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NEW YORK

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Title: The Boy Allies On the Firing Line
       Or, Twelve Days Battle Along the Marne

Author: Clair W. Hayes

Release Date: February 16, 2010 [EBook #12870]

Language: English

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The Boy Allies
On The Firing Line

OR

Twelve Days Battle Along the Marne

By CLAIR W. HAYES

AUTHOR OF
"The Boy Allies at Liège"
"The Boy Allies With the Cossacks"
"The Boy Allies In the Trenches"

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THE BOY ALLIES ON THE FIRING LINE

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THE BOY ALLIES ON THE FIRING LINE.

CHAPTER I.

TERRIBLE ODDS.

“Feels pretty good to be back in harness, doesn’t it, Hal?” asked Chester, as, accompanied by a small body of men, they rode slowly along.

“Great!” replied his friend enthusiastically. “And it looks as if we were to see action soon.”

“Yes, it does look that way.”

The little body of British troopers, only forty-eight of them all told, with Hal Paine and Chester Crawford as their guides, were reconnoitering ten miles in advance of the main army along the river Marne in the great war between Germany and the allied armies. For several hours they had been riding slowly without encountering the enemy, when, suddenly, as the little squad topped a small hill and the two boys gained an unobstructed view of the little plain below, Hal pulled up his horse with an exclamation.

Quickly he threw up his right hand and the little troop came to an abrupt halt.

“Germans!” he said laconically.

“And thousands of ’em,” said Chester. “They haven’t seen us yet. What is best to be done?”

The answer to this question came from the enemy. Several flashes of fire broke out along the German front, and the boys involuntarily ducked their heads as bullets sped whizzing past them.

“Well, they have seen us now,” said Hal; then turning to the men: “To the woods,” pointing with his sword to a dense forest on his right.

Rapidly the little body of men disappeared among the trees.

“Up in the trees,” ordered Hal, “and pick them off as they come!”

Swiftly the troopers leaped from their horses and climbed up among the branches. Here all could easily command a view of the oncoming German horde.

Rapidly the enemy advanced, firing volley after volley as they approached; then, at a word from Hal, the British poured forth their answer. And such an answer! Before the aim of these few British troopers, accounted among the best marksmen in the world, the Teuton cavalry went down in heaps.

There was a perceptible slackening in the speed of the approaching horsemen. Then, as the English continued their work, firing with machine-like precision and deadly accuracy, the Germans came to a halt.

“What are they stopping for?” cried Chester. “There are enough of them to overwhelm us!”

“I believe they fear a trap,” replied Hal. “They are afraid we are trying to ambush them with a larger force. We must keep up the delusion if we expect to get away.”

So saying, he ordered the men to the ground, and the little force advanced to the extreme edge of the woods. So far not a man had been even wounded, for the Germans, unable to see that their foe had climbed into the trees, had aimed too low.

From the edge of the woods the British poured several volleys, and then, as the enemy finally began an advance, they retreated slowly, firing as they flitted from tree to tree.

Apparently, Hal had rightly guessed the cause of the enemy’s indecision. They advanced slowly and warily; and when they finally gained the edge of the woods there was not a Briton in sight; but from further in among the trees the leaden messengers of death still struck the Germans, and man after man fell in his tracks.

Now the man nearest Chester threw up his arms and with a cry fell to the ground. The lad made as if to go to his assistance, but Hal stayed him with a word, and the little body of English continued their retreat, firing as they went.

Suddenly the pursued emerged from the woods into the open. A distance of half a mile lay between them and the next clump of trees. In this half a mile there was

nothing that would afford shelter; and the Germans were approaching nearer every second.

Hal did not hesitate.

“We shall have to make a dash for it!” he cried. “One more volley, men, and then run!”

One more death-dealing volley was delivered at close range, and then the little troop of English turned and fled. But they had traversed scarcely half the distance when the Germans reached the edge of the woods, and poured a volley into them.

Hal groaned as men fell on all sides of him. But still those who were left ran on. At length they reached the friendly shelter of the trees, but half their number lay behind, either dead or dying.

Once more, screened from the enemy, Hal halted the men.

“We may as well fight it out here,” he told them. “We will hold them off if we can, and if not we must retreat slowly, keeping behind whatever cover offers.”

A faint cheer went up from the handful who were left, and they turned determinedly to face their foes. They did not waste their fire. As the Germans came again into view, the British rifles cracked. Their marksmanship was superb, and rather than face this deadly fire the enemy halted.

Then began a game of hide and seek, with death the penalty for all who were seen. The firing was only at intervals now. Wherever a German arm or leg showed itself, a British rifle sounded and a German was accounted for.

For almost half an hour the game continued; and it was kept up until darkness fell. Fearing that it was the intent of the British to lure them into the hands of a strong force, the Germans did not attempt a charge, but contented themselves with trying to pick off their foes as they flitted from one tree to another.

But if the Germans had suffered, so had the English. Of the little troop of fifty, there now remained, besides Hal and Chester, but ten men. The two boys seemed to bear charmed lives, for neither had been struck once. They had exposed themselves to all dangers as well as had the troopers, but fortunately no German bullets had reached them.

And still the few English fought on. Now that darkness had fallen and two more men had dropped, Hal ordered those who were left to make a last dash for life. He sprang from behind the tree which had sheltered him, and Chester and the few remaining troopers joined him. Then they turned and sped as rapidly as the darkness would permit in the direction of their own lines.

Now that the fire of the English had ceased entirely, the Germans halted, puzzled. It was impossible for their officers to tell whether the enemy had all been killed, or whether the silence heralded the approach of a larger force. Their indecision undoubtedly saved the lives of Hal and Chester and the eight troopers, for had the Germans advanced they would have experienced little difficulty in killing or capturing them.

Silently but swiftly the ten forms dashed through the woods, and when at length they once more emerged into the open country they were completely exhausted.

“Well, I guess we are safe, what is left of us, at any rate,” said Chester as they halted to take a much needed rest. “It’s terrible to think of those poor fellows we left behind.”

“It is, indeed,” replied Hal; “but I don’t think they would complain. The British soldier is not that kind.”

“You are right,” agreed Chester. “And each accounted for more than one of his country’s foes before he went down. Were you hit, Hal?”

“No. Were you?”

“No. But come, we had better be pushing on again.”

With the loss of their comrades still preying upon their minds, the little troop continued on its way; and while they are hurrying onward we shall take time to introduce Hal and Chester more fully to those who have not met them before, and to relate how it came about that they were serving in such an important capacity with the British army in France.

CHAPTER II.

TWO YOUNG LIEUTENANTS.

Sturdy American lads, young though they were, Hal Paine and Chester Crawford had, when this story opens, already seen considerable military service. Each had received his baptism of fire during the heroic defense of the Belgian city of Liège, which had held out for days against the overwhelming horde of Teutons.

In Berlin with Hal's mother when the war broke out, they had been separated from her and left behind. With Captain Raoul Derevaux, a gallant French officer, and Lieutenant Harry Anderson of the British army, they finally succeeded in making their way, after many desperate experiences and daring adventures, over the Belgian frontier, as told in the first book of this series, entitled "The Boy Allies at Liège." They had reached Liège in time to take an active part in the defense of that city.

In escaping from Germany, each had done his full share of fighting and each had been wounded. They had finally reached Brussels, where they remained some time, while Hal's wound healed sufficiently to continue his homeward journey. As the result of their heroic actions, the Belgian commander at Liège had mentioned them so favorably in his report to King Albert, that he had bestowed upon them commissions as lieutenants in the Belgian army as a mark of distinction for their bravery.

It was while waiting in Brussels that they again encountered Lieutenant Anderson, from whom they had been separated, and it was through his inducement that they now found themselves attached to the staff of Field Marshal Sir John French, commander of the British forces on the continent, engaged in scout duty.

At the time when this story opens they had been sent in advance of the main army on a reconnaissance.

The German advance through Belgium into France, up to this time, had been

steady, although the Allies had contested every foot of the ground. Day after day and night after night the hard pressed British troops, to which Hal and Chester were attached, had borne the brunt of the fighting. But for the heroism of these comparatively few English, slightly more than one hundred thousand men, the Germans probably would have marched to the very gates of Paris.

But the arrival of the British troops had been timely, and under the gallant command of Sir John French, they had checked the overwhelming numbers of Germans time after time. The bravery of these English troops under a galling fire and against fearful odds is one of the greatest military achievements of the world's history.

Slowly, but standing up to the enemy like the true sons of Great Britain always have done, they were forced back. They stood for hours, without sight of the enemy, men dropping on all sides under the fearful fire of the great German guns miles away. While the French, farther south, gave way more rapidly, these few English stood their ground.

Time after time they came to hand grips with the enemy, and at the point of the bayonet drove them back with terrible losses. These bayonet charges were things of wonder to Hal and Chester, in spite of the fact that they had been in the midst of similar actions before Liège.

As the French and Belgians advanced in a wild whirlwind of fury, the English went about the business of a charge more deliberately, though with the same savage determination. They charged swiftly, but more coolly; gallantly, but more seriously, and the effect of their charges was terrible. The Germans who came on in the face of the fierce rifle and artillery fire, could not face the British bayonets, and time after time were driven back in disorder.

And as the British charged, always the words of their battle-song, fated for some unfathomed reason to become historic, rose above the sounds of battle:

"It's a long way to Tipperary.
   It's a long way to go;
It's a long way to Tipperary,
   To the sweetest girl I know.
Good-by, Piccadilly,
   Farewell, Leicester square.

It’s a long, long way to Tipperary,
    But my heart’s right there!”

Liège had fallen before the invading German hosts, though several of the forts still held out; Louvain had been captured and its beautiful buildings burned to the ground. Brussels had been invested by the Teutons. In Alsace-Lorraine the French had been forced to relinquish the spoils won in the first days of the war. General Pau, after a stubborn resistance, had fallen back, and General Joffre, commander-in-chief of the French army, also had been forced to retire.

So close to Paris were the Germans now that the seat of government, the day before this story opens, had been removed to Bordeaux. Homes and other buildings in the French capital were being razed, so that the great French guns in the city could sweep the approach to the town unobstructed. Paris, the most strongly fortified city in the world, was being prepared to withstand a siege.

And still the Germans came on. Several of the enemy’s war aviators flew over Paris and dropped bombs in the streets. This occurred upon several days, and then the French airmen put an end to these daring sky fighters. After this, no more bombs were dropped on Paris.

But as the Allies fell back, it was always the few British troops that time and again checked the Germans. The morale of the English was excellent.

In a final desperate charge, a small body of British cavalry had succeeded in driving back the German vanguard, while the main body of English retired still further. Then this little body of men returned, their number much smaller than when they had charged.

For some time now there had been no sign of the enemy, and Hal and Chester, with a small squad, had been sent toward the enemy’s line to reconnoiter. It was while on this reconnaissance that they had been attacked by the Germans in force.

Slowly the two lads and the eight men, all that was left of the fifty who had gone forth, continued their retreat. They had gone forth on horses; they were returning afoot. Their mounts were in the hands of the enemy. From the rear, in the darkness, still came the sounds of firing.

“Evidently they have not given up the pursuit,” said Hal.

“No; and they are probably mounted. Let’s turn off into this little woods,” replied Chester.

They did so, and followed by the remaining eight troopers continued on their way.

As they came to the edge of the woods, Hal, who was slightly in advance, stopped suddenly, and raised a warning hand. The little party halted.

“What’s the matter?” asked Chester in a whisper.

“Germans!” replied Hal briefly.

Chester approached closer and peered over his friend’s shoulder. Less than three hundred yards ahead he could dimly make out moving forms.

“Perhaps they are not Germans,” said Chester hopefully. “How did they manage to get behind us?”

“I don’t know,” replied Hal. “But I am sure they are Germans. Some way, I can feel it.”

“Well, what are we going to do?”

“We shall have to try and go round them without letting them hear us. Otherwise we are likely to be killed or captured.”

Making a wide detour, the little party continued on their way. For an hour they walked along unmolested, and then, suddenly, from almost directly before them, came a cry, in German:

“Halt!”

CHAPTER III.

WITH THE ARMY AGAIN.

In the dimness of the little woods in which they stood, the boys, at first, could not see the man who had accosted them.

At a word from Hal the little party came to a halt.

“Who goes there?” came the question from the darkness.

“Friends!” replied Hal in German, which he spoke like a native.

“Advance!” came the reply, and the shadow of a German soldier, with his rifle raised, ready to fire, suddenly appeared before them.

It was too dark for the German soldier to make out their uniforms until the English were upon him. Then he started back with a cry.

“English!” he exclaimed in surprise.

His amazement, slight though it was, proved his undoing. For as he staggered back Hal sprang forward, and the butt of his upraised rifle fell with stunning force upon the German’s head. The soldier dropped to the ground with a slight moan.

“We’ll have to get away from here quick!” exclaimed Chester. “Come on, men, follow us!”

Silently the little party, bearing off slightly to the right, went forward. Suddenly Chester stopped and clutched Hal by the arm.

“Great Scott!” he whispered. “Look! We are right in the middle of them!”

It was true. Ahead of them, in a long line running in each direction, the boys could see figures sprawled on the ground. It was a German force sleeping. There was not the sign of a light, a tent, or a hut. Here and there the boys could make out the dim form of a sentry flitting about.

“We have certainly got into a mess,” whispered Hal.

“We have that,” replied Chester. “Shall we make another detour?”

Hal thought for a few moments.

“I believe the best way is to try and go right through them without being seen,” he replied at length. “There is no telling how far this line stretches out, and if we didn’t get around them by daylight it would be all off with us.”

“But the sentries?” asked Chester.

“Well, we shall have to dispose of anyone who sees us without being heard. That’s all there is about it.”

“All right, then,” said Chester. “We might as well move at once.”

The plan was outlined to the men and they went forward. A moment and they were in the midst of the sleeping Germans. It was plain now that the line of sleepers stretched out for some distance, but that it was not very deep. Three minutes undiscovered and they would be through safely.

Silently they crept between the sleeping soldiers. There was a certain amount of safety in the very boldness of the plan, for it was unlikely, should a sentry see them moving about, he would take them for English; and even if he did now, they would be able to make a dash with some hope of success. The German soldiers, tired and completely exhausted, slept heavily, and not one so much as moved in his sleep.

The little party was now at the last line of sleepers, and just as Hal, believing they had accomplished their difficult task, drew a breath of relief, a form suddenly appeared from the darkness before them. It was a German sentry.

Before he could make an outcry Chester and Hal both leaped forward. The former’s hands grasped the German by the throat, stifling the sound of his voice, and Hal quickly delivered two hard blows to the man’s face. The German fell limply into Chester’s arms, and the boy laid him quietly on the ground.

Then they moved forward again. The sounds of the scuffle had aroused no one. But suddenly there was the sound of a fall behind. Turning his head quickly, Hal perceived the cause of this commotion which caused such a racket in the

stillness of the night.

One of the English soldiers had tripped over the body of a sleeping German and had fallen across him. He was up in a moment, but so was the German, sleepily hurling imprecations at the disturber of his slumber.

Before the German soldier was able to arouse himself, the Englishman dealt him a heavy blow over the head with his rifle butt. But the noise had brought another to the scene. There was the sharp crack of a rifle, and the English soldier who had caused all the trouble pitched to the ground. To the right Hal and Chester saw another sentry, a smoking rifle in his hands.

At the sound of the shot the whole German camp sprang to life as if by magic; and at the same instant Hal shouted:

“Run!”

At full speed the little party, only nine now, dashed forward. The other man lay dead in the German camp. There was a hoarse German cry of command, and a hail of bullets followed the fugitives into the woods. No man fell, though two groaned, and one dropped his rifle. The darkness made accurate shooting by the Germans impossible.

Not pausing to return the fire of the enemy, the fugitives stumbled on through the woods. Another and another volley came from the pursuing Germans, but they were firing at random now, and the fact that Hal and Chester had led the way well to the right augured well for their chance of safety.

But as the darkness made accurate shooting by the Germans impossible, so it made speed by the fugitives impossible also. They stumbled along as well as they could, now and then tripping over a fallen limb or tumbling into a hole. Tired and almost exhausted, they at length emerged into the open, and broke into a weary run.

“We have got to get under cover of some kind before they reach the edge of the woods, or we are gone goslings,” panted Hal.

Suddenly, in the darkness, they came upon another clump of trees, and as they stumbled into their shelter another volley rang out. One man groaned and stumbled. A comrade lent a supporting hand and dragged him into the woods.

“We’ll stop here a moment and pick off a few of ’em,” said Hal grimly.

The Germans were now advancing across the open space. Lying upon the ground, the nine opened fire. They aimed carefully and not a shot was wasted, and so rapid was their fire that the Germans halted.

“They don’t know how many of us there are,” said Hal, “and they are afraid to take a chance. One more volley, men, and then up and run for it again.”

A final volley was delivered with telling effect, and the English sprang to their feet and darted through the woods. The Germans gave them a parting shot, but there was no pursuit.

“That was pretty close,” said Chester.

“It was, indeed,” replied Hal, “and there is one more of our men gone. Was anyone wounded?” he asked, turning to the others.

“Shot in the shoulder, sir,” replied a man named Brown.

“They got me in the arm,” said another.

“Anyone else?” questioned Hal.

There was no reply, and Hal asked:

“Are you two men able to go on without assistance?”

“Yes,” was the reply.

“Good! Then come on.”

All night long the little party continued on their march, and it was not until the first gray streak of dawn showed them, in the distance, the first British line that the boys felt entirely safe.

Their report made, they were returning, later in the day, to their quarters to seek a much needed rest, when a well known voice exclaimed:

“Well, boys, how are you?”

The lads turned quickly about; then each gave a cry of delight and grabbed the man who had accosted them by the hand.

“Captain Derevaux!” they exclaimed in a single voice.

“No,” replied the gallant Frenchman, with a smile. “Major Derevaux, if you please!”

CHAPTER IV.

THE GERMAN RETREAT BEGUN.

Hal and Chester stood for some minutes grasping their friend by the hand.

“Major, eh,” ejaculated Hal. “I’m glad to hear that!”

“So am I,” declared Chester. “I am sure no one deserved promotion more than you.”

“Thanks,” laughed the major.

“Tell us,” said Hal, “what are you doing here? I thought you were with the Southern army.”

“I am; but I carried dispatches to General French, and if I mistake not, they are important ones. I believe that plans have been brought to a head and that we shall take the offensive soon.”

“Good!” cried Chester. “We have been retreating long enough.”

“But,” Hal protested, “we can hardly advance in the face of such odds; we must have reinforcements.”

“Well,” said Major Derevaux, “strong reinforcements already are arriving, and I believe that the advance will be general along our whole line.”

“That will mean severe fighting,” said Chester.

“Indeed it will,” replied the major. “It will mean fighting such as the world has never heard of before. It will mean death for thousands upon thousands. But the Germans must be pushed back.”

“And the Kaiser will find that he is not to have things all his own way,” said Hal.

“Exactly,” returned the major. “But I must leave you now, boys. I must return to my own regiment at once. Good luck to you!”

“Good luck!” exclaimed the boys as the major turned on his heel and strode rapidly away.

The two lads returned to their own quarters and gave themselves up to rest. So completely were they worn out that it was dark when they again opened their eyes; and they probably would not have done so then had not the clear notes of a bugle awakened them.

Rushing into the open, the lads saw that on all sides the troops were ready to move—whether forward or backward they could not tell as yet. It was evident, however, that something was afoot.

Hal and Chester made their way to the side of General French and joined the members of his staff. The gallant British commander was sitting his horse quietly, his staff grouped about him. Occasionally one went dashing away with some order, as the general gave a laconic command.

The boys had hardly taken their places when General French said quietly:

“Order a general advance!”

A moment later and the small though mighty host of Britain was in motion, and a loud cheer rang out on the still night air as the troops perceived that they were going forward—that the retreat had ended.

Swiftly and silently the army advanced. Ahead could be heard the crack, crack of rifle fire, indicating that the outposts were engaged with the enemy. Also, from the distance, could be heard the booming of the great German guns, and as the English advanced still further men began to fall before the deadly German artillery fire.

But the British did not falter; they plodded on as steadily as before. Then, after two hours of rapid marching, came the sudden command to halt. A moment later and a squadron of British cavalry came into view, retreating before a large force of Germans.

Just in front of the infantry the cavalry halted, and turned their faces toward the enemy. The advance of the British so far had not been discovered; but as the pursuing Germans came into view, the command to fire rang out.

There was a deafening crash as the British infantry hurled their messengers of

death into the compact ranks of the foe; and under this deadly fire the British cavalry dashed forward. Before the Germans could recover from their surprise the English horsemen were upon them, striking, cutting, slashing.

It was deadly and terrible work and the English did not go unscathed. But struggling thus, hand to hand, the Germans were no match for the English. Now there came from behind the Germans a large force of infantry on the run, and before these reinforcements the British cavalry was forced to retire.

All this was happening right before the eyes of Hal and Chester, in the very center of the British line. On the right and left the engagement was of the same fierce kind, and the deafening crashes of rifles and artillery on either side gave conclusive evidence that the British were engaged with the enemy all along their entire front.

Still the German cavalry pursued the British cavalry in the center. Then General French turned suddenly to Hal:

“Tell General Mayo to advance in force!” he commanded.

The general turned to Chester:

“Ask General Samson to bring his artillery into instant action!”

The two lads dashed away on their respective missions; and almost immediately the results of these two commands were apparent.

As the German infantry advanced in the wake of their cavalry, the British came to sudden life. Flame burst out from all along the center and the Germans recoiled. Volley after volley was poured into the wavering ranks of the enemy, and they turned to flee.

A supporting column was rushed hurriedly to their assistance, and as they advanced the British artillery opened fire. Great holes were cut in the advancing German line, but their advance was unchecked. From their rear reinforcements were coming continually.

The fire of the British artillery and infantry was deadly. Men fell by the hundreds, were mowed down like chaff before the wind by the accuracy of the British fire. In the English ranks men also were dropping on all sides, but the gaps were filled up immediately and the British, singing and cheering, continued

their advance.

The roar of battle could be heard for miles around, but the men engaged in the conflict were unconscious of it. They had but one sense left—that of sight—and their rifles continued to deal out death.

At length the German advance was checked, and then they began to fall back.

There was a rousing cheer from the English, and the advance was more rapid than before. The retreating Germans halted, turned to face the English, made a last desperate stand, then fled in disorder.

But as the English broke into a run to pursue their advantage still closer, they were met with a hail of bullets from a large force of the enemy's infantry which at that moment advanced, in support of their comrades, close enough to come into action.

The English reeled for a moment under this terrible fire, but they did not waver. Support was hurried to them. It was time for prompt action.

General French took in the situation at a glance and gave a quick command. A moment later the voices of the different officers rang out along the British line:

"With the bayonet! Charge!"

CHAPTER V.

THE CHARGE.

For the smallest fraction of a second there was an awesome silence, and then the British swept forward with a rush. Neither the bullets from the thousands of rifles nor the steady fire from the great guns of the German field batteries checked them.

The infantry covered the open space at a quick trot, and in almost less time than it takes to tell, it was at hand grips with the enemy, who stood braced to receive the shock of the charge.

The impact was terrific. The Germans stood gallantly to their work, encouraged by the shouts of their officers, but they were no match for the British troops in hand-to-hand fighting.

As the British closed upon them, the Germans poured in one fierce volley; but they had no time for more. Down went Teutons and English in struggling heaps, but the British poured over them and continued their deadly work.

All along the line the Germans gave ground slowly, their enemies pursuing them relentlessly and cutting them down as they retreated. The engagement became a slaughter.

Now Hal and Chester found themselves in the midst of the battle, in the fiercest of the fighting. Sent forward with orders, they found themselves in the center of the sudden charge. Neither was minded to turn back, but they managed to single each other out and soon were fighting side by side. Blood streamed from a wound in Hal’s cheek, where a German bayonet had pricked him slightly. Chester was unwounded.

Suddenly Hal found himself engaged with a German officer. With a swift move he swept aside his opponent’s blade and felled him to the earth. At the same moment a tall German soldier, thinking to deprive the lad of his weapon, brought his rifle down upon Hal’s sword.

But the boy's grip was firm and the sword snapped off near the hilt. Quickly Hal sprang forward, and before the German soldier could recover himself, the lad cut him down with his broken sword. Then, stooping, he picked up the sword which had fallen from the hands of the German officer, and sprang to the aid of Chester, who was fiercely engaged with two of the enemy, one an officer, the other a trooper.

One swift stroke of the boy's sword and the soldier was laid low. At the same instant Chester's sword slipped through his opponent's guard and the latter went to the ground, a deep wound in his side.

"Good work!" Chester found time to pant to Hal, and a second later both lads were once more too busy for speech.

Now Chester found himself engaged with a foeman worthy of his steel. The latter, a German lieutenant, was pressing the lad severely. At sword play the lad was clearly no match for him. Nevertheless Chester was giving a good account of himself.

Suddenly his sword was sent spinning from his hand, and as the weapon came down the point struck a German soldier squarely in the face. Chester's opponent sprang forward, his blade raised for a death thrust. But even as he thrust Chester dodged and the sword passed harmlessly over his head.

From his stooping position Chester seized the German officer by the knees before he could recover his balance and aim another thrust at him, and, with a quick heave, sent the officer spinning over his head. The German hit the ground with a thud, and as he was about to pick himself up an English trooper ended his fighting days with a thrust of his bayonet.

Chester seized the officer's sword and sprang forward into the thick of the conflict again. Side by side, Hal and Chester advanced with the victorious British troops, striking, cutting and slashing their way through the dense bodies of the enemy.

Suddenly Chester fell to the ground beneath the feet of the struggling men. A descending rifle butt had struck him a glancing blow on the head. Hal, engaged at that moment with another German officer, saw his friend's plight, and jumped back.

With his sword he swept aside a German bayonet which at that instant would have been buried in Chester's prostrate form, but as he did so a heavy blow fell upon the lad's head and he was sent to his knees. Above him, with poised bayonet, stood a German soldier.

Death stared him in the face and the boy realized it. It was impossible for him to regain his feet in time to ward off the thrust. Quickly he threw himself to one side, and as he did so the German toppled on top of him, lifeless.

Hal scrambled to his feet and saw that the man who had thus saved his life was none other than Lieutenant Harry Anderson.

"Just in time," said Hal briefly, and turned to where Chester was now struggling to his feet; and as the battle raged fiercely about them, unmindful of his own danger, he gave his entire attention to his friend.

Chester, shaking his head several times, announced that he was not seriously hurt, and with Lieutenant Anderson by their side they again plunged into the conflict.

But now the German retreat became more rapid. The enemy was unable to stand under the fierce charge of the British and they were giving way on all sides. The British pursued the foe rapidly and hundreds upon hundreds of the enemy were cut down in their flight.

Unable to keep back the English and retreat orderly, the Germans broke and fled. The retreat had become a rout. For some distance the British pursued them, and then a halt was called.

The losses of the British troops had been extremely heavy, but not so great as that of the enemy, who had suffered tremendously.

Now a thunderous roar broke out. The British artillery, unable to be used while the hand to hand fighting was in progress, was in action again, shelling the fleeing Germans.

The dead strewed the battlefield, and as Hal, Chester and Lieutenant Anderson made their way toward the rear, they were forced to climb over the dead and wounded, many with shattered limbs and maimed for life. But the Red Cross was at work, and the wounded were being cared for with the greatest possible

haste and gentleness.

“That was some fight, if you ask me,” said Hal to Chester, as they continued their way to the part of the field where they could see General French and his staff, Lieutenant Anderson having left them to rejoin his own men, from whom he had become separated.

“It was all of that,” replied Chester, “and I can’t imagine how we escaped with our lives.”

“Nor I. It doesn’t seem possible that anyone in the midst of such terrible carnage could live, to say nothing of being only slightly wounded. By the way, are you hurt much, Hal?”

“No; just a scratch on the face and a bump on the head. And you?”

“I was luckier than that, although a German did crack me with his rifle butt.”

