

**THE BOY SCOUT
AVIATORS**

BY GEORGE DURSTON

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I

CHAPTER II

CHAPTER III

CHAPTER IV

CHAPTER V

CHAPTER VI

CHAPTER VII

CHAPTER VIII

CHAPTER IX

CHAPTER X

CHAPTER XI

CHAPTER XII

CHAPTER XIII

CHAPTER XIV

CHAPTER XV

CHAPTER XVI

CHAPTER XVII

CHAPTER XVIII

CHAPTER I

SERIOUS NEWS

"As long as I can't be at home," said Harry Fleming, "I'd rather be here than anywhere in the world I can think of!"

"Rather!" said his companion, Dick Mercer. "I say, Harry, it must be funny to be an American!"

Harry laughed heartily.

"I'd be angry, Dick," he said, finally, "if that wasn't so English—and so funny! Still, I suppose that's one reason you Britishers are as big an empire as you are. You think it's sort of funny and a bit of a misfortune, don't you, to be anything but English?"

"Oh, I say, I didn't quite mean that," said Dick, flushing a little. "And of course you Americans aren't just like foreigners. You speak the same language we do—though you do say some funny things now and then, old chap. You know, I was ever so surprised when you came to Mr. Grenfel and he let you in our troop right away!"

"Didn't you even know we had Boy Scouts in America?" asked Harry. "My word as you English would say. That is the limit! Why, it's spread all over the country with us. But of course we all know that it started here—that Baden-Powell thought of the idea!"

"Rather!" said Dick, enthusiastically. "Good old Bathing-Towel! That's what they used to call him at school, you know, before he ever went into the army at all. And it stuck to him, they say, right through. Even after Mafeking he was called that. Now, of course,

he's a lieutenant general, and all sorts of a swell. He and Kitchener and French are so big they don't get called nicknames much more."

"Well, I'll tell you what I think," said Harry, soberly. "I think he did a bigger thing for England when he started the Boy Scout movement than when he defended Mafeking against the Boers!"

"Why, how can you make that out?" asked Dick, puzzled. "The defence of Mafeking had a whole lot to do with our winning that war!"

"That's all right, too," said Harry. "But you know you may be in a bigger war yet than that Boer War ever thought of being."

"How can a war think, you chump?" asked the literal-minded Dick.

Again Harry roared at him.

"That's just one of our funny American ways of saying things, Dick," he explained. "I didn't mean that, of course. But what I do mean is that every-one over here in Europe seems to think that there will be a big war sometime—a bigger war than the world's ever seen yet."

"Oh, yes!" Dick nodded his understanding, and grew more serious. "My pater—he's a V. C., you know—says that, too. He says we'll have to fight Germany, sooner or later. And he seems to think the sooner the better, too, before they get too big and strong for us to have an easy time with them."

"They're too big now for any nation to have an easy time with them," said Harry. "But you see what I mean now, don't you, Dick? We Boy Scouts aren't soldiers in any way. But we do learn to do the things a soldier has to do, don't we?"

"Yes, that's true," said Dick. "But we aren't supposed to think of that."

"Of course not, and it's right, too," agreed Harry. "But we learn to be obedient. We learn discipline. And we get to understand camp life, and the open air, and all the things a soldier has to know about, sooner or later. Suppose you were organizing a regiment. Which would you rather have—a thousand men who were brave and willing, but had never camped out, or a thousand who had been Boy Scouts and knew about half the things soldiers have to learn? Which thousand men would be ready to go to the front first?"

"I never thought of that!" said Dick, mightily impressed. "But you're right, Harry. The Boy Scouts wouldn't go to war themselves, but the fellows who were grown up and in business and had been Boy Scouts would be a lot readier than the others, wouldn't they? I suppose that's why so many of our chaps join the Territorials when they are through school and start in business?"

