulty was to find the shell-hole we had been in when Billy was killed. This was no easy matter,

for they all looked alike. Every time we got up to go from one shell-hole to another the machine guns rattled and the bullets whizzed around. I decided to search for it myself, trying each shell-hole close at hand and returning each time to the two boys with me. It was rather bewildering and nerve-racking, and I heaved a big sigh of relief when at last I found the place we had been in. I placed Billy's body in such a position that we could quickly seize it and carry it away. Then I crawled back to the two boys.

'Get ready to rush forward with me,' I whispered. At a whispered word we all got up, ran quickly forward, seized hold of Billy's body, and ran back to the protection of a shell-hole. By a miracle the three of us escaped the hail of machine-gun bullets. Eventually we reached the two boys we had left behind and were soon rejoined by the three scouts who had been detailed as a covering party. By this time the sky had become clouded, and there was a fairly heavy ground mist. We rested until things had become quiet again, and then started back. We were naturally more or less excited, and travelled for some distance before

giving the proper amount of thought to the direction in which we were going. It seemed to all of us that we had been travelling long enough to reach our own wire. I consulted my compass. We were travelling almost due south, and we should have been travelling west; in other words we had been moving parallel to our own line and had probably got off the front our battalion was holding. I knew that, further south, the line zig-zagged a little and No Man's Land narrowed down to seventy-five and one hundred yards in places. The ground mist had thickened, and we were simply groping around stumbling from shell-hole to shell-hole. The situation was full of peril, for even our friends might prove to be our foes. We stumbled on for another half hour, hoping each moment that we should come to our own wire. But never a sign of it did we see. We longed to hear a friendly Canadian voice, longed for a flare-light, longed for *something* to happen! But no; just a threatening, menacing silence. We were lost in No Man's Land! All this time we were carrying Billy's body with us; two of us went crouching ahead, fingers on the triggers of our revolvers, ready and ex-

pectant; then four of them carrying Billy; then the remaining two to watch the rear; and so we stumbled on for what seemed like hours—in that thick fog, slipping and falling, expecting each moment to be confronted with enemies. My foot caught in something. I stumbled and hit the ground with a crash. But at the same time I gave a great gulp of relief. I had fallen amongst some wire entanglements. But whose? We had been wandering around so long in that impenetrable darkness that we couldn't swear to anything. It was just as likely that it was German wire as that it was British. Boldness was the only method of solving the difficulty. To approach it cautiously was to court disaster. There was a strong likelihood of it being our own trench, and if they spotted us crawling up to it we would never get into it alive. The fact that we would speak in English would make them doubly suspicious. Scores of Germans spoke English; it was a favourite German trick for springing a surprise on our sentries. No, to approach boldly would be the best. So I decided to try this method alone, but one of the boys insisted on coming with me. We got up and started climbing over the

wire. Then we heard a little pop, such as accompanies the discharge of a rifle grenade, followed by a significant whine. We flopped. Just in time! A rifle grenade exploded at our heels. I got up—'Hello, GIN,' I yelled at the top of my voice. Bang!—a bullet whizzed past my cheek. 'GIN, GIN, all right GIN!' Bang! another bullet whizzed past me. I ducked, and at the same time a rifle grenade exploded behind us and perilously close to the boys we had left behind in the shell-hole. What could I do? I knew it was our own trench for they were Mills' grenades that were exploding. *I must get into that trench.* I jumped up again. 'Gin,' I yelled, 'for God's sake stop your firing.' Bang again, and another bullet whizzed past, but I kept on climbing over the wire.

'Hello,' a voice shouted, 'who is that?'

'The battalion scouts; didn't you know we were out?' I replied.

'No, we hadn't been told about it.'

I had hit the extreme right flank of our battalion, and about six hundred yards south of the point where I had gone out. The officer who had undertaken to warn the sentries had been wounded soon after

I left him, so my message had never reached them. We returned to the boys in the shell-hole.

'It 's all right, boys, we 're home at last.'

'Very glad, sir; it 's been rather a rough night.'

'Yes, it has; everybody seems to have a spite against us to-night.'

We got a stretcher and carried Billy back to headquarters. It was breaking daylight when I said, 'Turn in and have a sleep, boys, you must be tired,' and left them. When I arrived at headquarters, the C.O. was resting, so I wrote out my report—interrupted by many brief naps. I thankfully crawled into my bunk and was soon sleeping soundly and dreamlessly. It was my first and last experience of being lost in No Man's Land.

IX

WINNING A V.C.

IT was in the critical days of April, 1918. The Boche thought he was winning, while we more or less disagreed with him. He had the advantage though, for he was the attacking party, and kept us more or less guessing as to his intentions—one of the chief disadvantages of being on the defensive. What the staff craved for was information; and the best means to find out what was happening behind the Boche line was to get hold of some one who had been there quite recently, in other words—to grab a prisoner or two. He had started out gaily one day in March for a triumphant entry into the suffering city of Arras, but had been sent staggering back. He was now licking his sores, and we wondered if he was going to have another try.

We had been out for a few days' rest, and the following day were due to go back into

the line. The C.O. held a conference at headquarters, and, being Scout Officer, I had been notified to attend. The C.O. at once took us all into his confidence.

'The army intelligence people are very anxious to get a prisoner. Recently a few stealth raids, using small parties of men, have been attempted, but without any great success. We have received orders to put on something big, and something that will guarantee success from the beginning. We are to co-operate with a battalion that will be on our left. This is merely a preliminary announcement of our intention and must be kept secret. This raid will be carried out during our tour in the line.'

This was a welcome announcement, for it promised something exciting, especially for the scouts. Previous experience of raids warned us to be prepared for some especially hard work.

The following night we carried out our relief, and about midnight were settling down to the routine of a trench tour. Being on the defensive, special precautions were taken against surprise. When the headquarters of the battalion we relieved had gone, the C.O. sent for me.

'Now, then, M'Kean,' he said, 'I want you to start at once to locate definitely all the German outposts on our front, and to find out the condition of the German wire. We must have this information before we can make our plans for this raid. You can find out about this in your own way—you know more or less what is wanted.'

Now, if there was one kind of a job we preferred above all others, it was the job of locating enemy posts. We got into real touch with the Boche, and usually exchanged compliments in the shape of bombs. I took my map and went along to the scouts' dug-out, and we talked over the most likely place to go to get quick results. Running out from our front line to the Boche line were several old communication trenches, and we decided to try our luck along one of these. It was very probable that the Boche had an outpost in this trench, and it was fairly safe to presume that it would be well protected, for he never took a chance.

Pointing to this trench marked on the map, I remarked to the sergeant:

'I think we should find somebody at home along here, don't you?'

'Yes, sir,' he replied, 'it seems a most likely place.'

'All right, we 'll go there. Hurry the boys up and be sure to bring along a fairly good supply of bombs—they 're useful things to use in a trench.'

About an hour later we reached the front line. It was a dark night and the Boche was, as usual, very generously supplying all the artificial light for No Man's Land. We had decided to go out on the extreme right flank, so warned all the sentries as we went along that we were going out on patrol. We reached the place we were going out from. It was an outpost along the communication trench about twenty yards out from our front line. In the trench in front of the post was a mass of loose barbed wire, forming a 'block.' It was fairly well protected on the surface. A corporal was in charge of the post.

'Anything stirring around here, corporal?' I asked.

'Yes, sir, he 's bothering us with machine-gun fire — sweeps right over the top. "Shorty" there' (he indicated a tall, lanky youth) 'has just had a hole knocked into his steel lid.'

His words were quite true. At that very moment a hail of machine-gun bullets swept over our heads.

'He's been doing that every few minutes, sir,' the corporal remarked.

'Well, we 're going out to see if we can wake up a Heinie. Five of us are going out along this old C.T., expect to be back in a couple of hours.' We took off our steel helmets, and put on our woollen caps. I then waited for a few moments, for the old Boche was always methodical, and I knew we were about due for another ration of those machine-gun bullets. They came. Immediately afterwards, followed by the four scouts, I climbed out of the trench, over the wire, and dropped into the trench again on the other side of our 'block.' I was soon joined by the scouts with me.

'Now, I want two of you to keep a special look-out along the top,' I whispered; 'we don't want any Hun patrol to get in behind us and cut us off.' Then taking out my revolver from its holster, I stepped quietly along the trench, pressing each foot firmly into the ground before moving forward, and so eliminating the possibility of kicking any loose stones lying around. The trench 'zig-

zagged ' a little, and I could never see more than two or three yards ahead of me. We had gone about a hundred yards, and I was standing perfectly still—listening. I heard the rattle of a few loose stones only a few yards ahead of me. I quietly slipped back the revolver into my holster, and took out a bomb from my pocket. I grasped it in a manner so that I could quickly pull the pin and throw it. A revolver was always a useful weapon when once at close quarters, but a bomb was more useful for the preliminary sparring. I pushed on a few yards around a bit of a curve. About twenty yards from me I saw two Huns standing in the trench, and three others lay on top, looking towards me. A Hun patrol! I pulled the pin out of my bomb and got ready to throw it, when one of them saw me and gave the alarm. They all scampered away just as I let fly with the bomb. As soon as the bomb exploded I pulled out my revolver and ran along the trench in the direction in which the Huns had disappeared. I had only gone a few yards when I ran bang into a wire ' block ' strongly constructed. I was just collecting myself when I heard a significant whine, and a bomb ex-

ploded outside the trench. A moment later there was another deafening explosion as one burst just behind me. It was most unhealthy, and I took to my heels until well out of range. There was a series of explosions as the bombs came bouncing over. We returned to our trench, and I was able to report the definite location of *one* German bombing-post.

