

The Boy Allies with Haig in Flanders

Clair W. Hayes

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by Clair W. Hayes

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THE BOY ALLIES WITH HAIG IN FLANDERS

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Or The Fighting Canadians of Vimy Ridge

By Clair W. Hayes

CHAPTER I

A NEW USE FOR A DICTAPHONE

The rain fell in torrents over the great battlefield, as Hal Paine and Chester Crawford, taking advantage of the inky blackness of the night, crept from the shelter of the American trenches that faced the enemy across "No Man's Land."

In the trenches themselves all was silence. To a spectator it would have seemed that the occupants were, either dead or asleep; yet such was not the case.

It is true that most of the men had "turned in" for the night, sleeping on their arms, for there was no means of telling at what moment the enemy might issue from his trenches in another of the night raids that had marked this particular sector for the last few weeks; but the ever vigilant sentinels stood watch over the sleeping men. They would sound an alarm, should occasion demand, in ample time to arouse the sleepers if an enemy's head appeared in the darkness.

Hal and Chester, of course, left the American trenches with full knowledge of these sentinels; otherwise they might have been shot.

Once beyond the protecting walls of earth, they moved swiftly and silently toward the German trenches less than a hundred feet away -- just the distance from the home plate to first base on a baseball diamond, as Hal put it -- ninety feet.

These two lads, who now advanced directly toward the foe, were lieutenants in the first American expeditionary force to reach France to lend a hand in driving back the legions of the German Emperor, who still clung tenaciously to territory he had conquered in the early stages of the great war. These boys had, at one time, been captains in the British army, and had had three years of strenuous times and exciting adventures in the greatest of all wars.

Their captaincies they'd won through gallant action upon the field of battle. American lads, they had been left in Berlin at the outbreak of hostilities, when they were separated from Hal's mother. They made their way to Belgium, where, for a time, they saw service, with King Albert's troops. Later they fought under the tricolor, with the Russians and the British and Canadians.

When the United 'States declared war on Germany, Hal and Chester, with others, were sent to America, where they were of great assistance in training men Uncle Sam had selected to officer his troops. They had relinquished their rank in the British army to be able to do this. Now they found themselves again on French soil, but fighting under the Stars and Stripes.

On this particular night they advanced toward the German lines soon after an audience with General John J. Pershing, commander-in-chief of the American expeditionary forces. In one hand Chester carried a little hardwood box, to which were attached coils of wire. In the other hand the lad held a revolver. Hal, likewise, carried his automatic in his hand. Each was determined to give a good account of himself should his presence be discovered.

It was unusually quiet along the front this night. It was too dark for opposing "snipers" -- sharpshooters -- to get in their work, and the voices of the big guns, which, almost incessantly for the last few weeks, had hurled shells across the intervening distance between the two lines of trenches, were stilled.

Hal pressed close to Chester.

"Rather creepy out here," he said.

"Right," returned Chester in a whisper. "I've the same feeling myself. It forebodes, trouble, this silence, to my way of thinking. The Huns are probably hatching up some devilment."

"Well, we may be able to get the drift of it, with that thing you have under your arm," was the other's reply.

"Sh-h!" was Chester's reply, and he added: "We're getting pretty close."

They continued their way without further words.

Hal, slightly in advance, suddenly uttered a stifled exclamation. Instantly Chester touched his arm.

"What's the matter?" he asked in a whisper.

"Matter is," Hal whispered back, "that we have come to a barbed-wire entanglement. I had forgotten about those things."

"Well, that's why you brought your 'nippers' along," said Chester. "Cut the wire."

Hal produced his "nippers." It was but the work of a moment to nip the wires, and again the lads advanced cautiously.

A moment later there loomed up before them the German trenches. Hal stood back a few feet while Chester advanced and placed the little hardwood box upon the top of the trench, and scraped over it several handfuls of earth. The lad now took the coil of wire in his hand, and stepped down and back. The lads retraced their steps toward their own lines, Chester the while unrolling the coil of wire.

The return was made without incident. Before their own trenches the boys were challenged by a sentinel.

"Halt!" came the command. "Who goes there?"

"Friends," returned Hal.

The sentinel recognized the lad's voice.

"Advance," he said with a breath of relief.

A moment later the boys were safe back among their own men.

"If the Germans had been as watchful as our own sentries, we would have had more trouble," said Hal.

"Oh, I don't know," was Chester's reply. "I saw a German sentinel, but he didn't see me in the darkness."

"It was his business to see, however," declared Hal.

"Well, that's true. But now let's listen and see if we can overhear anything of importance."

Chester clapped the little receiver to his ear. Hal became silent.

Ten minutes later Chester removed the receiver from his ear.

"Nothing doing," he said. "I can hear some of the men talking, but they are evidently playing cards."

"Let me listen a while," said Hal.

Chester passed the receiver to his chum, and the latter listened intently. For some moments he heard nothing save the jabbering jargon of German troopers apparently interested in a card game. He was about to take the receiver from his ear, however, when another voice caught his attention

He held up a hand, which told Chester that something of importance was going on.

"All right, general," said a voice in the German trenches, which was carried plainly to Hal's ear by the Dictaphone.

"Stay!" came another voice. "You will also order Colonel Blucher to open with all his guns at the moment that General Schmidt's men advance to the attack."

"At midnight, sir," was the reply.

"That is all."

The voices became silent.

Quickly Hal reported to Chester what he had overheard.

"It's up to us to arouse Captain O'Neill," said Chester. He hurried off.

Hal glanced at his watch.

It was 10 o'clock.

"Two hours," the lad muttered. "Well, I guess we'll be ready for them."

A few moments later Captain O'Neill appeared. He was in command of the Americans in the first line trenches. These troops were in their present positions for "seasoning" purposes. They had been the first to be given this post of honor. They had held it for several days, and then had been relieved only to be returned to the front within ten days.

At command from Captain O'Neill, Hal made his way to the, south along the line of trenches, and approached the quarters of General Dupres. To an, orderly he announced that he bore a communication from Captain O'Neill.

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed the French commander, when Hal had delivered his message. "So they will attack us in the night, eh? Well, we shall receive them right warmly."

He thought a moment. Then he said:

"You will tell Captain O'Neill to move from the trenches with his entire strength. He will advance ten yards and then move one hundred yards north. You may tell him that I will post a force of equal strength to the south. He will not fire until my French troops open on the enemy."

Hal returned and reported to Captain O'Neill.

It was plain that the American officer didn't understand the situation fully. However, he simply shrugged his shoulders.

"General Dupres is in command," he said. "I guess he knows what he's doing or he wouldn't be here."

Captain O'Neill gave the necessary commands. The American troops moved from the trenches in silence. There was a suppressed air of excitement, however, for each man was eager for the coming of he knew not what.

CHAPTER II

THE AMBUSH

At the point decided upon for the American troops to take their stand was a collection of shell holes. In order that the attack upon the Germans might have all the elements of surprise when it came, Captain O'Neill ordered his men into these holes to guard against any possibility of surprise.

Now, it is an undoubted fact that when a man curls himself up with two or three preliminary twists, after the fashion of a dog going to bed, in a perfectly circular shell hole on a night as black as this, he is extremely likely to lose his sense of direction.

That is what happened to Private Briggs, of the American forces.

The Americans lay in silence, awaiting the moment of the surprise.

Suddenly it came. From the position held by the French broke out a fusillade. The Germans had approached closer.

Captain O'Neill and his followers got to their feet and dashed upon the enemy -- all but Private Briggs.

Besides his rifle, each man was armed with hand grenades - bombs -- which he carried in his pockets.

When Private Briggs sprang to his feet, it took him so long to untangle himself that the others had gone on ahead of him.

He could see no one.

However, want of courage was not one of his failings. He determined upon a plan of his own. While the other combatants were locked in a death grapple, he would advance by himself to the German trenches and hurl his grenade.

To think with Private Briggs was to act. He advanced at a run.

Suddenly a parapet loomed up before him. In this same parapet, low down, Briggs beheld a black and gaping aperture -- plainly a loophole of some kind. Without a moment's hesitation, Briggs hurled a Mills grenade straight through the loophole, and, forgetting for the moment that others of his troop were not with him, uttered a wild screech!

"Come on, boys!"

He leaped to the top of the trench by himself, and jumped from the parapet -- into his own trenches. Having lost his sense of direction, he had charged the wrong way.

As the bomb exploded in the French trenches, men rushed toward him. Still grasping several bombs, Briggs stared at them in wide-eyed surprise. An officer rushed up to him.

Briggs explained the situation. Fortunately, no one had been wounded by the bomb.

"You Americans! You Americans!" exclaimed the French officer. "But go!" he commanded. "Your men are out there," pointing; "do you not hear the sounds of conflict? If you charge there with the courage with which you have charged here, you may be of some use after all."

Briggs wasted no time. With a flush on his face, he again leaped to the parapet, and, a moment later, disappeared in the darkness, running as swiftly as he could to where firing indicated that the battle raged.

Meanwhile, what of Hal and Chester, and the American troops?

As the Americans poured from their shell holes after the first outburst of firing, they dashed toward where they could make out the forms of German infantry close at hand.

From beyond, the French, who had taken up a position as the French commander had outlined to Hal, poured a withering fire into the foe. The German officer in command immediately halted his advance, wheeled

his men, and gave battle to the French.

At almost the same moment the Americans dashed upon his men from the rear. One volley the Americans poured into the Germans, then their arms drew back and an avalanche of hand grenades sped on their mission of death. The execution was terrific.

In vain the German officers attempted to hold their men to the work in hand. Teuton ranks lost formation, and, as the Americans advanced with the bayonet, the enemy broke and fled.

The German surprise had failed; it had been on the other hand.

As the Germans retreated, the Americans pursued. A body of troops, led by Hal, came, upon an isolated group of the enemy.

"Surrender!" cried Hal.

The Germans needed no second offer. Their guns went to the ground at the lad's words, and they raised their hands in the air. They were made prisoners and sent to the rear. There was one officer among them -- a captain.

At the command from the French general, pursuit of the enemy was abandoned, much to the disgust of the American troops, who were for pursuing the Germans clear to their trenches, and beyond, if possible. Hal and Chester, however, realized the wisdom of the French commander's order, for there was a possibility, should the French and Americans advance too close, of their being set upon by overwhelming numbers from the German trenches, or of their being caught by batteries of rapid-firers, which most likely would have meant extermination.

As the French and Americans moved back toward their trenches -- the engagement had consumed only a few minutes -- Hal and Chester saw a man come flying toward them. This, although the lads did not know it at the time, was Briggs.

Straight past the American troops Briggs sped, and disappeared in the darkness beyond.

"Hello!" said Hal, "that man is an American. Wonder where he's going?"

"It's Briggs, sir," said a man in the ranks. "He has queer spells some times. Can we go after him, sir?"

Hal put the question up to Captain O'Neill. The captain hesitated.