“Look at the dead and wounded lying about,” said Hal. “It is a terrible thing—this modern warfare.”

“It is, indeed,” returned Chester, and the two continued on their way in silence.

General French noticed their approach. The British commander was standing as he had stood through the last part of the battle, exposed to the fire of the enemy, calmly smoking a cigarette!

CHAPTER VI.

THE BRIDGE IS HELD.

At a sign from General French Hal and Chester approached and saluted.

“Where have you been, sirs?” demanded the British commander.

Hal stepped forward and explained their absence.

“And you were in the midst of the charge?” questioned General French, when the lad concluded.

“Yes, sir!”

“And are not even badly wounded?”

“No, sir!”

“Wonderful!” exclaimed the general. Then, after a few moments’ silence: “You seem to bear charmed lives. I believe you are the two for my mission.”

“Yes, sir!” exclaimed Hal eagerly.

“Both of you report to me in an hour,” ordered General French.

The two lads saluted again and moved away.

“Wonder what he wants?” said Chester.

“Too deep for me,” was Hal’s reply.

“He said something about a mission. I guess that means more excitement for us.”

“I guess you are right. However, I am sure we can go through with it, no matter what it may be.”

“We can try, anyhow. That’s the best anyone can do.”

At the appointed time the two boys made their way to General French’s

headquarters.

“I have an important piece of work that must be done, and which will be attended with grave danger; are you willing to undertake it?” asked the British commander, coming to the point without preliminaries.

“We shall do our best, sir,” replied Hal.

“Good! The enemy has retreated beyond Meaux. To-morrow I shall try and drive him farther. It is absolutely necessary that our movements be not anticipated. As you see we have lost many officers. I want you to lead one hundred men to a position just this side of the bridge. The enemy must not be allowed to cross. One hundred men can hold the bridge as well as ten thousand. The men to go with you have been selected. They have volunteered for this duty. Captain Lee will show you where to find them. Hold the bridge! That is all!”

The two lads saluted and took their departure. They found Captain Lee, and with him were soon at the head of the little band of men who had volunteered to hold the bridge at Meaux against the whole German army, if necessary.

It was still dark, and it was a quiet little band that advanced through the British lines to take up their positions at the extreme front. A long range artillery duel was still in progress in spite of the darkness, but little damage was being done by either side.

Having retreated beyond Meaux, the Germans had unlimbered their artillery again and the British were replying. The little band of English, with Hal and Chester in lead, advanced to the edge of the bridge described by General French, and there took up their positions.

The bridge was very narrow, hardly wide enough for five men to walk abreast. On the British end the approach curved, making it impossible for one coming from the other direction to see what was at the other end. It was indeed a strategic point for defense. The river was high and thus precluded any attempt to ford it.

All night long the little band of men lay at the bridge, ready for battle on a moment’s notice. All night long the shells of both the Germans and British flew screaming overhead; but none dropped near them.

With the first faint glow of the approaching day the little band of British were awake. At Hal's suggestion they cut down trees, and dragged them to the end of the bridge, forming a barricade. Behind this they lay down.

It was almost noon before the man stationed to watch the approach to the bridge dropped quickly over the barricade and reported:

"They are coming!"

"All right," replied Hal. "We're ready for 'em!"

Under Hal's direction, a single line of rifles, twenty-five in all, appeared through the cracks of the barricade. The others had been divided into three bodies—each containing twenty-five men—each body directly behind the others. These were instructed to fill up the gaps made by the German fire. Thus, as each man in the front rank fell, his place would immediately be filled by another, the second by the third, the third by the fourth, so providing twenty-five men fell the front line would be still intact, although the fourth line would have disappeared.

Hal and Chester took their places just in the rear of the first line, where they could see what was going on and direct the fighting.

"Do not fire until they come into sight around the turn," Capt. Lee instructed his men. "Then mow them down, and make every shot count!"

Joking and humming to themselves, the men prepared for action. The first line poked their rifles through the barricade and lay down behind them. All was in readiness to repulse the attack.

Suddenly the first Germans appeared around the turn in the bridge, marching five abreast.

"Fire!" cried the captain, and the British rifles broke into flame.

Five Germans tumbled to the bridge.

A sudden idea struck Hal.

"There's no use wasting five bullets on each German," he told his men. "Let the five men on the left each pick out a man. The rest reserve your fire unless one of our men go down, then the one nearest him take his man, and so on!"

The second five Germans were too close behind their comrades, who had just fallen, to arrest their steps in time to avoid the British fire.

Five shots rang out as they came into view, and again five Germans fell. So far not a shot had been fired by the Germans. But now five more came around the turn with a rush, followed by five more, and still another five.

The first five dropped in a heap, but from the second five came a burst of flame and the crack of rifles. Two men behind the barricade dropped, one of whom was Capt. Lee. But the Germans paid dearly for their rash attack.

In less time than it takes to tell it, ten more Germans had bitten the dust. Then they drew off.

“Good work, men!” cried Chester. “We can hold them off indefinitely,” he added to Hal.

“Looks like it,” was Hal’s reply. “But if they make a concerted rush we shall have our hands full. How is Capt. Lee?”

“Very bad,” answered one of the men. “I am afraid he’s done for.”

And now the Germans came on again. The first five met the same fate that had overtaken their comrades, but behind them came more, and still more.

As each German rounded the turn in the bridge his rifle cracked, and continued to crack until he fell. Men inside the barricade also were beginning to fall fast now, and the reserve lines were being drawn upon more rapidly each minute.

Hal and Chester, crouching down, directed the defense. In spite of the fearful havoc wrought by the British fire, the Germans came on. The bridge was piled high with dead and wounded, but the enemy did not hesitate.

Their officers urged them on without regard for life, and bravely went to death with them. Rifles cracked in a steady roar and men on both sides fell rapidly. But each Englishman, sheltered as he was behind the barricade, accounted for at least several of the enemy before he himself went to his death.

Now the defenders had dwindled to fifty, and still there was no cessation of the German assault. The heaped up bodies of dead now formed a barricade for the Germans, and they advanced and fell behind them, using their dead companions

as shields. Ten or fifteen rows deep they stood behind their dead, and poured volley after volley into the defenders.

The British reserved their fire as much as possible, but whenever a German head showed above the barricade of bodies a rifle cracked and almost every time a German fell.

All afternoon the fighting continued, the Germans, because of the fierce fire of the remaining English and hampered by their own dead, being unable to rush the defenders.

There were less than twenty-five of the British unwounded. Hal and Chester had both been struck, Hal on the arm and Chester on the shoulder. But neither was badly hurt.

“Hadn’t we better retreat, sir?” asked one soldier of Hal, when there was a let up in the firing.

“What chance would we have?” demanded Hal. “The minute we broke and ran we would be shot down like dogs.”

“Then we might surrender.”

“Surrender! Never! We were ordered to hold the bridge and we will hold it as long as we can.”

The man subsided, and Hal turned his face toward the foe again. There was a sudden silence. The Germans drew off.

“Wonder what that means?” demanded Hal of Chester. “They certainly are not going to give up. I wonder what they are up to now?”

“I can’t imagine,” replied Chester. “But they have something up their sleeves.”

“Well, we’ll soon see,” said Hal.

But he was mistaken; for just as the first German again appeared around the turn, to be struck down by a British bullet, there was a sudden deafening roar from the rear, and turning suddenly Hal and Chester and the few brave soldiers who were left raised a feeble cheer.

Coming forward at a rapid trot were several squadrons of British cavalry, and far

behind could be seen columns upon columns of infantry, advancing swiftly.

“Hurrah!” shouted Hal. “Saved! Hurrah!”

“Hurrah!” repeated Chester, and completely worn out, he tumbled over in a heap.

CHAPTER VII.

HAL MAKES AN ENEMY.

Hal bent over his friend and shook him gently.

“Chester! Chester!” he exclaimed anxiously. “Are you wounded?”

There was no reply from the unconscious boy, and Hal became greatly alarmed. He turned to the few troopers who remained.

“Here, lend a hand some of you,” he commanded. “One of you fetch some water!”

Two of the men bent over the unconscious lad and one raised his head gently to his knee. A third dashed for the river, and a moment later returned with his cap filled with water.

Hal sprinkled a few drops of water on his friend’s face, and soon noticed signs of returning consciousness. Finally Chester opened his eyes and smiled feebly.

“Are you much hurt, old fellow?” asked Hal anxiously.

“No,” came the feeble response. “I don’t think so. A bullet just grazed my side. I don’t know how I came to topple over like that.”

Quickly Hal unloosened his friend’s coat, tore open his shirt and examined his wound.

“It’s only a scratch,” he said, straightening up at last. “Here,” pulling out his handkerchief, “I’ll fix it up until we can have a surgeon look at it. You will be able to walk in a few minutes.”

“I’m able right now,” said Chester, struggling to his feet.

Leaning heavily on Hal’s arm, Chester turned his eyes toward the river bank, which now was lined with British troops, who were firing steadily at forms disappearing on the opposite side of the stream. The approach of the English in

force had caused the Germans to beat a rapid retreat. From the opposite shore, however, still came puffs of smoke, and bullets continued to fall among the English troops, and here and there men fell to the ground.

“They arrived just in time, didn’t they, Hal?” said Chester.

“You bet they did,” was the reply. “But come, we will try to make our way back to our station.”

With Chester still leaning on his shoulder, Hal led the way, going very slowly because of his burden. Making his friend comfortable under an army wagon, Hal went at once to Gen. French to make his report.

“You have done well,” was the general’s only comment when Hal had concluded his recital.

Hal saluted and left.

“Guess I’ll go back and keep Chester company,” he said to himself.

He was walking slowly along with bowed head, musing, when he came suddenly into contact with another figure. The man with whom he had collided mumbled an imprecation and violently pushed the lad away, at the same time exclaiming:

“What do you mean by bumping into me like that? Can’t you see where you are going? I have a notion to teach you better manners.”

Hal’s face flushed, and he turned a steady gaze on the other, who proved to be a French lieutenant.

“I wouldn’t try it if I were you,” the lad advised him.

“What!” exclaimed the Frenchman. “You dare to talk to me like that?”

“Of course I dare,” was the lad’s heated response.

The Frenchman took a quick step forward and slapped Hal smartly across the face.

Hal promptly sent his right fist crashing into the other’s face and knocked him down.

The Frenchman rose slowly to his feet, and with blood streaming from his nose,

approached Hal.

“I am Lieutenant Dupree,” he said. “My friend shall call on you this evening.”

“I am Hal Paine, attached to the staff of General French,” Hal said calmly, “and your friend may call any time he so desires.”

The Frenchman bowed stiffly, and continued on his way. Hal returned to Chester.

“Back so soon?” said Chester.

“Yes,” was Hal’s reply; “and back with more trouble.”

“What’s the matter?” demanded Chester in some consternation.

“Well, I am afraid I have a duel on my hands.”

“A duel?”

“Yes; on my way here I accidentally bumped into some fiery French lieutenant. He slapped me across the face and I knocked him down. He then informed me his friend would call on me this evening. That sounds like a duel to me.”

“Yes,” said Chester, “unless it can be patched up.”

“I am afraid it can’t. You know these Frenchmen. As far as I am concerned, there is nothing to fight about, but I am afraid the Frenchman feels he has a grievance. He’ll probably demand a fight or an apology.”

“Well?”

“I have nothing to apologize for; therefore I am afraid it means a duel.”

“Not if I can prevent it,” exclaimed Chester, jumping to his feet.

“But you can’t,” replied Hal grimly. “And you had better lie down again. You are liable to strain your wound.”

“Oh, I am not worrying about the wound,” exclaimed Chester. “The doctor said there was no danger. It’s you I am worrying about. Why, you are likely to be killed.”

“Oh, I guess I can give a good account of myself,” returned Hal. “I’ve been

pretty fortunate thus far. I don't figure I am going to fall before any Frenchman's sword or pistol. I'll probably be saved for a German bullet some of these days."

Chester became silent. He knew that an argument was useless. Besides, he knew that in Hal's position his own actions would be the same.

It was shortly after 6 o'clock that evening when two French officers made their way to the quarters to which the boys had been assigned.

"Choose swords," said Hal laconically, as Chester rose to greet the callers.

"Mr. Paine," queried one of the Frenchmen politely.

"No," replied Chester; "but I shall act for him."

"Good," returned the Frenchman. "I am Lieutenant Mercer, and this," indicating his companion, "is Lieutenant Lamont."

"I am Chester Crawford," said the lad briefly.

"Then, to get down to business," said Lieutenant Mercer. "Mr. Paine has insulted my friend, Lieutenant Dupree. My friend demands an apology."

"There'll be no apology," said Chester shortly.

"Ah! In that case my friend, Lieutenant Dupree, demands satisfaction from Mr. Paine."

"It seems to me he has had satisfaction," said Chester.

"Ah!" replied the Frenchman cheerfully. "You no doubt refer to the blow passed by Mr. Paine? It is for that my friend demands satisfaction."

"He had that coming to him," declared Chester.

"So you may believe. Lieutenant Dupree thinks otherwise. Now, as to the arrangements——"

"Look here," said Chester, interrupting. "With the whole German army lined up in front of us, it seems to me that our friend should be able to find all the fighting he wants. This fighting among ourselves is all nonsense."

"But my friend's honor——" began the Frenchman.

“Bosh!” declared Chester. “It wasn’t your friend’s honor that was hurt. It was his face.”

“Then am I to understand that your friend refuses to fight?”

“No!” shouted Chester. “He doesn’t refuse to fight. He just doesn’t see the necessity of fighting. That’s all. But if you insist, he will give your friend all the satisfaction he wants.”

“I must insist,” replied Lieutenant Mercer.

“All right, then,” said Chester. “I am not familiar with dueling etiquette, but as the challenged party I believe the choice of weapons lies with us.”

The Frenchman bowed in assent.

“Then let it be swords!”

“Good! And the time and place?”

“I’ll leave that to you.”

“In the morning at half-past five—provided we are all alive—in the little woods half a mile in the rear. Are these convenient for you?”

“Perfectly. We shall be there on time. Will you please bring weapons?”

“I shall be delighted,” replied the Frenchman. “Until the morning, then,” and the two French officers bowed themselves out.

“Well, you are into it now,” said Chester to Hal, after their visitors had gone. “Looks to me as though you had a fair chance of seeing the Happy Hunting Grounds before six o’clock to-morrow.”

Before Hal could reply another visitor poked his head through the door of the tent.

“Am I intruding?” he asked.

“Lieutenant Anderson!” exclaimed Chester. “Just the man I wanted to see.”

“What’s the matter now?” demanded the lieutenant.

“Matter is that Hal’s mixed up in a duel, to be pulled off in the morning.”

“What!” exclaimed Lieutenant Anderson in surprise.

“Fact,” said Hal. “I bumped into some little whipper-snapper of a French lieutenant a couple of hours ago. He slapped me and I knocked him down. Now he demands satisfaction, and I am going to give it to him in the morning, at half-past five.”

The lieutenant sat down heavily.

“Well, you are the limit,” he said. “You are always in a scrape of some kind. I suppose it’s up to me to prevent the duel.”

“No chance,” said Hal briefly.

“No,” agreed Chester, “and it’s up to you to make the third party on our side. I suppose the other crowd will bring a surgeon.”

“Do you know what will happen if you are found out?” demanded the lieutenant.

“No,” said Hal.

“Well, it probably will mean strict confinement, at least. The regulations in regard to dueling are very stringent.”

“I can’t help that,” said Hal. “I can’t back out now.”

“Well, if that’s the way you feel about it,” replied the lieutenant, “I’ll help you as best I can. I’ll stay here to-night and go along to see that you get fair play.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DUEL.

It was hardly light when Chester, who had been unable to close his eyes, aroused Lieutenant Anderson. The two finished dressing before rousing Hal, thinking to give him all the rest possible before waking him up. Finally Chester shook him by the shoulder.

“What’s the matter,” muttered Hal drowsily. “Time to get up already? I just went to sleep. What’s up? Oh, yes, I remember now. I’m to fight a duel this morning. All right, I’ll be ready in a jiffy.”

“How did you sleep?” demanded Chester, as Hal was dressing.

“Fine. Never slept better in my life.”

Lieutenant Anderson approached and laid his finger on Hal’s pulse.

“You’ll do,” he said quietly.

“I haven’t any nerves, if that is what you mean,” said Hal with a smile.

Lieutenant Anderson smiled back at him.

“I believe it,” he replied. “But come, we had better be on our way.”

Quietly the three left the tent. There was a penetrating chill in the early morning air. It was light now, but the sun had not yet appeared above the horizon. Dense clouds obscured the sky.

“Not a very cheerful morning to die,” commented Hal lightly, as they made their way quietly along.

“You are not afraid, are you?” asked Chester anxiously.

“What, after yesterday? Not a little bit.”

“I don’t believe you know what fear is,” declared Lieutenant Anderson.

Lieutenant Dupree, his two friends and a surgeon were already on the ground when Hal, Chester and Lieutenant Anderson arrived. All raised their caps as they came together. The seconds drew apart to discuss the details of the duel, Hal and Lieutenant Dupree in the meantime discarding their coats and rolling up their sleeves.

The details completed, Hal and the French lieutenant were at last face to face.

“On guard!” came the command, given by Lieutenant Anderson.

The swords flashed aloft.

A moment later and they were at it. For a few moments both combatants were wary, each feeling the other out. A few passes and Hal realized that he was no match for the more experienced Frenchman.

“I must be very careful,” he told himself. “Perhaps I can wear him down a bit, and slip over a light thrust. I certainly don’t want to kill him. And I don’t want to be killed myself.”

The French lieutenant was pressing him sorely now. His sword darted in and out with dazzling rapidity, and Hal thanked his stars that he had been fortunate enough to have had some schooling in the use of the foil.

Hal contented himself with remaining on the defensive, and not an attempt did he make to touch the Frenchman, although the latter left several openings, only, Hal knew, to draw him on. The lieutenant at last began to grow impatient, and with impatience came carelessness.

He had realized, as had Hal, with the first few passes, that the lad was not an accomplished swordsman. And the fact now that he could not penetrate the other’s guard angered him.

Suddenly he aimed a fierce thrust at Hal, and the latter only escaped being impaled on the other’s sword by a quick leap aside. Before the Frenchman could recover his balance, Hal stepped nimbly forward again, his sword darted out, and the lieutenant dropped his weapon with a muttered imprecation. Hal’s point had pierced his arm just below the shoulder.

The Frenchman's seconds immediately leaped forward, and Hal stepped over to Chester and Lieutenant Anderson.

"I guess that ends it," he said. "I suppose his honor is appeased now."

"Don't be too sure," replied Lieutenant Anderson. "He is likely to be more furious than ever, and demand that the fight continue until one of you fall. He must realize that you are no match for him, and he counts on that to give him victory. However, I must say that you have handled yourself well, and, if you keep your head, you may succeed in dropping him."

The lieutenant's predictions proved correct. Lieutenant Dupree had had his wound bandaged, and now demanded that the fight be resumed. Hal was not the lad to protest, so the two were soon at swords' points again.

But now both Hal and Lieutenant Dupree fought more warily. Hal could read in his opponent's eyes that he had made up his mind to kill him. Touched once because of his carelessness, Hal knew that the Frenchman would be more wary.

In stepping back before a fierce thrust of his opponent's sword, Hal's foot slipped. He threw up his arm, and for a moment was off his guard. Before he could recover his balance, the Frenchman's sword flashed up under his guard and pierced him through the left shoulder.

The lad staggered back, and the Frenchman, unheeding the accident and the calls of Lieutenant Anderson and Chester, pressed his advantage. With a grim smile he started a thrust that would have ended Hal's days; but, with a sudden lurch, Hal staggered forward, threw up his sword, and, with a terrific stroke, swept the sword from the Frenchman's hand. Lieutenant Dupree was at his mercy.

The Frenchman stepped back and folded his arms, as Hal took a step forward.

"Kill me," he said quietly.

"Run him through!" shouted Lieutenant Anderson. "He tried to kill you unfairly."

Slowly Hal lowered his sword.

"No," he said, "I can't do it. Neither will I continue the fight." He turned to his late opponent. "I hope your honor is satisfied," he said.

The Frenchman turned, and, with bowed head, replaced his coat; then with his two friends he walked away.

The surgeon hurried to Hal's side and peered at his wound.

"Not serious," he said, after an examination. "I'll have it fixed all right in a moment."

The wound dressed, the surgeon offered Hal his hand.

"You are a gallant youngster," he said, "and I am proud to know you. Many a man in your place would have killed his opponent. Your coolness is a thing to be admired."

Hal shook hands with the surgeon, and the latter then took himself off.

Lieutenant Anderson approached Hal and grasped him by both arms.

"You are all right," he said, emphasizing each word. "I was afraid it was all up with you."

"And so was I," said Chester. "But, if you had fallen unfairly, I would have killed him myself."

The three made their way back to the boys' quarters, where they sat down and talked the duel over.

"The best thing you can do now," said Lieutenant Anderson to Hal finally, "is to get a little rest. Both of you are wounded, and will not have to report for duty. I shall tell General French that you will be all right in a day or two."

"Tell him we shall be all right in an hour or two, that will be much better," said Hal.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed the lieutenant. "Can't you even keep still for a day?"

"Well," said Hal, "there is likely to be some real fighting to-day, and we don't want to miss anything, do we Chester?"

"I should say not," was Chester's reply.

CHAPTER IX.

TO THE RESCUE.

“It looks rather awesome, doesn’t it?” said Chester.

“It certainly does,” was Hal’s reply.

The object of the boys’ conversation was a long armored train, which stood on a siding. It was late in the afternoon, and the two lads, after having taken a long rest, and being relieved from active duty by the express command of General French, had strolled up to the temporary siding, where the huge engine now stood puffing and snorting.

It was the first time either of the two boys had ever seen this rapidly moving vehicle of warfare. The open flat cars were protected by thick sheets of steel, behind which were mounted many small guns and rapid-firers.

These armored trains already had given good accounts of themselves in other parts of the long line of battle, particularly in Belgium, in the earlier days of the struggle, and were things of terror to the German troops.

The train beside which the two lads now stood was ready for instant action. The gunners were at their posts, ready to go forward at a moment’s notice. The engineer and firemen stood beside the huge engine.

In the distance the sound of firing could be heard, and occasionally a shell burst close to where the boys were standing. But they had been through their baptism of fire, and paid little heed to these messengers of death.

“They say that these trains have proven immense factors in sudden raids on the enemy,” said Chester.

“Yes,” agreed Hal, “and it is easy to see that among light armed troops they could do great execution. It would even take very heavy artillery fire to make an impression on those steel sides. Besides——”

He broke off with a sudden exclamation.

“Look out,” he cried, and leaped back, pulling Chester forcibly along.

A second later and there was a terrific explosion. A German shell had burst within a few feet of where the two lads had been standing.

A crowd of troopers, who had been idling about a few yards from the train, disappeared with the deafening report, and when the smoke had cleared away they were nowhere to be seen. They had been blown to atoms.

The boys rushed forward, but, even as they did so, they halted at the sound of a sudden cry, and, turning their faces up the track, they beheld a mounted officer galloping swiftly toward them. An officer dropped off one of the cars of the train, which, fortunately, had not been touched by the explosion, and hurried to meet the newcomer.

“Who is in charge of this train?” demanded the horseman, throwing himself from his mount without waiting for the animal to come to a stop.

“I am,” was the officer’s brief response.

“You are ordered to proceed forward at once under full speed,” was the command. “The Tenth Royal Dragoons are hemmed in by at least 10,000 Germans two miles ahead, and unless you arrive in time they will all be slaughtered.”

The officer in command of the train looked hurriedly about.

“Hicks!” he called loudly. “Hicks!”

There was no reply, and the officer shouted again. Then Hal stepped forward.

“If Hicks was your engineer,” he said, “there is no use calling him. He is dead.”

“Dead?” exclaimed the officer.

“Yes; that shell struck right beside him. The fireman also was killed.”

“Great Scott!” exclaimed the officer. “Then what am I to do? Hicks was the only engineer with us right now. The others have gone to their quarters, and by the time I could get them here it would be too late.”

“Well,” said Hal quietly, “if you want a volunteer, I am willing to tackle it for you.”

“You?”

“Yes; I have made some slight study of a locomotive, and, while I have never run one any great distance, I have ridden many miles in the cab of an engine in lumber camps in the United States.”

“And I can fire the engine,” Chester broke in.

“Well,” said the officer, “something has to be done at once; and, if you are willing to take a chance, so am I. Get aboard.”

He turned and rushed hurriedly back to his car, while Hal and Chester leaped aboard the locomotive. In response to a signal, Hal released the brakes, gently opened the throttle, and the great engine began to forge slowly ahead.

Gradually the lad opened the throttle wider, and the huge locomotive commenced to gain momentum, until at last it was rushing along like some mad thing. Chester, in the meantime, was busy with a shovel.

A moment, it seemed to the two lads, and the sound of firing rose above the roar of the locomotive, and the spat spat of bullets against the armored sides could be heard. But Hal did not falter. Rather, the engine seemed to leap ahead with even greater speed.

From the rear came the signal to slow down, and, under Hal’s firm hand, the terrific speed of the train was checked. Then also from the rear there came the sound of firing. The rapid-firers on the train had been unloosed, and their leaden messengers were spelling death in the ranks of the Germans, of whom the train was now in the middle.

Chester poked his head out the window of the cab, only to withdraw it quickly, as a bullet struck a quarter of an inch from his ear. But in that one brief glance he had taken in the situation.

A short distance ahead he could make out a small knot of British, almost surrounded by Germans. The British had taken their stand directly on the railroad track, the most strategic point for miles. A clump of small trees screened them from the enemy on one side, but from the other three directions the

Germans were pouring in their deadly fire.

The British troops stood gallantly to their work, and returned volley for volley. They fought on doggedly. Suddenly the armored train shot up the line which the British were holding, and Hal brought it to an abrupt stop.

Right and left the train poured in broadsides of machine-gun fire, mowing down the Germans at every yard. The Germans fell in heaps, and, as if by a miracle, both sides of the track were suddenly lined with high piles of the dead.

The little troop of British received this unexpected aid with a great cheer, broke from cover and dashed in pursuit of the great mass of Germans, who now were fleeing on all sides.

But the success of the British was destined to be short-lived. Hal and Chester, in the cab of the locomotive, had just raised a loud cheer when there was a terrific explosion, followed by a thundering crash, and both lads were hurled violently to the floor of the cab.

Chester, with blood flowing from a gash in his forehead, was the first to pick himself up. In falling his head had come in contact with a sharp projection of some kind. He was terribly dizzy, but his head was still clear.

He stooped over Hal, and at that moment the latter raised himself on his elbow and then got to his feet unsteadily.

“Great Scott! What was that?” he gasped.

Chester did not reply. Instead he swung out from the cab and glanced back over the train—or rather where the train had been. And what a sight met his gaze!

The train of armored cars was gone. Alongside the track lay pieces of wreckage, and many bodies and pieces of what had once been machine guns.

Hal peered over Chester’s shoulder.

“Another shell,” he said slowly. “But how does it happen we were not killed also?”

“I don’t know,” said Chester, “but I judge the shell must have struck in the middle of the train. Look, there is nothing left but the engine.”

It was true. In some unaccountable manner the engine had escaped scot free. At that moment Hal, who had glanced out from the other side of the cab, made a startling discovery.

“Wow!” he shouted. “Here come the Germans again—thousands of ’em. We are goners, now, sure.”

But, before Chester could reply, Hal jumped forward. With one hand he released the brakes and threw the throttle wide—and the huge locomotive leaped suddenly forward.

“It’s our only chance,” Hal shouted to Chester. “The track behind is covered with wreckage, and it is impossible to go that way.”

That the Germans understood their ruse was soon apparent. There was a shout from the oncoming horde, and the sharp crack of rifles and bullets began to spatter against the side of the engine.

“Well, we’ll give ’em a chase, anyhow,” said Hal grimly.

He opened the throttle even wider.

CHAPTER X.

A WILD RIDE.

