

**TALES
FROM A DUGOUT**

BY
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I DEDICATE THIS BOOK

TO THE

"ARMY OF THE PEOPLE WHO STAY AT HOME":

*the overaged, the women, the physically unfit
and the children. These are the ones to be
pitied, the ones who suffer most, because
their hearts are on the battlefields
of France, although their bodies
must stay at home.*

FOREWORD

Picture a dugout in one of the front line trenches of France, damp and evil smelling, hardly deep enough to protect the inmates from a three-inch shell-burst. This hole in the ground will comfortably house four soldiers. Put seven of them with full equipment and a machine gun in it, and what results? I dare say in civilian life there would be only one outcome—TROUBLE. Well, in the army on the Western Front, this situation spells GOOD FELLOWSHIP.

If it were only possible for a giant dictograph to be invented, the transmitter being placed in any dugout of the American Army in France, while at the receiver, across the Atlantic, the American Public "listened in," many a heartache would disappear, worry for the "boys at the front" would more or less vanish in mist. If the mothers, fathers, wives, sweethearts, sisters and friends, could only hear these conversations, their hearts would be filled with joy and pride for the fighting men of America. Of course, at times, few and far between, they would be slightly shocked, as most eavesdroppers are, but on the whole, they would listen to wonderful sentiment, clean and wholesome Americanism.

It has been my misfortune not to have occupied an American dugout as yet, but I have crowded into one with the Britisher, with good old Tommy Atkins. We are of the same family, the same blood runs through our veins, so Tommy's ideas and conversations are identical with those of our brave American

boys. Therefore, I hope that in a way these Tales from a Dugout will help fill the void of the absent dictograph.

It is only a matter of time before our boys and our Allies, God bless them all, will victoriously return to "Blighty," and be received in the arms of their waiting dear ones.

PREAMBLE

There were seven of them composing the crew of Gun No. 2, of the ——th Brigade Machine Gun Company. Their gun was the Vickers, light, .303, watercooled.

They were nicknamed as follows:

Curly, a Scotchman. Dubbed Curly on account of a cute little Delia Fox curl. He gave more attention to this curl than to his rifle. Many girls wrote to him, and he wrote to many girls.

Happy, a Londoner. He earned his title from his happy disposition. He helped Curly with his correspondence.

Hungry. His nickname needs no explanation. He was. Once Mr. Hoover dined with him, hence his food conservation idea. Hungry hailed from London.

Ikey. He was. Came from the East Side, London. Brave as a lion, and to our discomfort, musically inclined.

Dick. Irish, from Dublin. Always ready. Greatly admired the Kaiser because he started such a glorious scrap.

Sailor Bill. A Welshman. He had had a "cruise" in the Navy, and wanted everybody to know it. They did. He was detailed with the gun's crew to carry "ammo" (ammunition).

Yank. Got his handle because he was American. He hailed from the "Big Town" behind the Statue of Liberty, and was proud of

it, too. Committed a "technical error" and got mixed up in the Great Fight.

They were soldiers of the King, and their further personal history does not matter. It will suffice to say that they were fighting in the British Army for Justice, Democracy and Liberty.

Scene of action: "Somewhere in France."

Time: A few months after the sinking of the *Lusitania*.

After "stand down" had been passed along the fire trench, they would repair to their two-by-four dugout, and it was their custom to while away the time by taking turns at story-telling. Some of these were personal experiences, while others were told to them by their mates, the majority of whom, by this time, have either "gone West," or reached that heaven of the British soldier—"Blighty."

"THROUGH THE BIG GUNS' THUNDER"

Over the top and give them hell,
Up the ladders and through the wire.
Out in front, go across with a yell,
With bullets cracking from rapid fire.

Then the death song of a ricochet,
A curse or moan as your pal goes under,
You cannot stop, you must not stay—
It's on—on—thro' the big guns' thunder.