"My friend and I will go," said Hal. "We've been in this fighting game too long to take unnecessary chances, sir, but I don't like to see the man get into trouble when we can save him."

"Very well," said the captain; "you have my permission, but don't go too close."

"I'd like another man, sir."

"Take your choice."

Hal glanced at the men, and called:

"McKenzie."

A soldier stepped forward. This man, at one time, had been a top sergeant in the British army. He had served through the Boer war in South Africa. Hal had met him at the Fort Niagara training camp a few months before, and, while the man had failed to obtain a commission there, Hal had been able to have him enlisted in the regular army.

"Will you go with us, McKenzie?" asked the lad. McKenzie saluted.

"Glad to, sir," he replied.

"Good! Then come on," said Hal. "We are wasting time here."

Hal led the way at a rapid trot. He feared that Briggs had already approached too close to the German trenches, and the distance was so short that there was little likelihood of overtaking the man before he reached the trenches. The only salvation was, so far as Hal could see, that Briggs might have stopped before he reached the trenches.

As the three pushed forward, there came a sudden explosion ahead, followed closely by a second blast. The three redoubled their speed, and, a moment later, came in sight of the German trenches.

A strange sight met their eyes.

There, upon the top of the German parapet, stood Briggs. His right arm was raised and in it the lads could see a bomb. Apparently the explosions a moment before had come from the same source.

As the three looked on, Briggs sent another bomb hurling down into the German lines. There was a third blast.

"Great Scott!" cried Chester. "How can he get away with that? Why don't they shoot him?"

"They're trying," said Hal. "You can hear the bullets. They are flying over his head!" The lad raised his voice in a shout: "Briggs! Come down here!"

Briggs glanced down. Hal, Chester, and McKenzie had approached close now, and Briggs made out their features as he gazed down.

"One moment, sir," he said, "and I'll be with you."

Deliberately he drew back his arm again, and, a moment later his last bomb was hurled into the foe. As the explosion resounded from the German trenches, Briggs leaped down lightly, approached Hal and Chester, and saluted.

"I'm ready now, sir," he said.

"Then run!" cried Hal.

The four suited the action to the word, and dashed back toward the American trenches. From behind a volley a rifle fire crackled after them.

"Anybody hit?" cried Hal, as they dashed along.

There were four negative answers.

Five minutes later the four were safe in the American trenches.

CHAPTER III

A DANGEROUS MISSION

It was noon of the following day. Hal and Chester stood at attention before General Pershing, the American commander-in-chief. The latter gazed at them long and earnestly. With a half shrug he muttered, as he turned to his desk:

"But they are so young."

The words were not meant for the lads' ears, but Hal and Chester overheard them. Hal spoke:

"If you please, Sir," he said quietly, "we are not so young as you seem to believe. To me, Sir, our experience seems very old."

General Pershing glanced up from a pile of papers he was perusing. Again he looked at the two lads in silence. The two boys bore the close scrutiny unflinchingly. At length General Pershing got to his feet, and, approaching Hal and Chester, laid a hand on the shoulder of each.

"You are brave youngsters," he said quietly. "From what you have done since the American troops reached France, I know that Marshal Joffre and General Haig have not spoken too highly of you; and yet," here the American commander hesitated a moment before continuing; "and yet the piece of work I have in sight will entail, perhaps, more danger, more finesse, and more resourcefulness than any mission you have ever undertaken."

"You will find that we shall not be found wanting, sir," said Chester respectfully.

"I am sure of that," was General Pershing's response. "It isn't that I question your courage or your resourcefulness; but, because of your youth, in this particular business, I question your wisdom. It is a task for older and wiser heads, but --"

General Pershing broke off and became silent. Hal and Chester did not interrupt his meditations. At length the general continued:

"I wish to say before going any further that this mission, if you undertake it, in all probabilities, will mean death for one of you. It is for this reason that the task in hand requires the services of at least two men. One to go and come back, and the other to go -- and come back if he can. It may be that neither will return, and yet one must return if the safety of his country is to be maintained."

"We shall do our best, sir, if we are entrusted with the mission," said Chester quietly.

Again General Pershing hesitated. Then he took his decision.

"Draw up stools here," he said, and made room at his desk.

The lads did so. General Pershing spoke in a low voice.

"You both undoubtedly know," he said, "that since the American declaration of war on Germany, the activity of German agents and spies in the United States has grown to startling dimensions?" The lads nodded and General Pershing continued: "Very good. Now, I have before me a cable, in code, from the state department, which advises me that the department of state must have, at all hazards, a list of the most important German agents in America. It is essential. Here," the general pushed a slip of paper in front of the lads, "is the translation of the code message."

Hal and Chester glanced at the paper. It read:

"German prime minister has lists of agents and spies in United States. Realize it is not in your province to get list, but would enlist your aid, because our diplomatic agents have all left Germany. List is essential to safeguarding coast defenses and munitions plants. Do what you can."

The message was signed by the secretary of state.

Hal passed the paper back to General Pershing. The latter eyed him keenly.

"You realize the dangerous nature of the work?" he questioned.

"Perfectly, sir; also its importance. We shall be glad to undertake it, sir."

"Very well. Now I have a little information that may be of value. In another code message from the state department I am advised that efforts are being made to get a member of the diplomatic staff back into Berlin. There is one person in the German capital whom you may trust." General Pershing lowered his voice. "That person," he said, "is the wife of the German undersecretary for foreign affairs. She is an American woman, and upon several occasions has been of service to her own country. Her name is Schweiring."

"We shall remember, sir," said Chester.

"Now," said General Pershing, "I have no advice to offer as to how you shall reach Berlin, nor how you shall go about your work. Once in Berlin, however, you will have to be governed by circumstances. You speak German, I am told?"

"Like natives, sir," said Hal with a grin.

"Very well. I shall see that you are granted indefinite leave of absence. There is just one thing more. I want to say that I do not like to ask my men to become spies."

"Why, sir," said Chester gravely, "it's all for our country; and the day when a spy was looked down upon has gone. It is just another way of serving ones country, sir."

"Nevertheless," said General Pershing, "the punishment is the same as it has been down the ages: death."

"If caught," Hal added with a smile.

"True," was his commander's response, and a slight smile lighted, up his own features.

He arose and extended his hand. Both lads shook it heartily.

"I hope," said General Pershing, "that you may both come through safely. But if you don't -- well, good-bye. I don't need to tell you that if one can get through with the list that, from the nation's standpoint, what happens to the other is insignificant."

"I have a request to make, sir," said Hal, as they turned to go.

"Consider it granted," replied his commander.

"It is this," said Hal. "I believe that it would be well for us to take a third man along. It may be that he will never reach the German lines, but he should prove of help for the other two."

"Have you the man in mind?" asked General Pershing.

"Yes, sir. A man named McKenzie, a private in our troop. He's a Canadian, and has seen years of active service. Also, as I happen to know, he speaks German fluently."

"I shall give you a paper authorizing his indefinite leave of absence," said General Pershing.

He scribbled a few words on a piece of paper, and passed it to the lad. The boys drew themselves to attention, saluted, and left.

"A pretty ticklish piece of business," said Chester quietly, as they made their way to their own quarters.

"Rather," said Hal dryly; "and still it must be done. The safety of America depends upon the success of our mission. It may be well that it has been entrusted to us rather than to older men. We are less likely to be suspected if we reach Berlin safely. Besides, we have been there before, and are somewhat familiar with the city."

"Yes," said Chester grimly, "we've been there several times before. I recall that we went there once very much against our will -- prisoners."

"Well, we didn't stay very long," said Hal.

"Let's hope we don't stay for keeps this time either," said Chester. "To tell the truth, I don't think much of this spy business myself."

"Somebody has to do it," Hal declared.

"Of course, but I am not very fond of that sort of work."

"If you don't want to go -" Hal began, but Chester interrupted.

"Of course, I want to go if it must be. I am ready to do what I can for my country in whatever way I may."

"I knew it," said Hal; "I was only fooling. Come, we will acquaint McKenzie with his work. And if he comes safely through this, I feel confident he will not remain long in the ranks."

They found McKenzie, the erstwhile Canadian sergeant, in his tent.

"McKenzie," said Hal, "you are about to take a trip, I see."

"That so, sir? I hadn't heard of it."

"Yes," Hal continued. "I heard a man say you were about to go to Germany."

"And the man," said McKenzie, "was --"

"General Pershing, McKenzie."

"Very well, sir," said McKenzie, to whom the few words told the story of important work to be done.

"In that event, I presume that General Pershing has seen fit to allow me leave of absence."

"He has, McKenzie. I shall present the order to Captain O'Neill at once. In the meantime, see that your guns are cleaned, and that you have an extra supply of cartridges. We may need them. Also, leave any papers or other marks of identification behind. When you are ready, come to my quarters."

"I shall be there in half an hour, sir."

Hal and Chester made their way to Captain O'Neill's quarters. Hal presented the papers, granting leaves of absence to the three.

"Hm-m," muttered Captain O'Neill. "Something up, eh? Well, I wish I were going with you." He extended a hand.

"Good luck," he said quietly."

CHAPTER IV

INTO GERMANY

"We'll have to have a leader for this party," said Hal, "one whose word shall be law. I'm agreeable to Chester."

"I'd rather have you," said Chester.

McKenzie also voted for Hal, who already had done him some service. This agreement, stood.

"All right," said Hal. "Now that I'm in command, I'll outline the course of procedure. We'll go from here to the Dutch border."

"How about passports?" Chester wanted to know.

"That's simple enough. You remember the time when we drew up a set of fake passports representing ourselves to be correspondents of the New York Gazette? We'll follow the same plan, except that we each will be represented as correspondents of different papers. See, I've already drawn, them."

"I see," said Chester, "but American passports won't be honored in Germany now."

"But they will be in Holland," said Hal. "We'll see what can be done about having them changed there. Now, let's see if we know who we are."

He passed the fake passports to the others.

"I'm Barney McCann, eh?" said McKenzie, gazing at the paper he held in his hand. "Oh, well, I guess I can talk Irish as well as German if I have to. And I represent the Chicago Mail."

"I'm still Chester Crawford," said Chester, "and I represent the New York Gazette."

"I'm Hal Paine, and I represent the Philadelphia Globe," said Hal. "We'll probably have to change our names when we go over the German border, but these should answer their purposes in Holland. Fortunately, we have learned a few things from Stubbs, so we are not unfamiliar with the workings of a newspaper."

"Guess we had better get out of these uniforms," said Chester.

"Right. We'll don suits of plain khaki, such as Stubbs wears, and we'll equip ourselves with the necessary paraphernalia."

This was a simple task, and several hours later, horseback, the lads made their way toward where British troops, supported by French, were close to, the border of The Netherlands.

They showed their passports, prepared by Hal, to the British military authorities, and were permitted to pass.