The engine rocked crazily as it dashed along, and the boys hung on to whatever offered for dear life. Around curve after curve they shot with a lurch, the locomotive threatening at every turn to leave the rails.

“Where is the end of this road?” asked Chester of Hal, raising his voice to a shout to make himself heard above the roar of the speeding locomotive.

“I don’t know,” Hal shouted back.

“Then you had better slow down. The tracks in front may be torn up and we would certainly be killed.”

“You are right,” shouted Hal.

Quickly he closed the throttle and applied the brakes. The huge mogul trembled violently and shook all over, but its speed was soon slackened.

Looking behind, the two lads saw that they had left their pursuers far in the rear, and both breathed more freely.

“How far are we going on this thing, anyhow?” Chester demanded. “Don’t you think we had better get off and walk back?”

“What! and leave the engine in the hands of the enemy? Not much. Besides, I am certain the British must control this road at the other end or it would have been destroyed by this time. We’ll just keep on going and see what happens.”

“Well, something will happen, all right,” said Chester. “I can feel it in my bones. However, you are the doctor. Forward it is, then.”

The locomotive was going more slowly now, Hal always keeping a keen eye ahead. For perhaps five minutes they rode along without incident; then suddenly Hal, without even a word to Chester, “opened her up” again.

Once more the huge locomotive jumped forward.

“What’s the matter now?” cried Chester, springing to Hal’s side.

“Matter!” shouted Hal. “Look ahead.”

Chester peered out, and drew his head back with an exclamation.

“More Germans, eh!” he muttered, and then shouted. “You do the driving and I’ll keep her hot.”

“Good!” Hal called back, never taking his eyes from the road ahead.

Apparently the Germans were unconscious of the approach of the locomotive, for they did not even glance in its direction. Troopers stood beside either side of the track, and several groups were standing between the rails.

Closer and closer the engine approached, and still they did not move. A moment later and the great steel monster was upon them. There was a sudden shout, but it was too late—for some, at any rate.

The great locomotive caught them as they attempted to jump from the track, and hurled them in all directions. Hal and Chester ducked low inside the cab, and it was well that they did so; for, as the engine shot past, hundreds of bullets sped through the cab, and hundreds more flattened themselves against the steel-protected sides. It was close work, and no mistake.

“Whew!” breathed Chester, after they had safely run the gauntlet of the German fire and Hal had once more reduced the speed of the locomotive. “That was close.”

“Too close for comfort,” Hal agreed.

“I wonder how many we killed back there,” said Chester.

“I don’t know, but I am sure it was enough. It seemed to be their lives or ours.”

“It’s only a few more gone to the Happy Hunting Ground in a mistaken cause,” said Chester slowly. “But, as you say, it was either they or us. There was nothing else we could do.”

“No,” said Hal, “there wasn’t; but, just the same, it gave me a cold chill as they

went flying through the air. It was terrible."

Both lads were silent for a time, as the locomotive continued on its way. It was getting dusk now, and Hal was forced to reduce the speed of the engine even more. They went slowly along, both lads keeping a wary eye ahead for Germans.

Darkness came on, and still they rode along. Their speed was little better than a walk, and it was well that Hal had decided to discontinue his reckless driving.

From ahead, a sudden red glare went up to the sky, followed almost instantly by a report like that of a thousand cannons. The locomotive came to a stop with a jolt as Hal applied the brakes.

"What's up now?" demanded Chester.

"I don't know; but that explosion sounded to me as if there were something wrong ahead. I wouldn't be surprised if the Germans had dynamited the bridge."

"By George! I believe you are right," exclaimed Chester. "I wouldn't have thought of it, and if I had been in your place at the throttle the chances are we would have gone over if such is the case."

"Well," said Hal, "I'll climb down, take a walk ahead and investigate."

"I'll go with you," declared Chester.

"No, you won't. You stay here and watch the engine."

"You are right, as usual," said Chester. "But don't be any longer than you can help."

Hal agreed, and a moment later Chester lost sight of him in the darkness.

Slowly and cautiously Hal made his way along the track. As he moved stealthily around a curve in the road the cause of the explosion became apparent. It was even as he had feared. His quick wit had detected the meaning of the explosion and none too soon.

Just ahead, where a short time before had been a bridge spanning a deep chasm, there was now nothing but space. The bridge had been blown up. Had Hal applied the brakes to the engine one minute later, in spite of the fact that it was traveling very slowly, both boys probably would have been carried over the

embankment to certain death; for it is doubtful that either, in the darkness, would have noticed the absence of the bridge in time to leap to safety.

And now Hal could make out a number of rapidly moving figures. To his dismay, he saw that they were moving in his direction. He turned quickly and ran back to the locomotive, where Chester was anxiously awaiting his return.

“Out here, quick!” he cried, and Chester, in response to his command, leaped to the ground.

Hal once more jumped aboard the locomotive, unheeding Chester’s cry of wonder, released the brakes, and threw the throttle wide open. Then he dropped sprawling to the ground, while the engine dashed madly down the track.

Hal was not badly hurt and was quickly on his feet.

“What’s the matter?” asked Chester in alarm.

“Matter is that the Germans are coming this way,” answered Hal. “Come, let’s get away from here while we have a chance. We may be able to escape in the darkness.”

“But why did you start that engine down the track like that?”

“Well, I couldn’t see that it was any use to us any longer, and it may dispose of a few more Germans. They are walking up the track in force.”

This appealed to Chester.

“Good!” he cried, and both stopped in their tracks to listen.

A second and there came to their ears a sudden startled shout, followed by a fearful yell, a moment of silence, and then a crash.

“Good-by engine,” said Hal. “That’s a good job done. You perished nobly. Now,” to Chester, “let’s get away from this spot as fast as we can.”

They turned their faces in the direction from which they had come, and set out at a brisk pace. They plodded along for an hour through the open country, finally coming to a dense woods.

“Guess we had better try and lose ourselves in here,” said Chester.

“Right you are,” agreed Hal.

They entered the friendly shelter of the trees. Here they were forced to travel more slowly. They made good progress, however, and at the end of another hour had covered considerable distance.

“I guess we are safe enough as long as we can stay in the woods,” said Chester.

“Don’t be too sure,” declared Hal. “It’s the unexpected that always happens.”

The words were hardly out of his mouth when the truth of them was proved. As they emerged from where the trees were thickest into a little clearing a sudden, guttural command brought them to an abrupt stop.

“Halt!” came a voice. “Halt, or I fire!”

CHAPTER XI.

CAPTURED.

Caught thus unexpectedly Hal immediately threw his hands above his head; Chester followed his example. It was plain to both lads that there was not a chance in a thousand to escape, for the German soldier had his rifle pointed squarely at them.

Of course there was a possibility that by a sudden spring one of the lads might have succeeded in knocking the man down; but this probably would have meant the death of the other. Hal and Chester both realized that it was no time to take such a chance.

“We surrender,” called Hal in German, and immediately the soldier lowered his weapon and approached them.

He passed his hands around their waists and then felt in the pockets of their coats and relieved them of their weapons. Then he ordered:

“Right about; forward, march!”

The lads obeyed this command, and the German stalked after them, keeping his rifle in readiness for a quick shot should his prisoners attempt to escape.

But the lads had no thought of taking to their heels, for they were fully aware that a bullet would stop one of them at least should they make even one false move.

They continued their walk, and presently came in view of what appeared to be a large German camp. Here their captor marched them directly to the tent of the commanding officer.

“What are you doing within our lines?” was the latter’s first question after the soldier had related how he had made his capture.

“Well,” said Hal, “we were accidentally carried through your lines by a

locomotive which we happened to be running when the rest of the train was blown up. We couldn't get back, so we went ahead. We finally lost the engine, so we were making our way back to our own lines."

"Lost the engine? What do you mean?" asked the officer.

"Why," Chester broke in, "we sent it over a precipice that it might not fall into the hands of the Germans."

"You did, eh?" said the German officer. "Well, I shall attend to your case in the morning. Orderly! See that these prisoners are carefully guarded, and have them brought to me the first thing in the morning. Perhaps they may be induced to give me the information I require."

"You won't get any information out of us," said Chester angrily.

"Won't I?" replied the officer, with a sneer. "We shall see. Take them away."

The two lads were led to a small field tent and thrust inside, with a guard on the outside.

"Well, here we are again," said Chester, with a faint smile. "What do you suppose will be done with us if we refuse to divulge what the general wants to know?"

"I'm sure I don't know," was Hal's reply, "but I am afraid we are in for it this time. I have never taken much stock in the tales I have heard of the barbarous treatment of the Germans toward their prisoners, but one look at the general's face was enough to convince me that he would stop at nothing to gain his end."

"The same thought struck me, too," agreed Chester. "But, one thing is certain, he'll get no information out of me."

"Nor out of me, either," declared Hal.

Chester rose and started to walk around the tent. In the darkness he stumbled over something and fell to the ground. Arising he reached in his pocket and produced a match. A tiny flame lighted up the dark interior of the tent, and the lad stepped back with an ejaculation.

"Bicycles," he muttered.

“What?” demanded Hal.

“Bicycles. I wonder why they are here?”

“Probably dumped in here by a couple of men who have returned from a scouting expedition,” said Hal.

“By George!” exclaimed Chester suddenly.

“What is it now?” demanded Hal.

Chester did not reply immediately. He appeared to be thinking deeply.

“Have you a knife?” he asked at length.

Hal produced one, and, taking it from his friend’s hand, Chester stepped to the back of the tent. Quickly he opened the blade, and made a neat incision in the canvas, finally cutting out a little square. Then he put his eye to the hole and peered out.

There was no one in sight. The guard could be heard pacing to and fro in front of the tent, but apparently there was no guard at the rear.

Chester left his peep-hole and returned to Hal’s side.

“If we can get two of these bicycles out here,” he whispered, “we may be able to get away by a quick dash. Are you willing to take a chance?”

“Sure,” agreed Hal. “Anything is better than sitting here and waiting for I know not what. But do you think we can make it?”

“Well, we can at least try. There doesn’t seem to be a guard in the rear. I am going to cut a big slit in the back. Then we’ll slip the bicycles through it, mount and make a dash.”

“Good!” said Hal.

Quietly Chester slit the canvas in the rear of the tent, making a hole large enough for a man to step through. Quietly the boys each selected a bicycle and pushed it cautiously through the opening.

Once on the outside they drew a breath of relief.

“We’ll have to depend on our luck now,” whispered Chester. “Come on!”

The lads leaped into the saddles, and a moment later were speeding through the heart of the German camp.

In the very boldness of their scheme lay a certain degree of safety, for the sentinels on guard certainly did not look for two youths of the allied armies to be riding through their midst.

They were not even challenged as they sped through the camp, turning this way and that, and they had passed beyond the last row of tents before a hubbub from the rear told them that their flight had been discovered.

“We must be careful,” cried Hal, as he rode his wheel close beside Chester. “There is still the outpost to pass.”

But they did not diminish their speed. Rather, if anything, they pedaled faster; and then the outpost came into sight—a long line of men, almost in front of them. Some were pacing to and fro, while others sat upon the ground.

The riders were upon them before they knew it, and two flying bicycles sped between the German troopers. A cry of “halt!” went unheeded, and the Germans, quickly bringing their rifles to their shoulders, sent a volley after the lads.

But neither was hit. In the darkness the Germans were unable to aim carefully. The boys heard the hum of bullets around them, but they did not falter. There was no second volley, for the lads had disappeared in the darkness, and the Germans were not minded to spend their ammunition foolishly.

The first streak of dawn appeared in the sky, and still the boys rode on swiftly. But at length Hal slowed down and Chester followed suit.

“I’m tired out,” said Hal, as he jumped from his bicycle.

“And so am I,” replied Chester, as he, too, jumped to the ground to stretch his legs.

Suddenly from the distance in which they had come came a faint “chug-chug.”

Chester pricked up his ears.

“What’s that?” he demanded anxiously.

For a brief moment Hal paused to listen. The sound became louder. Hal sprang toward his bicycle.

“Come on!” he cried, and leaped into the saddle. “Motorcycles! We are pursued!”

Chester was hardly a second behind him, and the two lads were again riding madly along the road. Fortunately there were many curves in the highway, and this fact prevented their pursuers from sighting them from any great distance.

Hal suddenly brought his bicycle to an abrupt stop and jumped to the ground. Although not knowing what plan Hal had in his mind, Chester immediately did likewise.

The spot where they had alighted was in the midst of a clump of trees, and quickly the lads drew their bicycles in among them, hiding them from sight of the road. Then Hal turned, and, with Chester close behind him, dashed back in the direction from which they had come, taking care to keep well within the shelter of the trees.

And now Chester made out the object of his friend’s wild dash. It was a farmhouse, setting well back from the road. Chester had not detected it as they sped by, but Hal’s keen eyes had singled it out as a possible refuge.

“We’ll have to take a chance of the occupants being friendly,” Hal told his friend, as they ran toward the house. “If they will allow us to hide here until night, we may be able to get back to our lines safely.”

The boys ran around the house, and Hal rapped sharply upon the rear door. A moment later and a kindly-faced woman appeared in the doorway. She started back at the appearance of the two lads.

“Are the English coming?” she demanded, after a quick glance at the lads’ uniforms, and then she clasped her hands and exclaimed: “At last! At last!”

“No, madam,” Hal undeceived her, “the English are not coming—yet. We are trying to make our way back to our lines, but a German motorcycle squad is after us. We have come here to see if you will hide us until nightfall.”

The woman was silent for one moment. Then she stepped aside and motioned them into the house.

“Come,” she said quietly. “The Germans will not learn you are here through me.”

The lads stepped inside the door, and not a moment too soon. For at that very instant a band of a dozen Germans flashed by on the road, their motorcycles kicking up a cloud of dust.

CHAPTER XII.

A TRAITOR APPEARS.

Hal turned to Chester.

“When they fail to find us,” he said, “they’ll come back, inquiring all along as they return. They are sure to ask for us here.” He turned to the woman. “Have you a place where we can hide?”

“Yes,” she replied, “there is a secret trap-door to the attic. You may go up there and no one will be the wiser.”

“Then we had better get up there at once,” said Chester, “for there is no telling how soon they may return.”

A few moments later and they were safe in a little room at the very top of the house. After showing them to their retreat, the good woman departed, saying that she would return in a few minutes with water and food.

“You’ll need it,” she said, when Hal protested against putting her to so much trouble. “And, besides, I should be a poor Frenchwoman could I not aid the friends of my own country.”

She was back in a few moments, and the lads ate hungrily of the food she brought them, for it had been long hours since food or water had passed their lips.

After their benefactress had departed, Hal said to Chester:

“This is bound to be a tedious day. I guess we had better try and put it in sleeping. Besides, we’ll need all the rest we can get for our journey to-night.”

“Just what I was thinking,” said Chester, “and I’m ready to go to sleep right this instant.”

He stretched himself out on the floor and in a few moments was fast asleep. A

short time later and Hal also lay in the arms of Morpheus.

How long the lads had slept, they did not know, but they were awakened by the sound of voices directly below them.

“No, I have seen nothing of them,” came the voice of the woman who had given them refuge.

“But we have searched every place else,” came another voice, speaking in French, but with a heavy German accent. “They must be here. We found the bicycles a short distance from this house, and have scoured the woods. They must be here.”

“I say they are not,” came the woman’s voice, raised in anger.

“Well, I must search the house, at any rate,” said the German, “and, if I find that you have been aiding the enemies of Germany, it will go hard with you. Stand aside, please.”

“I tell you there is no one here,” cried the woman.

“Stand aside!” came the German’s voice again, and there was the sound of a struggle, followed by the voice of the German: “Search the house, men.”

Then came the sounds of heavy feet tramping through the house. Hal and Chester were both wide awake now and lay silent, listening. For an hour the heavy footsteps continued to ring through the house, and there was the sound of slamming doors and moving furniture.

And finally came the voice of the woman again: “I told you there was no one here.”

But apparently the German officer in command was not yet satisfied.

“Have you searched the attic?” he demanded of his men; “and the cellar?”

“There is no one in the cellar,” came a voice in reply, “and there is no attic.”

“I’ll have a look for myself,” came the reply, and heavy footsteps ascended the stairs into the room directly beneath Hal and Chester. There came to the lads’ ears the sounds of heavy blows against the floor on which they lay. Evidently the German officer was making sure that there was not an opening in the ceiling of

the room below. But after a while he desisted. The boys heard him descend the stairs, and a few moments later the sound of his voice:

“There is no one up there.”

Both lads drew a breath of relief. A moment more and a slamming door gave evidence that the Germans had departed.

“I was afraid he would locate the trap-door,” said Hal to Chester, after they had gone.

“Same here,” replied Chester. “But I wasn’t going to let them take me without a fight. Only one man could get up here at a time, and we could certainly dispose of him.”

“Yes, but they could starve us out, or set fire to the house or something, which would be worse than being captured. Besides, we couldn’t let the woman who has aided us come to harm.”

“No, that’s so, too,” agreed Chester. “I hadn’t thought of that.”

Further conversation was interrupted by a sound of some one at the trap-door. Chester and Hal both jumped to their feet, and stood ready above the opening in the floor to seize the intruder should it prove to be an enemy.

But when the trap-door came away the head of their benefactress appeared through the opening.

“You can come down now, if you want to,” she said. “The Germans have been here and gone. I am sure they will not return.”

Chester turned to Hal.

“What do you think?” he asked. “Shall we go down, or had we better stay up here?”

Hal considered for a moment.

“I guess we might as well go down,” he replied at length. “I don’t believe there is any likelihood of their coming back. Besides, it’s too cramped and stuffy up here for comfort.”

Accordingly both boys descended from their refuge, and a few moments later were sitting in the living room with their hostess.

“We can never thank you enough for what you have done for us,” Chester told her, after she had related her experiences with the Germans.

“No, indeed; we can never thank you enough,” agreed Hal. “Had it not been for your kindness we should have been in the hands of the Germans right now, and there is no telling what they might have done to us.”

The good woman waved aside their thanks.

“Pooh! pooh!” she said. “And why shouldn’t I help you? Surely no thanks are necessary because I did my duty.”

“But women——” Hal began, when she interrupted him.

“I have a son of my own in the war,” she said, her voice growing very low and tears dimming her eyes.

“And I hope,” said Hal gently, “should he ever be in a situation similar to ours, that another good woman may be the means of saving his life, and that some day he may return to you.”

“Just so he does his duty I shall be satisfied,” said the woman, who now introduced herself as Mrs. Madeline Dersi. “He has been a very wild boy, but I am sure that his heart is true and that he will fight to the last for his country, as did his father before him.”

“And I am sure of it, too,” said Chester. “When we return to our lines we shall make it our business to hunt him up.”

And at that moment there was a hasty step outside, the door to the room in which they were sitting was flung open, and a young man, in civilian garb, burst in.

Mrs. Dersi was across the room in a moment, her arms wrapped about the newcomer. Tears streamed down her face, as she repeatedly kissed the young man, who seemed to take no great interest in the procedure.

Finally Mrs. Dersi turned to Hal and Chester.

“My son,” she said proudly, “of whom I was just talking to you.”

Now the newcomer freed himself from her embrace and stepped forward.

“Who are these?” he demanded, pointing to the two lads.

Mrs. Dersi explained.

“And we were just talking of you,” she added; then stopped and surveyed her son critically. “Why are you not in uniform?” she demanded.

“Why, I—I—I——” stuttered young Dersi, “I am on a scout, and it was thought best for me not to go in uniform.” He turned suddenly to Hal: “Are you expecting any of your men here?” he demanded.

“Why, no,” replied Hal. “We are going to try and make our way back to our lines to-night.”

Young Dersi appeared to breathe easier, and this fact was not lost upon either Hal or Chester.

“Well,” he said, after a pause, “I haven’t time to stay here. I just dropped in a moment to see you, mother. You say the Germans went north? How long have they been gone?”

“About an hour,” said Chester.

“Good. Then it will be safe for me to continue on my way.”

He bowed to the two lads, kissed his mother, and a moment later had left the house, his mother accompanying him to the door.

“There is something queer about him,” said Chester to Hal, as Mrs. Dersi and her son left the room. “He’s not telling the truth.”

“I know it,” said Hal. “I don’t like to say it, but it is my belief he is fleeing from the French lines to give information to the Germans.”

“You mean you think he is a traitor?”

“I told you I didn’t like to say anything,” replied Hal, “but I am afraid you have hit the nail on the head.”

“In that event he is likely to tell of our presence here,” cried Chester.

“I’m sure he’ll tell,” said Hal quietly.

“Then what shall we do?”

“We shall leave at once—or, as soon as Mrs. Dersi returns. That is the best return we can make for her kindness to us. It would break her heart to know that her son is a traitor to his country.”

“It would, indeed,” was Chester’s reply; but further talk was prevented by the return of Mrs. Dersi.

“And is not my son a fine, brave man?” she asked, with justifiable pride.

“He is,” said Hal and Chester both, hoping that they were telling the truth.

“Mrs. Dersi,” said Hal, “we have decided that it probably will be better for us if we take our departure at once. I am sure there are no Germans near right now, and the sooner we get started the sooner we shall reach our own lines.”

“But would it not be safer to wait until dark?” questioned the woman anxiously.

“I am afraid not,” replied Hal, with a meaning glance at Chester. “We think we had better take our departure at once.”

Mrs. Dersi offered further objections, but at length, seeing that they were all in vain, she bade the two lads a sorrowful farewell, enjoining them to be sure and look her son up and to return to see her should the opportunity offer. This they gladly promised, and, leaving the friendly shelter of the good Frenchwoman’s home, continued on their weary journey toward the British lines.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FIGHT IN THE DARK.

Each boy put his best foot foremost, and they traveled at top speed. They wanted to put as much distance as possible between themselves and the house where they had so lately found shelter, for there was little doubt in the mind of either that young Dersi was a traitor, and that he would soon put their erstwhile captors on their track again.

Nor were they wrong; and, had they but known what they learned later, they would have sought shelter almost anywhere rather than continue their journey afoot. Even now the same band of German motorcyclists who had given chase the night before were again in pursuit. But now, instead of an even dozen, there were thirteen. For Young Dersi himself was with them.

Just out of sight of Dersi's home the Germans halted, and the young man himself approached the house. His mother greeted him effusively and inquired the cause of his sudden return.

"Well, mother," he said, "I have accomplished my mission. I have learned the strength of the German army, and am now returning to my own regiment. But what of the two lads who were here? Have they gone? If not, we can all continue our journey together."

"They departed several hours ago," his mother informed him.

"Then perhaps I can overtake them," said the young man. "In which direction did they go?"

The good woman pointed out the road taken by Hal and Chester, never thinking for an instant that her son meant to harm them. A moment later young Dersi left the house; and soon the Germans were once more upon the trail of the two lads.

Hal and Chester hurried along as fast as their legs could carry them. It was now nearing dusk, and with each forward step they knew that they were that much

closer to a place of safety. Darkness fell and still the two lads plodded onward.

At length, coming upon a small brook beside the road, they stopped to quench their thirst. Hal had risen to his feet and was waiting for Chester when from the rear once more came the faint “chug-chug” of a motorcycle, or motorcycles, the boys were unable to tell which.

Chester sprang to his feet.

“Here they come again,” he cried. “We were right. It is the traitor Dersi who has put them on our trail. Hustle!”

Side by side the two lads sprinted for a clump of trees almost directly ahead. They reached their friendly shelter just before the glare of a searchlight down the road gave evidence of the approach of their pursuers.

Once among the trees the boys dropped to the ground and became absolutely silent. A moment later and the band of Germans flashed by at terrific speed.

The boys arose to their feet and continued on their way, keeping in among the trees.

“We must be very careful,” Hal warned Chester. “When they fail to overtake us they are sure to return. When we hear them coming we’ll climb up a tree, or hunt a hole, or something. But we might as well go ahead as far as we can.”

“That seems the best way to me,” Chester agreed.

They continued their journey for perhaps an hour without hearing a sound of the Germans, and then, suddenly, they were made aware of the presence of the enemy.

Chester’s cap seemed suddenly to jump from his head. Both lads heard the hum of a bullet and the crack of a rifle. Immediately they both dropped to the ground.

They had not detected from which direction the bullet had come, and for that reason were at a great disadvantage. Crouched close to the ground they waited, ears strained for a sound by which they could locate the man who had fired.

But a sound came not. Nothing but silence. Crouched close to the ground as they were, the silence soon became stifling. Hal endured the suspense as long as he could, and then whispered to Chester:

“We can’t stay here. I’ll wriggle my way to that tree,” pointing, “and you creep behind that one,” pointing again, this time to a tree perhaps a hundred yards distant from the first.

“All right,” Chester whispered back.

Hal had hardly taken his position behind the tree he had selected for his own cover when a second sharp crack of a rifle broke the stillness of the night, and there was a flash of fire hardly fifty feet from him.

In the darkness Hal made out the form of a man, his gun pointed toward Chester, who at that moment succeeded in wriggling behind a tree.

“The dog!” said Hal angrily to himself. “I’ll fix him.”

Both lads were without weapons, their arms having been confiscated when they were captured by the Germans.

On hands and knees Hal made a short detour and approached his enemy from behind. Now he was hardly ten feet from the man, who loomed up like a giant in the darkness. Hal rose suddenly to his feet, and, as he did so, he stepped on the fallen limb of a tree.

The deathly silence was shattered by this sound, and Hal’s enemy turned suddenly to confront this unexpected assailant. But, before he could bring his rifle to bear, Hal was upon him.

The man did succeed in raising his rifle above his head, and he now attempted to bring it down on the lad’s head. But Hal was too quick for him. Stepping in close, he struck his opponent a stinging blow in the face, and at the same time seized the rifle barrel with his other hand.

As the man staggered back, Hal wrenched fiercely on the rifle, and the weapon came away in his hand. But the man was not badly hurt by the force of Hal’s blow, and he suddenly dropped his hand to his belt. A moment later and the naked blade of a knife gleamed in the night.

Hal saw his enemy’s move and sprang back. But the man was after him in an instant, his knife raised to strike. They were too close together for Hal to bring the rifle to bear upon his enemy, and, realizing that he probably was no match for

his opponent, the lad suddenly turned and ran.

But it was not Hal's intention to run very far from his enemy. He was not that kind of a boy. His idea was to get far enough ahead of the man so that he might turn and shoot him. But as he ran he felt a gust of air pass his ear, and he heard the sound of something whizzing by him.

The German, realizing the boy's purpose, and also that he could not overtake him, had hurled his knife. Hal also realized this the moment the knife sped by him, and stopped suddenly in his tracks.

In spite of the fact that his assailant had attempted to murder him, Hal could not find it in his heart to kill him in cold blood. Therefore, even as he turned, he raised the rifle high above his head, and, holding it tightly by the barrel, rushed upon his enemy.

In vain the man threw up his hands to ward off the blow. The force behind it was too great. Hal, wheeling half around as he swung, brought the heavy butt of the rifle against the side of the German's head with a crack. The man dropped limp at the boy's feet.

Hal lowered his rifle, and stood for a moment over his fallen enemy, wiping his brow. Then he stooped over and relieved him of his other weapons, two automatic Colts. These he slipped in his pocket, and once more turned his face toward the spot where Chester lay, unaware of the terrible fight that had just occurred.

Hal whistled softly—the whistle of the old days in America—and, listening, heard Chester whistle softly in return.

Believing now that everything was safe, Hal left his fallen enemy behind, and started toward the spot where Chester was rising to his feet.

Hardly had he traversed half the distance, when there was another shot, and Hal saw Chester, who was advancing to meet him, topple to the ground.

Hal turned in the direction of the flash of the rifle, and, scarcely taking time to aim with his newly-acquired automatic, fired. His effort was rewarded with a howl of pain, but, as the lad started to run to where his fallen friend lay, there was another shot, and Hal felt a bullet whiz by his head.

Quickly he dropped to the ground, thinking that his unseen antagonist would believe him dead. He held his revolver ready, prepared to fire at the first sight of his enemy.