"Of course it is! You've got the idea I'm driving at, Dick. And you can depend on it that General Baden-Powell had that in his mind's eye all the time, too. He doesn't want us to be military and aggressive, but he does want the Empire to have a lot of fellows on call who are hard and fit, so that they can defend themselves and the country. You see, in America, and here in England, too, we're not like the countries on the Continent. We don't make soldiers of every man in the country."

"No—by Jove, they do that, don't they, Harry? I've got a cousin who's French. And he expects to serve his term in the army. He's in the class of 1918. You see, he knows already when he will have to go, and just where he will report—almost the regiment he'll join."

But he's hoping they'll let him be in the cavalry, instead of the infantry or the artillery."

"There you are! Here and in America, we don't have to have such tremendous armies, because we haven't got countries that we may have to fight across the street—you know what I mean. England has to have a tremendous navy, but that makes it unnecessary for her to have such a big army."

"I see you've got the idea exactly, Fleming," said a new voice, breaking into the conversation. The two scouts looked up to see the smiling face of their scoutmaster, John Grenfel. He was a big, bronzed Englishman, sturdy and typical of the fine class to which he belonged—public school and university man, first-class cricketer and a football international who had helped to win many a hard fought game for England from Wales or Scotland or Ireland. The scouts were returning from a picnic on Wimbledon Common, in the suburbs of London, and Grenfel was following his usual custom of dropping into step now with one group, now with another. He favored the idea of splitting up into groups of two or three on the homeward way, because it was his idea that one of the great functions of the Scout movement was to foster enduring friendships among the boys. He liked to know, without listening or trying to overhear, what the boys talked about; often he would give a directing word or two, that, without his purpose becoming apparent, shaped the ideas of the boys.

"Yes," he repeated. "You understand what we're trying to do in this country, Fleming. We don't want to fight—we pray to God that we shall never have to. But, if we are attacked, or if the necessity arises, we'll be ready, as we have been ready before. We want

peace—we want it so much and so earnestly that we'll fight for it if we must."

Neither of the boys laughed at what sounded like a paradox. His voice was too earnest.

"Do you think England is likely to have to go to war soon—within a year or so, sir?" asked Harry.

"I pray not," said Grenfel. "But we don't know, Fleming. For the last few years—ever since the trouble in the Balkans finally flamed up—Europe has been on the brink of a volcano. We don't know what the next day may bring forth. I've been afraid—" He stopped, suddenly, and seemed to consider.

"There is danger now," he said, gravely. "Since the Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria was assassinated, Austria has been in an ugly mood. She has tried to blame Servia. I don't think Russia will let her crush Servia—not a second time. And if Russia and Austria fight there is no telling how it may spread."

"You'd want us to win, wouldn't you, Harry, if we fought?" asked Dick, when Mr. Grenfel had passed on to speak to some of the others.

"Yes, I think I would—I know I would, Dick," said Harry, gravely. "But I wouldn't want to see a war, just the same. It's a terrible thing."

"On, it wouldn't last long," said Dick, confidently. "We'd lick them in no time at all. Don't you think so?"

"I don't know—I hope so. But you can't ever be sure."

"I wonder if they'd let us fight?"

"No, I don't think they would, Dick. There'd be plenty for the Boy Scouts to do though, I believe."

"Would you stay over here if there was a war, Harry? Or would you go home?"

"I think we'd have to stay over here, Dick. You see, my father is here on business, not just for pleasure. His company sent him over here, and it was understood he'd stay several years. I don't think the war could make any difference."

"That's why you're here, then, is it? I used to wonder why you went to school over here instead of in America."

"Yes. My father and mother didn't want me to be so far from them. So they brought me along. I was awfully sorry at first, but now it doesn't seem so bad."

"I should think not!" said Dick, indignantly. "I should think anyone would be mighty glad of a chance to come to school over here instead of in America! Why, you don't even play cricket over there, I've been told!"

"No, but we play baseball," said Harry, his eyes shining. "I really think I miss that more than anything else here in England. Cricket's all right—if you can't play baseball. It's a good enough game."