Holland, although not a participant in the great war, nevertheless, soon after the outbreak of hostilities, had felt herself called upon to mobilize her military forces that she might protect her borders should one of the belligerents attempt to overrun her, as the Germans had overrun Belgium at the outbreak of the war. Therefore, when the three travelers reached the border, they were held up by the military.

Hal presented his fake American passport, and Chester and McKenzie did likewise. The officer who had accosted them turned them over to his superior.

"Your intentions," said the officer, "I hope are such as not to break Holland's neutrality?"

"We're perfectly peaceable, sir," returned Hal with a smile.

"Very well. This is a neutral country, and you are, of course, free to travel about it at your leisure so long as you conduct yourselves properly. Of course, were you American soldiers it would be necessary for me to place you under arrest, and YOU would be interned until the end of the war."

"I understand that, sir," said Hal.

"By the way," said the Dutch officer, "there is a Dutch newspaperman here at this moment. Perhaps you would like to meet him. He is Herr Heindrick Block, of the Amsterdamer."

"We shall be pleased," said Hal quietly.

The Dutch officer excused himself, and returned a moment later with a young Dutchman, whom he introduced to the three friends. They shook hands all around.

"I've already met a compatriot of yours," said the young Dutchman, smiling, "a Herr Stubbs. He is with one of the New York papers -- I forget which."

Hal and Chester gave a start of surprise, but quickly recovered themselves.

"He is with my paper, The Gazette, sir," returned Chester. "Is he in these parts?"

"He was yesterday," replied Block. "I do not know where he is now."

The three friends took an instant liking to the young Dutch newspaperman. He led the three to where he was temporarily quartered.

"We can have a little chat here," he said.

During the course of the conversation Hal asked:

"And what is the sentiment in Holland regarding the war?"

The young Dutchman hesitated a moment, and then turned and gazed around quickly.

"The sentiment," he said at last, "is that Germany must be crushed. Of course, at this moment Holland cannot afford to enter the arena. Germany has massed thousands of troops upon our border. An unneutral act would be dangerous. Nevertheless, Holland's sympathies are with the Allies -- have been from the start. There is another factor besides Holland's natural gratitude to England -- that makes for this. Germany has overrun Holland, as well as the rest of the world with spies. Holland is offended, but cannot afford to show it -- now. But while we are kept quiet, there are few of us who would not do much to help the Allied cause."

Hal thought quickly. He glanced at the young Dutchman shrewdly. He

felt he could be trusted.

"Then," said the lad quietly, "can you conceive of any way by which we can get passports from the Dutch government that will pass us into Germany?"

The young Dutchman manifested no surprise.

"Have no fear," he said, as Chester and McKenzie manifested some anxiety at Hal's words. "I shall not betray you. Only yesterday I was able to get a passport for your friend Herr Stubbs."

"What?" cried Hal. "Stubbs gone into Germany?"

"I supposed you knew that," said Block. "I supposed he was one of you."

"No," said Chester, "Stubbs is what he represents himself to be -- a war correspondent."

"Nevertheless," said Block, "he has gone into Germany as Herr Klepstein, a Dutch newspaperman."

"That means," said Hal, "that it will be hard work getting passports for us."

"Not at all," said Block. "I can do that with ease. There are many Dutch correspondents in Germany. Two or three more won't matter. One of you can take my passport." He looked at Hal. "You and I look something alike, anyhow," he said.

"So we do," Hal agreed. "But can you get passports for my friends here?"

"I can manufacture them myself, the same as I did for your friend Stubbs," said the Dutchman quietly, "I need not tell you, however, that should I be discovered I would probably be shot. But why shouldn't I do it? My mother was an English Woman."

"We shall be greatly obliged," said Hal.

Block led the way from the tent.

"Mount your horses," he said. "We'll go to the railroad station and catch a train for Amsterdam. You shall be my guests until the passports are prepared."

Hal was nothing loath. He realized that they had encountered good fortune in the person of Herr Block. He placed implicit confidence in the man, for it was perfectly plain that Block was telling the truth when he said his sympathies were with the Allies."

For two days the three friends were the guests of the young Dutchman at his bachelor apartments in Amsterdam. Upon the morning of the third day, Block presented them with passports properly vided by the Dutch authorities.

"These will get you through," he said quietly.

"We can never thank you enough," declared Hal, quietly. "Some day you will realize what a great thing you have done for the world."

"I realize it now," was the young Dutchman's reply. "I wish I were going with you, but it may be that I can be of more service here."

"Undoubtedly," said Hal, "if this is an example."

"Now don't forget who you are," enjoined Block. "You," to Hal, "are Herr Block, of The Amsterdamer." To Chester, "You are Herr Amusdem" To McKenzie: "You are Herr Spidle, both of The Nederlander. Do not forget. Should you encounter other Dutch correspondents, it will be well for you to stand on your dignity, and to talk to them as little as possible. Now, have you any idea how you are to go about the accomplishment of your mission, whatever it is?"

"No," said Hal, "I haven't. We shall act in accordance with developments."

"Well," said Block, "you may as well be going. The sooner you get there the better. I shall go with you to your train. You will have to show no passports until you get to the frontier."

At the station, Block saw them comfortably installed in a car that would carry them across the border. He shook hands with them.

"Good luck," he said quietly; and added: "Should you, by any chance, come out of Germany a jump ahead of a bayonet, remember you will find temporary, safety in my quarters. Good-bye."

CHAPTER V

THE GAME OPENS

"You may pass, gentlemen."

The speaker was a German officer. Upon the arrival of the three friends at the railroad terminus just across the German border the officer had made a tour of the train, examining the passports of the passengers. Hal, Chester and McKenzie had extended their passports along with the other passengers, and the German officer had found nothing wrong with them.

As the German took his leave, McKenzie breathed a sigh of relief.

"I was sure he was going to nab us," he said.

"Careful," whispered Hal. "We must do all our talking in German, and we must do very little of that concerning our private affairs. Remember, walls have ears, and I guess that will apply to a railroad car as well as a house."

"Right, Herr Block," said Chester with a smile.

The lads found that by remaining upon their car they would go straight

through to Berlin. The train was called the Amsterdam-Berlin express, and, while at the border, it was crowded with troops, there was still a fair sprinkling of passengers bound for the German capital.

It was after dark when the train pulled into Berlin and Hal, Chester, and McKenzie prepared to disembark. As the train stopped, Hal made sure that his revolver was loose in his pocket, settled his hat firmly on his head, and led the way from the car.

As with most travelers in that part of the world at that time, neither was burdened with baggage. Each carried a small portfolio, much used at that time by war correspondents, but they had no other luggage.

"We'll go to the Hotel Bismarck," said Hal.

Although it had been years since either Hal or Chester had been in Berlin, Hal's sense of direction now stood him in good stead. He remembered where the Hotel Bismarck stood as well as though he had been there yesterday.

At the hotel the three registered under their assumed names, and paid a month in advance for a small suite of two rooms.

"We expect to study the internal situation of the city for some time," Hal explained to the clerk, "and we want to feel sure that we shall have a place to stay while we are here."

The three made themselves comfortable in their apartments, and for some time talked quietly. At last Hal gave the word for bed.

"We don't know just how we shall proceed," he said, "but we must be fresh and ready for any eventuality in the morning."

Morning came and with it the three friends were astir. They had an early breakfast, and then Hal announced that he would fare forth alone.

"I'll tell you where I'm going," he said, "so that if anything happens to me you will go ahead with the work, regardless. Remember this. Even though I may get in trouble, your duty will be to get the list, irrespective of what my fate may be. America comes first, you know, Chester."

"Of course," was the latter's quiet reply.

"Well," said Hal, "I am going to the home of the German undersecretary of foreign affairs. I am going to see Mrs. Schweiring."

Chester nodded.

"Then we shall stay here until you return," he said.

"Very well," Hal agreed. "But if I have not returned by noon, you will know something has happened, and you will proceed about the work with no further thought of me."

He left the room quickly.

He made inquiries at the hotel office, and half an hour later found

himself before the residence of the German undersecretary of foreign affairs. He rang the doorbell. A footman answered the ring. Hal announced that he would like to see Mrs. Schweiring.

"Your card," said the footman, allowing him to enter.

"I have no card," said Hal. "You will tell her that Herr Block, of the Dutch newspaper, The Amsterdamer, desires to see her."

The footman bowed and departed. A few moments later he returned, followed by a young woman -- she could not have been more than 18, Hal decided. The young woman approached, and spoke to Hal.

"My mother is unable to see you at this moment, Herr Block," she said. "She has sent me to learn the nature of your business with her."

"I am sorry, fraulein," said Hal gravely, "but my business is with your mother. I cannot confide it to you."

The footman, meantime, had left the room.

The girl stamped her foot a little angrily.

"But mother has no secrets from me," she declared.

"That's the American blood talking now," said Hal to himself. Aloud he replied: "Nevertheless, fraulein, I must again ask to be permitted to speak to your mother."

The girl glanced at him sharply. Then she exclaimed in a low voice:

"You are no Dutchman, mynheer."

Hal started a trifle in spite of himself; then, realizing that this must have betrayed him, he dropped his hand to his pocket, where reposed his revolver.

The girl smiled.

"Have no fear," she said. "I shall say nothing. Can it be you are the one whom mother expects?"

"The best way to find that out," said Hal, "is to summon your mother."

The girl hesitated no longer. She fairly flew from the room. She reappeared a moment later, followed by an older woman.

"This is Herr Block, Mother," she said.

"Very well, Gladys," replied her mother. "Now, if you will leave us alone, and make sure that we are not disturbed."

"I shall stand guard myself," replied the daughter.

She disappeared into the long hall.

"Now, Herr Block," said Mrs. Schweiring, "you may tell me the nature of your business."

Hal glanced sharply about the room. Then he leaned close.

"I come from the American expeditionary forces in France," he said quietly.

Mrs. Schweiring manifested no surprise.

"I had surmised as much," she returned, "I had looked, however, for a man in civil life rather than a military man; also, I had looked for one farther along in years."

"I am sure you will find that my youth may work to our advantage," said Hal quietly.

"Perhaps. Now tell me in what way I may help."

"Well," said Hal, "I have come, two friends and myself, in an effort to lay hands upon the list of German spies in America -- the list kept by the German prime minister."

Mrs. Schweiring nodded.

"I had supposed as much. It was I who informed the department of state in Washington that such a list exists; but without help and without laying myself open to suspicion, I dared not try to get it. It is desperate work, but we shall see what can be done. Gladys!"

Her daughter re-entered the room in response to this summons.

"Gladys," said her mother, "Herr Block is the man we have been expecting; but he has not come alone. His companions are at the Hotel Bismarck, registered as Herr Spidle and Herr Amusdem. You will have their belongings moved here. They are friends whom you met in Switzerland and who will share our hospitality while here. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly, Mother."

"But we have no belongings," said Hal quietly. "We could not be bothered with excess baggage."