The next morning we decided to try a daylight patrol along another old communication trench. I took Pete with me, a sturdy boy and an old, experienced scout, who loved fighting as much as a duck loves water. The difficulty was in getting out of our trench and through our wire without being seen, for unseen glasses and telescopes were constantly searching along the outlines of our front line for any signs of movement. After several minutes of squeezing and wriggling, and without raising our bodies an inch from the ground, we finally succeeded in getting to the other side of our wire 'block.' We were pretty much out of breath though when we got there, so sat down and had a rest. Then, with revolver firmly clasped in my hand, and followed by Pete carrying a bomb (Pete

was the most wonderful bomb-thrower I ever saw), we proceeded with our reconnaissance. Owing to the zig-zag line of the trench I could never see more than a few yards ahead of me, so that I experienced a succession of delightful thrills of anticipation, expecting any moment to see or meet with something interesting. At last I came to some fairly new barbed wire, loosely strewn in the trench as a kind of rough obstacle. I turned round and whispered to Pete:

'I think we 're getting warm, Pete.'

'Yes, sir. I don't think his post is far from here.'

We climbed carefully over this wire, and a few feet further along came to a strong, impassable, well-constructed wire block. I tried several different methods to enable me to get through it, but in vain. I tried to wriggle underneath; to get past it sideways; for I was most anxious to have a look over that barricade of new sandbags a few feet further on. I was contemplating climbing over the top of it, when the head and shoulders of a Hun abruptly appeared, looking at me over the sandbag block referred to. We looked each other square in

the eye, and the surprise was mutual. I had stuck my revolver in my holster, and so was unprepared to become suddenly aggressive. But good old Pete was right there. I heard the click of the released lever as a bomb flew over my head and dropped neatly on the other side of that block. There was an explosion, followed by a shriek of pain. We were satisfied with our information, so lost no time in getting back into our own trench.

When I got back to headquarters the C.O. sent for me.

'I want you to come with me to the headquarters of the battalion that is putting on this raid with us; we are going to have a conference there to arrange preliminary details.'

We arrived there about an hour later. As a result of the conference, it was arranged to have a joint patrol to carry out an extensive reconnaissance over practically the whole of the front on which the raid would take place. This was on a frontage of about six hundred yards. It was to be really a frontal attack on a wide stretch of trench, with one or two small parties working up some old communication trenches. The

large parties for the frontal attack were to be assembled in No Man's Land, and one of the purposes of the patrol was to select assembly positions for these parties. No Man's Land, opposite the front to be raided, was from three to five hundred yards across, so we expected to be able to find good assembly positions a considerable distance out from our own front line. At midnight (the time agreed upon) the captain in charge of our raiding parties, the scout sergeant, and myself, met two officers and a sergeant from this other battalion. The sentries had already been warned, so we went out immediately. It was a brilliant moonlight night, and we moved around quickly and undisturbed. Nothing eventful happened until we reached the track of a light railway which ran directly across No Man's Land at right angles to our front line. We were then roughly about one hundred yards from the Boche front line. We knew, from a recent aeroplane photograph, that he was digging a new trench about fifty yards out from his present front line, so we were then only about fifty yards from this partly dug trench. The captain from the other battalion turned round to me and whispered:

'I think you and I will go up this track towards this new trench; the remainder can stay here in this shell-hole.'

'Righto,' I replied, 'lead on.'

So we started crawling up on the outside of the track until about twenty yards from the new trench. We could distinctly hear sounds of men working with picks and shovels, and lay listening for some time, when suddenly and startlingly two Huns popped up, apparently out of the ground in front of us. We hadn't realised we were quite so close to that trench. It seemed impossible for them not to see us lying there, so bright was the moonlight. They stood for a few moments looking down the track, then crossed over it and dropped into the trench on the other side. We rejoined the rest of the party and carried on with our patrol.

Although No Man's Land was so exceptionally wide opposite our trench, there was one place where the Huns had been seen manning a post only forty yards from one of ours. It was in one of the old communication trenches. In behind this post they had a machine-gun post. The bombing-post was at least two hundred yards out

from their main trench line, and the machine-gun post about thirty yards in the rear of it. The machine-gun post promised to be very troublesome, for it could enfilade the ground over which the main body of the raiding party had to cross. I had asked to be given the command of one of the raiding parties, so the C.O. gave me command of the party detailed to attack this bombing-post and the machine-gun post in the rear of it. As the scouts were to be distributed amongst the five separate raiding parties, I selected Pete to go with me. Pete was full of enthusiasm and fight, his dark eyes glowing as we talked over different plans for attacking these posts.

I reported to the C.O. the results of our joint patrol; he made notes and told me to be ready to attend a conference of officers in charge of raiding parties some time in the afternoon. I attended this conference, and it was arranged that I should take these different officers to the assembly positions selected for their parties. A meeting-place was arranged and a time fixed upon. The hour was late enough to give Pete and myself sufficient time to investigate the locality we were most interested in. I sent for Pete.

'What about a patrol as soon as it gets dark, Pete? I want you to come with me to see if we can locate definitely where this bombing-post is that we have to tackle.'

'Yes, sir, the sooner we find out exactly where they are the better.'

'All right; come back in a couple of hours' time and we 'll go out.'

It was just dark when Pete and I crawled out from our outpost. We crawled past our block and dropped into the communication trench. A few feet further on we came to the Hun block, strongly constructed of wire. To approach the post by that direction was out of the question. We climbed out of the trench, got down into a big shell-hole and held a whispered consultation.

'Don't you think we should go straight ahead, sir?' suggested Pete; 'we can keep fairly close to this trench.'

'Yes, I think we 'll push on ahead.'

We crawled out of the shell-hole into another adjoining it. From this we saw a mass of barbed wire, and proceeded to crawl up a slight rise towards it. We worked our way cautiously into it at a place where it was a little thin. It was moonlight, but there was a clouded sky, and it was raining

a little. After crawling partly through the wire, we lay side by side, looking and listening. Pete had wonderfully quick eyesight and saw, about seventy-five yards away, the shadowy outlines of three Germans—apparently digging. In a whisper he called my attention to them. We were busily engaged watching them when there was a loud report, and a flare light shot up about thirty yards in front of us. It was rather startling and unexpected. But we saw something even more startling and unexpected. Pete clutched my arm excitedly.

'Do you see him, sir, right there in front of us?'

It would have been impossible not to see him, the 'him' being a German sentry not more than fifteen yards away, head and shoulders showing above the outline of a trench. In speaking, Pete had turned his head towards me. We were seen! The sentry brought his rifle quickly to his shoulder, there was a loud report, a blinding flash, and the thud of a bullet into the ground underneath my chin (we were on a slight rise in the ground). A few seconds later another report and flash and the thud

of a bullet to the left, and just underneath Pete. He had missed us both!

'Get out of the wire as quick as you can, Pete, before he has time to throw a bomb.' I wriggled out myself in time to help Pete. We got up and ran back. Only just in time—a bomb dropped and exploded just about where we had been lying. A machine gun just behind this post fired a burst, the bullets passing over our heads.

'The son of a gun, Pete,' I said laughing, 'he really dares to show fight. He 's in for a beautiful time if he 's in the same place to-morrow night.'

Pete was stuttering with rage.

'Let me go back and throw these bombs, sir.'

'No, we don't want to alarm him, to find that the bird has flown when we get there to-morrow night. You can go back to headquarters. I 'm going to take these officers out to their assembly positions.'

It was daylight when I got back to headquarters. I turned in for a few hours' sleep. Early in the afternoon, accompanied by Pete, I went to talk over our plans with the party of men detailed to me for our little stunt. They clustered around me while I

showed them some maps and sketches of the trench we were interested in.

'Right here,' I said, pointing to the map, 'is our own post, about thirty yards along this C.T. out from our front line. There is a block here which we shall have to crawl over. About forty yards further along this C.T. you see marked the German bombing-post: we know exactly where this is for we saw the German sentry there last night. In front of this post is a strong wire block about twenty yards long. Now, we are going to assemble in shell-holes on each side of this trench. Six men, under Pete, will rush this first post—three men, with Pete, will be on this side of the trench, while the other three will be on the other side. Four rifle grenades will be fired into this machine-gun post marked here—about thirty yards in rear of the bombing-post. This will be the signal to rush the first post. Then six more, under myself, will follow quickly behind and rush the machine-gun post. One man will look after the mobile charges, for there are two dug-outs to blow up. Now, *speed* is to be the essential thing; pile right in on top of them—don't give them time to guess what is happening. If you drop your

rifle, fight with your fists. The zero hour is one o'clock in the morning, and we 'll try to get into position about quarter to one. At the zero hour a heavy artillery barrage will come down on the German trenches, but, because these posts we are tackling are so close to our own, the artillery will not be able to deal with them, so we must be prepared for a fight. It is most important that we should get this machine-gun post, for he can enfilade the other parties crossing the open.'