It hurts to see him torn apart,
For you've shared his grub on "sentry go,"

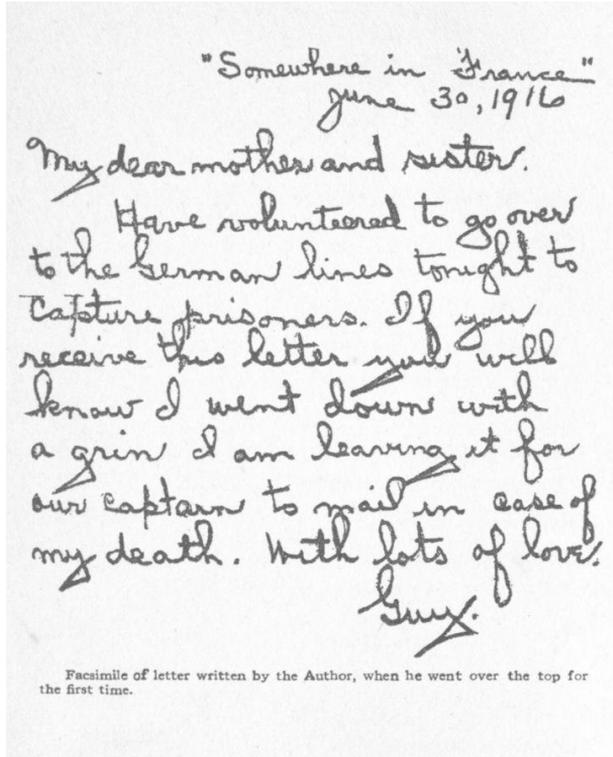
And listened to tales of his sweetheart,
In dugouts by the candles' glow.

But war is war, the trench must be taken,
Whether your life's blood pays the cost.
If the wounded die in holes, forsaken,
It's part of the game; they played, and—lost.

If you get hit and the blood runs out,
Don't cry and whimper from the ground,
But FACE that trench, don't turn about,
Cheer, tho' it's from the Great Beyond!

When you reach their trench, then use the
steel,
Sink it deep into Fritz's hide,
Send it home, so that he will feel,
How the women and children of Belgium
died.

A.G.E.



"Somewhere in France"

June 30, 1916

My dear mother and sister.

Have volunteered to go over to the German lines tonight to capture prisoners. If you receive this letter you will know I went down with a grin. I am leaving it for our captain to mail in case of my death. With lots of love.

Guy.

Facsimile of letter written by the Author, when he went over the top for the first time.

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TALES FROM A DUGOUT

IT was a cold and rainy afternoon. The gun's crew were huddled together in their dugout in the front line trench, about three hundred yards from the German lines.

If you should ask a Tommy Atkins "What is a dugout?" he would look at you in astonishment, and pitying you for your apparent lack of education, would answer, "What's a dugout? Why a dugout is a blinkin'—well, a dugout's a dugout."

This particular dugout was a hole in the ground. It was used to shelter the men in the trenches from shell fire. They also slept in it, or tried to. From their point of view, its main use was to drain the trenches of muddy water, and give them rheumatism. It also made a good hotel for rats. These guests looked upon them as intruders, and complained that they overcrowded the place. Occasionally the crew gave in to the rats, and took a turn in the trench to rest themselves.

The dugout was about eight feet deep, or, at least there were eight wooden steps leading down to it. The ceiling and walls were braced by heavy, square-cut timbers. Over the timbers, in the ceiling, sheets of corrugated iron were spread to keep the wet earth from falling. The entrance was heavily sandbagged and very narrow, there being only room for one person to leave or enter at a time. The ceiling was five feet high, and the floor space was eight feet by six. Through the ceiling a six-inch

square air-shaft was cut. They used to take turns sleeping under this in wet weather.

The timbers bracing the walls were driven full of nails to hang equipment on. After ammunition, belt-filling machine, rations, equipment, rifles, machine-gun, etc., had been stowed away, there was not much space for seven men to live in, not forgetting the rats.

It was very dark in the dugout, and as they were only issued a candle and a half every twenty-four hours, they had to economize on light. Woe betide the last man out who left the candle burning!

In this hotel of theirs, they used to sit around the lonely candle, and, through a thick haze of tobacco smoke, recounted different experiences at various points of the line where they had been, or spin yarns about home. At other times they'd sit for an hour or more without saying a word, listening to a German over in the enemy's front trench playing a cornet. My, how that Boche could play! Just to make them hate the war, he'd play "Sewanee River," "Home, Sweet Home," or "Over the Waves." During his recital, the trenches were strangely quiet. Never a shot from either side.