"You can play," admitted Dick, rather grudgingly. "When you bowl, you've got some queer way of making the ball seem to bend—"

"I put a curve on it, that's all!" said Harry, with a laugh. "If you'd ever played baseball, you'd understand that easily enough. See?"

You hold the ball like this—so that your fingers give it a spin as it leaves your hand."

And he demonstrated for his English friend's benefit the way the ball is held to produce an out-curve.

"Your bowlers here don't seem to do that—though they do make the ball break after it hits the ground. But the way I manage it, you see, is to throw a ball that doesn't hit the ground in front of the bat at all, but curves in. If you don't hit at it, it will hit the stumps and bowl you out; if you do hit, you're likely to send it straight up in the air, so that some fielder can catch it."

"I see," said Dick. "Well, I suppose it's all right, but it doesn't seem quite fair."

Harry laughed, but didn't try to explain the point further. He liked Dick immensely; Dick was the first friend he had made in England, and the best, so far. It was Dick who had tried to get him to join the Boy Scouts, and who had been immensely surprised to find that Harry was already a scout. Harry, indeed, had done two years of scouting in America; he had been one of the first members of a troop in his home town, and had won a number of merit badges. He was a first-class scout, and, had he stayed with his troop, would certainly have become a patrol leader. So he had had no trouble in getting admission to the patrol to which Dick belonged.

It had been hard for Harry, when his father's business called him to England, to give up all the friendships and associations of his boyhood. Had been hard to leave school; to tear up, by the roots, all the things that bound him to his home. But as a scout he had learned to be loyal and obedient. His parents had talked things over with him very frankly. They had understood just how hard it would

be for him to go with them. But his father had made him see how necessary it was.

"I want you to be near your mother and myself just now, especially, Harry," he had said. "I want you to grow up where I can see you. And, more-over, it won't hurt you a bit to know something about other countries. You'll have a new idea of America when you have seen other lands, and I believe you'll be a better American for it. You'll learn that other countries have their virtues, and that we can learn some things from them. But I believe you'll learn, too, to love America better than ever. When we go home you'll be broader and better for your experience."

And Harry was finding out that his father had been right. At first he had to put up with a good deal. He found that the English boys he met in school felt themselves a little superior. They didn't look down on him, exactly, but they were, perhaps the least bit sorry for him because he was not an Englishman, always a real misfortune in their sight.

He had resented that at first. But his Boy Scout training stood him in good stead. He kept his temper, and it was not long before he began to make friends. He excelled at games; even the English games that were new and strange to him presented few difficulties to him. As he had explained to Dick, cricket was easy for any boy who could play baseball fairly well. And it was the same way with football. After the far more strenuous American game, he shone at the milder English football, the Rugby game, which is the direct ancestor of the sport in America.

All these things helped to make Harry popular. He was now nearly sixteen, tall and strong for his age, thanks to the outdoor life he had

always lived. An only son, he and his father had always been good friends. Without being in any way a molly-coddle, still he had been kept safe from a good many of the temptations that beset some boys by the constant association with his father. It was no wonder, therefore, that John Grenfel, as soon as he had talked with Harry and learned of the credentials he bore from his home troop, had welcomed him enthusiastically as a recruit to his own troop.

It had been necessary to modify certain rules. Harry, of course, could not subscribe to quite the same scout oath that bound his English fellows. But he had taken his scout oath as a tenderfoot at home, and Grenfel had no doubts about him. He was the sort of boy the organization wanted, whether in England or America, and that was enough for Grenfel.

Though the boys, as they walked toward their homes, did not quite realize it, they were living in days that were big with fate. Far away, in the chancelleries of Europe, and, not so far away, in the big government buildings in the West End of London, the statesmen were even then making their best effort to avert war. No one in England, perhaps, really believed that war was coming. There had been war scares before. But the peace of Europe had been preserved for forty years or more, through one crisis after another. And so it was a stunning surprise, even to Grenfel, when, as they came into Putney High street, just before they reached Putney Bridge, they met a swam of newsboys excitedly shrieking extras.