'Do we start in as soon as the barrage comes down, sir?' asked one of the men.

'No, we wait ten minutes and go forward at the same time as the other parties. Now, Pete and I are going to take you up to the front line to show you where these posts are. The first one is actually in a British military cemetery: you can easily see the little wooden crosses. Have you any questions you want to ask?'

'Yes, sir,' asked one serious-looking Canadian soldier, 'do we get any rum before the show starts?' They all clustered round eagerly to hear the reply.

'No, not until it is over; we are going to assemble within twenty yards of the German

post, and if we give you rum some of you will start chattering and give the whole game away.'

'Hard luck if we go under,' murmured one of the group.

'Never mind about that; it will always be a drop more to go round,' spoke up one cheery youth.

'Now, don't forget what I said about speed—pile right in on top of them.'

To this last remark was added a picturesque emphasis from Pete.

We took them out to our bombing-posts in twos and pointed out to them the locations of the two posts.

'Now, then,' I said to the three N.C.O.'s of the party, 'remain in this post (our bombing-post) for a few minutes. Pete and I are going out, and if you watch us you will see where we are going to assemble, and also the direction to go to get right on top of the Huns.'

We were both anxious to see in daylight the place we had been in last night. We found the body of a dead German, and remembered how we had both crawled over him the night before. We were taking chances to be out there in daylight, but

we both felt it was worth it. This place would be familiar to us now in the dark. We crawled up towards the wire in front of the Hun post, but were soon seen, and had to scramble back quickly out of range of the bombs that began to come over.

When we got back to the N.C.O.'s I remarked to the sergeant in charge:

'Pete will go back with you and tell you anything you want to know; he will also give you a few wrinkles on blacking faces and equipment. Bring a party to headquarters at five o'clock to draw all the equipment and extra bombs and ammunition that we shall require. Have the party in the front line by eleven o'clock, and I will meet you there.' Turning to Pete I said, 'Come along to my dug-out at eight o'clock, Pete; I 'll be ready by then.'

Promptly at eight o'clock Pete reported to me, his face literally coal black.

'How on earth did you get your face as black as that, Pete?' I asked.

'Burnt cork, sir; nothing finer.'

'Can you make my face as black as that? I 'm afraid mine looks very patchy at present.'

In a few minutes Pete had made me look as undesirable as himself.

'What are you doing with the two haversacks?'

'Bombs, sir, ten in each.'

'You must be expecting a real battle tonight, Pete.'

'It will be if I can make it one, sir.'

'Well, we had better get a move on, Pete; we don't want to keep the boys waiting.'

We found them all there ready and waiting. I checked over each man's equipment.

'You take the first two men out to that shell-hole, Pete, and I 'll bring the remainder out to you—two at a time.'

Pete at once started out, accompanied by the two men, and a few minutes later I took the next two along. It was slow and difficult work. After passing our block we crawled on our stomachs for the twenty yards or so we had to go. We were then in a huge shell-hole only a few feet from the German wire. The last three men I took out into a shell-hole on the left side of the communication trench. I then rejoined the twelve men on the right side, and proceeded to get all ready for shooting the rifle grenades. It was ten minutes to one when

all was in readiness, and I crawled over to Pete and whispered:

'A good night for the show, Pete.' (It was not too dark and there was a slight drizzle.)

'Yes, sir; I believe we shall surprise them to-night. Shall we have another look at the fellow who fired at us last night?'

'Yes, we can see if he is still there.'

We crawled up into the wire. He was there, head and shoulders showing above the outline of the trench. We chuckled at the thought of the surprise he was going to get, when apparently he heard us and fired; but not *at* us. No doubt to reassure himself, I thought. I laid my hand on Pete's arm, the signal to remain perfectly still. For two or three minutes we scarcely breathed, and then quietly wriggled out of the wire and rejoined our party.

A perfect stillness reigned; it was the time when the activities of opposing armies are at their lowest. But for an occasional flare-light, no one would have guessed that legions of armed men were facing each other across that narrow strip of land known as No Man's Land. It was chilly, and we shivered a little with the cold. The boys

lay there very quiet—scarcely breathing. I looked at my watch—it was time!

Suddenly and without warning, the eerie menacing stillness was violently broken with the screaming sounds of hundreds of shells. It was deafening, tremendous! Our bombardment had begun. Shrapnel was bursting low and just in front of us; we could hear the whang of the shrapnel bullets and the deafening roar of bursting high explosives. Myriads of coloured lights—all flashing back their messages—were sent up from the enemy lines, illuminating the sky. To the uninitiated it was terrifying, nerve-racking. I knew some of the boys were new to this kind of thing so crawled round amongst them.

'Don't worry, boys, it's all our stuff. It won't half put the wind up him; he 'll be scared stiff when he sees us piling in on top of him.'

I then went over to Pete, who sat on the edge of the shell-hole, his eyes shining in the darkness with excitement, his fingers nervously clasping his revolver.

'Is it time yet, sir?' he whispered.

'Not yet, Pete, another couple of minutes.'

At last the luminous figures on my watch tell me the time is up.

'All right, Pete, get ready.' Then turning to the boys behind, I called:

'Fire your rifle grenades!' They did. 'Come on, Pete, I 'm going with you! Come on, boys!' I shouted. Pete and I sprang up together. We saw them lined up waiting for us as we stumbled forward entangled in the wire. Suddenly there were several blinding explosions at our very feet and the wicked rasping noise of the machine gun in front of us.

Pete clutched my arm and cried:

'I'm hit, sir,' and fell, mortally wounded. I reached down and grasped his hand.

'Hit badly, Pete, boy?' But he did not answer, he was already dead.

All about me there was a succession of blinding explosions and men were crying out in pain. That mass of wire on each side of the block was proving to be an impenetrable barrier. I ran a little to the right. I braced myself up, ran forward and took a flying leap over the wire. I just cleared it, staggered forward a few steps, and then hurled myself head first on top of a Hun who was just levelling his rifle at me.

I crashed to the bottom of a trench seven feet deep, with a startled Hun underneath me. In crashing into the Hun my steel helmet came down bang on to my face, and took away the tip of my nose. At the same time I saw myriads of dancing lights. The strap of my helmet had been at the back of my head, so the helmet was now dangling in front of my face. I lay breathing heavily with my right elbow sticking in the stomach of the Hun underneath me, who lay gasping—for I had knocked the wind clean out of him. I still retained a firm grip on my revolver, my finger on the trigger. I peeped over the rim of my dangling steel helmet and saw the figure of a big Hun gaily advancing upon me, the point of his bayonet about two feet from my throat. I promptly pulled the trigger; he gave a gurgling sound and sank down in a heap, his rifle and bayonet clattering to the bottom of the trench. The man underneath me, no doubt desperately startled by the exploding revolver, violently came to life and started throwing his arms around. It was no time for polite argument, so I pressed the muzzle of my revolver into him and pulled the trigger. I scrambled to my

feet and adjusted my helmet just as another Hun came rushing along towards me. I let go with my revolver; he gave a howl of pain, turned around and ran. Being a great believer in the demoralising effect of noise I ran yelling after him. There were quite a few Huns in that trench, and soon the bombs began to fly about. I had a couple with me so let fly with mine. More bombs came over; and I had to back up a little to get out of range. I was beginning to feel a little lonely and worried—for that machine gun was still firing—when at last one of my men came up to me.

'Give me your bombs, quick,' I said, 'and go back for some more.'

He handed me three bombs. I ran forward and threw them, forcing the Huns back along the trench. Back they came again, following the bombs with a mad rush towards me. I used my revolver with effect and they scampered back again, just as the man I had sent came rushing up with bombs. I grabbed two—ran forward and threw them, following close up with my revolver. I ran into six Huns, shot two of them, when the remainder turned round and threw up their hands. A few yards beyond I saw them

pulling down the machine gun. I called upon the man behind me to look after the prisoners, pushed my way past them in time to see the men with the machine gun disappear into a dug-out. I called back for a mobile charge and waited. It was two or three minutes before a man came staggering along with one—pulled the pin and threw it down the dug-out. A few seconds later the air was filled with flying débris. I leave to the imagination what happened to the Huns and the machine gun. Looking back, I saw the red flares—the recall signal—burning. I got back to find that Pete's body had been carried into our trench. The next day, and for two succeeding days, I suffered from what is popularly known as 'a stiff neck,' which will explain why it was the Hun lay winded underneath me.

Some weeks later the C.O. sent for me.

'M'Kean,' he said, 'I wish to congratulate you heartily on being awarded the Victoria Cross.'