"Then I shall see that you are supplied with necessary articles," said his hostess. "The success of your mission will necessitate it. At any rate," she said, turning again to her daughter, "you will send a car for Herr Block's friends."

The girl nodded and left the room.

"I need not caution you," said Mrs. Schweiring, as she led the way upstairs -- and showed to Hal a suite of three comfortably furnished rooms. "A little slip will spoil all. I shall introduce you to my friends as a Dutch war correspondent who, nevertheless, has in him a strain of German, with a little American blood. I shall represent that you have lived several years in America, but that your heart is with the Fatherland."

"And my friends?" questioned Hal.

"They shall be just what they represent themselves to be."

"Very well," said Hal. "You perhaps know best. But I must, as soon as possible, be introduced either to the prime minister or to one of his trusted assistants."

"I will tell you something," said his hostess. "The list which you seek is no longer in the hands of the prime minister. It is now in possession of General Rentzel, chief of the secret service; and the son of the general comes frequently to see my daughter, Gladys. But we shall talk more later. I will leave you now and see that sufficient wardrobes are procured for you and your friends."

She left the room.

CHAPTER VI

THE BOYS MAKE PROGRESS

It was a merry party that gathered around the dinner table in the home of the German undersecretary of foreign affairs two nights later. But beneath the smiling faces of five members of the party was a suppressed excitement, for this dinner had been given by Mrs. Schweiring for a purpose. The purpose was to introduce Hal, Chester and McKenzie to General Rentzel, chief of the secret service, and his son, Frederick.

Besides these two guests of honor there were present the German minister of foreign affairs and one or two other high diplomats. The boys were in distinguished company and they knew it.

True to her word, Mrs. Schweiring had provided the three friends with an abundant wardrobe, which included evening clothes. Dinner over, Mrs. Schweiring, her daughter Gladys, and the wife of General Rentzel, the only women present, retired while the men produced cigars and cigarettes.

Neither Hal nor Chester smoked, but they felt called upon to accept a cigarette each. McKenzie, however, had no such scruples, and accepted a fat cigar without hesitation.

Hal found himself in conversation with young Captain Rentzel, son of the chief of the secret service.

"I understand you have spent some years in America?" he questioned.

"Why, yes," returned Hal.

"Do you like the country?"

"Not overly much," replied Hal with a shrug. "There are some very nice people there, but they are mostly boors."

"My idea exactly," returned the young German officer, "although I have never been there. Do you think America can do much harm to Germany in this war?"

"Well," said Hal, "given time, yes; but the American people are notoriously slow in such matters. Besides, I understand that there are quite a few German agents at work there now. With enough of them, irreparable injury could be done to the foe before they could prevent it."

"I notice you say foe," said the young German; "Yet you have American blood in your veins."

"A trifle," returned Hal quietly; "not enough to make me lose sight of justice and right."

"Good!" cried the young German. "Listen. It's true that we have many agents abroad, but some of them have fallen under suspicion and consequently will be of no further value. We need more such men who have lived in America and know the customs, and also will not be suspected. By the way, have you an appointment for 10 o'clock?"

"Why, no," said Hal. "Why?"

"Will you go with me at that hour?"

"Where to?"

"To my father's quarters. He, as you know, is the chief of the secret service. As such, he has charge of the agents abroad. I thought he might make you a proposition."

"There will be no harm if I am unable to accept, will there?" asked Hal.

"Not a bit," replied the German heartily.

"Then I'll go."

The next hour was spent in general conversation, after which Captain Rentzel arose to take his leave.

"I'm going to run off with one of your friends, Miss Schweiring," he said, indicating Hal.

The others laughed, "Oh, take him and show him about a bit, Frederick," laughed Mrs. Schweiring's husband. "Only be sure that you return him safely."

Hal followed the young captain from the house.

Half an hour later he found himself in the palatial office of the chief of the German secret service.

Hal looked carefully about the room. A long table stood in the center. This apparently was the personal property of General Rentzel. Great easy chairs were scattered about the room. There was a window at the south side, and back, in the center, against the wall, was a large safe.

"Pretty comfortable place," said Hal aloud.

"Rather," agreed the young German. "Father believes in making himself

comfortable."

General Rentzel had not arrived yet, but he put in an appearance a few moments later. He manifested no surprise at sight of his son, but he eyed Hal askance.

"I thought you young fellows had gone to look about the city," he said.

"No, sir," replied his son. "I invited. Herr Block here to see you, sir."

"You did? Why?"

The son explained as quickly as possible.

"Hm-m," muttered the general when his son had concluded, eying Hal sharply. "How do I know you are what you represent yourself to be, sir?" he demanded.

Hal smiled.

"I'm not applying for a job, sir," he replied. "I came here at your son's suggestion. He said you might have a proposition to make, and if I can be of service without taking too great risk, I am willing, sir."

Again the general meditated. At last he said:

"It's true that we have need of men for the work my son mentions. To my mind, your youth would be in favor, rather than against, the success of the undertaking. Would you be willing to go back to America?"

"Well, I don't care particularly about going right now," said Hal truthfully.

"But there is nothing to prevent your going?"

"Well, no. But I would know the nature of my work first. I would not like to become a spy, sir. It seems to me that spies are not made of manly caliber, sir."

"You are wrong," was the quiet response. "Why, I can show you the names of men whom you would not think of suspecting, and yet who are acting for the German government in America."

"Is that so, sir?"

"It is indeed. Wait." General Rentzel arose, approached the big safe in the rear of the room, unlocked it and took there from a small paper-bound book. He returned to his seat at the table.

"In this little book," he said, tapping the table gently with it, "are the names of our agents in America. See, I'll show you a name, of worldwide importance, who is acting for us."

General Rentzel exposed a name. Hal glanced at it and then gave a long whistle.

"It's no wonder you are surprised," said the general, smiling.

"Neither is it any wonder that our agents have been so successful in America, considering names like that."

"I should say not, sir," returned Hal grim.

General Rentzel returned the book to his safe, closed the heavy iron door and twirled the knob.

"What do you say, sir?" he demanded, as he resumed his seat.

For a moment Hal seemed to hesitate. Then he said:

"I accept on one condition, sir."

"And that?" asked the general.

"That," said Hal, "is that I may have the week in which to put my affairs in shape. I shall have to resign my position with my paper and attend to a few other matters, sir."

"Very good, sir. You need not call here again. It would be unwise. I shall see you at the Swiss ambassador's ball, which will be held four nights from tonight. There I will give you what passports you need and other instructions. Until then, sir, auf Wiedersehen."

Captain Rentzel accompanied Hal from his father's office.

"You are in luck," said that worthy, "and the pay is big. In a year or two you will be a wealthy man."

Hal thanked the captain, and made his way home alone.

As he moved up the steps he was startled to see a shadowy figure lurking in the doorway. His hand dropped to his pocket, and he advanced cautiously.

"Don't be afraid. Take your hand away from that revolver," came the voice of Gladys Schweiring.

"Miss Gladys!" exclaimed Hal in surprise. "What are you doing here? It is almost midnight."

"I was waiting for you," was the low response. "I was afraid something might have happened."

"It has," replied Hal, "but it is good news and not bad. Where is your mother?"

"In the drawing-room."

"Are the others there?"

"Just your friends. The guests have gone, and father has retired."

"Good. I have important information for them,"

Hal followed the young girl into the drawing room. Chester rose to his feet.

"By George! I'm glad to see you back safely," he said. "I was afraid something had happened."

Others echoed his words.

"Folks," said Hal, "I've news for you -- good news."

"What is it?" demanded Chester eagerly.

"Well," said Hal very quietly. "I've seen the list!"

CHAPTER VII

THE MINISTER'S BALL

It was a gay assemblage that thronged the home of the Swiss minister four nights after Hal's interview with the chief of the German secret service. Elegantly dressed women and well groomed and handsome officers danced and sang, and from the general tone of the evening it would have been hard to believe that Germany was engaged in a war that threatened her very existence.

Hal, Chester and McKenzie went to the ball accompanied by Mrs. Schweiring and her daughter. Mrs. Schweiring's husband announced that he would appear later, as he had matters of importance to transact at his office.

This was the night that Hal had decided upon to make an effort to get the list of names for which the three friends were risking so much. He had a well- conceived plan in mind. The details he had worked out in the days following his interview with the German chief of secret service and his preparations had been careful and thorough. Now he was anxious for action.

General Rentzel reached the ball late in the evening. He paid his respects to the Swiss minister and to the latter's wife. A few moments later he encountered Hal, and escorted the lad to a secluded nook, where he presented the lad with several documents.

"This," he said, indicating one, "is your passport into Switzerland. From there you will travel as a Swiss subject. You will present that paper," and he indicated a second, "to Herr Baumgartner in Washington. You will find him still at the Austrian embassy. He will give you other instructions. Also, you will receive your pay through him, and whatever other money is necessary."

Hal bowed.

"Very well, sir," he said.

"I don't know that there is anything further," said General Rentzel, "except to warn you that treachery means death."

"I am aware of that, sir," returned Hal quietly.

"Very good, then. Good luck to you."

The general moved away.

Hal sought Chester instantly, glancing at his watch as he passed along slowly and without apparent haste. It was 10:30 o'clock.

"It's time to get busy, Chester," he said quietly. "It's half-past ten, and I may require an hour and a half. You get word to Gladys and her mother to keep General Rentzel here under some pretext until midnight. I'm off."

"Am I not going with you?" demanded Chester.

"No," said Hal. "I don't have time to wait, and the message must be delivered to Mrs. Schweiring or her daughter at once. I'll pick McKenzie up on the way. Good-bye."

"Good luck," said Chester simply.

Hal left the room quietly. In the hall he found McKenzie, whom he motioned to follow him. McKenzie did so quietly.

Outside Hal found the automobile which had brought them to the ball. He leaped in and McKenzie followed. Hal gave quick directions to the chauffeur to drive them home. The latter asked no questions.

At the home of Mrs. Schweiring Hal ordered McKenzie to remain in the car while the lad hurried into the house. He returned a moment later, carrying a small grip. This he threw into the car and climbed in after it.

"We have important business with General Rentzel," he told the chauffeur. "You will drive us there and then return to the ball for your mistress."

The chauffeur asked no questions. There were so many queer things going on in Berlin that he was not even greatly interested.

General Rentzel's office was in darkness when the car pulled up before it. Motioning McKenzie to follow him, Hal hastened up the steps. The chauffeur, in accordance with Hal's instructions, immediately disappeared down the street with the car.

In the darkness of the vestibule, Hal tried the door.

"Locked," he said. "Lucky we came prepared."

He opened the little grip he carried.

Meanwhile, Chester had carried Hal's message to Gladys. The latter had repeated it to her mother, and these two now shadowed General Rentzel every place he moved, for they were fearful that he might decide at any moment to leave the house. Chester kept his eyes on all three.