But the latter was not to be caught thus easily. Evidently he had heard of such subterfuges before. Hal waited patiently for some moments, and then, as there was no sign of his unseen enemy, he crawled slowly toward the spot where Chester had fallen.

What was his surprise to find that Chester was not there. For a moment Hal was stupefied, but his amazement was brought to an end by a low whistle, and, looking to the right, Hal beheld his friend behind a large tree.

A moment later Hal was beside his friend.

“Are you hurt much?” he demanded anxiously.

“Not even touched,” was the reply. “I dropped to the ground when the bullet whizzed by. I was afraid he would hit me next time.”

Hal seized Chester’s hand and squeezed it warmly.

“I was afraid it was all up with you,” he said. “I——”

The sudden flash of a rifle interrupted him, and another bullet flew past.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DEATH OF A TRAITOR.

“Great Scott!” Hal ejaculated. “We’ve got to get out of here some way. We can’t stand here and be shot down.”

“Wait,” said Chester, as Hal started to move away, and pulled the latter to the ground, where he had dropped himself.

“What is it?” demanded Hal.

“Let me look at that gun you have a moment.”

Without a word Hal passed it over. Chester examined it as carefully as possible in the dark.

“I don’t believe there is more than one man in these woods,” he finally said. “Now, you stay here, and I shall try and work round behind him.”

Without waiting for a reply Chester started crawling away, not directly toward the spot where the last flash of fire had come from, but bearing off well toward the right.

Hal started to protest, but, before he could utter half a dozen words, Chester had disappeared in the darkness. Hal lay in silence for some time. Finally, putting his cap upon a stick, he poked it cautiously out from behind the tree, where it was silhouetted against the opening between the trees.

A shot followed, and the cap leaped into the air.

“Good thing it wasn’t my head,” said Hal ruefully. “But if I can keep that fellow’s attention centered on me, Chester may be able to nab him.”

Once more he raised his cap on a stick and moved it about. Again there was a sound of a shot. But, even as the bullet sped by, there was a second report, and Hal heard his friend’s voice raised in almost a shout:

“I got him.”

Quickly Hal sprang to his feet and dashed in the direction of his friend’s voice.

When Chester had left Hal he crawled slowly, and, making a wide detour, came upon his unseen enemy from behind. The second time the man had fired at Hal’s hat, Chester was almost upon him.

Thinking that the man was shooting at his friend, being unconscious of the ruse Hal was employing, Chester immediately turned his own weapon loose upon the man, whom he could now plainly see. But, after firing, the enemy had shifted his position slightly at the very moment that Chester fired. Therefore, he escaped what otherwise would assuredly have been a death wound—for Chester was a crack shot—and received the ball in his pistol hand.

His weapon dropped to the ground, and he sent up a loud howl of pain.

Before he could seize the weapon in his other hand, Chester was upon him, and Hal was hastening to the aid of his friend, for, wounded though he was, the man put up a hard fight.

Chester forced him to the ground, but the man heaved him away with a mighty kick. Chester fell sprawling on the ground, and his opponent turned to grope for his revolver.

But, before he could pick it up, Hal was upon the scene. He took in the situation at a glance, and sprang upon Chester’s assailant.

Hal’s first leap bore his opponent to the ground, where the boy twisted one hand around the man’s throat. But, if he thought to overcome his opponent thus easily, he had reckoned without his host. Lying almost at full length on the ground as he was, he drove his fist straight upward into Hal’s face. The lad released his hold upon his enemy’s throat and fell back.

It was now beginning to grow light, and, as the man sprang after him, Hal recognized him. It was young Dersi!

“Dersi!” gasped Hal, as he once more put himself in an attitude of defense.

“Yes,” gritted his opponent, “and I am going to kill you both, right here and now.”

With this he sprang upon Hal and bore him to the ground. But the lad was not to be thus easily conquered, and, with a mighty effort, wriggled from beneath his assailant and sprang back to gain a breath.

This movement almost cost him his life, for, in springing back, he allowed his opponent time to reach down and pick up his revolver. This he now pointed full at Hal.

But aid came from an unexpected source. Chester, who had been lying unconscious up to this time, now recovered sufficiently to take in the situation about him. In his hand he still grasped the automatic.

This he brought to bear, and an instant before Dersi's finger pressed the trigger, Chester fired. Dersi fell to the ground with a groan. His revolver exploded as he fell, and the bullet whistled close to Hal's right ear.

Quickly Hal jumped to Chester's side and raised his chum in his arms.

"Chester! Chester!" he said anxiously. "Tell me, are you much hurt?"

"Not much, I think," was his friend's reply. "But he gave me an awful wallop. I shall be all right presently."

Hal did not leave his friend for a moment until Chester announced that his head had cleared up sufficiently for him to stand. With Hal's assistance he struggled to his feet, one hand holding the side of his head.

"He kicked like a mule," said Chester. "Great Scott! I never had anything hurt like that."

At that instant there came a groan from the fallen man.

Hal and Chester bent over him. Dersi's voice was very indistinct, and the boys at first were unable to distinguish what he said.

Hal placed his ear close to the dying man's lips. The voice came faintly.

"Do not tell mother I died like this. It would break her heart. She thinks I am a soldier of France. And so I was," and his voice became stronger, "until I fell in with evil companions. Then I began to gamble. I lost. I needed money. When the war broke out, I was offered a chance to cancel all my debts, if I would deliver certain plans to the Germans. I did. Then I was discovered."

“How?” demanded Chester.

“I was caught in the act of taking papers from my superior’s coat, which he had laid aside. I was court-martialed and ordered put to death. Through the connivance of another who was associated with me in this piece of treachery I managed to escape. He is high in the confidence of General Joffre.”

“His name?” demanded Hal quickly.

The wounded man was silent for some time.

“I have never betrayed a comrade,” he said at length, “but I am at the door of death. I must make what reparation I can. His name is General Emil Tromp.”

“What!” exclaimed Hal and Chester in a single breath.

“It is true,” continued the wounded man. “But listen,” and his voice grew fainter. The end was not far off now. “Listen! Will you do me one favor, you whom I have tried to kill?”

Hal and Chester nodded their heads in assent.

“Then do not tell my mother of my treachery. Tell her that I died in battle, fighting for my country, and that I was game to the end, as you Americans say. Will you do this for me, one who has sought your death?”

“We will,” promised Hal and Chester in a single voice.

“Promise,” said the dying man feebly, as he raised himself on one elbow.

“We promise,” said both lads solemnly.

The man fell back with a groan of thanks, and Hal bent over him, thinking that he was dead. But the voice came again:

“I wouldn’t have her know for all the world. I was always wild, but who would have thought that I would be a traitor to my country? When you see General Joffre, tell him at once what I have told you concerning the traitor. Immediately, do you understand?”

“We understand,” said Hal.

“And my mother, you will do as you have promised?”

“We have promised,” said Chester simply.

“Then I may die in peace,” said the wounded traitor.

He lay back on the ground at full length, shuddered, once, twice, and lay still.

Hal rose from his kneeling posture, and lifted his cap from his head.

“He is dead,” he said quietly. “May he rest in peace.”

“Amen to that,” said Chester, also standing with bared head. “And his mother. He is right. It would break her heart. We must see that she does not know.”

“And so we shall,” declared Hal. “It will be a lie for which I am sure we shall be forgiven.”

CHAPTER XV.

ATTACKED BY THE ENEMY.

“What shall we do with him?” questioned Chester. “We can’t go away and leave him here like this.”

“No,” Hal agreed. “I know we should, for our own safety may depend upon it, but just the same it goes against the grain.”

“If we had something to dig with,” said Chester.

“But we haven’t,” Hal interrupted.

But the two lads were saved the trouble of finding a grave for the traitor, for suddenly through the woods came the sound of tramping feet.

For a moment the two lads listened intently. Then Chester grabbed Hal by the arm.

“Come,” he said in a hoarse whisper, “we must find a place of safety.”

Hal drew back.

“Wait until I see if Dersi happened to have another gun,” he said.

He ran his hand over the dead man and at length rose up with a second revolver and a belt well filled with cartridges. One of the weapons he passed to Chester.

“We’ll probably need these,” he said grimly. “Now, let’s see if we can’t find a place to hide.”

Cautiously the two lads made their way through the woods. They could hear the sound of their pursuers, but they had little fear of being detected in the still uncertain light, as long as they kept the same distance between themselves and the Germans.

But suddenly a gleam of light showed in the forest. A German soldier had

flashed a pocket searchlight, and the glare of it fell squarely upon the crouching lads, before they could step behind a tree or any other place of refuge.

“Run!” cried Hal, suiting the action to the word.

Chester needed no urging, and also took to his heels. But their presence had been discovered, as was proved by the sharp crack of a rifle. Neither boy was touched, although the bullet passed uncomfortably close to Chester’s head.

Stumbling along as fast as the semi-darkness would permit, the boys made a brave effort to escape. But they were not to get off in such easy fashion. For again the searchlight lighted up the woods and exposed them to their pursuers. Both lads threw themselves to the ground, and thus avoided the volley of shots that were fired at them.

As Chester dropped, he heard a startled exclamation from his chum, and, glancing quickly about, he could see no sign of him. The lad was non-plussed, but, before he could so much as move, he heard Hal’s voice, apparently below him:

“Quick, Chester! Down here, but be careful how you come.”

Cautiously Chester moved in the direction of his friend’s voice. But he was not cautious enough, and a moment later, grasping out wildly for some means to stay his rapid descent, he was sliding down what seemed to be a steep embankment.

He brought up abruptly at the bottom, and felt Hal’s hand upon his arm.

“Great Scott!” he ejaculated. “Where are we? Down in the bottomless pit?”

Hal clapped his hand over Chester’s mouth, for his keen ears had detected the sounds of footsteps above.

“Quiet!” he whispered.

Chester needed no second warning. He did not move a muscle. From above came the sound of a voice:

“I wonder where they went?”

“I don’t know,” answered another voice, “but we had best be careful. They are probably armed.”

Now, Hal, moving his position slightly, felt a space behind him, and crawled slowly backward, where the darkness seemed greater, pulling Chester along after him. They continued this crawling for some minutes. Finally, raising his head, Hal dropped quickly again with a muttered exclamation.

In arising his head had come in contact with something above him. Raising an exploring hand, he investigated. He touched a rock above. Then he reached out on each side. As he had surmised, only a few feet each way were solid walls.

“A cave,” he muttered.

“What?” asked Chester.

“We are cooped up in a cave. If the Germans are wise enough, after they learn where we are, they will just sit down on the outside and starve us out. But, if they try to come in—well, I don’t think they will get very far, as long as our cartridges hold out. You wait here until I see how far back this thing goes.”

Chester obeyed, and Hal continued his exploration. For two or three minutes he crawled along, and then, turning a slight bend, gave a sudden exclamation. He had come upon a possible means of exit, for, apparently, the cave had two openings.

Quickly Hal poked his head out and looked around. He could see no one. Slowly he crawled back to where he had left Chester, and informed him of what he had learned.

“Then the best thing we can do is to get out of here quick,” was Chester’s decision. “Let’s go.”

Slowly Hal led the way along the low passageway, and, reaching the opening again, poked his head out. This time he was doomed to a disappointment. Hardly had his head emerged from the hole in the ground when he drew it in quickly again.

“What’s the matter now?” demanded Chester.

“Matter is,” said Hal quietly, “that there are six Germans standing about five yards from the entrance.”

“What!” cried Chester, in consternation.

“Exactly,” said Hal; “if you don’t believe it have a look for yourself.”

“Oh, I don’t want to look,” said Chester, bitterly disappointed. “I can take your word for it. What are we going to do now?”

“Well,” said Hal, “it looks to me like a good time to get out the other end.”

“Yes, but there are likely to be a few of them hanging about there, also,” said Chester.

“That’s so, too,” agreed Hal. “Well, I’ll tell you what: You sneak back there and investigate, and I’ll stay here and guard this end, in case one of them tries to get in.”

Slowly Chester crawled away. Reaching the opposite end of the cave, he cautiously poked his head out and looked around. In the dim light he could see no one. But he was afraid to call out to Hal—his voice might be overheard—so he took his tedious way back to where he had left his friend.

“All O. K.,” he whispered.

“Good,” said Hal. “Let’s get out of here, then.”

They crawled back along the dark passageway as rapidly as the darkness and the condition of the ground would permit, but before leaving their place of refuge, Chester thought it advisable to peep out once more.

And it was well that he did so. For, standing almost at the entrance of the cave three figures loomed up against the sky. Quickly Chester drew back in again.

“Three of ’em out there,” he informed Hal briefly. “What are we going to do now?”

“You’ve got me,” replied Hal. “Can’t you pick ’em off with your gun?”

“Oh, I can pick a couple of ’em off, all right. But what then? We would probably have a whole brigade upon us in two shakes of a lamb’s tail.”

“I guess you are right,” Hal agreed. “But we have got to do something.”

“So we have,” replied Chester; “but the question is, what?”

Hal was silent for several minutes, thinking. Finally he said:

“Well, I guess the best thing to do is to wait and see what happens. Perhaps they may leave before broad daylight and not discover this cave. In that case we shall be safe enough. Now you stay here and guard this end, and don’t move unless I call. I’ll do the same at the other end.”

“All right,” said Chester. “We’ll keep our posts till daylight, whether they go away or not. Then, if we have not been discovered, we can at least see what we are doing.”

Hal moved slowly along the passageway once more, being very careful not to make any noise. He crawled on hands and knees, his head thrust out before him.

Suddenly, as he moved slowly along, his head came in contact with another moving object with an audible crack.

He had bumped into a second crawling figure.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE STRUGGLE IN THE CAVE.

In spite of the pain that shot through his head following the contact, Hal did not lose his coolness or his presence of mind. Although his head hurt badly, he did not utter a sound.

His unseen antagonist apparently was too surprised to make an outcry, or it may have been that he thought he had bumped into a wall. If the latter were his thought he was quickly undeceived.

As he sat back on his haunches, to rub his head, Hal moved lightly forward, and, judging the distance by the sound of his enemy's movements, fell on top of him.

He had gauged the distance to a nicety, and before the German could cry out, one of the lad's hands sank deep into his throat. But the latter was a powerful man and not to be overcome easily. He hurled the lad from him with a quick shove, at the same time twisting on the wrist of the hand that gripped his throat.

The pain was almost unbearable and Hal was forced to loosen his hold. But again the lad sprang, before the German could take the offensive, and this time struck out fiercely with his right fist. The German uttered a cry of pain, and with one hand delivered a smashing blow at the face so close to his own.

But Hal had figured on this move and had calculated the time of the blow perfectly. With a quick movement of his head he avoided the huge fist, and there came a terrific howl of pain from the German. The blow had passed over the lad's head and the German's fist had crashed into the solid wall.

And at the same instant there came the sound of a shot from Chester's end of the cave.

This sound spurred Hal to greater activity, for he realized now that their presence had been discovered by those on the outside. He felt certain that the sound of the shot would probably bring new visitors into the cave from the end he was

supposed to guard.

Quickly, then, while his opponent was still in agony from the self-inflicted blow, Hal drew his revolver and, reversing it, struck out in the direction of a muttered curse.

He was rewarded by another groan of anguish and a moment later by the sound of a falling body. Quickly the lad leaped forward, his weapon held ready to strike again. But there was no need of a second blow. The German was unconscious.

By great exertion Hal succeeded in turning his wounded adversary over and pushed him slowly along the passageway, using him as a shield in case he encountered another of the enemy.

At length he came to the end of the passageway, and pushed his prisoner out. Even as he did so a bullet whistled by his head and he heard the crack of a German rifle. Hal lost no time in getting back into his hiding place.

But now he discovered that even this was not far enough, for a bullet came whizzing into the cave after him. It hit the side of the wall and went skimming over his head.

With all possible haste the lad retreated around the little bend, and throwing himself upon his face held his revolver ready to fire at the first sign of an advancing foe.

He lay perfectly still, not making the slightest noise, and after some moments heard the sound of voices.

“I tell you I must have hit him. I never miss at that distance,” said one. “And, besides, if he were in there we could hear him.”

“I wouldn’t be too sure,” came a second voice. “He’s liable to be there waiting for you.”

“Well, I am going in after him anyhow,” said the first speaker.

A moment later Hal heard the German approaching. He half arose to his knee and trained his revolver at the darkness ahead of him.

Then there came the sound of the German rounding the bend, and taking careful aim at the distance above the ground he believed the man’s head would be, Hal

pressed the trigger.

There was a terrific roar that echoed and reechoed through the passageway, a howl of pain and then silence. For a moment Hal waited, for he did not wish to be caught napping. Then he slowly made his way forward. Presently he came in contact with a man's body. It was the enemy.

Propping himself up behind the dead man, Hal felt more comfortable.

"It will be daylight soon," he said to himself, "and they can't get in here without me seeing them And one man here is as good as a hundred."

Raising his voice, Hal shouted:

"Are you all right, Chester?"

"All right," came back the answer. "One man tried to get in here, but I got him," for all the time that Hal had been engaged Chester had been having troubles of his own.

After Hal had left him, Chester, seeking to ascertain the exact position of the Germans at his end of the cave, and, if possible, their number, had ventured too close to the opening.

A German, walking past at that moment, struck a match to light a cigarette, and Chester's form was clearly outlined in the glare of it. With a hoarse guttural exclamation the German dropped his match and cigarette and brought his rifle to bear.

But before he could press the trigger Chester had disappeared in the darkness of the cave. Evidently believing that the lad would flee from him, the German, sprawling upon hands and knees, gave chase.

Chester, well back in the cave, judged his pursuer's distance by the sounds of his awkward movements. He waited until the German got well within the cave, then raised his automatic and quickly fired twice.

The sound of the explosion was so great that even Chester himself was frightened. This was the shot that Hal had heard as he grappled with his opponent.

Fearing a trap, Chester did not move for several moments, keeping his revolver

aimed steadily. But then, as there was no sound from the German, Chester slowly moved forward.

His outstretched hand touched a soft object, and his exploring fingers sought out the German's face.

"He'll do no more fighting," was Chester's only comment.

Relieving the German of his arms and ammunition, Chester sat down to await the approach of the others, who he was certain must have heard the sound of the shot.

And they were not slow in coming. Suddenly the flame of a match appeared in the opening, and taking quick aim Chester let fly with his automatic.

There came a groan of pain from the opening to the cave, but the exact result of his shot Chester could not determine. The light had disappeared and the cave was again in darkness. Hal, at his end of the cave, having serious business of his own to attend to, had not heard this last shot.

And now Chester stretched himself out on the ground to ward off any further attack. He was brought suddenly to a sitting posture again by the sound of a shot from Hal's end of the cave.

Several times he called out but received no answer. He was just on the point of leaving his post and following after his friend when Hal's voice came to him.

"Thank God," he exclaimed softly, "Hal is still alive."

He resumed his former position and lay calmly awaiting the next move of the enemy, with a human shield in front of him, even as Hal had at his end of the cave.

For hours, it seemed to both boys, they lay there silently, save for an occasional shout to the other, when the darkness of the cave began to give way to a faint glow of light. The sun had arisen, and each boy, at his own end of the cave, breathed more freely.

"It's getting light here, Hal," called Chester.

"And here, too," Hal shouted back.

And both lads were struck with the same thought.

“At least, we can see what we are doing now.”

CHAPTER XVII.

SAFE.

Gradually it became more light and at length a beam of sunlight shot into Hal's end of the cave. But still the lads kept silent vigil, being afraid to leave their places of concealment, and believing that the Germans on the outside were still on the watch for them.

Nor were they wrong, for at both entrances to the cave, or at least standing nearby, were two groups of German soldiers, patiently waiting for the boys to emerge from their retreat. The Germans rightly surmised that they would not remain idle long after daylight.

At length Hal could endure the suspense no longer. Silently he quitted his end of the cave and made his way cautiously back toward his friend.

"What's up?" was Chester's greeting.

"I don't know," replied Hal. "The Germans may have gone away, but I believe they are still loitering on the outside. However, this inaction is getting monotonous. We've got to do something, and we've got to do it right away."

"My sentiments exactly," Chester agreed. "But what?"

"Well, I don't know exactly. We shall have to figure out something."

There was a long silence, which was finally broken by Chester.

"There is but one way I can think of," he said.

"What is that?" demanded Hal.

"Well, suppose we make a dash out of this end, shooting as we go. Those guarding the other end will naturally think we are trying to escape, and will come to the aid of their companions. Then we can run back into the cave, crawl through as rapidly as possible and make a run for it out the other end."

Hal was somewhat dubious of this plan, but after some further talk, in which neither was able to hit upon a better one, the boys finally decided to act upon Chester's suggestion.

Accordingly, with drawn revolvers, they slowly made their way to the entrance of the cave, and Chester peered out cautiously.

"No one in sight," he whispered to his friend. "Perhaps they have gone."

"Be very careful," cautioned Hal. "They are likely to be lurking around here some place."

Quietly the boys emerged from the cave, and began walking slowly. But they had hardly gone five paces when there came a command:

"Halt!"

Swiftly the lads turned in the direction from which the hail had come, and beheld a squad of Germans approaching them with leveled rifles.

The automatics of both lads spoke simultaneously and continued to spout fire for several seconds. Then they turned and ran hurriedly back to the cave, into which they disappeared before their startled foe could realize what had happened.

Two German soldiers lay on the ground, while a third stood swaying dizzily on his feet.

With all possible haste the lads crawled through the passageway, and soon emerged at the other end. But now caution was thrown to the wind, for the lads figured that the Germans left to guard this end of the retreat were by this time on the way to aid their companions.

Their revolvers still gleamed in their hands, however, ready for instant use in the event that their plan had miscarried.

But it had not, for there was not a German in sight, and soon the boys were running through the woods as fast as their legs could carry them. At length Hal pulled up, panting.

"I guess we have given them the slip this time," he panted.

"Let us hope so," replied Chester fervently. "If we ever get back to our own

lines, I believe I shall be more careful in the future."

Hal glanced at his friend with a peculiar smile.

"Anybody that didn't know you would believe you meant that," he said. "But I know you better, so I don't."

"Well, perhaps I did make it a little strong," said Chester with a smile, "but that's the way I feel about it right now."

The boys had now regained their breath, and at a word from Hal resumed their journey, walking at a brisk pace.

Now they came to a clearing in the woods, stretching out for perhaps 200 yards, and the end of this another dense forest. They started across the open ground at a run, for they had no mind to be overtaken by the Germans where there was nothing to offer protection.

They had almost reached the forest on the other side and each was mentally congratulating himself upon giving the pursuers the slip when a shot rang out from behind, and a bullet cut the ground beside Hal.

"Quick!" said Hal, and increased his pace, swerving from side to side as he ran, making it difficult for the Germans to aim accurately. Chester did likewise, and soon they were safe once more beneath the protection of the great trees.

But now that they had been discovered, the lads knew that it was to be a race for life. They knew that it was but a question of a few minutes until the remaining Germans would again mount their motorcycles and give chase. Also they realized that their chances of eluding their pursuers were much more slight in broad daylight than they had been in the darkness.

Therefore they ran at top speed. While they were not afraid and had not lost a whit of their nerve, they realized that discretion was the better part of valor, and their feet continued to hit the ground at breakneck speed, until again came to their ears the first faint sounds of the pursuing motorcycles. Gradually the sounds became more distinct, this telling the boys that their pursuers were gaining rapidly, although the rough condition of the ground made it impossible for the motorcycles to travel very fast.

Finally, when he could run no more, Hal threw himself to the ground, and

Chester immediately followed his example. For a few moments they lay there, panting, their tongues literally hanging out like worn out dogs.

Then they sprang to their feet again, and making an abrupt turn to the right plunged into the underbrush right where it was the most dense. Here Hal espied a large tree, with low hanging branches. With Chester by his side he rushed for it.

Hal stood aside while Chester grabbed the lowest branch and swung himself up, and then he followed suit. High up in the tree the lads climbed, the close set branches affording an excellent screen.

Half a minute later six motorcycle riders hove into sight, hardly a hundred yards from where the boys were perched.

Chester's fingers twitched on his revolver, but Hal, who had noticed the set expression on his friend's face, uttered a low warning.

And the sound of Hal's voice was almost their undoing. For the Germans had come to a pause and Hal's words carried plainly in the silence to their ears.

For a moment the Germans glanced about hurriedly, seeking out their prey. Then they sprang behind trees themselves, their rifles ready to fire. They had not yet discovered the boys' hiding place, and were fearful of a shot from ambush.

Then one, raising his eyes, saw Hal, and quickly raised his rifle. But Hal's eye was keen also, and before the German could press the trigger Hal's revolver spoke and the German tumbled to the ground.

Chester fired at the same moment as did Hal, and a second German clapped his hand to his head and reeled. But before the other pursuers could raise their rifles, there came from ahead a sound that brought a loud "Hurrah" from Hal and Chester, and a moment later, on the dead run, came a small body of British infantry.

Quickly the Germans leaped onto their motorcycles and turned to run. But now the advancing British were in full view, and a voice of command rang out:

"Fire!"

A volley rang out. Not in all the world were there better marksmen than those

British troopers. Four Germans reeled in their saddles and tumbled to the ground.

Hal and Chester descended from their place of refuge.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON A NEW MISSION.

The two lads hurried up to the officer in command of the English troops.

“You arrived just in time,” cried Hal, grasping the hand the officer extended.

“I should say you did,” declared Chester, also shaking the officer’s hand. “A few moments later and we would have been goners, sure.”

“Well, I am glad we arrived so opportunely,” said the officer, laughing a little. “We heard shooting in this direction last night, but we did not get an order to advance until this morning. As you may perhaps have surmised, we are part of the advance guard of the army.”

“Do you mean the French and English have both assumed the offensive in force?” demanded Hal.

“Exactly,” replied the British officer. “We are not far in front, and are pushing slowly along, that we may take the Germans by surprise, if possible. Perhaps you may have gathered some information as to the German position and strength?”

This last was in the form of a question, and the lads made haste to answer in the affirmative.

“We have not learned a whole lot,” Chester continued, “but we have a little information that may be of value.”

“Then you had better hasten back to General French and report,” said the officer. “I am sure he will be glad to have any information you may be able to give him.”

The lads thanked the officer, and soon the little troop was on the advance again. Hal and Chester resumed their journey in the opposite direction. For an hour they hurried along, occasionally meeting a detachment of mounted troops going forward, but they had traversed at least five miles before they made out in the distance the first long line of the British advance.

It was indeed an imposing sight, this long line of khaki-clad men, marching rapidly toward them, and Hal and Chester were not unmindful of it, and their hearts swelled with pride at the thought that they themselves were a part of this great fighting machine.

They hurried on toward the advancing army. Already the lads had been challenged several times, but upon explaining their predicament had been allowed to continue on their way. Now they reached the first line of the advancing host, and an officer hastily rode toward them.

Upon a glance at their uniforms, now unkempt and dirty, he saluted.

“What is your business here?” he demanded.

Briefly Hal explained, and added:

“We are seeking General French. Can you direct us to him?”

The officer did as requested and the lads made off in the direction he indicated. It was fully two hours later before they were admitted to the presence of the commander-in-chief of the small though mighty host of Britain.

For once the English field marshal lost his habitual calm and greeted them warmly.

“I had made sure that you two lads were lost,” he said. “Come, give an account of yourselves.”

Chester did so as briefly as possible, and General French listened to the lad’s recital in unfeigned amazement.

“And so you are the two who created such havoc in the ranks of the enemy,” he exclaimed when Chester had concluded his account of their adventures. “I learned through some of my scouts that a wild engine had dealt a heavy blow to the Germans, but I had never thought that you two were aboard it.”

Then it was that Hal told his commander of his encounter with young Dersi, and of what the latter had told him concerning General Tromp, of General Joffre’s staff.

“What!” cried General French, springing to his feet. “Tromp a traitor! Why, it is unbelievable. General Joffre has entire confidence in his ability and integrity.”

“Nevertheless it is true, there can be no doubt of that,” said Hal quietly. “Dersi told us with almost his dying breath, and he certainly was repentant at the end.”