I felt rather staggered and bewildered.

'Thank you, sir,' I replied—and that was all I could say.

X

THE WARNING WHISTLE

WE all felt it was the beginning of the end, though none of us guessed just how near the end was. After participating in a record advance, we were hustled north to deliver another of those ' hammer blows ' that brought fame and final victory to the British Army. We were not lucky enough to get in at the beginning. The show had been going a full twenty-four hours before the shells began to shake themselves out around us, and we were tired, too, with long night-marches and very little rest during the day-time. The last day of our move was spent in train and bus, to be followed by another night-march. Seeing that the day's train journey was preceded by a night-march, this combination of activities found us pretty tired at the end of them all.

Very soon after daylight, after not more than three hours' sleep, I was given instructions to proceed forward with my scouts for a reconnaissance of the area we were to move up to that night. It was ground captured only the previous day. When we arrived there we were well on the fringe of the battle raging in front of us. The long string of ambulances and walking wounded testified to the severity of the fight; and the columns of bedraggled though smiling and happy prisoners also testified to the success we had gained.

We found the area allotted to us, and studied the best route, having respect both to its shortness and *safety* (for the shortest way was very seldom the safest). With seven or eight hundred men to bring along we had to give a good deal of thought to the route to be used.

We arrived back only in time to get a bite to eat and start off again as guides. It was dark and raining, and all the routes were jammed with traffic—ammunition columns dashing up with shells for the guns; more guns going forward; engineers and infantry all packed in along the roads. With motor lorries, ambulances, empty ammuni-

tion wagons, all coming back, it was really marvellous how anybody ever got anywhere. The rain came down pitilessly. Our accommodation in the trenches was very limited, and more than half of the boys had no shelter from the rain.

Early the following morning the C.O. sent for me.

'We are expecting to go into the line tonight, M'Kean. You had better take a couple of your scouts and go forward to the headquarters of the brigade in the line. They may be able to give you some information about the relief. Here is a new map that has just arrived; you can take this with you and mark on it any information you can get up there.'

I got two scouts and went up forward. They were shelling heavily all the routes of approach, for most of them were jammed with guns galloping forward to new positions. Arrived at brigade headquarters, I found a small dug-out crammed full of people on the same job as myself, the quest for information. I squeezed myself in and had the good fortune to catch the eye of the brigade-major.

'Come on in, M'Kean,' he called out.

I went forward very willingly.

'Now, what is it you want to know?'

I explained.

'Yes, we have had notification that your brigade will relieve us to-night, but we cannot give you any information regarding the probable positions of the battalions, for we are attacking at 12.30 to-day.' (It was then just after eleven). 'If all the objectives are gained at the stated time we shall have pretty complete information for you. The best thing you can do, though, is to wait here and see how things go.'

So I waited. I looked outside and saw the artillery galloping up and getting into position for putting over the barrage for the attack at 12.30. Ammunition was also being rushed up to the guns. In brigade headquarters everything was bustle and hurry. Promptly at 12.30 every gun around the place opened up with a bang. About two thousand yards ahead we could see the white puffs of the exploding shrapnel. From the little hillock we stood on we could also see our infantry climb out of the trench and go forward—being lost to view in the smoke of the Hun barrage. The battle was on! Around us the gunners worked fever-

ishly to feed the smoking guns. In brigade headquarters there was tense excitement and much speculation. The Hun was stubbornly resisting at this point, and scores of machine guns swept the ground over which our men had to advance. Conflicting reports from observers began to arrive, at one moment raising our hopes high, at the next dashing them to the ground. At three o'clock no authentic news of the progress of the attack had arrived. I could not wait any longer. The battalion was nearly four miles away, and I must get back to it, for it had to be brought up that night to relieve the attacking battalions.

When the head of the battalion arrived at brigade headquarters, one hour before midnight, information from the front line was both scanty and contradictory. There had been heavy fighting and severe casualties; one battalion had lost all its officers excepting the medical officer, and he was in command of the battalion. Messages had been sent out to the attacking battalions asking them to have guides report to take in the relief, but at midnight no guides had arrived. The C.O. decided to go forward.

Somewhere in front of the village we

would pass through we expected to find what remained of the attacking battalions. With scouts in front, the battalion moved off in quest of the units it was to relieve. In less than an hour we came to the supporting battalion, the officers of which, as far as their information went, believed themselves to be in the front line. Upon inquiring for the whereabouts of the two battalions we were to relieve, we were informed that all they knew about them was that they had attacked that afternoon and that nothing had been heard of them since. It seemed inconceivable that two whole battalions had been literally wiped out. *Some one* must be out there in front. The C.O. gave orders for us to relieve this battalion. When this was completed I got hold of the scout corporal, and we started off in search of the missing battalions. After stumbling around in the darkness for half-an-hour we found three men in a shell-hole roughly organised for defence. Two belonged to one of the units we were to relieve and one to the other unit.

'What has happened, boys, that you are separated from your battalions,' I asked.

'The machine-gun fire was so bad, sir,'

one of them answered, 'that we were forced back, and all our officers have been killed or wounded.'

'Where are the rest of your battalions?'

'Scattered around in shell-holes, sir.'

'I suppose you 've had a lot of casualties?'

'Yes, sir, there are not many of us left.'

'Well, you can wait here. As soon as we find the whereabouts of the remainder of your battalions we 'll bring some men along to relieve you.'

This last piece of information seemed to give great satisfaction, and they readily indicated the direction where we might find the survivors of the battle. And so we continued our search, finding a couple of men in one shell-hole and half a dozen in another.

I went back to our reserve company, explained the matter to the company commander, and he agreed to bring his company forward to relieve the men out in front.

It was almost daylight before this was completed. When daylight came it was found that our left flank was 'up in the air'—in other words we were not in touch with the battalion on our left, which left a gap (how wide we could not tell) between us.

I started out alone to find the whereabouts of this battalion. After many narrow escapes from being 'winged,' due to the attentions of Boche snipers, and also after travelling almost eight hundred yards, I finally 'made connection.' Now that the gap was known to both battalions we could arrange to have it looked after. The problem now was—how far away was the Boche? Once again it was the work of the scouts to find out, so, losing no time, I took a scout with me and started off in the direction of the Boche line. An old trench ran out in this direction, and we went out along this. It was shallow and we always had a good view on both sides of it. We expected to go two or three hundred yards before encountering any Boche, but this distance was passed and we had gone quite six hundred yards before a single rifle shot rang out from a point about three hundred yards in front of us.

'Well,' I remarked to the scout, 'I don't see the sense of us holding a line nearly a thousand yards from the Boche. If *we* don't push forward *he* soon will, at least as soon as he finds out how far we are away from him.'

Just then we were attracted by a loud whirring noise overhead, and a camouflaged aeroplane with the markings of the Maltese cross on it swooped down to within a hundred feet of us. It was a German single-seater scout. The pilot looked out over the side, circled round once, and then headed off in the direction of Hun-land.

'There he goes,' I said; 'he 's seen us and thinks we are holding this ground. I don't see why we shouldn't be holding it, do you?'

'No, sir; it will make a good jumping-off place for the next attack.'

'Yes, exactly. I think we had better hurry back now and recommend pushing out some outposts to hold the ground.'

So we returned to headquarters and reported the situation. The C.O. sent instructions to the forward companies to push out outposts, and in this way our line was advanced six hundred yards without a casualty!

In the afternoon we received information that the British troops on our right were going to attack to clear out a village and seize some high ground. We were also informed that one of our brigades would

attack through us at daybreak on the following day, assembling for the attack at our newly-established outpost line.

About four o'clock in the afternoon a heavy bombardment on our right brought us up out of our dug-out to watch the progress of the attack on our right. The village to be attacked was simply smothered with shells. It was two or three hours later that we heard of the complete success of the operation. The attack had been pushed home and an advance made beyond the objectives, thus leaving the Huns in front of us in a narrow and dangerous salient.

'Would the Huns wait for our attack?' was the question worrying the staff. It seemed feasible that they would not. If not, then an attack on the grand scale would be a mistake. If they had evacuated the trenches they were holding then we could quietly take possession of them and so avoid a useless expenditure of ammunition, and, possibly, many precious human lives. Now, who was to find out if the Hun was still holding on?—the scout, of course—so it came as no surprise to us when about eleven o'clock that night instructions came

to 'send out scouts to ascertain if the enemy is still holding the trenches (naming them) opposite you.'