Chester was plainly nervous. Had he been in the danger himself his nerves would have been as hard as steel, but the inaction while someone else was doing the work made him impatient and fanciful.

Finally General Rentzel approached the Swiss minister and paid his adieus. Then he moved toward the cloakroom.

Halfway there he was intercepted by Mrs. Schweiring and Gladys.

"You are not going so soon, your excellency?" questioned Mrs. Schweiring.

"I must," was the reply. "I have work to do at my office that will keep me until far into the night."

"I'm sorry," was the reply. "Have you seen my husband?"

"Why, no."

"I understood him to say that he had some business with you; perhaps I was mistaken, however."

Twice now the general had attempted to move on, but Mrs. Schweiring had prevented it. He tried again, and she asked:

"What time have you, your excellency?"

General Rentzel glanced at his watch.

"Half-past eleven," he said.

"Surely, it is not that late," said Mrs. Schweiring. "Why, we have only been here a short time."

"Madame," said General Rentzel at this juncture, "I must ask you to excuse me. I must be going."

There was no reply the other could make to this without laying herself open to suspicion. She stepped back, and the German secret service chief passed on.

Behind him the woman and her daughter wrung their hands. They had been unsuccessful. In their minds they could see General Rentzel bursting in upon Hal and McKenzie in the middle of their work.

"What are we going to do?" cried the mother.

"They must be warned!" cried the daughter.

"But how?"

"I will warn them myself. It is a long ways to the general's quarters. He will be in no hurry. I can get there ahead of him."

"But if you should be discovered?"

Gladys shrugged her shoulders and was gone before her mother could protest.

Outside she dashed up to the Schweiring automobile and cried to the chauffeur.

"To General Rentzel's quarters! Quick!"

The machine sprang forward with a lurch.

Two minutes later, Gladys, peering from the car, made out as they passed what she took to be General, Rentzel's machine. She urged the chauffeur on even faster.

Half a block from the general's quarters, she ordered her driver to stop and then to take up position down a side street, where it was dark, and wait for her. These instructions were obeyed without question.

Gladys hurried toward the house.

There was no light to be seen as she ascended the steps and laid a hand on the door knob. Nevertheless the girl moved silently, for she did not know what servants might be in the house.

The door opened without a sound. Gladys advanced into the darkness.

From time to time she stopped as she moved along, but she was so afraid that General Rentzel might arrive before she could warn Hal and McKenzie that she wasted little time.

She came to a door, which opened noiselessly. She peered into the darkness, and in what appeared to be another room she saw what looked like a star.

The girl breathed a cry of thankfulness. She knew that she had found what she sought. She moved forward more rapidly.

As she walked along toward the light, she suddenly tripped over an obstacle hidden by the mantle of darkness and fell to the floor.

There was a crash that resounded throughout the house.

CHAPTER VIII

HAL GETS THE LIST

When Hal and McKenzie stopped in the entrance way upon finding that the door was locked, Hal took from the little grip he carried a long skeleton key. This had been procured for him by Mrs. Schweiring, and Hal knew that it would unlock almost any door.

To gain entrance to the house, therefore, was but the matter of an instant.

From his grip again Hal produced a small flashlight, with which he lighted their way. Thanks to the lad's previous visit to the house, he knew right where he was going, so there was no time lost in search.

Straight to the large safe in the general's private office Hal led the way. There he passed the light to McKenzie and placed the grip on the floor.

"No chance it has been left unlocked, I guess," the lad muttered.
"However, I'll try it."

He shook the handle. The safe was locked.

"As I thought," said Hal. "Well, the rest will take time. Turn the light on the lock, McKenzie."

McKenzie obeyed.

From his grip Hal took an ordinary cake of soap. This he proceeded to rub around the lock and stuff into the cracks. This done to his satisfaction, he stepped back and surveyed his work.

"All right, I guess," he said. "I never tackled anything like this before, but I think I know how it's done."

The next article he produced from the grip was a small vial. One look told McKenzie what it was. It contained nitroglycerine. This Hal poured under the edge of the safe. Then he attached a fuse and lighted it. Immediately he threw a heavy blanket, which was the last article the grip contained, over the safe to muffle the sound of the explosion that would occur in a few moments.

"Get back in the corner and crouch down, McKenzie," said Hal, and did the same thing himself.

At that moment there was a crash in the adjoining room. Hal's revolver leaped out, as did McKenzie's, and both dashed into the room. McKenzie flashed the light across the floor, and there, just getting to her feet, was Gladys.

"Quick! You must fly!" she cried. "General Rentzel is on his way and will be here at any moment."

The fuse in the other room was burning fast, as Hal knew. The lad determined, in that instant, that he would not leave the house without getting the list for which he had come.

He pulled Gladys back into the room where the fuse was fast burning to the safe. McKenzie followed, and the three crouched down.

A moment and there was a muffled explosion, followed by a flash of fire. Smoke filled the room. With a cry to the others to stay where they were, Hal dashed to the safe. It was as he hoped. The door had been blown clear.

Quickly Hal explored the contents of the safe. Then he gave a cry of delight. His hand encountered what he felt sure was the book he sought. He ran across the room with it to where McKenzie held the flashlight and by its glow examined his prize.

It was the list he sought.

Hal hesitated one moment, and then he pressed the book into the hands of Gladys.

"Quick!" he said. "Out the window with you. Give this to Chester and

tell him to get out of Berlin at once. Tell him he will be followed but that he must get through."

"But you -" protested Gladys.

There came the sound of rapid footsteps in the next room. Hal picked Gladys up in his arms, carried her to the window, and dropped her to the ground as he said in a low voice:

"To hesitate means failure. Do as I say and quickly."

He returned to McKenzie's side. When he reached there McKenzie extinguished his light.

"Well, we've got the list," he said quietly.

"We have," Hal agreed, "but our lives probably will pay the forfeit. We must stay here until we are discovered. To follow Gladys would mean her capture."

"We won't have to wait long," said McKenzie grimly. "Here they come."

It was true.

Footsteps came toward them. Suddenly the room burst into light as someone pressed an electric light button. General Rentzel strode into the room.

His eyes fell upon Hal and McKenzie immediately. He said nothing, but gazed about. Then he saw the shattered safe. He dashed forward with a cry and examined the interior, carefully. Then his face turned white as he faced Hal.

"The list," he said in a hoarse voice, "where is it?"

Hal smiled.

"Where you will never get it, I hope," he replied quietly.

General Rentzel strode forward with a shout.

"They are spies! Seize them, men!" he cried.

Hal's right arm shot out and the chief of the German secret service sprawled on the floor.

"To the stairs!" Hal cried to McKenzie.

The Canadian needed no urging. Two German soldiers fell to the floor under his quick blows and then McKenzie joined Hal on the steps which fled upward from the rear of the room.

Hal produced a revolver. McKenzie did likewise.

"The first man who moves dies!" cried Hal, as he moved his revolver from side to side.

The men below, of whom there were perhaps a dozen, stood still. Apparently each was afraid to make the first move.

General Rentzel sat up and wiped his face with a handkerchief.

"Shoot them!" he cried.

From the rear of the crowd there was a flash of fire and a report. A bullet sped over Hal's head. McKenzie's revolver flashed and a German fell to rise no more.

At this moment McKenzie took command.

"Up the steps!" he cried.

Hal realized that to hesitate meant instant death. He was, perhaps, two steps above McKenzie, and he covered the rest in two leaps. There he stopped and covered the room. He was in position to protect McKenzie's retreat.

McKenzie also leaped to the top step, and there, for a moment, they were out of the line of fire. To reach them it was necessary for the Germans to stand directly in front of the steps, and there was no man below who felt called upon to face this certain death, in spite of the hoarse commands of General Rentzel.

But in a situation like this could not last long. Other officers and soldiers, aroused by the explosion appeared on the scene. Hal realized that their predicament was desperate. With a cry to McKenzie, Hal darted back along the hall, turned into the first room he saw, flung open the window and leaped to the ground.

McKenzie was close behind him.

Hal led the way along the street at a rapid walk, with McKenzie at his heels. The lad turned down several side streets, doubling occasionally on his tracks in an effort to throw off possible pursuers. As they drew farther away from the house where they had been discovered they encountered fewer and fewer people. Apparently the sound of the explosion had not reached here.

They were safe for the moment and Hal breathed easier.

"Hope Chester has a good start," he said to McKenzie in a low voice.

"He should have by this time," was the reply. "They figure, of course, that we have the list."

Hal would have replied, but as they passed a house at that moment a man stepped from the door. Hal uttered an exclamation of pure amazement.

The newcomer was dressed in costume that he had worn since the war began. He looked much as upon the night that Hal first saw him. He paid no attention to Hal and McKenzie at first, but Hal brought him about with a word.

"Stubbs!"

It was indeed the little war correspondent of whose presence in Germany Herr Block had told the three friends before they left Holland.

Stubbs wheeled sharply. He saw Hal and turned pale.

"Hello -- hello, Hal," he gasped. "Wh -- what are you doing here?"

"Is that your house?" demanded Hal, indicating the one from which Stubbs had just emerged.

"Yes; why?"

"Then we'll go in with you," said Hal quietly.

"But I don't want to go in," declared Stubbs.

"But we do," said Hal. "Meet my friend, McKenzie, Stubbs."

"I don't want to meet him," declared Stubbs. "I tell you I'm in danger here."

"So are we," said Hal. "That's the reason we're going to take advantage of your hospitality. Come on in, Stubbs. We've got to get out of this country."

"I'll never get out alive now that you've showed up," Stubbs mumbled.

But he led the way inside.

CHAPTER IX

STUBBS IS CRESTFALLEN

Inside, Stubbs struck a match.

"I say! Hold up, there!" Hal exclaimed, and grasped the hand that held the match and extinguished the flame. "We don't want any light in here," he added.

In vain Stubbs tried to pierce the darkness with his eyes to make out the lad's features.

"Humph!" muttered the little man. "What have you been up to now?"

"Stubbs," said Hal, "the whole of Germany will be scouring the city for us before long. We've got to get away from here."

"Well," said Stubbs, "the whole of Germany is already looking for me, but they haven't found me yet."

"What are they hunting you for?" demanded Hal. "Surely, you haven't harmed anyone."

"Maybe not; but they've discovered who I am."

"That you're an American war correspondent, eh?"

"Why, no," said Stubbs quietly, "they've discovered that I'm here at

command of the American state department searching for a certain list of names."

It was Hal's turn to be surprised and be started back.

"What's that?" he cried, believing that he could not have heard aright.

Stubbs repeated his statement.

"But I thought --" began Hal.

"And what business have you to think!" demanded Stubbs with sudden anger. "Haven't I the same, right as you to do something for my country?"

"Of course, Mr. Stubbs, and I think all more of you for it, but at the same time I never dreamed --"

"Of course you didn't. Neither did anyone else, which is the reason my services were accepted. That is, no one knew it outside of Germany, but they seem to have spotted me here soon enough."