“Oh, I do not doubt your word,” General French assured Hal, “but it seems impossible. Something must be done at once.”

“Will you allow me to make a suggestion, sir?” asked Hal respectfully.

“By all means,” was the general’s reply.

“Then I would suggest that you send word of General Tromp’s treachery to General Joffre by special messenger, and not trust to the field wireless, for in that way Tromp might learn that he was suspected and make his escape.”

“An excellent idea,” said General French. “It shall be acted upon at once.” He turned away, signifying that the interview was at an end.

But Hal had no intention of letting such a piece of work slip through his fingers.

“If you please, general,” he said. “Chester and I would like to carry the message. You see, we are greatly interested in this matter.”

The general glanced at the two lads, and a faint smile lighted up his face.

“And so you shall,” he said at length. “Refresh yourselves with food and drink first, and then report to me.”

Hal and Chester saluted and took their departure. Having done as the general ordered, they lost no time in returning to him. General French had already prepared his dispatch and this he placed in Hal’s hand.

“General Joffre no doubt will be amazed at the contents of this message,” the general told the lads, “and he probably will demand all details from you. Tell them to him as you have to me and I am sure he will be convinced. That is all, except that you return as soon as possible, for I may have other work for you.”

The two lads saluted and started forth on their journey. Both had been furnished with good horses at the command of the general, for they had asked for these in preference to being carried in an army automobile.

“Those things are likely to break down any time,” Hal had confided to Chester,

“and you can always depend upon a good horse.”

Chester had agreed with him, so now we find the two lads mounted and riding rapidly toward the southwest, in which direction they knew they should reach the French commander-in-chief.

It was a long, tedious ride, for the French general, that he might have perfect quiet in which to make his plans and direct the movement of the French forces, had made it his custom to remain well in the rear of his army. And here, the following day, the lads found him, and upon informing his orderly that they bore important communications from General French, were admitted to his presence at once.

The French commander-in-chief sat at a small desk, surrounded by members of his staff. Hal and Chester drew themselves up and saluted; then the former advanced and placed the document in Gen. Joffre’s hand.

Quickly the French commander ran his eyes over the paper; then leaned back in his chair. For perhaps five minutes he retained this position, uttering no word, apparently deep in thought.

Then he arose, and with a wave of his hand dismissed all his staff, motioning for Hal and Chester to remain. The tent cleared, the general spoke:

“Now tell me your story,” he said briefly.

Hal did so, and the general listened attentively, without asking a single question until Hal had concluded his story.

“It must be true,” he said at length, half to himself. “I remember well that there was something mysterious in the traitor Dersi’s escape. It was never explained satisfactorily. Yes, it must be true.”

He was silent again for some moments, then finally spoke again:

“And I would have staked anything I possess on Tromp’s honor. He has uncommon ability. Still, there has always been something queer about him. Yes, it must be true.”

Suddenly the general sprang to his feet with agility that Hal and Chester had not believed him capable of, and struck a small bell upon his desk a sharp tap.

Immediately an orderly entered.

“Have my car brought here instantly,” commanded the general briefly.

The orderly saluted and withdrew.

Chester and Hal stared at each other in some surprise. What could the general be about to do? They were soon enlightened.

“I must act at once,” said the general, again half to himself. “Never would Tromp have a better chance to work treachery to our cause than at this time. I must stop him, and I must do it personally and without publicity, for should this become noised abroad throughout France, nothing could prove more detrimental to our cause.”

He turned suddenly to Hal and Chester.

“And you two shall come with me,” he said. “You shall confront Tromp. If he is guilty, we shall find it out some way.”

At that instant the orderly entered again and saluted.

“Your car is ready, sir,” he said.

The general moved toward the door, motioning for the lads to follow him.

“Come,” he said. “We shall go to the front, where even now Tromp is in command and meditating mischief.”

CHAPTER XIX.

A BIT OF UNWRITTEN HISTORY.

So this is how it transpired that Hal and Chester, two American boys, happened to be present at an interview between the commander-in-chief of the French army and General Emil Tromp, an incident that has never been told, and never will find its way into history; an interview between a gallant French officer and another who, were his actions known, would be likened to the greatest of American traitors—Benedict Arnold.

Hal and Chester followed General Joffre from his tent without a word and entered his car behind him.

“To General Tromp’s command,” said General Joffre briefly. “Hurry!”

The chauffeur needed no second urging, and a moment later the huge car was literally flying over the ground, passing large bodies of troops moving rapidly forward as though they were stationary.

Hal and Chester found ample time to take an inventory of the general’s car. It was a huge machine, and besides being fitted up luxuriously was also furnished as an office, that the general might still be at work while he hurried from one part of the field to another when events demanded his immediate presence. Even now, with treachery threatening, and whirling along at a terrific speed, General Joffre, probably because of habit, fell to work sorting papers, studying maps and other drawings.

For almost two hours the car whirled along at top speed, and at length pulled up in the rear of an immense body of troops, who, even to Hal and Chester, could be seen preparing for an advance.

General Joffre was out of the car before it came to a full stop, and Hal and Chester were at his heels. An orderly approached.

“My respects to General Tromp, and tell him I desire his presence immediately,”

ordered General Joffre.

The orderly saluted and dashed away. General Joffre paced up and down nervously. Finally, at the approach of rapid footsteps, he raised his head. A group of officers were approaching. One of them advanced right up to the general and saluted, and even as he did so the sound of a bugle rang out, ordering a general advance.

“Sir——” began the officer, whom the boys instantly knew to be General Tromp.

General Joffre interrupted him with a wave of his hand.

“Why this sudden advance?” he demanded coldly.

General Tromp started back.

“Why, sir,” he explained, “I have word that a large force of the enemy is approaching to give battle. I am advancing to meet him.”

“Order a halt,” said General Joffre abruptly.

“But, but——” began General Tromp in some confusion.

“Order a halt, sir!” commanded General Joffre sternly. “Or,” as he saw that General Tromp still hesitated, “shall I do it myself?”

General Tromp turned and gave the command to one of his staff, who immediately dashed away. A moment and a bugle rang out, and the great army came to a pause.

“Now, sir,” said General Joffre to General Tromp, “you will please dismiss your staff.”

Without a word General Tromp turned and gave the necessary order. A moment later and the four, General Joffre, General Tromp, Hal and Chester, were alone together.

“What is the meaning of this, sir?” demanded General Tromp, with some dignity.

“The meaning, General Tromp,” said General Joffre calmly, “is that you are a traitor!”

General Tromp started back, and his hand went up before his face as if to ward off a blow.

“What!” he cried in well simulated surprise. “Have a care, sir. I shall allow no such insults, even though you are my superior officer.”

“Tush, tush,” chided the commander-in-chief gently. “Why keep up the pretense? You are discovered. Why not admit it and have done?”

“Sir!” cried General Tromp, drawing himself up. “I demand an explanation of your strange conduct.”

“And you shall have it, sir!” thundered General Joffre, now very angry, as he took a step forward.

General Tromp quailed before him. His eyes fell to the ground and his injured dignity dropped from him like a mask.

“I accuse you,” continued General Joffre, “of being a traitor to France. I accuse you of aiding and abetting the escape of another traitor, one Dersi. And I also accuse you,” and here the general pointed an accusing finger at General Tromp, “of even now playing into the hands of the enemy by ordering an advance, when you knew very well that such an advance could mean only the extermination of our troops.”

By a great effort General Tromp forced his eyes to meet those of his commander.

“I deny it,” he said in a thick voice.

“A denial is useless,” said General Joffre quietly.

But General Tromp had now succeeded in regaining command of himself to a certain extent, and once more he tried to bluff it out.

“Who accuses me?” he demanded, with well assumed bravado.

“I do,” said Hal, stepping forward.

“And I,” cried Chester, also advancing a step.

General Tromp turned to General Joffre.

“And you take the word of those two upstarts in preference to mine?” he

demanded.

“I do,” said the general quietly, “upon the advice of General Sir John French, who vouches for the truth of their story. Besides, your actions just now have convicted you. Come, Tromp, further denial is useless. Dersi has confessed.”

“Dersi!” exclaimed Tromp, his fingers twitching. “If I could just get my hands on him for one minute——”

“But you can’t,” said General Joffre. “He is dead. And he died with a clear conscience, as I hope you will do.”

“What do you mean?” cried Tromp, starting back.

“Exactly what I say,” was General Joffre’s chilling reply. “You have your choice. Either the way I mean, or to be publicly hanged as a traitor. If possible, I desire to avoid publicity. Which shall it be?”

General Tromp shifted nervously from one foot to the other, his hands twitching convulsively. Suddenly one hand leaped to his side.

“I wouldn’t do that,” said Hal quietly, and turning General Tromp saw the lad’s revolver pointed squarely at him, held in a steady hand.

His hand dropped to his side again, and for some moments the traitor stood in silence. Then, suddenly, his shaking stopped. He raised his eyes and looked his commander straight in the eyes.

“It shall be as you say, sir,” he said calmly. “You are right. I am a traitor. I would not have been, but—but—well that makes no difference now. You shall see, sir, that I am no coward. I am not afraid to die. Neither need you fear that I shall not do as you command. Thus shall I atone for my sin.”

“I do not fear you will disobey,” said the general softly.

“I am sorry, sir,” continued General Tromp, “sorry because of you, more so than because of France. I know that it is useless to ask your forgiveness.”

“For your treachery toward me,” said General Joffre softly, “I forgive you freely; but for your treachery to France I cannot.”

The traitor once more looked the general straight in the eyes, and slowly his

heels came together and his hand came to a salute.

“Good-by, sir,” he said quietly; then turned on his heel and walked away, his carriage erect, and without a tremor.

For a moment General Joffre stared after him, and his eyes became dim. Quickly he passed his hand over his eyes; then, motioning for Hal and Chester to follow him, turned slowly toward his car.

“A good man—and an excellent officer,” he muttered to himself, “if he had but gone straight.”

The car sped away. That evening, while Hal and Chester stood beside General Joffre, back again in his headquarters, an orderly rushed into the tent, and forgetting the formality of a salute in his haste, went up to the general and thrust a paper into his hand.

Silently the general read it, passed it to Hal, and turned his head away. Chester, leaning over his friend’s shoulder, read the words the message contained:

“The body of General Emil Tromp was found in his quarters at the front this afternoon. He had shot himself through the head.”

“Evidently came by field wireless,” said Chester.

“Yes,” replied Hal.

General Joffre turned again to his desk, picked up a pen and wrote. Then he read aloud to Hal and Chester:

“General Emil Tromp was struck down by a German shell at the front this afternoon. He died almost instantly.”

“I am sure I may depend upon you to say nothing of what you have heard to-day,” he said quietly.

“You may, sir,” said Hal and Chester in one breath.

General Joffre tapped the bell on his desk. An orderly entered and came to a salute.

“Orderly,” said General Joffre, handing him the message he had just written,

“have this sent to the war office immediately.”

The gallant French commander turned again to his desk, and as the orderly, Hal and Chester passed from his tent he once more brushed the moisture from his eyes.

CHAPTER XX.

OFF ON A RAID.

Hal and Chester accepted General Joffre's offer of an automobile to make their return trip, which consequently did not consume as much time as their journey to the headquarters of the French commander-in-chief.

The first thing they did upon their arrival was to report to General French. The latter listened gravely to their story, and then said:

"I know that I need not caution you to obey General Joffre's injunction concerning the fate of General Tromp. Let the matter be forgotten."

The lads saluted and left the tent to hunt up temporary quarters of their own, for the great army had again come to a halt.

Meanwhile, what of the great driving movement of the allied forces, which after checking the vast German horde almost at the gates of Paris, had forced the foe back mile after mile without cessation? A word of the situation is here necessary.

From the first moment when the allied armies had assumed the offensive, after being driven back for days by the Germans, they had continued their steady advance. Such fighting as the world had never known was in progress continually, for the Germans contested every inch of the ground.

Time after time the Allies threatened the German lines of communication, and the Germans were forced to fall back to protect them, or to be cut off and eventually annihilated, or forced to surrender. The strategy of General Joffre, condemned by many in the earlier days of the war, now was beginning to bear fruit, and he was praised on every hand.

The English, under the command of Sir John French, the chief stumbling block in the path of the Germans as they advanced on Paris, were proving their mettle every day. Despite their numerical inferiority to the enemy, they stood bravely to their herculean task, until now the whole world realized that they were the real

fighting strength of the allied army.

Each day found the Germans farther and farther from the walls of Paris. Each day found the Allies pressing the foe more closely. The great battle line, stretching out for more than 200 miles, was in constant contact with the enemy. Almost hourly there was such severe fighting as in former wars would have earned the designation of battles. But along this great line they were but skirmishes.

The losses on both sides had been tremendous, although the Germans, because of the fact that they had been previously on the offensive, and also because of the massed formation they had used in their advance, had suffered considerably more than the Allies.

Louvain and other towns in Belgium had been sacked by the Germans, pillaged with fire and sword, until hardly one stone was left upon another. And now the fighting was again in Belgium, that little buffer state which, ever since she became a nation, has always been the battleground of European wars.

The Belgian army, in spite of the terrible havoc wrought upon it by the heavy German guns, was still fighting desperately and had no mind to withdraw from the conflict. Possibly Belgium had more at stake than any other country in the war. She was fighting for life and freedom—from possible absorption into the German Empire.

And now the German forces had been pushed clear across the River Marne, where they were making a determined stand. The eastern shore of the little river was held by the Kaiser’s troops, the western shore by the Allies.

So here the great armies now paused for a moment to take a much needed breathing spell. For the moment the fierce advance of the Allies was checked. Tired men sank to the ground in the ranks, there to remain until the battle should be resumed.

But over all still was heard the roar of the great guns. The artillery continued in action, as it had ever since the two great armies had come into contact with each other. Shells dropped and burst among the troops on both sides of the river, blowing men to atoms; but still the main portions of the armies rested on their arms, awaiting the word to move forward again.

The fire of the German artillery was hourly creating great havoc in the allied army; but in spite of their great guns, the greatest ever known, their execution had been no more terrible than that done by the smaller guns of the Allies; for the fire of the British gunners was far superior to that of the Germans. Few shells were wasted, while, up to this time, the comparatively poor marksmanship of the German gunners was the cause of much comment and surprise.

So now, when Hal and Chester once more returned to their own posts, they found the two great armies lined up on either bank of the Marne; or rather some distance from it, only the outposts of either army occasionally riding right up to the river's edge, while the great shells continued to burst on both sides of the river.

Hal and Chester sought out Lieutenant Anderson, whom they found after a long search. Through an orderly they also reported to General French, apprising him of where to find them should he desire their presence. After a short talk with Lieutenant Anderson, who had insisted that they make free use of his quarters, both lads turned in, for they had been many hours without sleep, and were tired out.

How long they slept it is impossible to say, but they were awakened by Lieutenant Anderson shaking them by the arm.

"Get up," commanded the lieutenant. "You are ordered to report to General French immediately."

Hal and Chester were on their feet in a moment. Bright sunlight streamed through the entrance to the tent. It was early morning.

Once more in the quarters of General French, both boys impatiently waited for him to speak—to tell them the reason he had summoned them so suddenly.

At length the general rose and approached them. He placed a hand on the shoulder of each, and spoke:

"You two lads already have been of invaluable service. Perhaps I should not again call upon you so soon, although I know your hearts are in the success of the arms of France and England. But you have so often proved your fitness for dangerous missions that you seem the ones needed."

“We shall be glad to undertake the work, general, no matter what it is,” said Hal.

“Indeed we shall,” agreed Chester.

“What I must know,” said General French, “is the approximate strength of the enemy on the other side of the Marne, the positions of his troops and so on. I could ascertain this possibly by means of the flying corps; but in that event the enemy would know that I had learned. It must be done some other way. Are you lads willing to undertake this task?”

“Yes, sir,” said Hal and Chester, almost in a single breath.

“Good,” said General French. “I shall leave the means to you, for I have already come to know your resourcefulness. I have only one injunction: Be back at the earliest possible moment.”

The two lads saluted and left the tent. They immediately returned to Lieutenant Anderson, where they apprised him of the nature of the work before them.

“You two youngsters certainly do have all the luck,” said the lieutenant, “while we old heads sit back here and do nothing.”

“It seems to me that you have been doing your share,” said Hal.

“And to me, too,” Chester agreed.

“Oh, well,” laughed the lieutenant. “I have seen considerable action. I don’t suppose I should complain. But how do you propose to gather this information? I suppose you realize that you have quite a sizable job on your hands?”

“Yes, we realize that,” Hal replied, “and we thought perhaps you could help us with an idea or two.”

The lieutenant was silent for some moments. Finally he said:

“I believe that I should not go alone, were I in your place. The enemy will be constantly on the lookout for spies. My plan would be to make quite a detour along the river, crossing by a bold dash and riding right into the heart of the enemy’s country, at whatever point it might be practically unprotected.”

“A good idea,” said Hal. “But, in that event, we should have to have a larger party.”

“Exactly,” said Lieutenant Anderson. “And I, for one, offer my services. I suppose we should have at least twenty-five men.”

A few moments later Hal was back in General French’s headquarters.

“General,” he said, “I should like to have your permission to pick twenty-five men, and permission to use one of the highest power automobiles in the army.”

The general looked at him in silence for a while before speaking, but finally said:

“You have my permission. Here,” turning to his desk and writing a few words, “is a written order. I shall not ask the nature of your plan. Good luck to you.”

“I shall let you pick the men,” said Hal to Lieutenant Anderson, when he was again back in the latter’s quarters, “and, so far as they know, you are in command.”

“Very well,” was the reply; “but remember that it is not so. On this expedition I waive my rank, and will act under your orders.”

Half an hour later Chester and Hal inspected the men selected by Lieutenant Anderson, to whom the boys were introduced as scouts. A likely body of men they were, strong and sturdy, and not a man of them under six feet in height.

“Look like they could give a good account of themselves,” muttered Chester to himself.

At length all were piled in a great motor truck, and a second later, in response to Hal’s directions were speeding southward.

CHAPTER XXI.

ACROSS THE MARNE.

For two hours the great motor truck continued its journey southward at top speed. Then Hal called a halt.

Quickly the men clambered out, and with Hal in the lead marched in the direction of the river.

The place where Hal had ordered the men from the car could not have been better selected, for, on the opposite side of the river, though Hal did not know it then, there was a considerable open space between the German forces.

The troopers followed the lad to the bank of the river, and then, as there was not a shot from the opposite side, all walked boldly along the shore. At length they came upon a number of small boats, evidently having been placed in readiness by some of the British forces.

“We’ll appropriate these,” said Hal. “Luckily they were here or we should have been forced to swim across.”

The men piled into the boats, and pushed off. They reached the opposite side without discovery, and hastily clambering up the bank were soon hidden from sight in a clump of trees. Here Hal called another halt, until he was able to decide upon his next move.

The boats had been pulled into the trees, to be used for their return trip. The driver of the auto truck was ordered to remain where the party had left him. All in readiness for a hasty retreat, Hal now bethought himself of a way to successfully accomplish their mission.

After a consultation the party moved forward, keeping as much as possible in the shelter of the trees. As they approached the edge of the little woods they came suddenly upon three German horsemen.

The latter had not seen them, so quietly had they crept along. Hal, Chester and

Lieutenant Anderson were upon them before they knew it, their men right behind them. Seeing that they were far outnumbered, the Germans did not put up a fight.

The hands of all three immediately went into the air, and one of them called out in German:

“We surrender.”

“Dismount!” ordered Hal, and the Germans obeyed.

“This is what I call luck,” said Hal to his friends.

“What do you mean?” demanded Lieutenant Anderson.

“Why,” said Hal, “here we have three horses and three German uniforms. If that isn’t luck, I don’t know what is.”

Quickly the three Germans were stripped of their uniforms, bound and gagged.

When Hal, Chester and Lieutenant Anderson had donned the German uniforms, Hal called three of the British troopers to him.

“You men,” he said, “will leave all your weapons here, except your revolvers, which you will hide in your clothes. Then you will accompany us, afoot, apparently as prisoners.”

He called a fourth trooper to him.

“Your name?” he demanded.

“Bristow, sir.”

“Then, Bristow, we appoint you to take command while we are gone. The rest of you will remain here until we return, or until you find it necessary to retreat across the river.”

“Very good, sir,” said Bristow, and fell back and informed his companions of the situation.

“Do you realize,” asked Lieutenant Anderson of Hal, “that if we are captured in these German uniforms it will mean a spy’s death for all of us?”

“Perfectly,” said Hal, “but we shall have to take that chance. I believe that having three English soldiers with us, apparently prisoners, will be a means of avoiding detection.”

“All right,” said Chester, “only we shall have to be careful.”

Quickly the three mounted, and marching the soldiers on ahead of them started north, bearing off slightly to the east. For an hour they continued their journey, passing now and then a body of German troops. But they were not molested, not even challenged.

At length they came upon a farmhouse, setting well back from the road.

“Perhaps we can learn something here,” said Chester.

Hal called a halt, and all approached the house. The door was opened by a young woman, who started back in dismay at sight of them.

“Have no fear,” said Hal, who acted as spokesman of the party. “We are simply tired out and hungry. We thought perhaps you could furnish us with a bite to eat, and also our prisoners here.”

Without a word the woman opened wide the door, and motioned for them to enter. The six followed her into the dining-room, where soon a hearty repast was spread on the table.

“We have been on a mission south,” Hal said to the woman. “Can you tell me just how far the German staff is from here?”

“It can’t be very far,” the woman replied, “for some of the officers often come here to eat. They say that they like my cooking better than the regular army fare. I wouldn’t be at all surprised if some of them were to come along soon.”

“Good,” said Hal, aloud, but nevertheless he was seriously alarmed. He did not wish to come into such close proximity with the German staff officers.

Hastily the six bolted their food, and even as they were disappearing around the outbuildings, Chester, glancing back, saw six men, in gold-trimmed uniforms, entering the house they had just quitted.

“Great Scott,” he said, “we got out of there just in time. Look.”

The rest looked back and saw the cause of his excitement. In the shelter of a clump of trees Hal called a halt.

“There must be something up,” he declared, “or the German staff would not be this far south. I don’t suppose General French has been informed of this. In some way we must find out what is going on.”

“And I wouldn’t be surprised,” said Chester, “if they were using that farmhouse for a certain purpose.”

“By Jove! I never thought of that,” said Hal. “I believe you have hit it. That is where they are making their plans. I wonder”—and he grew greatly excited. “I wonder if by any chance the Kaiser could be in that party.”

“He is probably pretty near the whole party,” said Lieutenant Anderson dryly. “Kaiser Wilhelm is no coward, and if his staff is there, this close to the British lines, the Kaiser is probably there also.”

“Then it’s a wonder the woman didn’t say something about the Kaiser being near.”

“She probably didn’t know him,” said the lieutenant.

Hal sat wrapped in thought for a long time.

“Do you know what I am going to do?” he said at length, dismounting.

“No. What?” demanded Chester and Lieutenant Anderson in a single voice.

“I’m going to sneak back to the farmhouse, and see if by some hook or crook I can hear what is going on. We shall probably not have another chance of overhearing the German plans.”

“Great Scott!” said Lieutenant Anderson, “that certainly is a bold plan. You don’t mean it?”

“I certainly do,” was the reply.

“Then I shall go, too,” said Chester.

“And me,” declared Lieutenant Anderson.

“No you won’t,” said Hal, positively. “The rest of you will stay here. If I should

get into any trouble, I shall fire my revolver, and then the rest of you can come up. The six of us will be a match for them, the Kaiser included."

Suddenly Chester was struck with a great inspiration.

"Why can't we get the rest of our men, and capture the whole crowd?" he demanded in great excitement.

"I had thought of that," replied Hal, "but something tells me it can't be done—a hunch, if you like. I have a feeling that if we attempt such a thing our whole expedition will go wrong. I can't explain just what I mean, but I feel it."

"And I too," declared Lieutenant Anderson. "I don't know why, but I know it's true."

"Bosh!" said Chester, but the words of his two friends evidently had created some impression, for his ejaculation was only half-hearted.

"Well, if you must go by yourself, all right," said Lieutenant Anderson. "But my advice is that the sooner you get there the better."

Hal nodded, and, a moment later, going some distance to one side, where he knew he could not be seen from the dining-room window, he walked slowly toward the house.

He made no attempt at concealment as he walked along, for he knew that such an action, should he be seen, would be suspicious and would probably mean an unsuccessful termination of his plan. He had little fear of detection, clothed as he was in a German uniform.

Now the lad reached the house, and sought a means of entrance. He did not wish to go in the front door, for fear that someone might see him, so, keeping close to the wall, he walked around the house.

His effort was rewarded. For at the extreme rear was a low window, apparently halfway between the first and second floors.

"Evidently, at a turn in the steps," Hal told himself.

Quickly he grasped the edge of the sill, and exerting great strength slowly and cautiously drew himself up. The window was open, and the lad put one leg over the sill. A second later he sat in the opening, and then disappeared inside the

house.

Very cautiously he ascended the steps. Remembering the exact location of the dining-room, the lad sought out the room above it. There, at one end of the room, he found what appeared to be a little closet.

Gently opening the door, he peered in. Nothing but darkness met his eyes. Hal stepped inside, pulling the door to after him, leaving just a little crack that he might not be suffocated.

Then he laid his ear to the floor and listened intently. From below came the faint sound of German voices.

Hal ran an exploring finger over the floor of the closet. His finger felt a little hole, and changing his position the boy saw a very small opening in the floor. He put his eye to the hole and peered down, and as he made out the figures in the room below he chuckled softly to himself.

The first man upon whom he laid his eyes was Count Von Moltke, commander-in-chief of all the German armies, and who, upon one occasion, had saved him from death before a firing squad.

“Wonder what he would say if he could see me now?” Hal asked himself.

His gaze roved over the room, and there at one end of the table sat an imposing figure in gold-trimmed military uniform, sword between his knees, a fierce military mustache curling upward.

There was no mistaking this figure. It was Wilhelm II, Emperor of Germany!

CHAPTER XXII.

THE KAISER.

In spite of the fact that Hal had sure sense that Emperor Wilhelm would be in the room below, he felt a peculiar thrill creep over him as he made out the imposing figure of “The War Lord of Europe.” He whistled softly to himself.

“Great Scott!” he ejaculated, and then looked long and silently.

“To think,” he said to himself after a long pause, “that he is primarily responsible for this great war, with its toll of thousands of lives and the destruction of property worth millions of dollars.”

Unconsciously, almost, he drew his revolver, and pointed it straight at the War Lord’s breast.

“With one little movement of my finger,” said the lad softly to himself, “I could snuff out the life of the man who has already sent thousands to their death. One shot, and——”

His fingers tightened on the trigger, but for a moment only. Then he lowered his weapon, and a moment later dropped it back in his pocket, while he wiped away little beads of perspiration that had gathered on his brow.

“It’s no use,” he told himself, “I couldn’t do it if I wanted to.”

Wilhelm II, Emperor of the German Empire and War Lord of Europe, will never know how close he was to death at that moment!

Now the voices of the officers in the room below became louder, and by straining his ears the lad could make out what they were saying.

“If,” came a voice from below, and Hal recognized it as that of Count Von Moltke, “if we can draw the British to this point, we can cut them off from their French support and annihilate them. And——”

“And,” came the voice of the Kaiser himself, “we can, then, by a quick turning move, take the French by surprise and our victory will be complete.”

“Exactly, sire,” came Count Von Moltke’s voice again.

“But, sire,” said a third voice, “what have we to warrant that the English will accept our bait?”

The Emperor did not reply immediately, and Count Von Moltke broke in again.

“We will make a strong showing on the eastern shore of the Marne,” he said, “and will retire slowly before the British. As they come on, flushed with apparent victory, Von Kluck will take them on the left flank. We shall cut them to pieces.”

“The plan sounds well to me,” came the voice of the Kaiser again. “General Von Kluck, how soon can you be in readiness to execute this coup?”