Another prospective night's rest vanished. A few minutes after receiving this message I was out, in the blackest night imaginable, on my way to interview the Huns, with five scouts stumbling along after me. Our progress forward was helped considerably by the fitful glare from a burning village behind the Hun lines. Occasionally it flared up, showing up objects around us with startling and disturbing distinctness. We reached the line of our deserted outposts, which had been withdrawn so as not to interfere with the assembling of the attacking battalions. A shallow trench ran out in the direction of the Hun lines. Revolver in hand, I led the way along the trench. The dull red glow of the burning village acted as our guide. From what we had seen in our daylight patrol I knew that the Hun, if he was still holding on, was somewhere not very far in front of us. Wherever he was, we must startle him into life: it was the old business of making contact. Cautiously and with every sense keenly alert, I pushed along the shallow

trench followed by four faithful fighting scouts. The trench, after about two hundred yards, became deeper and showed signs of recent use. This was significant. Then the glare from the burning village died away and we were left to grope our way along in the black darkness. So dark was it that I had to feel my way forward along the side of the trench. There was no sound save the occasional shriek and whine of a shell passing overhead. Then something seemed to hit my knees and I fell headlong into the trench. I was upon my feet instantly; but only just in time to prevent a scout from following headlong after me. Stretched tightly across the trench were two plain wires, the first about twelve inches from the bottom of the trench and the second about nine inches above the first.

'Step over the wires,' I whispered back.

I now went forward feeling with both hands and feet. About ten yards further along I came to another plain single wire about three feet from the bottom of the trench.

'Get underneath the wire,' I whispered to the scout behind me.

Another ten yards and I ran into two more wires, one about two feet from the bottom of the trench and the other a foot above it. We safely negotiated these and continued along the trench for a few more yards. I stopped suddenly. I could have sworn I heard a faint whistle. I listened intently for a few minutes but no other sound reached me. A few more yards and again a whistle—a little more distinct this time. I turned to the scout behind me.

'Did you hear that?' I asked.

'Yes, sir, somebody whistled.'

'So I thought. Did you hear it before?'

'Yes, a few minutes ago I thought I heard it.'

I went silently and cautiously forward a few more yards, having, owing to the intense darkness, to feel my way along. I had the misfortune to touch some loose earth on the side of the trench. It only made a very slight noise, but promptly that warning whistle—much more distinct and closer—rang out again. Just then flames burst forth from the smouldering village, and I saw clearly outlined in front of me a huge mound of earth.

'Wait here,' I whispered back, and then,

crouching close to the side of the trench, I moved along until this mound towered above me. Another huge flame shot up from the village. I remained there, statuesque. Then that whistle again, loud, clear, and distinct—sounding almost at my elbow. Breathless, I waited for something to happen. There was a blinding flash a few yards from my face and a flare light shot up; it broke, throwing a bright white light over everything. I remained standing, but with an almost overpowering desire to turn and run. It seemed an eternity before I was once again enshrouded in darkness. I quietly withdrew until I rejoined the scouts.

'A few more yards,' I said, 'and I would have walked on top of them. They must be blind if they didn't see me. I 'm a bit suspicious of them. We 'll have to go back just as carefully as we came out.'

So, passing the scouts, I led the way back. It was nearly two o'clock when I got back to headquarters. I immediately wired the result of my patrol to brigade, using, of course, the camouflage language which the circumstances demanded.

The attack would be proceeded with at

4.40 that morning. I was curious about the defenders of that mound and was not at all loath to carry out the instructions I received about seven o'clock that morning to proceed ahead of a company sent up to support the attacking battalion.

The going forward was not to be without incident, for no sooner had I started ahead with my scouts than a swarm of Fokkers, not less than twenty-five in number, came circling overhead. They opened up with their machine guns and the noise was terrific. Bullets began to patter around us, but we plodded steadily ahead across the open, not a man being hit. We at last reached the protection of the trench where we had to remain to await further orders. In crossing over I had noticed the mound of my previous adventure. It was now a few yards behind the trench we were in. I moved over towards it. Around it were the evidences of a fierce fight—I counted twelve dead Huns, including an officer. Just then a sergeant of the attacking battalion came came along.

'Looks as if you met with opposition here, sergeant,' I remarked.

'We certainly did, sir; my platoon lost

eighteen good men taking this nest here. We captured eight machine guns and eighteen prisoners, besides what you see lying around dead, sir.'

So *these* were the people who had almost had me as a visitor a few hours before. I 'm afraid if there had been any argument they would almost have had the best of it!

XI

A BAYONET CHARGE

THE incident of this story follows quickly upon the episode of 'The Warning Whistle.'

At this time each day was so crowded with excitement and activity that it is difficult to select any particular incident which stands out strikingly above all others. They were days of hurried movement and ceaseless activity; attacks were conceived and launched successfully in the space of a few hours. The thorough and methodical gathering in of information, which gave such scope and variety to the activities of the scout, was abandoned. Attack followed upon attack with breathless rapidity; every success was exploited to the utmost, and every local reverse was speedily overcome by the immediate launching of a new and successful attack.

We were for ever on the move, and as all movement of bodies of troops was carried out in the night, it was the work of the scouts to ' spy out the land ' in the daytime, and to guide the troops forward in the night. The word ' relief ' had become a nightmare to us, and it gave me no particular emotions of joy and pleasure when the C.O. sent for me and informed me that there would be a relief that night; I was to report to X headquarters to arrange details and take my scouts forward to reconnoitre routes. It was a dirty business, for the forward area was being heavily shelled, and before we returned two of my scouts were wounded, one of them rather badly.

I reported to X headquarters and found a colonel in charge of the relief arrangements.

' Now, my boy,' he said, ' you will find things rather mixed up, and your unit will have to relieve elements of three battalions. There was severe fighting this morning, and we have not yet got complete information of the exact whereabouts of all units.'

Things *were* mixed up, and the prospects of a smooth and speedy relief looked very

remote. However, on paper, things looked fair, and with a bit of luck we might pull through successfully. I felt slightly optimistic when I returned to headquarters. I was, however, quite unprepared for the drastic alterations in the arrangements.

'More alterations, M'Kean,' the C.O. informed me as soon as I reported; 'only one company will go into the front line instead of the two you have already arranged for.'

'But what about the other one, sir? I have already arranged for guides to meet them.'

'Oh, you 'll have to find a place for them to-night; put them a few yards behind the front line company. In any case they will have to go up in support, for we are attacking at five o'clock in the morning.'

'Attacking at five o'clock in the morning, sir!'

'Yes, a local attack to establish a 'jumping-off' place for the big attack on the following day.'

The C.O. then pointed out to me on a map the plan for the attack. The Huns were stubbornly holding on to a high dominating hillock known as the 'Crows'

Nest.' This was to be cleared, and the attack pushed beyond it.

'What about our arrangements for to-night, sir? It is too late to alter them now.'

'You 'll have to go ahead yourself, M'Kean, and get them in the best way you can. We must be in position to attack before five o'clock.'

It promised to be a most interesting night. Shortly before midnight I arrived at the rendezvous where the guides from the front line battalions were to meet us—the junction of a road and trench. The guides were to be there at eleven o'clock, but none were in sight when I arrived. At any moment I expected to see the first company of our battalion arrive, and I had but the vaguest idea of where they had to go. Who would arrive first, the guides or the battalion? To keep a battalion on that road was to ask for casualties, for already the road had been heavily shelled. But the guides appeared first—about half an hour after midnight. I found the officer in charge of the guides.

'How long will it take to get to the front line from here?' I asked.

'Not less than an hour.'

'The arrangements have been changed, and only one company goes into the line.'

'Where does the other company go?'

'They 'll have to get into shell-holes behind the front line; we are attacking at five o'clock.'

'Attacking! well, you 've certainly got to hustle to get into position.'

'I know we have; the only thing for it is for the second company to keep touch with the first.'

'Yes, that 's what you 'll have to do.'

The prospect of two companies, in single file, having to keep in touch, was a most distressing one. One o'clock arrived and still no sign of the battalion. Just then a salvo of shells came bouncing around us and we had to scuttle for cover. It was exactly 1.45 A.M. before the head of the battalion arrived at the rendezvous. The guides joined them, and they continued on to the front line. The second company followed closely behind. I saw the company commander.

'You 'll have to keep touch with the company in front; there are no guides for you.'

'All right, Mac, we 'll see to that.'

I then hurried on to the head of the battalion and came up alongside of the company commander.

'Did you see the runners, Pat, with the operation orders for the attack?' I asked.

'No, we didn't see them.'

'That 's unfortunate, for they are not likely to arrive in time now; they 've missed you, I guess. Did you hear the news?'

'I heard that we are attacking at five o'clock in the morning. Do you know any of the details?'

'I have a general idea. We advance about fifteen hundred yards and dig in. It is a creeping barrage, but I don't know how fast it moves—about one hundred yards in three minutes, I should think. Just as soon as the barrage drops down we hop over.'

Just then our conversation was interrupted by the cry, 'lost connection in the rear.'

The company commander halted and called back, 'Pass the word when everybody is closed up.' We resumed our conversation.

'Have you any idea of the direction we go, Mac?' asked Pat.

'Roughly due east,' I answered. 'We skirt along on the north side of the Crows' Nest and, as far as I can remember, we cross two trenches which the Hun is holding.'

'I suppose this is only a kind of local attack?'

'Yes, the Crows' Nest has changed hands twice already. This time we intend to go well beyond it to establish a jumping-off place.'

Just then the word was passed along. 'All closed up,' so we moved forward again. It was a rough, slow journey. In places the trench was blown in and we had to climb out and back in again. Then we came to a road running through the trench. The guide halted.