"I see," said Hal. "Then you must have made an effort to get the list of German agents in the United States."

Stubbs gave an exclamation of amazement.

"Who said anything about spies?" he asked.

"Well, you didn't, to be sure," said Hal, "But as I happened to have the list in my hands a few moments ago, I didn't need to be told."

"You had it?" cried Stubbs, unconsciously raising his voice.

"Yes."

"Where is it now?" demanded Stubbs eagerly.

"Safe, I hope," replied Hal quietly, "but don't talk so loud, Stubbs. I sent the list to Chester by a trusted aide, and I have no doubt he is on his way out of the country with it now."

"How'd you get it?" inquired Stubbs.

Hal explained.

"By George!" said Stubbs. "You fellows have all the luck. I tried and failed."

"Maybe you didn't know where it was," said Hal.

"Didn't, eh? Say, let me ask you something. Didn't you think it was rather strange when you approached General Rentzel's place that there was no one around, eh?"

"Well, such a thought had occurred to me," Hal admitted, "but I supposed no one was on guard through overconfidence."

"Do you want me to tell you where the guards were?"

"Why, yes, if you know."

"Well, I know all right. They were chasing me around the highways and byways, if you want to know," Stubbs exploded. "They discovered me trying to get into the house and I ran for my life. Well, this beats the Dutch! I cleared the road for you and you grabbed the list!"

Stubbs became silent.

"At all events," said Hal, "we got the list -- and that is what counts, after all."

"True," said Stubbs, and extended a hand in the darkness, which Hal grasped warmly. "Well," he said, "we're all tarred with the same brush, and it will give these Huns great delight to stand us all up before a wall or with ropes around our necks in a bunch. The sooner we get back to our lines the better for all our families."

"But the question is, how?" said Hal quietly.

"I've got a big automobile waiting for me about a mile from here," said Stubbs. "If we can get into it we can go a long ways without interruption."

"They'll wire ahead," said Hal

"So they will," Stubbs agreed, but I've also got a pocket full of the prettiest passports and other credentials you ever saw. I didn't chop down my bridges behind me, as you seem to have done. Once in my car, as I say, and we'll move away from here."

"Then we may as well be moving," said McKenzie, who had not spoken until that moment.

"Right," Hal agreed. "But we must be careful. No telling how many Germans are nearby, scouring the streets for us. Lead the way, Stubbs."

"That's right," said Stubbs, "pick me for the easy work."

"I'll lead the way if the little man is afraid," growled McKenzie.

Stubbs whirled on him in the darkness.

"Look here!" he exclaimed, "I allow no man to talk to me like that. Understand?"

McKenzie was somewhat taken aback, but he growled again:

"Then lead on and don't talk so much."

Stubbs would have made " another angry retort, but Hal nudged him to move.

Muttering to himself, Stubbs led the way to the street again.

There was no one in sight as they emerged from the darkened house, and

they moved off down the street with rapid strides. Occasionally they saw passing civilians, with now and then an officer or trooper or so, but Berlin seemed to be sleeping securely in the knowledge that the enemy was far from its door.

Hal gazed at his watch by the glare of a street light. It was almost 4 o'clock.

"Two hours to daylight," he muttered. "We shall have to hurry."

Fifteen minutes later Stubbs slowed down.

"My automobile is in a small garage around the next corner," he said, and added significantly, "if nothing has happened to it."

"Let's get it then," said Hal. "We don't want to stand here."

Stubbs moved on again and Hal and McKenzie followed him closely.

There was no sign of a living person near the little garage. Stubbs approached and attempted to throw back the closed door. It would not budge.

"Let me try, Stubbs," said Hal, pushing forward.

He took from his pocket a short but well tempered piece of steel. He found that the door was held by a padlock. He inserted the piece of steel in the top, and, putting forth all his strength, broke the lock.

There was a sharp report as the lock fell to pieces.

"Quick, Stubbs!" Hal cried. "That noise will have aroused every sleepy policeman within a mile."

McKenzie lent a hand and the door was thrown back. Stubbs gave a gasp of relief. The automobile was there.

"You do the driving, Hal," cried Stubbs. "Pile in here, man," this to McKenzie. "She's all ready to start. Come on."

The others wasted no time in words. McKenzie scrambled in the back seat alongside Stubbs, while Hal sprang to the wheel. A moment later the automobile moved slowly from the garage.

As the big machine came clear into the street, a bright light suddenly flashed around the next corner and headed toward them. Hal knew in a moment what it was. It was a motorcycle, bearing a policeman. There was but one course to pursue, and Hal acted without hesitation. He threw the machine into high and it dashed directly toward the motorcycle.

The man saved his life by swerving swiftly to one side. His machine bumped the curb and threw the rider off. When he picked himself up the automobile bearing the three friends was turning a corner, apparently on one wheel for Hal had scarcely diminished the speed.

The German drew his revolver and fired a shot ill the air. He was sounding the alarm and summoning assistance at the same time.

Quickly he righted his motorcycle, mounted, and made off in pursuit of the high- powered automobile.

At the sound of the German's shot, Hal increased the speed of the automobile.

"McKenzie!" he cried.

McKenzie leaned forward so as to catch the words the lad shouted back to him.

"Get your guns ready!" cried Hal. "Don't let anyone come at us from the rear."

McKenzie understood. He repeated Hal's words to Stubbs, shouting to make himself heard.

"Can't anyone catch us from behind," Stubbs shouted back. "This car will outrun anything in Germany."

McKenzie made no reply, but looked to his guns. He knew that it was not pursuing automobiles that Hal was afraid of; but high-powered motorcycles in use in Germany would probably be able to overtake the car no matter what its speed.

So far, however, the road behind was clear.

CHAPTER X

TOWARD THE FRONTIER

Hal set his course by instinct and the glow of the disappearing moon, and a few moments after their swift departure, it seemed, they were beyond the city itself, headed straight for the Dutch frontier.

There was no pursuit, and Hal rightly judged the reason to be because he had thrown pursuers off the track by several sharp turns before leaving the city proper.

After an hour's riding, Hal made out specks ahead that he took to be automobiles. He increased the speed of the car slightly to make sure of this fact. The car driven by Hal was gaining, but so slightly as to be almost imperceptible.

"Those fellows are hitting up a pretty swift gait," the lad muttered. "I wonder why."

The sound of a shot was suddenly swept back to Hal's ear.

"Hello!" he muttered. "Trouble ahead."

He slowed down, for he had no mind to mix up with the Germans so long as it could be avoided. Suddenly the first automobile ahead came to a stop. The second did likewise. Hal shut off his searchlight and approached slowly in the darkness.

It became plain, as he drew closer, that the first automobile had been stopped by a pistol shot, which probably had punctured a rear tire.

There came more pistol shots and then silence. Hal brought his own machine to a dead stop.

A few moments later one of the automobiles ahead, as Hal could see by the position of its searchlight, began to turn in the road. Instantly Hal flashed his own light on and sent the car forward. This he did because he realized it would look suspicious should the flare of the other light show Hal's car standing still in the road.

The other car had now come about and approached Hal's machine.

McKenzie and Stubbs both had been watching the proceedings ahead with strained eyes. Now they were ready for Hal's words:

"Guns ready back there. We'll pass if they let us alone."

The cars came closer together. Suddenly Hal was struck with a thought that sent a chill down his spine. Suppose Chester was in that car! Maybe the pursuit he had witnessed was the pursuit of Chester.

The cars were almost together now. Instead of turning off to the right to allow the other to pass, as it seemed to have every intention of doing, Hal only swerved slightly. Then, before the other car could pass, he brought his own machine to a stop and sprang to the ground, revolver in hand. McKenzie was close behind him.

Only Stubbs remained in the automobile, and he, too, held a revolver ready for instant action.

A voice from the strange car hailed Hal.

"Why do you stop us like this?" it demanded.

"Want to see who you are," was the lad's reply. "A spy has escaped from Berlin, and I have orders to search all vehicles."

"You are mistaken," said the voice. "The spy has not escaped. We have him here."

"Good!" exclaimed Hal. "Nevertheless, I must satisfy myself that you are speaking the truth and are what you represent yourselves to be."

"Of course," returned the voice. "Approach."

Hal went forward slowly, gun in hand, as did McKenzie.

Hal now made out that there were four occupants of the car, besides the man at the wheel and a figure stretched out in the tonneau.

With his cap down over his eyes, he peered in. The men were in civilian garb and Hal knew, therefore, that they must be members of the secret service and not of the military. He knew, too, that they would consequently be that much harder to handle. Nevertheless, he determined upon a bold stroke.

"Hands up, all of you I" he cried in a stern voice.

His revolver covered the occupants in the front seat. McKenzie covered the rear.

"Here, what's the meaning of this?" exclaimed a man who seemed to be the leader. "You fool! Haven't you been convinced yet that we are what we say."

"Perfectly," returned Hal quietly. "That's why I must insist that you raise your hands. Instantly!" His voice hardened and his finger tightened on the trigger. "Shoot without hesitancy," he warned McKenzie.

McKenzie's lips were set in a determined line. It was plain that he would need no urging.

"Well," said one of the Germans, "it's my belief you are also spies."

"Hands up!" repeated Hal.

"If you must have it you must!" exclaimed the first German.

His hand flashed up and in it was a revolver.

McKenzie's revolver flashed. The German dropped back.

The man at the wheel released his hold on the steering apparatus and also reached for a gun. Hal dropped him without changing his position.

One of the Germans, before either Hal or McKenzie could stop him, hurled himself over the far side of the car. The other two raised their hands.

"That other fellow is probably bent on mischief," said Hal to himself, "but we'll have to take a chance. Cover 'em" he ordered McKenzie, "while I get their guns!"

Hal advanced to the side of the car and deprived the two Germans of their revolvers. Then he climbed in and motioned the Germans to get out. After that he bent over the still form in the bottom of the car. It was Chester.

"Keep those fellows covered, McKenzie," he warned. "Don't let them move. One of them may have the list."

The Germans made no move under the muzzle of McKenzie's gun, held in a steady hand.

Hal lifted Chester's head to his knee. As he did so there was a sharp report from nearby, quickly followed by a second, and Hal felt a slight pain in his left arm.

He dropped Chester's head and leaped to the ground.

"That's the man who escaped," he said. "I'll have to get him, McKenzie. You watch, these fellows closely."

"It's all right, Hal," came a voice from the lad's own car. "I got him!"

It was the voice of Stubbs, and the little man now came forward.

"I stayed behind to cover you fellows," he explained. "The man who jumped out of the car made a detour and came up to my car. From its protection he took a shot at you. He didn't see me in the darkness, though, and I beat him to it. He was so close I couldn't miss."

"Thanks, Stubbs," said Hal quietly. "Now you look in the car and see if you can't find some rope or blankets or something to tie these fellows with."

Stubbs returned shortly with several thin blankets, which Hal quickly fashioned into an improvised rope. The two prisoners were bound.