"Germany threatens Russia!" they yelled. "War sure!"

Mr. Grenfel brought a paper, and the scouts gathered about him while he read the news that was contained on the front page, still damp from the press.

"I'm afraid it's true," he said, soberly. "The German Emperor has threatened to go to war with Russia, unless the Czar stops mobilizing his troops at once. We shall know tonight. But I think it means war! God save England may still keep out of it!"

For that night a meeting at Mr. Grenfel's home in West Kensington had long been planned. He lived not far from the street in which both Harry and Dick lived. And, as the party broke up, on the other side of Putney Bridge, Dick, voicing the general feeling, asked a question.

"Are we to come tonight, sir?" he said. "With this news—?"

"Yes—yes, indeed," said the scoutmaster. "If war is to come, there is all the more reason for us to be together. England may need all of us yet."

Dick had asked the question because, like all the others, he felt something that was in the air. He was sobered by the news, although, like the rest, he did not yet fully understand it. But they all felt that there had been a change. As they looked about at the familiar sight about them they wondered if, a year from then, everything would still be the same. War? What did it mean to them, to England?

"I wonder if my father will go to war!" Dick broke out suddenly, as he and Harry walked along.

"I hadn't thought of that!" said Harry, startled. "Oh, Dick, I'm sorry! Still, I suppose he'll go, if his country needs him!"

CHAPTER II

QUICK WORK

At home, Harry had an early dinner with his father and mother, who were going to the theatre. They lived in a comfortable house, which Mr. Fleming had taken on a five-year lease when they came to England to live. It was one of a row of houses that looked very much alike, which, itself, was one of four sides of a square. In the centre of the square was a park-like space, a garden, really. In this garden were several tennis courts, with plenty of space, also, for nurses and children. There are many such squares in London, and they help to make the British capital a delightful place in which to live.

As he went in, Harry saw a lot of the younger men who lived in the square playing tennis. It was still broad daylight, although, at home, dusk would have fallen. But this was England at the end of July and the beginning of August, and the light of day would hold until ten o'clock or thereabout. That was one of the things that had helped to reconcile Harry to living in England. He loved the long evenings and the chance they gave to get plenty of sport and exercise after school hours.

The school that he and Dick attended was not far away; they went to it each day. A great many of the boys boarded at the school, but there were plenty who, like Dick and Harry, did not. But school was over now, for the time. The summer holidays had just begun.

At the table there was much talk of the war that was in the air. But Mr. Fleming did not even yet believe that war was sure.

"They'll patch it up," he said, confidently. "They can't be so mad as to set the whole world ablaze over a little scrap like the trouble between Austria and Servia."

"Would it affect your business, dear?" asked Mrs. Fleming. "If there really should be war, I mean?"

"I don't think so," said he. "I might have to make a flying trip home, but I'd be back. Come on—time for us to go. What are you going to do, boy? Going over to Grenfel's, aren't you?"

"Yes, father," said Harry.

"All right. Get home early. Good-night!"

A good many of the boys were already there when Dick and Harry reached Grenfel's house. The troop—the Forty-second, of London—was a comparatively small one, having only three patrols. But nearly all of them were present, and the scout-master took them out into his garden.

"I'm going to change the order a bit," he said, gravely. "I want to do some talking, and then I expect to answer questions. Boys, Germany has declared war on Russia. There are reports already of fighting on the border between France and Germany. And there seems to be an idea that the Germans are certain to strike at France through Belgium. I may not be here very long—I may have to turn over the troop to another scoutmaster. So I want to have a long talk tonight." There was a dismayed chorus.

"What? You going away, sir? Why?"

But Harry did not join. He saw the quiet blaze in John Grenfel's eyes, and he thought he knew.

"I've volunteered for foreign service already," Grenfel explained. "I saw a little fighting in the Boer war, you know. And I may be useful. So I thought I'd get my application in directly. If I go, I'll probably go quietly and quickly. And there may be no other chance for me to say good-bye."