'A machine gun sweeps this road, sir,' he said to the company commander, 'we must hurry across.'

'All right,' answered the company commander, 'lead on.' Then he turned to the man behind him, 'Pass the word back to hurry across the road.'

The next obstacle was an old shelter in the trench. We had to climb first of all

through a window and then out through a door in the other end. Lightly equipped as we were, it was no easy job to get through that window; for the men it was almost impossible. After getting through we went forward some distance and halted. I looked at my watch. It was three o'clock.

'I say, Pat, we 've got to do a big hustle to get that relief completed and in position by five o'clock!'

'Yes, we have, Mac, but we can't go ahead and leave half of the men behind.'

We moved forward again and at last reached the front line.

'Wait here,' said the guide, 'and I 'll bring our company commander along.'

He returned soon afterwards, bringing the company commander with him.

'Glad you have arrived,' said the company commander; 'we 'll be darned glad to get out. Just let your men lead on. I have a sergeant here who will go ahead. Come round here and I 'll tell you all I know about things.' We followed him. 'I suppose you know we are attacking at five o'clock?' I inquired.

'No! that 's the first I 've heard about it. We attacked up here yesterday.'

'Did the Boche put up a fight?'

'Not much of a one here: we cleared the whole of this trench out, took sixty prisoners and only had three casualties.'

'Well, that sounds cheering anyway.'

'We 've just taken six prisoners,' continued the company commander. 'A party of them came out to establish a post; one of my officers saw them, took a few men with him and attacked them. They killed three, took six prisoners, and the rest of the crowd scattered. The prisoners haven't come along yet, but they should be here soon. We 'll detain a couple of them and question them; we might get some useful information for you fellows.'

'Thanks,' said Pat. 'Could you point out the Crows' Nest from here?'

'Sure, easily,' replied the company commander. 'Do you see where those 'heavies' have just landed?'

'Yes, over to the right,' said Pat.

'Well, that 's the Crows' Nest; they 've simply smothered that place to-night; been dropping "heavies" into it for the last five or six hours. I don't think there 'll be any one left alive over there to give you any trouble.'

A few minutes later two prisoners arrived, one wounded, who was being carried on the back of the unwounded prisoner. They both were mere boys. They were Alsatians and spoke French.

'I have a sergeant here, a French-Canadian, who speaks French,' said Pat; 'he 'll ask him all the questions we wish to have answered.'

'Righto,' said the company commander, 'ask him first of all what division he belongs to, and how old he is?'

The sergeant put these questions to the unwounded prisoner.

'The 123rd Division, sir; he is eighteen years of age.'

'Does he like the Germans?'

'No, sir, he hates them, and says he 's glad he 's a prisoner. He says the Germans hate the Alsatians.'

'How long has he been in the German army?'

'Six months, sir.'

'What were they doing out there to-night when we attacked them?'

'They came out under an officer to establish an outpost, sir; they didn't know that we were so close to them.'

'Are they expecting an attack?'

'Yes, sir, he says they 're always expecting an attack now. He also says that they received orders to attack us at eleven o'clock last night, but the order was cancelled, as they had no bombs, and very little ammunition.'

'Are they getting enough to eat?'

'No, sir, he says that they 've had no rations or water for two days. The ration parties go out but never return. Our shelling of the back areas is causing heavy casualties and they are unable to get up supplies.'

'Have they been having many casualties?'

'Yes, sir, he says his company have been in the line three days and have lost eighty men out of one hundred and ten.'

The company commander turned to Pat: 'I think that 's about all we want to know. Is there anything else you would like to ask him?'

'Yes; ask him if the two trenches opposite are heavily manned.'

'Yes, sir,' said the sergeant, 'he says they have quite a lot of machine guns in them.'

'All right,' said Pat, 'I'm satisfied with that information.'

The two prisoners then continued their way out. The company that had been relieved started to file past us. Our second company then came along, went along the front line, then climbed out of the trench and went back a few yards into shell-holes. Pat and myself then went along the front line.

'Can you give me a job, Pat?' I asked, 'for I intended to go over in some capacity or other.'

'All right, Mac; one of my platoons hasn't an officer, and I 'd be glad if you would take it over.'

'Righto, lead me to it. By the way, we haven't much time to waste, Pat; it 's 4.30 now—only half an hour before we go over.'

I found the platoon sergeant of the platoon I was attached to.

'Take me round amongst the boys in the platoon, sergeant; I want to have a little chat with them, for I 'm going over with you.'

'All right, come this way, sir.'

I found that about half a dozen of them had only joined the battalion that night, and it was their first experience of warfare. Rather a rough introduction I thought.

'Now, boys,' I said, 'as soon as our barrage drops down I 'll hop over the top, and I want every man-jack of you to follow. You 'll feel a bit shaky when our barrage drops down, for there 'll be such an ungodly noise; but just watch it—keep close behind the bursting shells, but don't get underneath them. It will be nothing but a walk over if you do this.'

The boys were now only impatient for the fun to commence. At ten minutes to five the faint grey light of dawn appeared, the last that many a brave lad was to see. But I am sure that no such thoughts saddened or daunted the brave hearts of the boys around me. We laughed and joked and lighted our cigarettes. I was alternately climbing up and down from the firing step. At three minutes to five the dim outline of the Crows' Nest became visible. Our heavies were still crashing into it, and a pall of smoke hung about it. I pulled out my revolver, passed the word along to get ready, and then sat on the parapet waiting. Then it came, that fiendishly destructive, but friendly barrage of ours! The shells screamed and shrieked overhead and burst into flame in front of us. I jumped up.

'Come on, boys,' I yelled, and started forward.

The light was still very faint. Behind me I saw the dim shadowy figures of men following me; in front of me, that wall of flame and iron. The German barrage now came down, mingling with ours. The noise was deafening, but above it all rang out the voices of our boys, yelling and cheering as they came straggling forward. The more enthusiastic and adventurous rushed past me.

'Come back,' I yell after them; 'do you want to get into the barrage?' They hesitate, then come back; but one party, more adventurous than the rest, turned back too late. One of our own shells bursts in amongst them, and when the smoke clears away only two of them come limping back. We wait a minute for the barrage to lift; the boys continue to shout and cheer, and we move forward upon a wave of excitement. During a pause one boy rushed up to me:

'Have a cigarette, sir?'

'Yes, thanks, I will. Have you a match?'

'Yes, sir, light up.'

The barrage lifts and we surge forward again in the semi-darkness. The white outline of a trench shows up a few yards in front; the barrage has just lifted from it.

'Come on, boys,' I shout, and there is a wild rush forward. We clamber over the wire and meet the Huns climbing out of the trench. 'Kamerad! Kamerad!' they shout hysterically. Laughingly some of the boys give them a poke with their bayonets, and the Huns scurry wildly past us. We jump the trench and follow the barrage. Everybody is shouting encouragement to the other fellow. The light is getting better. Through the smoke of the barrage I see the outline of a second trench. As we move up closer I see several round significant objects lying on the parapet—machine guns! If they get only one of them into action the result will be catastrophe! Just then one of our officers came up. Although yelling at the top of his voice I barely heard him say:

'What about a bayonet charge?'

'Yes,' I shouted back, 'the very thing.'

'All right, I have a whistle here; when I blow it we 'll all rush forward.'

'Righto, we 'll be with you.'

'A bayonet charge,' I yelled, 'everybody for a bayonet charge.'

'A bayonet charge! a bayonet charge!' was the cry everywhere around me. Some of the boys laughingly felt the points of their bayonets.

'All ready,' I shouted.

'Yes, sir,' came back the reply.

I signalled to the other officer—he blew his whistle and we made a wild rush forward, uttering the most weird, blood-curdling cries. A solitary machine gun spat out for a few seconds, and two or three bombs were thrown from the trench, and then we were on top of them! The Huns made a brief effort at resistance, but it was short-lived. Then they shrieked for mercy—but it was too late! We collected eight machine guns, enough, if bravely handled, to wipe out a whole battalion. Then we continued our triumphant progress. It was almost daylight now. We followed up our barrage until it ceased to move forward and became protective.

'Come on; string out everybody and dig in,' I yelled.

Pat came along.

'Hullo, Pat, how 's it going?'

'Fine, but we 've got to dig in now.'

'Yes, we 'll soon have everybody working hard.'

A few minutes later I looked over to the left, where a Boche machine-gun nest was still in action. As the boys closed in on them they began to waver. Then I saw a Boche officer do a characteristically dirty German trick. Only one gun was firing spasmodically; our men were working their way forward, running from shell-hole to shell-hole. I watched it all from a flank from where I could plainly see everything that happened. I saw men manning three other guns, though they were not firing a shot. The reason for this soon became evident. The Boche officer seized hold of a man and pushed him out in front of the trench. The man seemed most unwilling to go. The officer then threatened him with a revolver. Then the meaning of all this by-play flashed upon me as the Hun came stumbling forward with his hands over his head. At the same time two Huns got out of the trench and ran back. It was a bluff—a trap! I held my breath as I watched events develop. Would our men get up and go forward believing that the

Huns had given up the fight? If so, then those three guns would all open up on them. I watched and waited in breathless suspense, and then I gave a shout of joy as several rifles spurted fire, and the surrendering Hun toppled over dead. The ruse had failed!