“Not before day after to-morrow, sire,” was the reply. “It will take me that long to bring my men to the designated point, at the same time keeping the British unaware of their withdrawal.”

“And how many men will you be able to bring?” asked the Kaiser.

“Half a million, sire.”

“Leaving how many in their present position, as a screen?”

“Very few, sire. Hardly more than 50,000 men.”

The Kaiser growled something, unintelligible to Hal, into his mustache. Then he spoke aloud:

“If the British were aware of that,” he said, “by a quick advance they would place us at a tremendous disadvantage.”

“So they would, sire,” agreed General Von Kluck. “But it must be seen that they do not anticipate our plan.”

“In that event,” came the Emperor’s reply, “it will be necessary for that part of your force which is left to make a show of strength at the same moment the mass of your command is withdrawn.”

“Exactly what I had figured upon, sire.”

“Good; but you say it is impossible for you to be ready until the day after to-morrow. In that event, we must hold the English in their present positions at all costs. A premature advance on their part, while we would undoubtedly repulse it, would mean the ruination of our coup. See to it, gentlemen, that there is no leak.”

“There shall be none, sire,” came a chorus of officers.

“Very well. But I had had my mind set on being in Paris long ere this. Had it not been for the interference of these English—and these starving Belgians, I would be there now,” and the Kaiser’s voice grew harsh. “They must be crushed,” and he struck the table a heavy blow with his clenched fist.

“And crushed they shall be, sire,” said Count Von Moltke soothingly. “It is only a question of time.”

“Well, you have been long enough doing it,” came the Emperor’s angry voice. “See that you do not fail me again. If you do——”

He broke off, but his silence was more menacing than any threat he might have uttered.

There was the sound of chairs scraping on the floor, and a moment later of heavy footsteps. Hal, in his hiding place, knew that the German officers were leaving the house.

“By George!” the lad muttered to himself, “Wilhelm must be a holy terror. I’ll bet Von Kluck, Von Moltke and all the rest are due for a terrible wigging, for I’m here to see that this plot fails.”

Hal waited patiently for perhaps half an hour, and then, feeling certain that the coast was clear, emerged from his hiding place. He was just lowering himself from the window by which he had entered when, from almost below him, there was a loud scream.

Glancing down, Hal beheld the pale face of the woman who had given them food only a short time before. Fearing that the Emperor and his officers might be attracted by her screams, Hal dropped quickly to the ground, and an instant later had his hand clapped over the woman’s mouth.

“Quiet!” he commanded in a harsh voice. “If you make no noise you shall not be harmed. Otherwise——” he paused significantly.

The woman shuddered once or twice, but she uttered no further sound.

“Go into the house,” Hal commanded, and followed her.

“I guess I had better tie you up for safe keeping,” the lad muttered to himself. “I can’t afford to be interfered with now.”

He found a piece of rope, and, making a gag out of a napkin, gagged and bound her securely. Then he placed her gently in a chair.

“You will have to sit there until someone comes along to free you,” he told her. “I hope it won’t be long, for your sake, but I can’t afford to take any chances with you.”

He left the house; and as he turned his eyes toward the spot where he had so lately left his friends, his heart sank.

Chester, Lieutenant Anderson and the three troopers were running toward him as fast as their legs would carry them, closely pursued by a band of mounted Germans. Even at this distance Hal could make out the forms of Count Von Moltke, and, yes, Emperor Wilhelm himself!

With the high German officers came a little troop of mounted soldiers, evidently, Hal thought, an escort, that had been left some distance behind while the Emperor and his officers discussed their plans in the farmhouse. In all, there were twelve horsemen dashing after the fugitives.

Now his friends came up with him, and Hal, believing as did his friends that discretion was the better part of valor, also turned and ran. Several shots rang out, but none was touched and they did not pause to reply.

“Just wait till we get back to our own men,” thought Hal to himself as he ran along, “that is, if we can make it.”

But help came unexpectedly. Bristow, the man who had been left in charge of the little band of English, hearing the sound of firing, had crawled forward to investigate. He made out the figures flying toward him and recognized them instantly; also, he saw the pursuing horsemen.

Quickly he returned to his men, and at a word they all dashed forward. This reinforcement arrived not a moment too soon, for the horsemen were overhauling the fugitives rapidly.

When the fugitives saw their own men approaching they stopped in their mad flight, drew their revolvers and fired at the pursuers with almost a single movement.

The horses of the Germans came to a sudden halt, being pulled up on their haunches, so forcibly did their riders bring them to a stop. A moment later the pursuers themselves were in full flight.

Hal laughed loudly to himself, and so great became his mirth that he was forced to hold his sides.

“What on earth is the matter with you?” demanded Chester in great surprise. “What are you laughing at?”

“Why,” explained Hal, between bursts of laughter, “I am laughing at the sight of Emperor Wilhelm II, War Lord of Europe, flying as if the evil one himself were after him!”

CHAPTER XXIII.

WITHIN THE ENEMY'S LINES.

Briefly now Hal recounted to his two friends what he had overheard in the farmhouse, pointing out the danger that threatened the allied armies. When he had concluded he said:

"Now I have another plan, and I want to know if you, Chester, and you, Lieutenant Anderson, will follow my instructions?"

"Certainly," said the lieutenant.

"You know I will, Hal," said Chester.

"All right, then. What I want you to do is this: Return and report to General French what I have just told you. Take the men with you. That's all."

"But you?" demanded Chester; "aren't you coming, too? Surely you have accomplished the mission successfully."

"No," replied Hal. "In this German uniform I believe I shall be perfectly safe on this side, and I am going to try and gain further information. It may be that I can learn something that will be important."

"Then I shall go with you," declared Chester.

"And I, too," said Lieutenant Anderson.

"Oh, no you won't," said Hal grimly. "Didn't you just promise to obey my commands, both of you?"

"But we didn't know what you planned to do," said Chester.

"I know you didn't," said Hal. "That is why I asked your promises before I told you."

"But I don't think it is fair," protested Chester.

“I don’t care what you think,” replied Hal. “You have both promised, so that’s all there is about it.”

In vain did Chester and Lieutenant Anderson protest. Hal was firm.

“Come, now,” he said at last. “You are making it more dangerous for me every moment you stand here arguing about it. Get in the boats and return at once.”

Slowly Chester and Lieutenant Anderson complied with his request. The men already were in the boats, and Hal stood and watched them row away.

“I shall be back some time to-night or in the morning,” he called to Chester; “but,” and he smiled grimly to himself, “if I were you, I wouldn’t wait up for me.”

Chester and Lieutenant Anderson waved their hands in reply, and with one last look Hal turned and made his way back in the direction of the farmhouse.

He walked by the house without stopping, for he had no mind to linger long in that vicinity.

“The quicker I find the main army and lose myself among the rest of the officers the better off I shall be,” he told himself.

He espied a small squadron of Germans approaching him at a quick trot. Making sure that his revolvers were ready for instant action, the lad trudged bravely on. The mounted troops passed him at a distance of perhaps a hundred yards, and the officer in command waved his sword in greeting as they went by.

“So far, so good,” muttered the lad to himself.

Small bodies of troops passed him at more frequent intervals now. But feeling perfectly safe in his German uniform, with shoulder straps of captain, the lad continued boldly on.

At last, some distance ahead, he made out a large encampment.

“Guess this is the place I am headed for,” he told himself.

He approached boldly and soon mingled with the German officers, who were taking life easy, war, seemingly, being far from their thoughts. The place, to Hal, looked as if it might be a drill ground, with a large body of troops on parade.

He walked about for an hour or more and was not challenged once, although once or twice passing officers nodded pleasantly to him.

“Either they mistake me for someone else, or they are a very pleasant and courteous set,” the lad told himself. “However, I didn’t come here to learn how they behave themselves. I won’t get any information this way. I wonder who is in command here, but I can’t afford to ask.”

Continuing his stroll, he at last mingled with a crowd of officers who were idling about talking.

“I heard General Beulow say that we were likely to be ordered forward within a few hours,” said one of the group of officers.

“So?” questioned another. “I had forgotten that you are now a member of his staff.”

“What’s up, do you know?”

“Nothing that I can talk about,” replied the other with a pleasant smile.

“All right,” said another. “The sooner the better.”

The little group broke up and Hal continued his stroll.

“Good,” he said to himself. “At least I have learned that General Beulow is in command here.”

And he had learned not a moment too soon, as it turned out.

At that moment an officer approached him.

“I can’t seem to place you,” he said. “Is your regiment here?”

“No,” returned Hal, in excellent German, without the slightest accent. “I am attached to General Von Kluck’s command. I came here with him to-day.”

“Oh,” said the German officer, “then you are on his staff?”

“Yes.”

“In that event I am in luck. Evidently you are the very man I have been sent to seek. You are Captain Dersam?”

Hal took a long chance.

“Yes,” he replied.

“Good,” said the German officer. “Come to my quarters. I have documents to deliver to you.”

Hal followed the German officer to the latter’s tent. There the German took from a small express box a small package of papers, which he placed in the lad’s hands.

“These,” he said, “you are to deliver to General Von Kluck. I suppose you knew that he had already returned to his command?”

“Yes,” replied Hal firmly. “I was simply waiting for these. My horse is yonder,” and he waved his hand.

“Oh,” continued the German. “Then perhaps you know that Von Kluck, Von Moltke and the Emperor himself had a brush with a bunch of British or French spies a while back. The Emperor was much put out. He believed that information of an expected coup had leaked out, so all generals were hurried back to their posts to see that everything was shipshape.”

“Yes,” said Hal briefly; “I know.”

He placed the papers in his pocket.

“Auf Wiedersehen,” said the German officer, bowing Hal from his tent. “Your orders are to put those papers into General Von Kluck’s hands at the earliest possible moment.”

“It shall be done,” said Hal as he walked rapidly away.

“Great Scott!” he said to himself. “I am in luck. I wouldn’t be surprised if these papers were orders concerning the movement which I overheard in the farmhouse.”

Quickly he sought out a quiet spot, and broke the Imperial seal. It was even as he had expected—only more. For the papers contained the present troop positions, their expected movements and the number of men and how stationed.

Hal whistled softly to himself.

“Won’t General French be surprised when he sees these?” he said softly. “Now to get back.”

It was growing dusk, and as Hal walked along toward the outposts in the direction from which he had so recently come, he whistled blithely to himself. It was a mission well done, and the lad, although by no means egotistical, was well aware of it.

He passed the farthest outpost of the camp unchallenged, and made off in the darkness. Then, still feeling safe in his German uniform, and more confident at having not been recognized during his stay in the German camp, he paid no heed to footsteps that were now approaching.

A lantern swung suddenly into his face by a newcomer caused him to start back in surprise. And even as he did so he made out that the pair who had accosted him were a man and woman.

And what is more he also recognized the woman. It was she whom he had so recently bound in the farmhouse. And her cry made it apparent that she had recognized him as well.

“It is he!” she exclaimed in a loud voice.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A COLD SWIM.

Before Hal could recover his composure, which had left him at being so suddenly accosted, the woman had thrown her arms around his neck, pinioning his hands to his side. He tried to shake himself loose without hurting the woman, but so tight was her grasp that he was unable to do so.

The man who was with her came to her assistance, dodging around the struggling pair with his revolver reversed, held ready to strike. But the woman herself prevented this, for he was unable to bring the butt of the weapon down on the lad's head without the imminent risk of injuring the woman.

Hal contrived to keep the woman between the man and himself, until he had decided just what course to pursue. He had now freed his hands, and awaited an auspicious moment to spring upon his enemy.

It came at last. Suddenly hurling the woman violently from him, Hal leaped forward and, catching his opponent off his balance, struck out swiftly with his bare fist. There was a sharp "spat" and the man fell to the ground.

Hal turned to run, but found himself opposed by the woman, who pointed the revolver at his head. She held the weapon in a steady hand, and the lad realized that a miss at that close range was utterly impossible.

"Hands up!" commanded the woman.

Hal temporized.

"Now see here——" he began.

The woman interrupted.

"Hands up!" she commanded again.

This time Hal obeyed, for he knew by the hard ring in the woman's voice that

she was not to be trifled with.

“About face,” commanded his captor.

Hal did as ordered.

“Now,” continued the woman, “you will march on ahead of me, and, remember, at the first false move I shall fire.”

Without a word Hal turned and started away, the woman but a few paces behind him. But Hal was of no mind to be taken back to the German camp. He realized clearly what fate awaited him there.

His nimble wit was at work as he walked along, and he finally hit upon a plan. It was not without danger, but the lad figured he might just as well be shot then and there as to be put to death as a spy.

As he walked along he seemingly tripped over some unseen obstacle. In attempting to regain his balance he reeled backward. The woman by this time was right upon him.

Unable to tell whether he had really tripped or whether it was a ruse, she stood undecided a moment. That moment proved her undoing. For Hal, spinning on his heel, swept the revolver from her outstretched hand, and with a quick leap seized it himself.

“Now, madam,” he said calmly. “I shall give you just thirty seconds to get away from here. If you have not put a considerable distance between us by the time the thirty seconds have expired, I shall be forced to use this weapon, much as I should dislike to shoot a lady. I am on important business and it brooks of no delay. Neither shall one life stand in the way.”

The woman took one quick look at him, then turned and ran.

“I am glad she believed me,” said Hal to himself. “I don’t believe I could have brought myself to shoot.”

He turned and walked back to the spot where he had placed one of his opponents hors de combat.

The latter was just struggling to his feet, and as Hal approached he sprang forward.

“What! haven’t you had enough yet?” asked the lad in well simulated surprise. “Well, here’s some more then.”

He stepped quickly forward, and feinting with his left, drove his right fist squarely into the German’s mouth. It was more than flesh and blood could stand, and once more the German toppled to the ground, where he remained, unconscious.

“Now to get back across the river,” said Hal to himself. “Wonder if I can find a boat of some kind.”

He walked slowly along the bank, keeping a keen eye out for any kind of a craft in which to make the trip. He could find none; but, from the direction of the great German camp, came the sound of excited voices and the trampling of many feet.

“Great Scott! Here they come,” exclaimed Hal aloud. “I guess it’s up to me to get away from here pretty quick.”

Without a moment’s hesitation he advanced to the water’s edge and plunged into the stream. The water was icy cold, and Hal’s breath was taken away by the suddenness of the shock.

He recovered himself in a moment, however, and struck out for the opposite shore. About half way across he became aware of voices on the shore immediately behind him.

“I don’t believe there is anyone there,” said a voice.

“The woman is a spy herself, that’s my belief,” said a second. “She has concocted this story as an excuse for her being abroad at this hour. I certainly don’t believe there is a spy on this side of the river.”

“Nor I; however, if he is in that water we can spot him with a searchlight. Turn yours on.”

Hearing the words, Hal took a long breath and sank from sight. It was well that he did so promptly, for a brilliant shaft of light flashed across the water, making it as bright as day. The German swept it back and forth across the water. He could see no one.

“I told you so,” he said. “There is no one out there. Come, let’s get away from here.”

“Good,” returned the other. “Come on.”

Hal remained under the water just as long as he could and came to the surface as the Germans turned to walk off, ready to take another quick breath and dive again. But seeing no sign of the searchlight, he rightly concluded that the Germans, who had been but half-hearted in their search anyhow, had gone.

Treading water he listened intently for a few moments, and then made out the sound of retreating footsteps.

“Well,” he said to himself at last, “I guess they have gone. Now to get out of here as soon as I can. I’ll be frozen if I don’t hurry.”

With quick strokes he continued his cold swim, and soon emerged upon the farther shore. He made out the form of a dark figure some distance away, and hurried toward it, remarking to himself:

“Looks like a sentinel. I’ll get a match from him and build a fire and get thawed out before I continue my journey.”

He approached to within a few yards of the figure before his presence was noted. Then the sentinel, for such he proved to be, hearing footsteps behind him, turned suddenly and leveled his rifle at Hal.

“Halt!” he commanded.

“It’s all right,” said Hal. “I’m English.”

“Come a little closer and let me look at you,” said the sentinel, not lowering his weapon.

Hal did as commanded. Suddenly the sentinel made out the German uniform and his rifle leaped up again.

“So,” he exclaimed. “You Dutchman! You thought you’d fool me, did you? You are my prisoner. One false move and you are a dead man.”

“Don’t be a chump,” said Hal, his teeth chattering from cold. “I tell you I’m English. Can’t you tell that by my talk? What do you think I am? A German?”

“Well,” said the sentinel, “what do you think I would take you for in that German uniform?”

Now Hal understood, and in spite of the cold he laughed.

“I don’t blame you,” he said. “I forgot all about this uniform. But I can assure you I’m English. I’ve been over the river getting a little information.”

“Well,” said the sentinel, by no means assured that Hal was what he represented himself. “I’ll let the colonel decide that point. March ahead of me now, and mind, no tricks, unless you want a bullet in your back.”

“All right,” said Hal shortly, “as long as you can’t take my word for it, I suppose I shall have to go with you.”

He walked along some little distance, the sentinel behind him with leveled rifle, before he came to the tent of the officer in charge of what he now saw was a reconnoitering force.

“My name is Paine,” he informed the colonel. “I have been across the river within the German lines on a mission for General French. I have accomplished it and was returning when this sentinel accosted me. I can show credentials,” and he showed the officer a pass signed by the commander-in-chief.

The officer shook hands with him.

“What can I do for you?” he asked.

“I must be back at the earliest possible moment,” said Hal. “Have you a fast auto?”

“Yes.”

“Then I should be grateful if you would allow me to make use of it.”

“It shall be done,” said the officer. “Now you sit here by the fire while I have it put in readiness. You are half frozen.”

“Thanks,” replied Hal. “I am. But I haven’t very long to stay. Please have the car ready as soon as possible. And if you can spare a driver I shall be glad of his services. I don’t believe I could drive the car any great distance.”

“You shall have him,” agreed the officer, and left the tent. Hal huddled up close to the little fire.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE GERMAN COUP FAILS.

Wrapped tightly in a great fur overcoat that the officer had insisted on lending him, Hal snuggled back comfortably in the large automobile as it sped over the ground toward General French's headquarters.

The chauffeur was a speed demon and the huge machine covered the ground much more quickly than the one in which the little party of British had started on their mission. It was not long, therefore, before the lad found himself descending from the car. Another moment and he once more stood before his commander.

"So, you got back safely, eh," exclaimed General French. "Young Crawford gave me your report, and I was afraid that you would be captured. Did you learn anything further?"

"Yes, sir," Hal made reply. "I have learned the number of men in each command, their positions and all details."

"What!" exclaimed General French in great surprise.

"Yes, sir," continued Hal, and reaching in his pocket he drew out the documents given him by the German officer. "Here they are, sir."

General French took the papers from the lad's hand, and glanced at them quickly. After a brief perusal, he laid his hand on Hal's shoulder.

"You have done well," he said quietly. "I shall not forget it. You may go now, for I doubt not that your friend is greatly worried over you. I will say this: You have rendered an invaluable service to England—one that the King shall hear of. I have already taken steps to thwart this German coup, and if we are successful the credit will be mainly due you."

Hal saluted and with glowing heart left the general's tent.

"Now to find Chester," he said.

He had little difficulty in doing this, for Chester was still making his quarters with Lieutenant Anderson. Approaching the lieutenant's tent, Hal walked up cautiously.

"I want to surprise them," he told himself.

Inside he heard the sound of voices, and he paused to listen.

"I'm afraid he won't ever get back," came Chester's voice. "I should have insisted on accompanying him. I shouldn't have let him go alone."

"Still," said Lieutenant Anderson, "he was in command. We had to obey him."

"That is true," replied Chester, "but just the same if ill befalls him I shall feel that I am partly to blame. Besides, we had the information we went after. What had he to gain by staying and putting himself in the enemy's power?"

Stepping quietly into the tent, Hal advanced to the center before he was observed.

"A whole lot, Chester," he said quietly.

Chester and Lieutenant Anderson were upon their feet in an instant, and one had him by either hand, wringing it enthusiastically.

"Stop it, stop it," laughed Hal. "You'll wring my arms off."

"And so you are back safely," said Chester, looking long at his friend.

"Yes, I'm back," said Hal.

"And what did you learn? Anything else?"

"Lots," replied Hal, "but let me get out of this wet German uniform;" having done which he plunged into a story of his experiences after they had left until his return to General French's tent.

"And General French says," he concluded, "that steps have been taken to spoil the Kaiser's plan."

"Good," said Chester and Lieutenant Anderson in one voice.

"Well," said Chester, after some further talk, "I guess we might as well turn in.

Anderson and I were unable to sleep because you had not returned. We can rest easier now."

Almost completely exhausted, the three were soon slumbering deeply. The day's work had been strenuous indeed, and there is no telling how long they would have slept on had not the sound of a bugle, calling "To arms!" roused them.

Quickly they leaped up, and throwing on what few clothes they had removed, were soon at their posts. The whole army was ready to move at a moment's notice.

The first glimmer of the morning sun appeared over the horizon as the command for a general advance rang out. Slowly at first, then faster, the great British fighting machine moved on, squadron upon squadron of cavalry leading the way.

There were no bridges across the little river, nor were there boats enough to carry the army across. But under the direction of skillful engineers, the best in the world, pontoon bridges sprang up as if by magic. Before the Germans were fully aware of what was going on, several thousand men had been hurled across the little stream.

These—advancing in the face of the overwhelming force of Germans, rushed forward to check them—fought off the enemy while other British troops were poured over the Marne. Desperately did the Germans try to drive them back. Time after time they charged, only to be hurled back again by the British horsemen, and the infantry that now had had time to form after crossing the river.

Artillery was brought into action to force the British back across the little stream. But it was no use. The Germans had been caught unprepared. Already Gen. Von Kluck had weakened his defense by sending some of his men south to take their places in the force with which the Kaiser and his generals expected to execute their great coup.

Evidently the danger of a sudden attack had not been anticipated by the German general staff. That the British, without the support of their French allies, farther to the south, would take the offensive, was a factor that had apparently been overlooked.

The surprise was practically complete. The British army on the continent at this

time numbered slightly more than 100,000 men. Probably two-thirds of this whole force was hurled across the Marne in this battle, which, starting as a skirmish, soon grew into one of the fiercest and bloodiest struggles of history.

Scotch Highlanders, Irish troops, Sikh legions, recently arrived from India, British troops from other of her foreign possessions and the English themselves stood shoulder to shoulder, fighting nobly and driving back the foe.

But the Germans contested every inch of the ground. Outnumbering the British as they did, however, they were slowly compelled to retreat, the British pursuing them relentlessly.

Apparently it was not General French's plan to push the battle too strongly now. It was merely his intention to deliver such a blow as would make the coup planned by the Germans impracticable.

For seven solid hours the battle for the opposite shore of the Marne continued, both sides fighting desperately and heroically. Then, as the Germans continued to retreat, General French called a halt. The British fell to work digging trenches in the recently won ground, and preparing to resist an attack should one be delivered.

This first skirmish on the eastern banks of the Marne, while possibly unimportant, when viewed in the light of later events, became one of the greatest factors in the offensive movements of the Allies.

Now that the English had obtained a foothold upon the opposite side they did not relinquish it, in spite of heavy assaults made by the Kaiser's troops in the days that were to follow. Passage across the stream for the rest of the allied army was now comparatively easy, for the English, already having a foothold, stood ready to drive off the Germans as reinforcements crossed.

And if the action at the Marne was one of the deciding factors in the offensive movement of the Allies, the credit of it is undoubtedly due largely to Chester and Hal, who, at the risk of their own lives, enabled the British troops to catch the Germans in their own trap.

That the boys' value in this important battle was recognized, is evidenced by the fact, that, when the army once more had come to a halt, General French summoned the two lads to him, and with a hand on the shoulder of each, and his

whole staff grouped about him, said:

“You have done well! England is proud of her kinsmen!”

CHAPTER XXVI.

TRAPPED.

It was two days later. The battle was raging fiercely. On all sides men were dropping singly, in pairs, in tens and in hundreds. Since early morning, when an advance guard of Germans had approached the British line, the struggle had continued without a minute’s breathing space.

Gradually giving way before the English attacks, the German troops fell back mile after mile, the English, in the section of the field where the fighting had been going on, pursuing them closely. Unmindful of their support on either side, the British still pressed forward, until now they were far beyond either flank.

Suddenly from either side of the English troops came a thundering volley. Taken by surprise, the British halted suddenly, while men tumbled to the earth on every hand.

Before the officer in command could give the order to fall back, a force of Germans was hurled into their rear, completely cutting them off from any possible hope of aid from that direction. A thousand men were in this little force now completely surrounded.

But the officer in command of the British was not of the caliber to surrender. He was a typical son of Albion, a fighting man, none other than Captain Harry Anderson, whose part in the expedition across the Marne had raised him to that rank.

Advancing with his command, he soon found himself the ranking officer still on his feet. Hal and Chester, who the night before had shared his quarters, at the call to arms had plunged into the thick of the conflict alongside the gallant captain. In spite of the terrific carnage, in spite of the shot and shell that fell about them, they had so far escaped injury.

Perceiving that retreat was cut off, Captain Anderson conceived a possible escape. With a loud cry of “Forward!” to his men, he dashed right into the face

of a terrible rifle and artillery fire.

Men dropped as though mowed down by the wind, but the little column halted not. They had spread out, fan-wise, at the command of Captain Anderson, to avoid as much as possible the sweeping fire of the Germans, and they now pressed forward at a run.

Completely surprised at this sudden charge by the little body of men, that the German officers evidently believed entirely in their power, and still more surprised by their desperate offense in the face of overwhelming odds, the Germans, for a moment, gave way.

That moment was enough for the success of Captain Anderson's strategy. At the point of the bayonet the British burst through the German line, dealing out death on every hand as they did so. A moment and the Germans rallied, but it was too late.

The British were now through the barrier of steel, and had taken refuge behind a little ridge. And now the reason for the captain's sudden charge became apparent.

Directly ahead was a large house, and for this refuge the British dashed madly. The first man to reach the door tried the knob. The door was locked. From behind came the plod of the heavy German feet and the sharp crack of rifles.

There was not a moment to lose. With a swift blow of his rifle butt, the British soldier smashed in the door, and into this opening the troops poured. A second squad had dashed around to the rear of the house and performed a similar operation. In less time than it takes to tell it injured and uninjured alike were in the house. The ground outside, however, was strewn with their companions.

Quickly every window in the house was manned, the doors barred. And the British stood silently awaiting the approach of the enemy, which they knew would come in a very few minutes.

"If it were not for the artillery we could hold this place indefinitely," said Captain Anderson.

"Yes," agreed Chester; "or, if we can manage to hold out till night, we may be able to get away."

“It is possible, too,” said Hal, “that our absence will be noticed and aid sent to us.”

“I’m not banking much on that,” replied Captain Anderson, “for, if we are missed, our loss probably will be put down to the fortunes of war. It is hardly possible General French would know we are cooped up in this house.”

“That’s so,” said Chester. “Well, we will have to hold on as long as we can. That’s the best we can do.”

“Exactly,” agreed Hal quietly.

The three approached the window in front of the house on the second floor. But, even as they neared it, the rifle of the soldier guarding it spoke.

“Evidently the siege has begun,” said Hal grimly. “Poor fellow!” he added, as one of the men at the window toppled to the floor, a bullet in his head.

His place was quickly taken by another, and the battle went on. The firing became fiercer with each passing moment. The British barred the windows with chairs, tables, and whatever other articles of furniture they could find, leaving an opening just large enough to poke their rifles through.

But even this was not enough to keep out all the German bullets. Still men fell, though not as fast as before. Captain Anderson assigned Hal to direct the fire of the British in the front of the first floor and Chester in the rear. The captain took command of the second floor himself.

The three were everywhere encouraging the men, seemingly being all over their respective stations at once. Occasionally, as a man fell, Hal or Chester would step into the breach and hold the place until relieved by another soldier.

Noon came and went, and still the fighting continued. Apparently, thus far, the Germans had not conceived the idea of battering the house to pieces with their big field guns. Evidently they thought they could take it without this trouble.