Sometimes, when he had finished, Ikey would go into the trench and play on his harmonica. As soon as the crew saw that harmonica come out, it was a case of "Duck down low," for the Germans would be sure, when the first strains reached them, to send over "Five rounds rapid." That harmonica was hated by both sides. More than once Sailor Bill chucked one over the top, but Ikey would sit down and write a letter, and in about ten

days' time would receive through the post a little oblong package, and then the crew knew that they were in for some more "Five rounds rapid." They didn't blame the Germans.

Still, that harmonica had its uses. Often they would get downhearted and fed up with the war, and "grouse" at everything in general. Then Ikey would reach in his pocket, and out would come that instrument of torture. The rest then realized there were worse things than war, and cheered up accordingly.

On this particular rainy afternoon the gun's crew were in a talkative mood. Perhaps it was due to the fact that Curly had made his "Tommy's cooker" do what it was supposed to do—make water boil in an hour and a half. A "Tommy's cooker" is a spirit stove, which is very widely advertised as a suitable gift to the men in the trenches. Many are sent out, and many are thrown away.

Anyway, the "cooker" lived up to its reputation for once, though a little behind its advertised schedule in making water boil. Curly passed around the result of his efforts in the form of an ammunition tin half full of fairly good tea. Each took a good swig, lighted a Woodbine cigarette,—they had "come up" with the rations the night before—and settled back against the damp earthen walls of the dugout to listen.

It was Dick's turn for a story. He cleared his throat two or three times and said—nothing. A chorus of "Come on, let's have it," from the rest of the crew did not help matters. In desperation Dick said, "I guess you fellows'll have to excuse me this time, I can't seem to remember a thing."

"Yank" helped him out with, "Say, Dick, tell us about Jim, the platoon mascot you used to have."

"Sailor Bill or Hungry could tell it better. Even Ikey knows it," replied Dick.

But after much coaxing from Happy, Curly and Yank, Dick started in.

JIM—SOLDIER OF THE KING

AS TOLD BY DICK

JIM—SOLDIER OF THE KING

"OUR company had just arrived at rest billets, after a hard eighteen kilo march from the front line sector.

"The stable we had to sleep in was an old, ramshackle affair, absolutely over-run with rats. Great, big, black fellows, who used to chew up our leather equipment, eat our rations, and run over our bodies at night. German gas had no effect on these rodents; in fact, they seemed to thrive on it.

"The floor space would comfortably accommodate about twenty men lying down, but when thirty-three, including equipment, were crowded into it, it was nearly unbearable.

"The roof and walls were full of shell-holes. When it rained, a constant drip, drip, drip was in order. We were so crowded that if a fellow was unlucky enough (and nearly all of us in this instance were unlucky) to sleep under a hole, he had to grin and bear it. It was like sleeping beneath a shower bath.

"At one end of the billet, with a ladder leading up to it, was a sort of grain bin, with a door in it. This place was the headquarters of our guests, the rats. Many a stormy cabinet meeting was held there by them. Many a boot was thrown at it during the night to let them know that Tommy Atkins objected to the matter under discussion. Sometimes one of these missiles would ricochet and land on the upturned countenance of a snoring Tommy, and for about half an hour even the rats would pause in admiration of his flow of language.

"On the night in question we flopped down in our wet clothes and were soon asleep. As was usual, our gun's crew were together.

"The last time we had rested in this particular village, it was inhabited by civilians. Now it was deserted. An order had been issued two days previous to our return that all civilians should move farther behind the line.

"I had been asleep about two hours when I was awakened by Sailor Bill shaking me by the shoulder. He was trembling like a leaf, and whispered to me:

"'Wake up, Dick, this ship's 'aunted. There's some one aloft who's been moanin' for the last hour. Sounds like the wind in the riggin'. I ain't scared of 'umans or Germans, but when it comes to messin' in with spirits it's time for me to go below. Lend your ear an' cast your deadlights on that grain locker, and listen.'

"I listened sleepily for a minute or so, but could hear nothing. Coming to the conclusion that Sailor Bill was dreaming things, I was again soon asleep.

"Perhaps fifteen minutes had elapsed when I was rudely awakened.

"'Dick, for God's sake, come aboard and listen!'

"I listened, and sure enough, right out of that grain bin overhead came a moaning and whimpering, and then a scratching against the door. My hair stood on end. Blended with the drip, drip of the rain, and the occasional scurrying of a

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