"Now search 'em for the list," said Hal.

The war correspondent did so. There was no list to be found.

"Search the one you just disposed of, Stubb," Hal ordered.

The little man obeyed, and a moment later gave an exclamation of triumph.

"Here it is," he cried.

"Good!" said Hal. "Now we'll lay these fellows where they can't move to give an alarm."

This, too, was but the work of a moment.

"Lend a hand, McKenzie," said Hal. "We'll move Chester into our own car and then move on. It is dangerous to remain here."

Chester was gently transferred from one car to the other and laid in the bottom.

"You fellows see if you can revive him as we go along," said Hal. "We have no time to waste."

He sprang again to the wheel, and the car moved on.

Daylight overtook the four friends as they sped along the country road. Occasionally other automobiles flashed by, but they were not molested.

Under the administering hands of Stubbs and McKenzie, signs of life soon became apparent in Chester's body. He moaned feebly once or twice, and then opened his eyes. For a moment he did not realize where he was, but with remembrance of the recent attack, he suddenly sat up and aimed a blow at Stubbs, in whose lap the lad's head had rested.

"I say! What's the meaning of this?" cried Stubbs. "What are you trying to hit me for?"

"Is that you, Stubbs?" asked Chester in a feeble voice.

"You bet it's me, and I'm going to spank you good if you don't keep quiet."

"How'd you get here?"

"That's a long story," replied Stubbs, "and we don't have time to tell it now."

"How do you feel, old man?" asked McKenzie.

"Great Scott! You here, too?" exclaimed Chester.

"Yes; and Hal is driving this car. You keep quiet now. We're in grave danger and you must get all the rest you can. We may have need of your services before long."

Chester's head dropped back and his eyes closed. He sat up abruptly again a moment later, however, and demanded sharply:

"Where's the list?"

"Safe," replied Stubbs quietly.

Chester sank back again with an exclamation of satisfaction.

CHAPTER XI

MCKENZIE IN ACTION

It was broad daylight now and Hal felt the necessity of traveling at a slower speed than he had through the darkness of the night. Accordingly he reduced the speed of the big car to not more than thirty-five miles an hour.

Stubbs leaned forward and called to Hal.

"How far do you suppose we are from the Dutch border?"

"Don't know," was the reply, "but it's a long ways. We're not more than 70 miles from Berlin."

Several times during the next few hours they were halted, but were permitted to pass on, after showing their passports. Apparently the Berlin authorities had not wired ahead, and Hal was unable to account for this satisfactorily.

"Something peculiar about it," he muttered, as he bent over the wheel.

For the next few hours the automobile proceeded on its way without interruption, save for a single stop to replenish gasoline and air.

It was well along toward evening when Stubbs announced that the Dutch frontier was only a few miles distant. Once over the line they would be comparatively safe.

A foreboding of trouble swept over Hal.

Chester had slept during most of the trip thus far. McKenzie had examined the lad carefully and discovered that he was suffering from a flesh wound in the left side. The Canadian had bound this up as well as he could as the automobile jostled along.

His experienced eye told him there was nothing dangerous about the wound. It was painful, of course, and Chester would naturally be stiff in body for some time; but, providing the wound was kept clean, there was no danger of infection.

Now, at Hal's injunction, Stubbs aroused Chester. The lad opened his eyes slowly.

"How do you feel, old man?" asked McKenzie.

Chester sat up and passed a hand across his forehead.

"I don't feel any too playful," he said with a wry smile. "Where are we, anyhow?"

"Getting pretty close to the Dutch border," returned McKenzie.

"What'd you want to wake me for?" Chester demanded of Stubbs.

"Believe me," said Stubbs, "I didn't want to wake you up. It's usually safer for all concerned when you and Hal are both asleep. I woke you up because Hal told me to."

"That's all right, then," said Chester. "But don't you try to rub it into me, Stubbs, just because I've got a bullet hole in me is no sign I'm a cripple, you know."

"Maybe not," said Stubbs. "Here, take this gun."

He passed a revolver to Chester.

"What's the idea?" demanded Chester, taking the revolver; "going to fight me a duel or something?"

"Don't be a fool," said Stubbs. "We're still in Germany, remember. You may need that gun before we get out."

"All right, Stubbs," returned Chester. "Thanks."

Ahead, Hal suddenly made out a large body of men in such position as to block the road. He slowed down the car, and, leaning back, addressed the others.

"If I'm not mistaken," he said quietly, pointing, "just beyond lies the Dutch border. Once across we are comparatively safe. At least the Germans will not dare to follow us on to neutral ground. At the same time, if we are apprehended by Dutch military authorities our mission will be a failure, because we shall be interned. What is your advice?"

"Get into Holland first and let matters take their course later," said Chester quietly.

"I agree with you," said McKenzie.

"And I," said Hal.

"Well," said Stubbs, "I don't. Not that it will make any difference, of course, because you will do as you wish anyhow."

"If you have any better plan, Stubbs," said Chester, "let's hear it."

"I don't have any plan," declared Stubbs, "but seems to me you could think of a better one. To rush through those fellows ahead means a fight, a that's why you decided on that plan. I'm against a fight at all hazards."

"So I perceive," said McKenzie dryly.

"Well; you stick along anyhow, Stubbs," said Chester.

"Oh, I'll stick," said Stubbs, "but I'm going to tell you right now I don't think I'm going to do you any good."

"Well, if we are decided," said Hal, "we might as well go on. We'll show our passports again and it may be we'll get through without question. However, something tells me we are going to have trouble, so get your guns ready."

"If you think we're going to have trouble, I'm absolutely positive of it," Stubbs mumbled to himself.

However, each looked to his weapons and made sure that they were in working order.

"One of us has got to get through," said Chester in a low voice. "Who has the list, Stubbs?"

"Hal," was the response.

"Then Hal must get through no matter what happens to the rest of us," said Chester quietly.

"Good lord!" said Stubbs. "Why didn't I keep that list!"

As the large automobile approached, several of the Germans ahead stepped directly into the road and one threw up a hand in a signal demanding a halt. Hal made out that at this point there were perhaps a dozen men, though to each side he saw countless other forms. These latter, however, appeared no wise interested in the automobile and its occupants, but went about their several duties.

Hal put on the brakes and the automobile came to a stop a few feet from the nearest German, who, it appeared, was a colonel of infantry.

The German, followed by his men, approached the car and surrounded it.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"Dutch war correspondents," replied Hal quietly.

"Your passports," demanded the German.

The four friends produced their passports and extended them to the officer. The latter scanned them hastily, then cried:

"As I thought. You are the men we want. Seize them!" This last command to his soldiers.

Instantly the dozen soldiers swooped toward the automobile, their rifles leveled. At the same moment Hal sent the large automobile forward with a jump.

The German rifles spat fire. Revolvers appeared simultaneously in the hands of Chester and McKenzie. Both sprang to their feet, and, each holding to a side of the machine, they returned the fire, as Hal bent over the wheel.

"Crack! Crack!"

Chester and McKenzie fired together.

In spite of the movement of the car their aim was true, and two German soldiers fell in their tracks. Stubbs still kept his seat.

The automobile, with its first lurch forward, had mowed down several of the enemy, and now dashed forward with a clear path to the Dutch border.

Behind, at command from the German officer, the troopers, still upon their feet, fell to their knees, and, taking deliberate aim at the rapidly moving car, fired.

There was an explosion from the automobile. The car jumped crazily. Chester, still standing, revolver in hand, was flung violently into his seat, but McKenzie was not so fortunate. He toppled from the car head foremost.

One of the German bullets had punctured a rear tire. Hal brought the machine to a stop.

"Out and run for it!" cried Hal, and suited the action to the word.

Chester clambered out with more difficulty, for the wound in his side still pained him. McKenzie, strange as it may seem, had not been badly hurt by his fall. He got to his feet, still clutching his revolver. As the Germans hurried toward him, he raised the automatic and opened fire.

The first German pitched headlong to earth, as did the second.

McKenzie gave ground slowly.

With a swift look he saw that Hal had almost reached the Dutch border, which he perceived was guarded by a squad of Dutch soldiers. Chester also was limping in that direction. Stubbs, in spite of his opposition to fighting, was lending the lad a helping hand.

"They'll make it, if I can hold these fellows a minute," muttered McKenzie.

He faced the foe again, and from a pocket brought forth a second automatic.

"Not for nothing was I called the best shot in the northwest," he said quietly.

Hal's idea in not waiting to assist in the flight of the others, McKenzie knew on the instant. The list they had risked so much to get must be taken from German territory at all hazards. McKenzie knew, too, that Chester and Stubbs were simply following instructions when they also fled. It was every man for himself. A German bullet whistled close to the Canadian.

"Well," he said quietly, "I'll get a few of you before you drop me."

He faced his foes unflinchingly.

CHAPTER XII

SAFE AT LAST

McKenzie's arms went up again -- not shoulder high -- just to his hips. For McKenzie, in his early days, had been reckoned in the Canadian northwest as the most deadly shot in the country. He fired from his hips and aimed by instinct and not by sight.

Each automatic flashed once and two more of the foe fell to the ground. McKenzie staggered a bit as a German bullet plowed into his shoulder. Then his revolvers spoke again.

As he fought, the Canadian gave ground slowly. He seemed to bear a charmed life. Two other bullets struck him -- one in the arm and the other in the thigh, but no one reached a vital spot.

Hal, Chester and Stubbs, in the meantime, had reached and crossed the Dutch border. There they were immediately taken in charge by order of the Dutch officer in command. Hal addressed the officer quickly.

"Can't you do something for my friend?" he demanded, pointing to where McKenzie was still battling against heavy odds.

The Dutch officer shook his head.

"I would if I could," he said, his face flushed.

"He is a brave man, and it is a pity for him to die thus. But Holland is neutral. To interfere might embroil us."

"But if I can show you how?" asked Hal eagerly.

"If you can show me how, yes!" exclaimed the Dutchman. "Talk quickly."

"We carry Dutch passports," said Hal quietly. "That should suffice. However, cannot you send your men forward under the pretext that the Dutch border at this point extends an additional one hundred yards?"

That will be enough."

"But --"

"Oh, I know it doesn't, but that will be up to others than you. It will be the subject of diplomatic negotiations. Will you?"

For a moment the Dutch officer hesitated. Then he commanded an officer who stood near him.

"Captain Hodden! You will move forward with your company and inform the foe that if he persists in firing on Dutch soil we shall be forced to return it!"

The Dutch captain seemed only glad for this excuse. He dashed away, and a moment later Dutch troops advanced onto German soil.

McKenzie, meanwhile, found that he had but two shots left in his weapons. He glanced backward, and as he did so the Dutch troops advanced.

"If I can reach them," the man thought.

He whirled, emptied his automatics into the face of his enemies, dashed the now useless weapons after the bullets, and took to his heels, zigzagging as he ran.