Our shell-fire was now diminishing, and we were all busy digging in. The position was a most unenviable one. We were being enfiladed with machine guns from a flank. Moving from shell-hole to shell-hole was dangerous business. I saw Pat go down with a bullet wound in the leg, and an officer with me received a bullet through the head. Then a Hun plane came over and provided us with a thrill. He saucily circled overhead, swooping down until his machine almost touched the ground. He outstayed his welcome, though. One of our Lewis gunners fired a short burst and Mr. Hun came crashing to earth to the accompaniment of wild cheers from the troops.

Then the Fokker 'circus' devoted their attention to us in a rather mean fashion. About twenty-five of them came circling overhead at a height of about five hundred feet and calmly unloaded their baggage of

bombs upon us. For the space of a few minutes we were all extremely uncomfortable. The last and most exciting incident in a day of incidents was when a runner, following behind me as I ran from shell-hole to shell-hole, had the few bristles on his upper lip (which he designated by the rather ambitiously descriptive term of a moustache) very cleanly shot off by a machine-gun bullet! It was literally the closest shave that I had ever seen—either inside or outside of a barber's shop! Later in the day I was back in headquarters, eating a meal that had been postponed for twenty-four hours, reciting, with very great satisfaction, the details of our hurricane and successful bayonet charge.

XII

CAPTURING A VILLAGE

ON the night of the day of the bayonet charge, instructions came through for the big attack of the following day. It was an attack ambitiously planned.

First of all, the famous Wotan Switch was to be broken through, and then we were to sweep forward, over-running several villages and trench systems, until we finally reached the Canal Du Nord. Battalion was to ' leap-frog ' battalion; brigade to ' leap-frog ' brigade, and finally division was to ' leap-frog ' division! At the end of the day the first attacking wave would be left miles behind! Behind the attacking infantry were legions of cavalry and swarms of motor machine guns, which were to add the final touch to the discomfiture of the Hun. Tanks were to attack with the infantry; low-flying aeroplanes would also

be there to assist. Before our gaze would be spread the whole panorama of battle: the might of the British Army would irresistibly sweep forward, driving the Hun before it, recapturing the soil of glorious, suffering France!

A spirit of confidence prevailed everywhere. Victory was as certain twelve hours before the attack as it was twelve hours after it.

Our battalion was to leap-frog another battalion in our brigade who were to start the ball rolling. The ' kick-off ' was to be shortly after five o'clock, and we came into the game at eight o'clock. The C.O. explained the details of the attack to me. We were to attack through a fairly large village, and then sweep on through a wood just beyond it. The depth of the advance was to be a little over two miles.

' You will take your scouts up with you, M'Kean,' the C.O. concluded. ' After we get through the village and into the open I want your scouts to push ahead of the battalion, the same way as practised for open fighting. Here are a number of message maps on which they will send back reports. Distribute these amongst them

before the attack starts. Impress upon them all the necessity of frequent reports. We want to know exactly what the situation is in front.'

I saw the scouts, distributed the maps, and explained the details of the attack to them.

At six o'clock the next morning, almost an hour after the attack had started, I left headquarters at the head of ten scouts—moving forward in single file. As far as the eye could see were (what we called) little 'blobs' of men moving forward. Spread out in this fashion, they lessened the risks of sustaining heavy casualties, a single shell rarely claiming more than half a dozen victims. Already, behind us we could see some of the artillery limbering up ready to move forward. The smoke of bursting shells ahead indicated our barrage. Coming back out of the battle were many cheery walking wounded, and swarms of prisoners, many of them without escort, came trooping past. It was a scene of animated movement, and it showed that all our confidence had been justified—for the famous Wotan Switch was battered, broken, and lost for ever to the Germans. As we ap-

proached it, we were amazed at the masses of wire protecting it: three distinct belts averaging forty feet in depth, before the first trench was reached! In other words, there were one hundred and twenty feet of dense wire entanglements between us and their front line trench, and our men went through it! The trench was a first class one, deep and well constructed, with immense dug-outs, and an abundance of concrete machine-gun emplacements. It was the dug-outs that had been Fritz's undoing—he had stayed down in them until invited by our men to come out and surrender. If he had ever shown the same bravery in fighting as he showed alacrity in surrendering, the war would not yet have been won. Here and there we saw a dead German—but very few. The bulk of them preferred shameless surrender to heroic dying.

In between his front and support line was another continuous mass of wire, flattened out in places by our tanks—some of which we saw moving leisurely around ahead of us. As we watched their unconcerned rambling movements it gave a touch of unreality to the whole scene. It seemed

impossible to realise that a tremendous decisive battle was being fought. The realism was soon disturbingly evident to us all again though, as his heavy ' crumps ' began to bounce around us.

We at last arrived at the Hun support line, where our battalion was assembling to carry on the attack. In front of this line was a protective barrage of ' heavies,' most of them falling in the village we had to attack, which lay in a hollow about three hundred yards in front of us. Leading down to the village was a sunken road. I got into the trench at a point where this road cut through it. A few men belonging to the battalion which had led off the attack were sitting around having a smoke. I inquired if any of them had seen men of my own battalion around.

' Yes, sir, they 're gone.'

' Gone! gone where? '

' They are carrying on with the attack, sir; they left here more than five minutes ago.'

I looked at my watch—ten minutes to eight and the attack was not to take place until eight.

' Come on, boys,' I said to the scouts,

'the battalion is out in front somewhere. I 'm pretty sure they are not in that village; if they are, they are having a warm time.'

We climbed out of the trench and went a few yards down the road when, looking to my left, I saw one of our company commanders, with a few men, sitting in a shell-hole. I at once hurried over to him.

'Hullo, John,' I said, 'where 's your company?'

'Scattered around somewhere, Mac. We started too soon and got into our own barrage. I thought we were too soon, but I saw them moving forward on the right so I went ahead, thinking that my watch might be wrong.'

'No, it 's only ten minutes to eight now, and that barrage of heavies doesn't lift from the village until eight o'clock.'

'Yes, that 's what the operation order says.'

'How many of your company have you around here?'

'Only headquarters—about twenty all told, including the headquarters' Lewis gun section.'

'Well, I have ten scouts with me; I don't

see why we can't have a shot at taking that village as soon as the barrage lifts. If we can only get in there right afterwards I don't think there 'll be much opposition.'

'Righto, Mac, I 'm game. As soon as it is eight o'clock we 'll push off.'

In the meantime our position was anything but an enviable one. The Boche, angry at losing his valuable and supposedly impregnable system of defences known as the Wotan Switch, was viciously pounding them with 5.9's. More than one came perilously close to us, in fact several just missed us by a matter of a few yards.

'I don't mind how soon eight o'clock comes around, John, do you?'

'Not at all, Mac, there are surely more peaceful places in France than this particular spot here.'

'Well, it only wants three minutes; what do you say if we gather the men together from the shell-holes and so be ready to move off prompt?'

'All right, we had better do that.'

A couple of minutes later between fifteen and twenty of us were standing together, when one unlucky 5.9 landed square in amongst us. I felt something hot, for all

the world like a hot cinder, go into my leg, and knew I was hit. The scout corporal who was with me fell on his face, killed instantly. When the smoke cleared away only two or three were left standing. John lay stretched out, hit in two places, while most of my scouts were casualties. I limped over to John.

'Badly hit?' I inquired.

'Only two chunks in me, I can't walk though. Not a very nice beginning for our attack.'

'No, but it 's eight o'clock and we must push off. I 'm hit in the leg but I can carry on for a little while.'

'Well, good luck, Mac.'

'Thanks,' I replied, 'don't worry about us; we 'll get on all right.'

I then detailed some men to bandage up the wounded and to see that they were all got out; collected the remnant, amounting to eight men and a Lewis gun, and went down the road to attack the village. As far as I could see we were the only ones moving, though I knew it would only be a question of minutes before reinforcements followed up. We had not gone far before we found some work to do. About one

hundred yards down the sunken road leading into the village we came to our first dug-out. I shouted down and there was instantly a chorus of 'Kamerads' from the depths of it. I trifled with my German:

'Kommen Sie up hier or we 'll shoot you verdamtt quick.'

'Ya! Ya!' came back a chorus of agreement, which was very gratifying to the pride I felt in the fluency of my German.

In a few seconds a German appeared scrambling up the dug-out steps, trying his best to get a footing on the broken woodwork and at the same time to keep his hands above his head in the approved style of the 'Kamerading' German. There was the bang of a rifle at my elbow and the Hun toppled backwards, and a chorus of shouts, shrieks, and moans came from the assembled Huns below. I turned and saw a scout standing with a smoking rifle in his hand and a broad, expansive smile on his face.