And now darkness drew on. The German fire had played havoc with the defenders, but, if they had suffered severely, the enemy’s loss, exposed as they were to the grilling fire from the house, had been enormous.

Night fell, and with it came a lull in the firing. Hal took advantage of this respite

to hurry upstairs for a word with Captain Anderson. As they conversed in low tones, they were startled by an outcry from the floor below.

Hurriedly descending the stairs, they beheld the cause of the commotion. Struggling in Chester's arms was a man in civilian garb.

"I caught him just as he was about to open the front door," Chester explained.

The man's struggles were soon quieted, and he stood before Captain Anderson, pale and trembling.

"What are you doing here?" demanded the latter.

"I was hiding in the cellar," said the man in a shaking voice. "When you English burst in I didn't know what to do. I remained in my hiding-place until there was a lull in the fighting. I was afraid I would be killed if I was found, so I tried to get out the first time I thought I had a chance."

Captain Anderson looked at him queerly.

"Surely you are not a German?" he asked.

"No, sir," was the reply, "I am French."

"Then what need had you to be afraid of us?"

"Well, you see, sir," was the nervous reply, "I am a peace-loving man. I don't want to fight, and I won't fight if I can help it."

"A nice specimen of a Frenchman, to be sure," said the captain, with a sneer. "If you are such a peace-loving man, how does it happen we find you here? Why haven't you fled with the rest of the old women and children?"

"Well, you see, sir," quavered the man, "I have been hiding here. I was afraid that if I went to Paris I would be forced to fight."

"And you have been hiding here ever since war broke out?"

"Yes, sir. I have a nice hiding-place downstairs," and he rubbed his hands in satisfaction.

"And you were not discovered by the Germans?"

“No, sir; and a party of officers were here only yesterday.”

“Then, no doubt, you heard their plans. Perhaps you can give us important information?”

“I could, yes, sir,” was the reply. “But, if I do, will there be any pay for me?”

The captain was taken by surprise.

“And you call yourself a Frenchman,” he said in contempt. He took a threatening step forward. “No,” he said angrily, “there will be no pay, but I can promise you that if you don’t tell what you know you will be shot right here and now.”

“Oh, sir, you wouldn’t do that,” said the man in a wheedling voice.

“Wouldn’t I?” exclaimed the captain. “You shall see.”

He turned to his men, and, in response to a signal, two of them approached the Frenchman. But the stern tone had convinced the man that the officer meant what he said.

“I’ll tell, sir,” he cried, falling on his knees.

Captain Anderson waved his men away.

“Very well,” he said coldly, “and see that you make no mistake. If your information is of no value you shall be shot anyhow.”

“But it is, sir,” protested the Frenchman.

“All right. Then let’s have it.”

“The Germans are planning an aëroplane raid on the English,” said the man, in a low voice. “There is a park of aëroplanes hardly two miles from here, on the road leading to Viviers. They are ready for instant flight.”

“What!” exclaimed Captain Anderson. “Are you sure?”

“Perfectly,” was the reply. “I heard the German officers talking of it only yesterday. They said it would deal a death-blow to the English.”

“And so it would,” said the captain, “unless it can be stopped.”

Hal broke suddenly into the conversation.

“Can you point the approximate whereabouts of this park of machines out to us?” he asked.

“Easily, sir.”

“What’s your idea?” asked Captain Anderson.

“Simply this,” said Hal. “I believe that by a dash we can get through the Germans. They will not expect it, and, if they did, would not expect us to go forward. Consequently, the guard in front is not likely to be vigilant. We have enough men here to make a successful raid on these machines and destroy them.”

“A first-class idea,” said the captain. “We’ll do it.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

A DEED OF DARING.

Quickly the captain formed and outlined a plan. Then, gathering his men behind him at the door, he prepared for a sortie. Among the troops were a few engineers, the captain ascertained upon inquiry, and these he placed at the extreme rear of the little body.

When all was ready, the captain opened the doors and stepped out. Hal and Chester were right behind him. It was very dark, and, as there was no light in the house, Germans who were on guard, being a considerable distance back to avoid the fire of the British defenders, did not at first make out the forms flitting silently from the house.

Half the little troop had emerged before a single rifle shot, followed by a volley, gave notice that they had been discovered. Then, at a word from Captain Anderson, the British charged right at their enemy.

Not a shot was fired until they were at close quarters, in spite of the fact that the German fire was not ineffective. Then, as the men spread out in a long line, they blazed forth their answer, and, hard upon this, charged with the bayonet.

Apparently the Germans had not prepared for such a move on the part of the enemy, for they gave ground rapidly. The skirmish was brief, with success to the British.

The Germans in flight, Captain Anderson, Hal and Chester soon found the Viviers road, and led their men along at double time. The two miles were covered quickly, and finally the three could make out in the darkness what appeared to be a factory. Closer approach showed that this what it was.

“Must be a temporary affair,” said Captain Anderson, in a low voice. “And what are those objects nearby?”

Hal peered through the darkness.

“Look like armored automobiles to me,” he said.

“And so they are,” declared Chester. “And there must be twenty of them. Seems to me an act of providence must have put them there. We couldn’t want anything better to escape in.”

“You are right,” declared the captain.

The captain now divided his men into three forces, one of which he commanded, the other two being led by Hal and Chester.

The first column approached to within fifty yards of the automobiles before being discovered. Then the cry of a German sentry rang out.

At the word of command, the British opened fire, and again charged with fixed bayonets. But the German guard was strong, and evidently had been on the alert against a possible surprise.

A rapid-fire gun stationed near the automobiles opened fire. The first column of men was literally annihilated, Captain Anderson himself going to the ground with a severe wound in his chest. Not one of the troopers reached the automobile.

Seeing what had happened to the first column, Hal and Chester were more wary. They approached from two directions, and, before the machine-gun could be turned upon them, were at hand grips with the enemy.

A squad of men hurled themselves upon the German gunners, and this weapon spoke no more. Then the British advanced upon the aviators, who stood near to guard their machines.

Both sides were fighting in small groups, and at once began a fierce interchange of shots at a distance of fifteen yards. The airmen, who were crouching along the edge of the road, answered the British fire with great bravery and vigor.

While this fighting was in progress, the detachments of engineers, which had been in the extreme rear of the British columns, armed with improvised tools, hurled themselves upon the aëroplanes. With sure blows from their rifle butts, and whatever other implements they could lay hands on nearby, they destroyed the motors, the gasoline reservoirs and the running gear of the German machines.

At this moment one of the armored automobiles burst into flames. A fierce red glare shot high into the air, lighting up the scene of carnage with great brilliancy.

While the little column commanded by Chester now withdrew a short distance, the lad having ordered this in the hope that he might find Captain Anderson still alive, Hal, with the comparatively few remaining men, advanced to one of the armored automobiles, in which stood a German officer, directing his men.

The officer opened fire on these few British with an automatic revolver. Two men fell. Hal felt a bullet graze his arm, but not before he had discharged his own weapon against the chest of his opponent, who fell to the ground, fatally wounded.

A second German, whom Hal had not noticed in the machine before, brought his rifle butt down over Hal's head. But the lad's quick eye had seen the descending weapon, and his upraised arm warded off the blow. His left arm, however, fell to his side numb, and he stumbled and fell to the ground.

He was up in a moment, and sprang upon the German, one arm still hanging by his side, and his revolver gone. The German brought his rifle to bear, but, stepping quickly forward, the lad struck up the weapon, even as the German pressed the trigger.

With a quick leap Hal was in the automobile, and was grappling with the German trooper. The German, unable to use his rifle at such close quarters, struck out with his fist. Hal dodged and his opponent drew back with a cry of pain. His fist had struck the steel side of the car, and his arm was now useless.

The two were now on even terms. The German reached out and attempted to entwine his fingers in Hal's throat, but the lad was too quick for him. Dodging suddenly, he came up under the other's chin, and sent him spinning head over heels from the car, so fierce was the contact.

Then the lad turned his eyes to other sections of the field. He could see no signs of an enemy. Evidently the Germans had had enough, or were awaiting the arrival of reinforcements before renewing the fight, for they had no way of determining the strength of the British attacking party.

In any event, Hal realized that there was no time to lose. Leaping from the car, he ordered the few men who were left to man the waiting automobiles, quickly

ascertaining that there were enough men capable of driving them. Then he set out to hunt Chester and Captain Anderson.

He found Chester on his knee, supporting the unconscious form of their friend.

“Hurry, Chester, get him into this car,” he ordered. “We’ll have to get out of here at once.”

He helped the men lift the unconscious British officer into one of the automobiles, leaped in himself, and took the wheel.

Five of the other cars also were ready to go, each containing twenty men, all that was left of the thousand who had made a dash for the farmhouse in the morning.

Hal gave his orders slowly and tersely.

“Follow me, single file,” he called to his men, “until I give the word to close up. Then range right alongside of me. We will go as swiftly as possible, and try to get through the German lines without a fight, if by any chance it is possible. However, if we have to make a quick dash and fight, it would be better to do it side by side, and plow right into the enemy. Do you understand?”

The driver of each car signified that he understood perfectly, and Hal started his car off slowly. The others fell in line, and soon all were moving along at a brisk pace.

Hal found time to call back over his shoulder to Chester:

“How is the captain?”

“I fear he is in pretty bad shape,” was the reply; but, even at that moment, the captain showed signs of returning consciousness.

He stirred a little and moaned feebly. Then he raised his head.

“Where am I?” he demanded.

Slowly and carefully Chester explained the situation to him.

“And was the raid a success?” he asked. “Were the German aëroplanes destroyed?”

“Yes, every one of them,” replied Chester.

“Good! Now, give me a rifle, or a revolver, or something. I know we can’t get through the Germans without a fight, and I want to do my part.”

In vain did Chester protest. Captain Anderson insisted, and at length Chester was forced to comply.

As the five automobiles, containing not more than a hundred British all told, approached the center of the German force, each man determined to get through to the allied lines or to die in the attempt.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A DASH FOR LIBERTY.

Swiftly the high-powered armored motor-cars rushed on, drawing closer and closer to the solid ranks of the enemy. Not expecting trouble from within their own lines, the Germans were not on the lookout for this spectacular dash, and so were caught unprepared.

Hal gave the prearranged signal. The other cars increased their speed and drew up to him, two on either side. At a second signal they increased their speed to the utmost, and dashed forward.

The Germans lay sprawled about, the close formation having been more or less broken following the morning fight. The five speeding monsters were upon them almost before they realized it. As the cars approached the first irregular line of troopers, the British in the machines opened fire. In spite of their terrific speed, their aim was good. Germans tumbled right and left, or fell back as they attempted to rise.

Then the machines plowed in among them, hurling them helter-skelter on all sides, the occupants continuing their destructive fire.

But now the Germans opened fire, and, in spite of the fact that the speed of the flying automobiles made accurate shooting impossible, the British did not escape scot-free. Three men in one of the machines to the left of the one driven by Hal dropped their rifles and sank to the bottom of the car. In one on the opposite side a soldier threw up his hands and tumbled from the car.

Hal, protected as he was on either side, had not been touched, nor had Chester, who stood erect the while, firing rapidly with his automatic.

Suddenly the car nearest the lads on the left swerved, and almost bumped into them; in fact, would have done so, but for Hal’s promptness in turning slightly to the right. The driver of the car had been struck by a German bullet and killed.

The driverless machine, swerving suddenly to the left, leaped forward ahead of the others, turned suddenly to the right again, and plunged straight toward the dense masses of Germans, the British inside still shooting as calmly as though they stood on firm ground, although it was plainly evident to them that the wild car was carrying them to certain death.

All this the boys could see at a glance, but they quickly passed beyond, and so did not see the gallant fate of their comrades.

Plunging straight into the dense masses of Germans, the gallant machine leaped upon them like a thing of life, hurling them off on all sides, and running amuck over their prostrate forms. Then, with another sudden turn to the left, it sped directly toward a group of officers, who stood nearby directing the firing. So sudden was this unexpected turn that the officers were run down before they could move from their tracks.

Then the machine darted straight at a German field battery.

It was a fatal move, for a German gunner sprang forward—there was a fearful roar—a loud explosion, a cloud of smoke, and, when the smoke had cleared away, there was no automobile to be seen—nothing but wreckage and a few maimed bodies scattered about.

But Hal and his companions were having troubles of their own. Even at the moment that the first car disappeared in smoke, the driver of a second sprang to his feet, waved his arms about, as he wildly gasped for air, and tumbled overboard. The machine, now wild, turned and crashed into its nearest neighbor.

There was a terrific crash, and both cars turned turtle. Came a cry of triumph from the Germans, but Hal and the driver of the other remaining car paid no heed; rather, if possible, their cars leaped ahead faster than before.

But the herculean task the lads had set out to accomplish was too much. In spite of the fact that the Germans had been taken by surprise, their numbers were so great that the success of such a dash was impossible.

Straight ahead the boys made out a regiment, drawn up with leveled rifles. In one last desperate attempt to break through, Hal and the driver of the other car dashed into them.

A blow from the butt of a German rifle knocked the driver of the second car from his seat as he swept past, and the machine, turning round and round, like a huge top, suddenly turned over, pinioning its occupants beneath it.

A second later and Hal felt a sharp sting in his left hand. In spite of the desperate attempt he made to keep the machine steady, it rocked from side to side at the sudden loosening of his hand.

Fearing that all would be killed if he did not stop the machine, the lad threw off the clutch and applied the brakes. Then, in the center of a large force of Germans, who came rushing in upon them, the lad stood up in the machine, and, raising his uninjured hand, shouted:

“We surrender!”

A German officer called a hoarse command, and the long line of threatening rifles was lowered.

“Come out of there,” called the officer, “and be quick about it.”

Hal did as commanded, and a moment later Chester also was on the ground. Turning back to the machine, they tenderly lifted Captain Anderson out and laid him on the ground. He had fainted during the wild ride.

Hal turned to the German officer.

“Will you please see that my friend,” indicating the captain, “receives medical attention at once?”

“It shall be done immediately,” returned the German officer gravely, and motioned to two of his men to carry the unconscious captain to a nearby hospital tent. Then he turned to Hal and Chester.

“Do you know that you have created terrible havoc in our ranks?” he demanded.

Hal smiled grimly.

“That is what we intended to do,” he made reply. “However, we wouldn’t have done so had you permitted us to return to our lines in peace.”

The German officer also smiled faintly.

“You are bold lads,” he said quietly. “Come, I will take you to General Von Kluck.”

The lads followed the officer, and presently came before the German commander, the man whose great military genius some days later saved his wing of the army from probable annihilation.

Standing beside the German commander was another officer, somewhat younger, recognizing whom, Hal’s heart leaped into his throat. This second officer was none other than the man who, some days before, had placed in Hal’s hands dispatches for General Von Kluck—papers that, through Hal’s bravery, had been turned over to General French, and had thus foiled the coup planned by the Kaiser himself.

The German recognized Hal almost immediately, in spite of his British uniform. He stepped forward, and, with a sneering smile, said:

“How do you do, Captain Dersam?”

General Von Kluck, who had been looking silently at the two lads, turned to the officer.

“You know these prisoners?” he questioned.

“Well, I know one of them,” was the reply. “That is, I thought I did once. It seems that I was mistaken.”

“Explain yourself.”

“This,” said the German, pointing to Hal, “is the young man to whom I told you I delivered the dispatches intended for you. He represented himself to me as Captain Dersam, of your staff. Later we found Captain Dersam gagged and bound on the banks of the Marne. Therefore, this officer must be a traitor.”

General Von Kluck rose to his feet excitedly.

“So,” he exclaimed, “you are the man whom we have to thank for the defeat of our plan, eh?” He turned to the officer. “And you say he was in German uniform?”

“Yes, sir.”

The general turned to Hal.

“Do you know what that means?” he asked.

Hal nodded his head.

“It means,” continued the general, “that you are a spy. You shall pay the penalty.”

“But,” Hal protested, “I was not captured within your lines in German uniform nor in disguise. You cannot treat me as a spy.”

“I can’t, eh?” cried General Von Kluck angrily. “Well, you shall see.”

“The boy is right,” came a stern voice from behind him, and, turning, Hal started back in amazement.

“The Emperor!” he cried.

And from other throats in the group came the time-worn salutation:

“*Hoch der Kaiser!*”

CHAPTER XXIX.

GERMAN HOSPITALITY.

“Yes,” continued the Emperor of Germany, “the boy is right. He has spoiled our plans, I will admit; but it takes a brave man to wander into our lines as he did. It takes a brave one to have made a dash in the armored cars I have just witnessed; and it takes a brave man to raid right into the heart of our arms and destroy twenty-five aëroplanes, as I have no doubt he did.”

“What,” exclaimed all the German officers in the tent, “the aëroplanes destroyed?”

“Yes,” continued the emperor, “and with them another opportunity to deal a death-blow to the English.” Then, turning to Hal: “I have no doubt that you were concerned in that—am I right?”

“Yes, your majesty,” said the lad.

“I thought so,” said the emperor, and he turned again to General Von Kluck.

“The lad is perfectly right when he says that he was not captured in disguise. No doubt he was within our lines in German uniform, but, as he was not captured, he cannot be executed as a spy. Do you understand?”

“Yes, sire,” said General Von Kluck, bowing low.

“It seems to me,” went on the Kaiser, “that rather than spend so much time looking for spies to put to death, it would be advantageous if some of my officers would expend their energies in looking more carefully after my interests.”

Once more the emperor turned to Hal.

“If I mistake not,” he said, “you are an American. Am I right?”

“Yes, sire,” said Hal.

“Then how comes it that you are fighting for Great Britain?”

Hal explained the misfortunes by which they had been left in Germany, and of how, eventually, they had taken service with the Allies.

“And who is your friend?” asked the Kaiser, pointing to Chester.

“Chester Crawford, sire,” replied Hal, “my boyhood chum.”

“And the wounded man?”

“An English officer, your majesty,” said Hal, “and a brave one.”

“I have found that all the British are brave,” said the Kaiser grimly. “I was misinformed as to their attitude in this crisis,” and the Kaiser’s voice grew harsh; “it was not the only subject on which I was misinformed.”

His words were clearly intended for the officers, more than for Hal.

He was silent for some moments, and then to General Von Kluck:

“General, I will take these lads to my own quarters. I desire to question them on matters pertaining to their own country. You will send a guard for them in two hours.”

“Yes, sire,” said General Von Kluck.

The Kaiser motioned to Hal and Chester.

“Follow me,” he commanded.

Surrounded by his personal bodyguard, and with Hal and Chester close behind him, the emperor made his way to his own handsome and luxurious field quarters.

Inside the tent he motioned the two lads to seats.

“Now, tell me,” he said, “what is the general sentiment in America toward Germany? Where is the general sympathy in this war?”

He had addressed Hal, so the latter replied, Chester maintaining a discreet silence.

“We were not in America when the war broke out, your majesty,” he said, “but I believe that I am right when I say that the sympathies of the United States, generally speaking, are with the Allies.”

The Kaiser nodded his head.

“I was afraid so,” he said. “But why?”

“As to why, I can’t say,” replied Hal. “Chiefly, I suppose, because it is an English-speaking country.”

“I suppose that is true,” said the emperor, “and still there are many more persons of German descent in the United States than of any other nationality. Do the people of the United States believe that Germany brought about this war?”

“From what I have heard from Canadian officers and some others, I am afraid they do, your majesty,” said Hal.

“It is not true,” thundered the Kaiser, bringing his clenched fist down heavily on the table. “I tell you it is not true. Do you understand? It is not true. I did all in my power to prevent this war. It is Czar Nicholas of Russia who is to blame. He and his Slavs would overrun Germany. But, with the help of God, I shall prevent it. I will not be called the War Lord of Europe for nothing!”

Hal and Chester were startled at this sudden outburst. Neither realized that Hal was, perhaps, the only person who had dared to stand before the German monarch and tell him to his face that he had not the sympathy of the whole world, and that he was held responsible for the greatest war of all history.

Now the Kaiser was talking to himself, his fists still clenched, and he tapped nervously on the table, as he muttered:

“They have lied to me. Yes, they have lied to me. They told me that few held me to blame, that the sympathy of the world was with me. I thought they lied then. I am sure of it now.”

Suddenly he ceased talking, and turned to the table, where he was soon engrossed in looking over some papers and maps. So he sat, utterly disregarding the presence of the two American boys; nor did they venture to interrupt his profound study, until two hours later General Von Kluck sent the guard ordered by the Kaiser to take them away. When the officer in charge of the squad made

known his commission, the emperor signified his consent with a nod of his head. He addressed no further words to Hal or Chester.

“I am commanded,” said the German officer, “to take you to my tent and see that you are well guarded, until it is decided what disposition is to be made of you.”

In a large and commodious tent the boys were made comfortable, and a guard stationed around the outside. Then the officer took himself away to make his report to the general.

“Well,” said Chester, “they have got us this time, and I don’t see any way of escape. Here we are, right in the heart of the German army, and we might just as well be in the Sahara desert, as far as our chances go of getting back to our own lines.”

“Don’t be so downhearted,” said Hal. “More peculiar things have happened. We are at least in no danger of being shot. I suppose we should be thankful for that.”

“Yes, I suppose we should,” Chester agreed. “But just the same I would like to be back where we belong.”

“Well, you can’t tell,” said Hal. “We may be able to give them the slip. However, I would be opposed to any plan that did not have a good chance of success. For, if we failed, I am sure they would shoot us without compunction.”

“There is no doubt of that,” said Chester. “Von Kluck would do it anyhow, if he didn’t fear the heavy hand of the Kaiser. By the way, what do you think of the Kaiser, anyhow?”

“Well,” said Hal slowly, “I believe, in the first place, that he takes himself too seriously. I believe that he considers himself the chosen instrument of Heaven to put down the Slavs, to say nothing of the French and English. He has the mistaken idea that he is a man of destiny.”

“Yes,” agreed Chester, “there is no doubt that he thinks he is right and the whole world wrong.”

Further talk was interrupted by the return of the German officer.

“You are to remain here for the next few days,” he informed them. “As the emperor has interested himself in your behalf, General Von Kluck is awaiting

further word from him as to what to do with you. Right now the emperor will not talk. He is busy with his maps and papers, and, when he is busy, no one dare disturb him."

"And what do you suppose will be done with us eventually?" asked Chester.

"Why," was the reply, "I suppose you will be treated as all other prisoners of war. You probably will be sent to Berlin."

"Back to Berlin!" exclaimed Chester in deep disgust.

"Back to Berlin!" repeated Hal, and he punctured his exclamation with a long whistle. "Great Scott!"

CHAPTER XXX.

A NEW FRIEND.

It was indeed a sad word to the ears of the two young American lads. As Hal said, they had had trouble enough getting out of Berlin at the outbreak of the war, and had almost been forced back to the German capital once before. To be prisoners of war in Berlin certainly would be an inglorious finish to their military careers.

“I would rather go to any one other spot on the map,” Chester told his chum. “Berlin! Can you imagine being cooped up there and never even knowing what is going on?”

“It would be tough,” Hal agreed. “And, once there, I am afraid we would have to stay until after the war. I don’t imagine there is much danger of anyone escaping from that place now.”

“Nor I,” said Chester. “If we hope to get away, we shall have to do it before we get to Berlin.”

But it seemed that the lads, if they had any hopes of escape, were doomed to disappointment. They were carefully guarded, and, while they were made comfortable, there was never a moment that they were not beneath some watchful eye.

Several times they were allowed to leave their canvas prison and stroll about outside, but on each of these excursions the German officer in whose custody they had been placed accompanied them; and finally from General Von Kluck came the order for them to be sent to Berlin.

“I sort of hate to see you go,” the German officer told them, upon informing them of their fate. “We have gotten along famously together. However, I am sure you will be well treated in Berlin, and that when you are released at the end of the war you will be able to deny some of the tales of German cruelty to their prisoners.”

“From the treatment we already have received we can deny them now,” said Hal.

“Indeed we can,” Chester agreed.

“Come,” continued the officer, “what do you say to a little walk around? You will not start on your journey until to-night.”

Accompanied by their guard the boys once more started on an excursion through the huge German camp. For an hour or more they walked about, discussing the war in its various phases, but finally the officer told them that it was time for him to report for duty, and they started back toward their temporary prison.

As they were walking slowly along a large gray shape came bounding toward them. Almost in front of them it came to a stop. It was a dog.

Hal reached forth a hand and patted the animal on the head, and the dog’s tail wagged in friendship. But when the German officer also stretched forth a hand, he uttered a menacing growl.

“He must be one of your French war dogs,” said the German with a laugh, quickly withdrawing his hand. “We have captured a large number of them, and, in spite of the fact that we treat them as well as we know how, they will have nothing to do with us.”

At that moment another German officer approached the trio, and, as he came closer, the dog snarled and showed his teeth. The German drew back his foot, and, before anyone could interfere, kicked the animal sharply in the ribs.

But the German paid dearly for this act, for, with one quick bound, the dog leaped upon his assailant, and, snarling fiercely, bore him to the ground. Hal, Chester and their officer friend jumped quickly forward, and, after a sharp tussle, succeeded in dragging the dog off, though not until he had considerably shaken up his victim, even drawing blood from a wound in his throat.

With a fierce imprecation, the German reached for his revolver, drew it quickly, and aimed it at the dog. But, before he could pull the trigger, Chester leaped forward, and, with a quick movement of his arm, knocked the weapon from the German’s hand.

The German turned angrily on the lad.

“What do you mean by that?” he demanded, in a rage.

“You won’t shoot him while I am here,” cried Chester, also aroused.

“What business is it of yours whether I shoot him or not?”

“You try it again and I’ll show you what business it is of mine, if the whole German army is standing round,” shouted Chester furiously.

Hal grabbed his friend by the coat and attempted to pull him back, but Chester was too angry now to pay any heed, and he stood facing the German threateningly.

At this point the other officer evidently decided it was time to interfere.

“Come, come,” he said to Chester. “That’s enough of this. I am sure Lieutenant Dennig meant no harm. I’m sure he’ll apologize if he has said or done anything to displease you.”

“What! Me apologize?” demanded the German. “And what for, pray?”

“I don’t want any apology,” declared Chester. “All I want is for him to understand he can’t shoot a dumb animal while I’m around.”

“Is that so?” sneered the German, but the boys’ guard cut him short.

“Lieutenant Dennig,” he said sharply, “you forget yourself. These prisoners are under my protection and shall not be insulted.”

The lieutenant drew himself up sharply, saluted his superior officer, and walked rapidly away.

“One more enemy,” said Chester to Hal, as the man made off.

“Oh, he’ll get over it,” laughed the boys’ guard. “He knows he is in the wrong—that’s what makes him so angry.”

The object of this little unpleasantness still stood near, wagging his tail and looking at the two lads. When they continued their walk toward their tent, he calmly followed them.

The lads did not notice this, however, until they had entered the tent, and then Hal espied the nose of their newly-found friend poking its way in after them. A

moment later and the dog was curled up at one side of the tent, sleeping.

“Looks like there are three of you to guard now, instead of two,” said the officer. “However, I guess it is all right.”

“I wonder if it would be possible,” said Chester, struck with a sudden thought, “for us to take him to Berlin with us?”

“I’ll see what can be done about it,” replied the officer. “I believe that I can arrange it all right.”

“We certainly would appreciate it,” continued Chester, “and, if the time ever comes when we may be of service to you, you may command us.” The officer smiled.

“I doubt if you will ever have the opportunity,” he said. “Present circumstances would indicate that there is little likelihood of it.”

“Well, you never can tell,” said Hal, “the fortunes of war, you know.”

“True,” said the German, “and, if ever occasion arises, I shall take you at your word.”

He bowed and left the tent. Hal and Chester now turned their attention to the dog, which still lay sleeping. Chester whistled sharply. The dog was on his feet in a second, ears cocked and sniffing the air eagerly.

“A real war dog, all right,” said Chester. “What shall we call him, Hal?”

“Perhaps he has a name already,” said Hal. “Try him.”