"Then you think England will be drawn in, sir?" asked Leslie Franklin, leader of the patrol to which Dick and Harry belonged, the Royal Blues.

"I'm afraid so," said Grenfels grimly. "There's just a chance still, but that's all—the ghost of a chance, you might call it. I think it might be as well if I explained a little of what's back of all this trouble. Want to listen? If you do, I'll try. And if I'm not making myself clear, ask all the questions you like."

There was a chorus of assent. Grenfel sat in the middle, the scouts ranged about him in a circle. "In the first place," he began, "this Servian business is only an excuse. I'm not defending the Servians—I'm taking no sides between Serbia and Austria. Here in England we don't care about that, because we know that if that hadn't started the war, something else would have been found.

"England wants peace. And it seems that, every so often, she has to fight for it. It was so when the Duke of Marlborough won his battles at Blenheim and Ramillies and Malplaquet. Then France was the strongest nation in Europe. And she tried to crush the others and dominate everything. If she had, she would have been strong enough, after her victories, to fight us over here—to invade England. So we went into that war, more than two hundred years ago, not because we hated France, but to make a real peace possible. And it lasted a long time.

"Then, after the French revolution, there was Napoleon. Again France, under him, was the strongest nation in Europe. He conquered Germany, and Austria, Italy and Spain, the Netherlands. And he tried to conquer England, so that France could rule the world. But Nelson beat his fleet at Trafalgar—"

"Hurrah!" interrupted Dick, carried away. "Three cheers for Nelson!"

Grenfel smiled as the cheers were given.

"Even after Trafalgar," he went on, "Napoleon hoped to conquer England. He had massed a great army near Boulogne, ready to send it across the channel. And so we took the side of the weaker nations again. All Europe, led by England, rose against Napoleon. And you know what happened. He was beaten finally at Waterloo. And so there was peace again in Europe for a long time, with no one nation strong enough to dictate to all the others." But then Germany began to rise. She beat Austria, and that made her the strongest German country. Then she beat France, in 1870, and that gave her her start toward being the strongest nation on the continent.

"And then, I believe—and so do most Englishmen—she began to be jealous of England. She wanted our colonies. She began, finally, to build a great navy. For years we have had to spend great sums of money to keep our fleet stronger than hers. And she made an alliance with Austria and Italy. Because of that France and Russia made an alliance, too, and we had to be friendly with them. And now it looks to me as if Germany thought she saw a chance to beat France and Russia. Perhaps she thinks that we won't fight, on account of the trouble in Ireland. And what we English fear is that,

if she wins, she will take Belgium and Holland. Then she would be so close to our coasts that we would never be safe. We would have to be prepared always for invasion. So, you see, it seems to me that we are facing the same sort of danger we have faced before. Only this time it is Germany, instead of France, that we shall have to fight—if we do fight."

"If the Germans go through Belgium, will that mean that we shall fight?" asked Leslie Franklin.

"Almost certainly, yes," said Grenfel. "And it is through Belgium that Germany has her best chance to strike at France. So you see how serious things are. I don't want to go into all the history that is back of all this. I just want you to understand what England's interest is. If we make war, it will be a war of self-defence. Suppose you owned a house. And suppose the house next door caught fire. You would try to put out that fire, wouldn't you, to save your own house from being burned up? Well, that's England's position. If the Germans held Belgium or Holland—and they would hold both, if they beat France and Russia—England would then be in just as much danger as your house would be. So if we fight, it will be to put out the German fire in the house next door.

"Now I want you to understand one thing. I'm talking as an Englishman. A German would tell you all this in a very different way. I don't like the people who are always slandering their enemies. Germany has her reasons for acting as she does. I think her reasons are wrong. But the Germans believe that they are right. We can respect even people who are wrong if they themselves believe that they are right. There may be two sides to this quarrel. And Germans, even if they are to be our enemies, may be just as

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