'Now you 've done it,' I exclaimed angrily, 'we'll never get those Huns out of that dug-out in a blue moon now. You can stay here and persuade them to come out, but you 'll not have to use such harsh methods.'

So, leaving another man with him, I went along to the next dug-out. After some little persuasion seven trembling Huns, with the fear of death in their eyes, trooped up and accepted with alacrity our invitation to hustle back along the road in the direction of our lines.

There were three more dug-outs to be 'mopped up' before we reached the village, so, being anxious to get into the village as quickly as possible, I left four men there to do the 'mopping up,' and pushed on, with a corporal and a scout, into the village.

Believing it to be unwise to follow the road directly into it, we branched off to the left, skirted round the back of a house, passed through an orchard, climbed over the débris of a broken-down wall, and found ourselves in the village square—with the village church opposite.

What happened now seems incredible. Looking out of the doors and windows of the houses facing on to the square were scores of scared-looking Huns! I gave a gasp of astonishment. This was certainly walking into trouble, I thought. For a moment I was dumbfounded, momentarily

expecting the Huns to open up on us—for we were frightfully outnumbered. For a few seconds we stood there and stared at one another. Then I started waving my arm wildly as though encouraging scores of men on my right and left to come forward.

'Come on, the old Fourteenth,' I shouted, 'walk into them! Come on, you 're the boys that can do it!' About fifty yards in front of me were two husky Huns watching me through the paneless windows of a fairly large house. One of them was a tall fellow, well over six feet, wearing a heavy black moustache and carrying his full load of equipment. Still shouting and waving my revolver over my head, I made a wild rush at him. He promptly turned, dropped his rifle, and ran for his life! This was the deciding act, the cue to the rest of the Huns. Their rifles clattered noisily, as they threw them as far from them as they could, then scrambled out of the houses and 'footed' it for all they were worth! I was soon in the midst of a mob of fleeing Huns, running as hard as they were, and keeping my eye on my particular quarry. Hampered as he was with his huge pack I soon caught up

to him, pulled him over, and stood flourishing my revolver over him.

'Kamerad! Kamerad!' he yelled piteously. I gave him a couple of healthy kicks, assisted him to his feet, gave him a parting kick and sent him scurrying back in the direction of our lines.

Once again with the Huns it was a case of 'follow my leader.' Seeing the tall one of the black moustache running wildly back towards our lines, the majority of them promptly turned round and followed him, while we stood by and calmly looked on. At least fifty Huns went past us. Looking around I could see, at a distance, scores more of them making frantic efforts to get away.

'Come on, boys,' I called to the two with me, 'let us cut them off.' We ran down a street leading out from the square for a distance of about seventy-five yards until we came to a main road running through the village. Turning to the left along this, we had only gone a few yards when we met a crowd of frightened looking Huns making a wild dash for freedom. We simply 'shooed' them back, and they ran as madly in the other direction. We kept

running up and down this road, meeting Huns endeavoring to escape down the side streets leading on to the road. In every direction we could see fleeing Huns, and it was a case of simply directing the traffic. Not one of them offered any opposition. Once we saw several dash round opposite sides of a house, and meet violently and unexpectedly. They scrambled to their feet and dashed off again in different directions. Panic wasn't the word for it! We couldn't believe it was a war—it was more like a pantomime! I couldn't help it, I just leaned up against a house and laughed—it was all so comical.

We had now a mob of running Huns behind us—at least two hundred, I calculated —and a mob fleeing in front of us. With many of them it was a toss up which way they ran, and with many others they seemed to have no idea of which way they were running; merely to be running seemed to satisfy them.

I remarked to the scout with me:

'Look here, none of our battalion have showed up yet, and we have a mob of Huns behind us. If they get wise to things, they may turn back and take us along with them!

I think we had better wait here until some one turns up.'

I had scarcely finished speaking when I saw the scout who had attempted to discourage the Huns from surrendering approaching.

'Hullo,' I called out, 'are any of the battalion coming up?'

'Yes, sir,' he answered.

'Well, go back and hustle them along.'

Soon afterwards we saw about a score of our men approaching, so we hurried on down the road through the village. But I must describe an incident that happened while we were waiting on that road.

A German officer came from a side street about seventy-five yards to the left of where we were standing. He glanced back at us and then continued his dignified walk.

'Take a crack at him with your rifle,' I said to the corporal. He did. The bullet missed, but the Hun officer gave a quick glance backward and perceptibly increased his pace, while endeavouring to maintain his dignity.

'Take another one,' I said.

This time it caught him in the arm and bowled him over. He scrambled to his feet,

gave one wild glance backwards, abandoned his dignity, and disappeared down the road as fast as his legs could carry him!

We followed on down this road until we came to the outskirts of the village. About five hundred yards away we could see the wood we had to go through. Running wildly towards its protection were at least three hundred Huns.

'Go back and bring a Lewis gun along,' I said.

Soon afterwards it arrived and kicked up the dust at the heels of the retreating Huns. There was many a wild glance backwards, and no one attempted to stay behind with those who were hit.

About one hundred yards farther along there was a bend in the road. I had seen scores of Huns disappear round this bend, and had wondered where they had all gone to. Leaving the Lewis gunners to do their execution, I ran down towards the bend in the road, followed by a scout. It ran into a cutting with sides about twelve feet high. Standing at the entrance to a dug-out was a little German captain, holding a map in his hand. I ran forward, rather breathless, seized his map and stood looking at him.

He smiled genially and pointed down the dug-out entrance. I looked down. It was too dark down there to see anything, but I heard the murmur of many excited voices. I motioned to the captain to bring them up. He assented with a smile, and very soon afterwards the Huns started trooping out. As each one came out I pointed up the road and gave them a good healthy kick, which none of them waited to have repeated. I had expected ten or twelve Huns to come up, but the number almost reached forty before the captain made a sign that they were all gone. He pointed to another dug-out a few yards further on.

'All right,' I said, 'shoot 'em up.'

He called down the dug-out, and very soon more Huns appeared. They all received the same impartial treatment. Some of them made a grimace, and many of them forgot, for a moment, to hold their hands above their heads in the approved 'Kamerad' style.

Included amongst the prisoners were two officers who, in the excitement and exuberance of the moment, received the same undignified treatment. This dug-out yielded thirty more prisoners. The captain

then indicated a third dug-out, smiling broadly all the time.

'What, some more!' I exclaimed. 'Why, you have enough men here to hold half a dozen villages if you only knew how to fight. If your gang is an example of a military nation may the Lord always preserve us from being one!'

But nothing could take the smile off the German captain's face. He proceeded to persuade the occupants of the third dug-out to come out, and over forty of them filed past us. Despite the fact that I only had one leg in working order I still proceeded to dole out my particular brand of an affectionate farewell. Altogether we collected well over one hundred prisoners from those three large dug-outs. When the last German had gone we walked a few yards down the road until clear of the cutting. On the left of the road, about two hundred yards away, we saw German artillerymen getting ready to abandon their guns. Giving a whoop, the two of us started running towards them. The German gunners fled precipitately, and we were soon scratching the number 14 on two smoking 5.9's.

Just then I was on the point of collapsing.

I had had no bandage on my wound yet and had lost a lot of blood, but even now there was to be no rest.

The left flank had not come up, and some German field guns, not more than six hundred yards on our left, were switched on to us, firing at us over open sights. We were forced back to take shelter, and rejoined the rest of the battalion, which was now swarming through the village. I sat down, bandaged up my leg and then, leaning on the arm of the scout, started back up the road. When we came to the three dug-outs I was amazed and furious to see the little German captain standing there.

'What the devil are you doing here,' I cried angrily, 'I sent you out ages ago.'

But nothing could repress that ingratiating smile of his. He rushed over to me and got hold of my arm.

'Ah, monsieur blessé?' and motioned me into the dug-out. I was feeling a bit faint, so went in.

The Hun artillery was now turned on to the village, and houses were toppling over. Just as we were starting back a tank came ambling up the road; the door opened and the tank officer stepped out.

'Hullo, good morning,' he said, 'is this' (naming a village)?

'No, but you see that place about a mile over to the left?'

'Yes,' he replied.

'Well, that 's the spot you want.'

He climbed back into his tank and started off for the village. The tank offered an excellent target for the anti-tank guns, and it was not long before they put it out of action. Skirting the village, I followed for some distance in the wake of the tank, but the Hun machine gunners got their eye on me and, though wounded and limping along with the aid of a stick and the arm of a scout, they did their best to get me, and we had to scamper as best we could from shell-hole to shell-hole.

When we got back out of range we saw thrilling sights. Everything was moving forward—tanks, artillery and infantry—to carry on the attack. It was a most inspiring spectacle, an example of that calm splendid confidence in our ability to beat the Hun.

It was my last battle. I limped painfully out of the war with the feeling that a triumphant ending was fast approaching.

A few weeks later, to use a descriptive American phrase, the Hun 'quit cold.' Despite all that I have seen written about the bravery of the German soldiers, I saw very little of it that day, and the most satisfying memory of all is that of my last day in the war, when I booted so many scores into captivity!

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