Chester called off the many dog names familiar to him, and Hal added a few. But, although the animal wagged his tail with evident pleasure at thus being talked to, he gave no evidence of owning any of the names in the boys’ vocabulary.

Hal approached and laid his hand on the dog’s head. Then, for the first time, he noticed the collar he wore.

“Hello!” he said, in some surprise.

“What is it?” said Chester, also approaching.

“Collar,” said Hal briefly. “Perhaps his name is on it.”

Both boys bent over the dog.

“Here it is, sure enough,” cried Chester.

“Can you make it out?” asked Hal.

“It’s a little dark,” replied the lad. “Bring him over here nearer the light.”

This was done, and once more Chester bent over the collar.

“Well?” demanded Hal.

“Yes, I can read it,” replied Chester.

“What is it?” demanded Hal.

Chester read aloud:

“Marquis—Twenty-third French Infantry.”

“A dispatch dog, eh?” said Hal.

“Yes,” said Chester; “and, if I mistake not, a very valuable addition to our party.”

CHAPTER XXXI.

BERLIN ONCE MORE.

By dint of persuasion the German officer succeeded in gaining the consent of General Von Kluck to allow the boys to take the dog with them. That Marquis was just as pleased to go as the boys were to have him, was plainly evident. When they left their tent for the last time, and whistled to him to follow, he bounded after them with enthusiasm.

The train on which the boys were to be taken back to Berlin did not leave until well along toward midnight, but, with some 5,000 other prisoners, British, French and Belgians alike, they were bundled aboard early. Heavily guarded, and without a weapon of any kind or description, there was no fear of a break for liberty, in spite of the large number of prisoners.

The lads were shoved into a car already loaded down with prisoners and took their positions at the far end, the dog between them. In spite of misfortune, the prisoners all were far from unhappy. They joked and chatted as though they were on a pleasure trip.

Finally, after much delay, the train started with a jolt, tumbling men all over each other as it gradually gathered momentum. They were hurled hither and yon, but they only laughed.

The trip was necessarily slow, for the train, time after time, was switched on to a siding to permit of the movement of German troop trains carrying soldiers from the western theater of war to the east, or from the east to the west.

Consequently, it was late the following night when the train finally pulled in, and the prisoners were ordered to get out. Under the leveled rifles of a strong German guard, they stepped to the ground, and, after being divided into squads at the direction of the German officer in command, were marched away.

Hal, Chester and Marquis were among the last to leave the train. As the dog tumbled out after them, there was an exclamation from a German officer.

“What have we here?” he demanded, approaching the boys. “A dog, eh? Well, we haven’t time to fool with dogs,” and he leveled his pistol at Marquis.

Marquis drew back his lips in a snarl, even as Hal stepped forward to stay the German’s hand.

“This dog was allowed to come with us by special command of General Von Kluck,” he said quietly.

“So you say,” was the reply. “But how am I to know that you speak the truth?”

“The very fact that he was allowed in the car should be sufficient proof of that,” said Hal quietly.

The German officer lowered his weapon.

“I guess you are right,” he said. “I beg your pardon.”

He appraised the boys with a critical eye, and then became more friendly.

“You are British officers?” he asked.

“We are attached to the staff of General French,” Chester replied.

“So? and at your age? I presume you have seen considerable action?”

“Considerable,” replied Hal, with a smile; “at Liège, Louvain, the battle of the Marne, and some other skirmishes.”

“You have been in luck,” said the officer. “And here I have been, ever since the war broke out, receiving prisoners as they are sent on. Worse luck!”

“Cheer up,” said Chester, smilingly, “you probably will get your chance before the war is over.”

“I hope so,” replied the German, and continued: “I am going to arrange for you to come with me—yes, and the dog, too,” as he saw Hal glance at his canine friend. “You can tell me stories of the war. Besides, I am interested to know how it is that two so young should have seen so much fighting.”

“If I may make so bold,” said Hal, “you are not so old yourself.”

“True,” said the German, with a pleasant smile. “But I am twenty,” he added

proudly.

“Then we are not much younger than you,” said Chester.

“Well, maybe not; but you seem to have had a whole lot more fun.”

His other work disposed of, the German turned to the two lads.

“Come with me,” he said, and the boys followed him.

“I am at liberty to accept your parole,” said the young German, “if you are prepared to give it.”

Chester glanced quickly at Hal, and the latter replied.

“We appreciate your offer very much, but we decided long ago that we would give our parole to no one.”

“Oh, well,” said the German, with a laugh, “it doesn’t matter. There is no chance of your getting out of Berlin, anyhow. However, since you refuse, it will be necessary to keep more careful watch over you.”

The officer bundled the two boys and the dog into a taxi, and they were soon riding along the streets.

“I am taking you to my home,” said the young officer. “While there, you will be treated as my guests, except that you will always be guarded.”

“We understand,” said Chester quietly.

“Looks natural along here,” said Hal suddenly, nudging Chester.

“It certainly does,” said Chester, with a smile, for he had at that moment recognized the spot where he, Hal, Lieutenant Anderson and Captain Derevaux had met for the first time—the spot where the French and British officer had been set upon by a gang of young thugs.

“What, you have been in Berlin before?” questioned the German officer in some surprise.

“Oh, yes,” said Hal. “We spent one vacation here with my mother.”

He thought it best not to let the German know how they had escaped from the

German capital following the outbreak of the war. Chester also made no reference to this.

All the streets which the taxi traversed were familiar to the boys now, and they pointed out different places of interest to each other as they sped along. Finally the taxi drew up and stopped.

The young German leaped lightly to the ground, and stood there as the boys emerged from the taxi. Looking up, the lads beheld a handsome and commodious house.

“My home,” said the lieutenant simply, “and yours, so long as you are forced to remain in Berlin.”

The lads followed their captor up the steps, and into a prettily furnished hall, where a servant, summoned by the officer, hurried away with word for Mrs. Strauss, for, as Lieutenant Heinrich Strauss, the officer now introduced himself to the boys.

A few moments later a pleasant-faced woman appeared in the hall. The boys were quickly introduced to her, and she made them welcome, adding:

“I am sure the general also will be pleased to have you with us.”

Both lads looked questioningly at the young officer, who hastened to explain.

“General Strauss is my father, in command in Berlin. Perhaps were it not for that, I would not have ventured to bring you to my home. You would have to have gone with the other prisoners.”

“Thanks,” said Chester. “I am sure we both appreciate it.”

“Indeed we do,” agreed Hal.

Before either the young lieutenant or his mother could reply, there came a heavy footstep without; a moment later the door was thrown quickly open, and a German officer, huge in stature, and imposing in his uniform, draped with gold and lace, strode in. At sight of the two boys he came to a sudden pause.

“What have we here?” he demanded, in a great, booming voice.

“Two of my prisoners, sir,” said the lieutenant, stepping forward and saluting.

“Your prisoners, sir? Do you mean that they are spies whom you have captured in Berlin?”

“No, sir. They came with the last trainload of prisoners.”

“Then, why are they not with the others?” demanded General Strauss sternly.

“Why, sir,” stammered the lieutenant, “I—I——”

“Enough,” said the general in a softer voice, his eyes twinkling although this he endeavored in vain to hide. “You mean that you are up to some of your old tricks—that your sympathies have gotten the upper hand of your better judgment. Do you know what I should do with you, sir?”

The lieutenant made no reply, and the father continued:

“I should have you court-martialed for disobeying the command of your superior officer. But I won’t do it this time. However, it is a very good thing that our emperor—God bless him—is a very good friend of your father. Otherwise——”

He broke off and shrugged his shoulders significantly, then continued:

“Then no doubt that big gray dog I stumbled over outside—and which almost bit me—is the property of your prisoners.”

Hal stepped forward and saluted.

“He is, sir,” he said.

The old general eyed the lad for some minutes in silence. Hal bore the scrutiny without flinching. Then the general turned to Chester and repeated the process. Chester also met his gaze squarely.

“Humph!” ejaculated the German commander; then turned suddenly to his son.

“When you have introduced us,” he said, “we shall all go in and have something to eat!”

CHAPTER XXXII.

A PIECE OF PAPER.

Upon the two following days Hal and Chester, in company with the young German lieutenant, viewed the sights in the German capital. Instead of the peaceful, pleasure-loving city of their vacation, it now bore naught but signs of war.

Officers in automobiles, afoot and on horseback, were rushing hither and thither continually. Troops were moving through the streets of the city upon every hand —some preparing to entrain for the west, and some for the east, where even now it was known that the great hordes of the Czar of all the Russias were approaching as fast as their vast numbers would permit.

It was indeed a scene to delight a war-like eye, and it was not lost upon the two lads.

“It’s going to be an awful job to lick these fellows,” Chester confided to Hal, as they strolled about one afternoon.

“There is no question about that,” was Hal’s reply. “Still, it has to be done.”

“And will be done eventually,” declared Chester grimly. “The trouble is that we are not likely to see it done.”

“Don’t lose heart,” said Hal. “Something may turn up. You never can tell.”

And something did turn up, though it was nothing the lads could possibly have anticipated. As they walked down the street a squad of German soldiers approached, in their center a man in civilian clothes. Lieutenant Strauss and the boys approached them.

As the three neared, the officer in command of the squad called a halt.

“What have we here?” asked Lieutenant Strauss.

“A spy, sir,” was the reply.

“Where was he found?”

“About thirty miles west of the city.”

“How does he account for his presence there?”

“He has not had much to say,” replied the officer, “but he did tell me that he fell from an aëroplane.”

“Does he deny being a spy?”

“He does, sir.”

“Then how does he account for the fact that he wears no uniform?”

“He doesn’t account for it at all, sir. He refuses to say anything on that score.”

Hal and Chester, during this conversation, had drawn as close to the prisoner as the armed guard would permit.

“Looks like an Englishman,” said Hal.

“That’s what he is, all right,” declared Chester.

The prisoner looked up suddenly at hearing these words, spoken in English. Then, with a sudden movement, he shook off his guards, and, apparently in a dash for freedom, sprang toward Hal and Chester.

Taken by surprise, the boys leaped back, but not before Chester, throwing up one hand to ward off what he believed was an attack, felt a little piece of paper slipped into his hand.

In spite of his surprise, his fingers closed over it involuntarily; and, at the same instant, the man grappled with him. As they struggled, the lad was surprised to hear his opponent whisper:

“Don’t lose it. It must reach Grand Duke Nicholas at all costs, and at once. Much depends upon it.”

Then the prisoner grew weak in the lad’s grasp, and Chester realized what was expected of him.

“I’ve got him,” he cried, and, throwing the man to the ground, fell on top of him.

The guards lifted the two to their feet, and once more the prisoner was closely surrounded. Lieutenant Strauss now signified that he desired no further information and the squad of soldiers marched away, the prisoner meantime hurling epithets at the two lads.

“A nice pair of Englishmen you are,” he cried. “Traitors, that’s what you are. If you hadn’t stopped me I would have got away.”

“Never mind him,” said Lieutenant Strauss. “He’s naturally angry at being foiled in his attempt to escape.”

Chester, the little piece of paper still clutched in his right hand, was now impatient to be where he could read it, and for that reason pleaded fatigue. Stealing a moment when the lieutenant’s attention was directed elsewhere, he slipped the paper into his pocket, as he feared that, upon close scrutiny, the lieutenant might see that he was concealing something in his hand.

Alone in their own room, before Chester could speak, Hal said:

“What on earth did you want to interfere with the prisoner for? He might have got away if it hadn’t been for you. No wonder he called us traitors.”

Chester only smiled for answer, put his hand in his pocket, and pulled forth the little piece of paper. Holding it up where Hal could see it, he said:

“I didn’t know you were fooled, too. I thought you would surely know that there was something up.”

“Something up!” exclaimed Hal. “What do you mean?”

“Why, simply that the prisoner’s attempt to escape was a ruse.”

“A ruse?”

“Exactly. That’s why he jumped toward us. Do you see now?”

“No,” replied Hal, losing his temper, “I don’t. Quit beating around the bush. If you have anything to tell me, do it.”

“Well, then,” said Chester, “you see this piece of paper?”

“Yes.”

“Well, the prisoner made his attempt to escape for the sole purpose of handing this to one of us. I happened to be closer to him than you were. That’s why I got it.”

“You mean——” began Hal.

“Exactly,” Chester interrupted. “Now, let’s see what it says.”

Both lads bent over the paper.

“It’s written so finely I can hardly make it out,” said Chester, after looking over the paper.

“Bring it over to the window,” replied Hal. “Under a strong light we may be able to read it.”

Again both lads bent over the little piece of paper. This is what they read:

> “For the success of military operations in the western theater of war, it is essential that the Russian campaign be pushed with immediate vigor, particularly in the north. Knowing that we are all working in sympathy and accord, without awaiting an answer, I take it for granted that this suggestion will be acted upon.”

“No address and no signature,” said Hal. “What’s it all about?”

Chester bent closer over the paper.

“What’s this at the bottom?” he said.

Hal looked again.

“Some kind of a seal, it looks like to me,” he said, after a careful scrutiny. “By Jove, I have it! It’s a secret sign, that’s what it is. The man for whom this is meant will undoubtedly recognize it.”

“I believe you have hit it,” exclaimed Chester.

“But how are we to know for whom it is intended?” said Hal. “It carries no address.”

“It is intended for Grand Duke Nicholas, commander-in-chief of the Russian armies,” replied Chester.

“How do you know that?”

“When I was wrestling with the prisoner he told me so,” was Chester’s reply.

“Well, then,” said Hal, “we know for whom it is intended, but what did the man give it to you for?”

“Well, he said that it must be delivered at all costs.”

“I hope he didn’t expect us to deliver it.”

“I guess he did though, or to see that it went on its way.”

“Yes; and how are we going to do it? Can you figure that out?”

“No,” said Chester, “I can’t. But something has got to be done. I imagine that

General French and General Joffre figured that it would be delivered without fail. Either the messenger did not take the route as commanded, or it was believed safe for him to go by air in a sudden dash."

"Well, I can't see that that part makes any difference. The question now is, what are we going to do with it?"

"Yes," replied Chester; "that's the question."

For a long while the boys sat and talked over this strange episode, each suggesting plans and then discarding them as unwise.

Suddenly Chester sprang to his feet with an exclamation.

"What is it?" asked Hal eagerly.

"We'll take it ourselves!" he exclaimed.

"We will, eh?" said Hal incredulously. "Would you mind telling me how?"

"I won't tell you anything," was Chester's reply. "But are you willing to do as I say?"

"Yes," replied Hal, after some consideration.

"Good! Then, with luck we shall put this paper in the hands of Grand Duke Nicholas!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

TAKING A CHANCE.

“The first thing to do,” said Chester, “is to appropriate two of Lieutenant Strauss’s uniforms. That’s your job.”

“That’s right—pick out the easy work for me,” replied Hal sarcastically. “How do you figure I’m going to get ’em?”

“I don’t know,” said Chester. “That’s up to you. My job, and a much harder one, it seems to me, is to appropriate one of the general’s big maps, so that if we do succeed in getting out of Berlin, we shall know where we are going.”

“I take back what I said,” exclaimed Hal. “I’ll try to get those uniforms.”

“Trying is not enough,” said Chester. “You’ve got to get ’em!”

“All right, then,” replied Hal, “I’ll get ’em!”

Since the two lads had been guests, or prisoners, in the Strauss home, a detail of soldiers had been stationed around the house, with orders not to let either of the lads pass unless accompanied by either the lieutenant or the general. The boys had been given the freedom of the house. The lieutenant had demurred at the placing of a guard around the house, saying that there was not the slightest chance of the boys escaping, anyhow, but the general had held out on that point, remarking:

“I know these Americans better than you do. They’re slippery. You have to watch them closely, or they will slip between your very fingers.”

Choosing a moment when the lieutenant had left the house, Hal slipped unobserved into his room. He knew the uniforms hung in a closet.

He approached and tried the knob. The door was locked.

“It’s up to me to see if I can’t pick that lock,” he told himself, and set to work

with what improvised little tools he could bring from his pocket.

In vain he worked. He could not pick the lock. He stepped back and viewed the door, meantime keeping his ear cocked for sound of footsteps from without. Then an idea struck him.

Using his knife as a screwdriver, he removed the hinges from the door. A moment later he was inside the closet. Quickly selecting two of the lieutenant's uniforms, he laid them on a chair, and hurriedly put back the door and tightened the bolts.

Then, holding the uniforms behind him, he made his way back to his own room, where he threw the uniforms under the bed. Chester was not there.

"Hope he has things as easy as I did," said Hal to himself, and sat down to await his friend's return.

When Chester entered the general's private room, which he found unlocked, he went straight to the general's desk. He knew that maps and valuable papers were kept there, because the general had once referred to them as being there while at supper.

The desk was locked, but this did not disconcert the lad, for he had expected it would be. Drawing a small buttonhook that he always carried from his pocket, he inserted it in the keyhole. After several unsuccessful attempts the lock finally turned, and Chester quietly threw up the top.

Walking to the door and making sure that no one was near, the lad returned to the desk. Quickly he looked over the assortment of papers, and at length a smile lighted up his face. Evidently he had found what he was in search of, for he quickly thrust a paper in his pocket.

He did not leave at once, but continued to rifle the contents of the general's desk. Finally he appropriated several more documents, which he also thrust into his pocket.

There was the sound of a door slammed on the floor below. Quickly the lad closed the desk, and, walking softly to the door, peered out. There was no one in sight. Closing the door quietly behind him, Chester walked rapidly down the hall to his own room, where Hal was waiting for his return.

“Did you get it?” asked Hal, as Chester entered the room and closed the door behind him.

“Yes,” replied Chester; “and you?”

“They are under the bed,” said Hal, with a grin. “I believe I would make a first-class burglar.”

“And I,” agreed Chester. “However, ‘All’s fair in love and war,’ you know.”

“I am glad I do know it,” said Hal. “Otherwise I wouldn’t think much of myself now.”

“We had better hide these things,” said Chester. “Their loss might be discovered and a search made.”

“Where shall we put them?”

Chester glanced around the room. He walked to the closet and opened the door. Peering in, he found, just above the top shelf, a small opening, apparently not meant for use, as it was too close to the ceiling.

“Put ’em in here,” he said, and, withdrawing the papers from his pocket, he suited the action to the word.

Hal now brought the uniforms out from under the bed, and, by dint of hard squeezing, also finally succeeded in secreting them. The dark cloth made the hiding-place look like nothing more than a hole.

“All we need now are swords and pistols,” said Chester.

“Pistols,” agreed Hal. “I don’t know that we need swords.”

“You don’t,” said Chester, in contempt. “We would make a couple of fine-looking officers, strutting around without swords, wouldn’t we?”

“You’re right,” Hal agreed, somewhat sheepishly. “Where are we going to get them?”

“The general always leaves his sword and revolvers on the table in the hall before retiring,” said Chester. “Then I noticed another pair of swords hanging on the wall there. Also the lieutenant invariably leaves his weapons on the parlor

table. Careless, I say, but lucky for us."

Chester's thoughtfulness in hiding the articles they had appropriated stood them in good stead, as it turned out that evening. General Strauss, upon his arrival home, went straight to his private office, saying that he would be in to dinner in a few moments.

Accordingly the others went in and sat down at the table without waiting for him. A moment later the old general came storming into the room.

"My maps!" he cried. "My maps! Has anyone seen my maps?"

The lieutenant jumped to his feet.

"Have you lost them, sir?" he asked.

"Lost 'em? Lost 'em? Do you think I would ask for them if I knew where they were?"

"Perhaps you left them at headquarters, sir."

"No, I didn't leave 'em at headquarters," raged the general. "Someone has stolen them!"

"Stolen, sir? Why, there has been no one in the house, and you know that none could have entered without the guard on the outside seeing them."

"I tell you they have been stolen!" cried the general. "I want the house searched at once—every room in it, sir, yes, and the room of these two Americans also."

"Father!" admonished the lieutenant. "Surely you are not accusing them?"

"I am not accusing anybody, sir, but I want this house searched. Must I call for outside help, or will you help me, sir?"

"I'll help, sir," replied the lieutenant quietly. To the lads he said softly: "Never mind him. He is always irritable when he misplaces something."

The old general's sharp ears caught this remark.

"Irritable, am I?" he cried. "Well, maybe I am, but I don't need to have my own son apologize for my actions. If I have done anything that demands an apology I'll apologize myself."

Lieutenant Strauss shrugged his shoulders, as he said:

“I’ll search the second floor, sir. Will you take the first?”

“Yes,” snapped the general, “and see that you make a thorough job of it.”

At this juncture Chester rose to his feet.

“If you think we have your papers, sir,” he said quietly, “we are willing to submit to a search.”

“And searched you shall be,” said the general. He turned to his son. “Search them!”

The lieutenant protested, but to no avail. The lads submitted to the search in silence.

“They have nothing, sir,” said the lieutenant.

“Then search the second floor,” commanded the general.

An hour later the lieutenant came downstairs, and a few moments later the old gentleman, now considerably cooled off, also returned.

“I found nothing, sir,” reported the lieutenant.

“Nor I,” said the general slowly. “Can it be I was mistaken? Perhaps, after all, I did leave the maps at headquarters.” He turned to Hal and Chester. “I hope you will pardon me for my outburst,” he said gravely, “but I am easily excited.”

“Say no more about it, sir,” replied both lads together, but to each came the same thought:

“We are in luck.”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SAFE AGAIN.

Dinner over and the old general having left the house, Lieutenant Strauss said to the boys:

“There is still some amusement in Berlin, in spite of the war. Would you care to accompany me to the play to-night?”

Both lads, knowing that this would be as good an opportunity as they could expect for making their escape, pleaded that they were too tired.

“Some other evening, if that will do as well,” said Chester.

“Oh, all right, whatever you say,” replied the lieutenant. “I hope there are no hard feelings—that you will overlook my father’s show of temper?”

“Of course,” said Hal. “Anyone would have done the same under the circumstances.”

After a few further words the lieutenant departed, and the lads, bidding his mother good night, and announcing their intention of retiring early, made their way to their room.

There their air of leisure gave way to haste.

“We’ll have to hurry,” said Hal. “The general will fail to find his maps at headquarters, and will be back here in two shakes of a lamb’s tail.”

Quickly the lads threw on the young lieutenant’s uniforms, and Chester placed the maps in his pocket.

“We will have to go without revolvers,” said Chester, “for we certainly can’t afford to wait until the general and lieutenant come home.”

“I should say not,” Hal agreed. “The sooner we get out of here now the better, providing we can get out.”

Quickly, but silently, the boys made their way from the room and descended the stairs. Stepping lightly upon a chair, Hal secured the two swords, suspended in their scabbards with a pair of army belts, and, leaping lightly down, passed one to Chester.

Quickly the lads strapped the swords around them and quietly they opened the front door and closed it softly behind them. Then, with a swaggering air, they descended the front steps, to bump squarely into one of the guards.

The guard drew back respectfully and saluted.

“I beg your pardon, sir,” he said, addressing Chester. “I saw you go out once before, but I didn’t see you return.”

“You must be more careful,” said Chester, imitating the lieutenant’s voice. “My friend and I came in a few moments ago and I didn’t see you anywhere.”

“But I was right here, sir, or at least, only a few steps away,” protested the soldier.

“Well, I’ll pass over it this time,” said Chester, “but don’t let it happen again. The prisoners might escape.”

“Thank you, sir,” replied the soldier, saluting again. “But the prisoners will not escape while I am on guard. Never fear, sir.”

The lads bade the soldier good night and walked slowly away. Once around the first corner, however, they increased their pace, and soon had put considerable distance between them and the Strauss home, where, even now, the old general, having failed to find his maps at headquarters, was again raging about, swearing that his documents had been stolen.

Walking into a quiet little shop, Chester purchased two revolvers. Also, while there, he withdrew the map from his pocket and studied it carefully.

“I want to impress this firmly on my mind,” he said to Hal, “for we may not have a chance to look at it again for some time.”

Hal also bent over and studied the map carefully. A few moments later they left the store, each feeling more secure because of the ugly-looking Colt each carried in his pocket.

As the boys walked along one of the dark streets, they became aware of the soft pat-pat of steps behind them, coming swiftly. They turned to face whatever danger threatened, and then Hal suddenly broke into a laugh.

“Marquis!” he cried aloud.

Sure enough, it was their four-footed friend. He came running up to the boys, wagging his tail happily at being with them once again, but with reproach in his eyes at having been left behind.

“Good old Marquis,” said Chester, patting his head. “You didn’t want to be left behind among all these Germans, did you?”

Marquis wagged his tail fiercely.

“What are we going to do with him?” asked Hal. “Won’t he be in the way?”

“No, I don’t think so,” replied Chester. “Not if the plan I have in mind works.”

“What is your plan?”

“You’ll know soon enough,” said Chester calmly. “Come on.”

For two hours the lads walked along, gradually drawing out of the city at the eastern extremity. They passed many German officers as they walked along, but were not molested nor even challenged.

Finally, beyond the city, Chester increased his pace and the two boys and the dog hurried on. At length they came to a large building.

“I thought I was right,” said Chester to himself. “But I was beginning to doubt it.”

“What is it?” demanded Hal. “What is that building?”

“That,” said Chester calmly, “is an aëroplane station. We shall now go in and get one.”

“Oh, we will, eh? And I suppose they give one to every strange officer who happens along?”

“No, they don’t,” said Chester. “But, among other things in General Strauss’s desk, I found several orders upon this place, each one calling upon the

commandant to furnish bearer with one plane."

"Why didn't you tell me before?" demanded Hal.

"I wanted to save it as a surprise," said Chester.

As they approached nearer, it became apparent that the structure was a long, low shed. A hundred yards away, they were challenged by a sentry.

"I have an order for the commandant," called Chester.

"Approach," said the sentry.

A moment later, the commandant, being summoned by the sentry, arrived.

"What can I do for you, gentlemen?" he asked.

Without a word, Chester pulled one of the orders he had appropriated from General Strauss's desk from his pocket and passed it to the commandant. The latter glanced at it quickly, and then bowed.

"You shall have the machine in five minutes," he said, and left them.

True to his word, five minutes later a large-winged biplane stood before them.

"You will have to run this thing," Chester whispered to Hal.

"Well, it won't be the first time," Hal whispered back.

Hal took the aviator's seat and Chester also took his place. Then the latter whistled to Marquis, who came bounding up and sprang in and sat down calmly between Chester's feet.

"Surely you are not going to take that dog," protested the commandant.

"Yes," said Chester. "He is one of the dispatch dogs taken from the French. We are going to make use of him with a false dispatch."

"I see," exclaimed the commandant. "A good idea."

"Isn't it?" said Chester.

"All ready?" demanded the commandant of Hal.

“All ready,” was the lad’s reply.

“Let her go, then,” the commandant ordered the two men who had appeared to give the aëroplane a start.

A moment later and the machine was speeding along the ground.

“Good luck,” called the commandant.

Chester waved his hand in reply.

Now Hal touched the elevating lever, and the aëroplane left the ground, and, soaring high in the air, sped on its way.

“Which way, Chester?” Hal called back over his shoulder.

“Due east,” replied Chester, “but first rise as high as you can.”

Hal obeyed this command, and soon the two boys and a dog were thousands of feet above the earth.

“What’s your altitude?” called Chester.

Hal told him.

“Good!” said Chester. “Keep her there, and now head due east.”

Quickly Hal brought the big aircraft about, and pointed her nose in a direction that eventually, barring accidents and the misfortunes of war, would land them in the heart of Poland, where the mighty armies of Russia were rushing upon the German legions.

“I know we shall get through safely,” called Chester, as they sped along. “Some way I feel it.”

“And so do I,” Hal called back.

They were right, and before another night had fallen these two young American boys placed in the hands of the Grand Duke Nicholas, commander-in-chief of the mighty hordes of the Czar, the paper which had so strangely fallen into their hands—the paper which, later on, brought about more than one serious check to German arms.

But here ends the story of the Boy Allies along the Marne. Their further adventures will be told in a succeeding volume, entitled, "The Boy Allies With the Cossacks; or a Wild Dash Over the Carpathian Mountains."

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