The bullets in his body impeded his progress, but he reached the advancing Dutch troops safely. There was a cry of anger from the German lines as McKenzie found shelter among the Dutch troops. The Germans halted, and an officer advanced.

"I must ask you to deliver that man to me," he said to Captain Hodden.

"I am sorry, but what you ask is impossible," was the reply. "This is Dutch territory, and you advance further at your peril."

"Dutch territory!" exclaimed the exasperated German. "You stand on German ground, and the man you are protecting is a spy. I demand his return."

"You won't get him," was the reply, "and I am instructed to inform you that the next German bullet that falls on Dutch ground will be considered a hostile act against a neutral nation. It will mean war!"

"I don't care what it means," shouted the German, now thoroughly aroused.

"Perhaps not," said Captain Hodden, "but your superiors may. I would advise you to order your men to fall back."

For a moment the German hesitated, and it appeared that he would risk a breach of neutrality to capture McKenzie. At last he turned away.

"Holland will rue this day!" he exclaimed, as he ordered his men to retire.

Captain Hodden now retreated to Dutch territory, where McKenzie was turned over to the Dutch colonel.

"Thanks for the reinforcements," he said quietly. "They would have done for me sure."

Hal, Chester and Stubbs crowded about and shook the Canadian by the hand. The colonel asked to see their passports, and the four friends produced their bogus documents.

"So you are Herr Block, eh?" he demanded, eyeing Hal closely.

Hal bowed, but did not reply.

"As it chances," said the Dutch officer sternly, "I happen to be the brother of Herr Block, so I know you are not he. You are under arrest, sir."

"For what?" demanded Hal.

"For traveling under false passports, sir. You friends are under arrest also. You shall be sent to Amsterdam under guard. And you told me you were Dutch subjects!"

"No I didn't," said Hal. "I told you we carried Dutch passports, and so we do."

"It amounts to the same thing. It seems I have broken Dutch neutrality to help a batch of spies. You are all under arrest."

He summoned Captain Hodden to take charge of the four friends.

"You will be responsible for them," Colonel Block said.

The captain saluted and marched his prisoners away. They were put in a tent some distance away and a guard stationed over them. They were not searched.

"Well," said Hal, "we're out of Germany, but, it seems to be a case of out of the frying-pan into the fire."

"They can't shoot us as spies," declared Stubbs. "Holland is not at war and we have not been active against her."

"No, but they can take this list away from me," said Hal, "and it has to go to Washington."

"Then we'll have to get out of here," said McKenzie.

"A nice job," declared Chester, "and two of us wounded. By the way, McKenzie, your wounds need attention. I'll call the Dutchman and have you fixed up."

He hailed the guard outside, who in turn passed the word for the captain. The latter appeared a short time later, and Chester explained what he wanted. The captain moved away and fifteen minutes later a Dutch physician entered the tent and dressed McKenzie's wounds.

"Well, that feels some better," said McKenzie with a laugh, as the surgeon departed. "I feel as good as new now."

The four were kept in the tent all night, and early the next morning were informed that they would be taken to Amsterdam at noon. The trip was made under heavy guard, and that evening the four friends found themselves secure in a military prison in the Dutch capital.

"We're safe enough here, that's certain," declared Stubbs.

"We're safe enough, if you mean we can't out," Hal agreed. "But in some way or other this list must be delivered to General Pershing."

"Show the way, and we'll do it," declared Chester.

As the friends discussed possible plans, a visitor was ushered in. This proved to be Herr Block, the man who had assisted them to get into Germany and who only a few moments before had learned of their arrest.

"It's too bad," he said. "So near and yet so far, as you Americans say, eh? Tell me, is there anything I can do for you."

"You might get us out of here," said Hal.

Herr Block smiled.

"Easily said, but not so easily done," he made answer. "However, I have no doubt it can be arranged."

"You do?" exclaimed the others. "How?"

"Well," said Herr Block, "you would be surprised if you realized the extent to which Holland's sympathies are with the Allies. Of course, it must not appear on the surface for it would mean war with Germany -- and we are not ready for war now. However, I shall see that the door to your cell is left open tonight. When your jailer comes with your meal he will drop his keys. You will rap him over the head with something, that it may not look as though he were implicated. Then walk out of the jail and come to my quarters. No one will molest you."

"By Jove," said Hal. "That's simple enough."

"Your meal will be brought in half an hour," he said. "I shall be waiting for you at eight. You know the way to my quarters?"

"You'd better give me the necessary directions," said Hal.

Herr Block did so and took his departure.

"It all sounds simple enough," said Stubbs, "but it doesn't sound good to me."

"Don't croak, Stubbs," said Chester; "you ought to be glad to get out of here."

"Oh, I'll be glad enough to get out, but it doesn't sound plausible."

"Truth is stranger than fiction, Stubbs," said Hal.

"It'll have to be this time to convince me," declared the war correspondent.

The four became silent, awaiting the arrival of the jailer.

CHAPTER XIII

THE RETURN

It was half-past seven when the jailer entered the cell in which the four friends were imprisoned. He carried a large tray, on which was loaded food. As he entered the cell, he dropped his heavy key ring. Hal pounced upon it.

The man's back was toward him. The lad raised the heavy ring, but he did not strike.

"Here, jailer," he said; "you've dropped your keys."

The jailer looked around. Hal hoped he would spring forward, that he might have an excuse for striking, but the man only said simply:

"You know what to do with them."

He turned his back again. For a moment Hal hesitated.

"Well," he said finally, "if it has to be done, the sooner the better."

He raised the heavy bunch of keys aloft again, and brought it down on the jailer's head. The man dropped to the floor and lay still. Hal threw the keys down beside him.

"Hope I didn't hurt him too much," he muttered. He turned to the others. "Now," he said, "shall we eat of this food or shall we leave at once?"

"Let's get out of here," said Stubbs. "We can eat any time. Something may turn up to defeat our plan."

But nothing did.

Hal led the way from the cell and along a long corridor. At the end were steps, which the friends mounted quietly. At the top they found it necessary to pass through what appeared to be the office of the superintendent, or whoever was in charge. Inside a man sat at a desk.

Hal hesitated a moment. He knew there was little prospect of all passing through without attracting the man's attention, and he had no means of knowing whether this man was a party to the plot or not.

However, the lad moved forward again, and the others followed without question.

The man at the desk shifted his position, and Hal stepped quickly toward him, his fist ready to strike. He caught low words:

"Hurry up and get out of here."

The lad's hand dropped to his side, and he made haste toward the door on the far side of the room. Through this all passed safely, and Hal stood before a door he felt sure led to the street. The door opened easily, and Hal, Chester, McKenzie and Stubbs passed out into the darkness.

Stubbs heaved a sigh of pure relief.

"Well, we did do it," he muttered. "I didn't believe it possible. Wish I had some of that grub now."

"Wouldn't be surprised if Herr Block could rustle us up something to eat," said McKenzie. "He seems to be a right resourceful sort of a customer."

Hal found Herr Block's quarters without difficulty. It appeared that Herr Block had anticipated that they would be hungry, for he had a tempting repast already spread when they arrived. To this the four friends did full justice, for they were, indeed, hungry.

"Now," said Herr Block when they had finished, "if you will tell me what success you had on your mission and how you managed I will appreciate it. After that, I will see you safely into your own lines. I have a large automobile waiting, and you may depart at any time; but I am greatly interested in your adventures."

Hal was nothing loath, and recounted the manner in which he and McKenzie had secured the list of coveted names.

"Now, Chester," he said when he had concluded, "it's your turn. You haven't told us yet how you left the house and how you chanced to be discovered."

"My adventures don't amount to much," replied Chester. "I left the ball with Mrs. Schweiring. We were somewhat alarmed at Gladys' disappearance, but there was nothing we could do but wait."

When Gladys came rushing into the room, she thrust the list into my hand, and told me what had happened, and that I must fly. I commandeered the Schweiring automobile, and took to the road. I don't know how the Germans got wind of my departure, but soon after I left the city I knew I was being followed.

"There was nothing I could do but try and outrun my pursuers, whoever they were. It soon became apparent, however, that this was impossible, because the pursuing machine was too high-powered. Nevertheless, I determined to go as far as possible and leave something to chance."

"My pursuers fired at me several times, but they didn't hit anything so far as I could discover. All of a sudden, however, my engine went dead. I yanked out my automatic, determined to give battle. I fired at a man who alighted from the pursuing car when it stopped, but I must have missed him. Before I could fire again a bullet hit me, and that's all I remember until I woke and learned that Hal, McKenzie and Stubbs had saved me."

"Well, you have all had an exciting time," declared Herr Block. "I wish that I could have been with you. However, this war is not over yet, and, personally, I do not believe that Holland will maintain her

neutrality to the end. In that case, I still may have opportunity of lending a hand."

"You have already lent a hand," declared Hal, "and you must know that when you lend a hand to the Allies you are also helping your own country, and, ultimately, the cause of the whole world."

"I believe that to be true," replied Herr Block quietly; "otherwise, I would not have raised a hand to help you. Germany must be crushed. There is no room for doubt on that score. If Germany wins, what nation in the whole world is safe?"

"True," said McKenzie. "It's too bad the world could not have realized that a long time ago. The war might have been over by this time."

"As it is," Herr Block agreed, "the war will not be over for years. But come, I am keeping you here idle when I know you are all anxious to be about your work."

He led the way to the street, where a large touring car awaited them.

"I'll drive you as far as the border myself," said the Dutchman.

The four friends climbed in, and the car dashed away in the darkness.

For perhaps four or five hours they rode along at a fair speed and soon, Hal knew, they would once more be within their own lines.

It was half-past four o'clock in the morning when Herr Block stopped the car and said:

"I'll leave you here. You must make the rest of the trip alone."

"Great Scott! You can't get out here in the middle of the wilderness," said Hal.

"Don't worry," laughed Herr Block. "I haven't far to go. If you'll look to the right there you will see the lights of a little town. I shall be able to get a conveyance there for my homeward journey. I brought you this way because it will save time and trouble."

He stepped from the car, then reached back and extended a hand to Hal, who had taken his place at the wheel.

"I'm awfully glad to have met you," he said quietly, "and I am glad to have been of assistance to you. I trust that we shall see more of each other at some future time."

"Thanks," said Hal, gripping the other's hands. "If it hadn't been for you our mission would have failed. We shall never forget it."

Herr Block shook hands with the others, and then disappeared in the darkness.

"A fine fellow," said Hal, as he sent the car forward.

"You bet," Chester agreed. "I hope we shall see him again."

Stubbs and McKenzie also had words of praise for the assistance given

them by Herr Block.

Dawn had streaked the eastern sky when the four friends made out the distant British lines. Chester gave a cheer, which was echoed by the others.

"At the journey's end," said Hal quietly.

As the automobile approached the British line, an officer, with several men, advanced with a command "Halt." Hal obeyed, and leaped lightly from the car.

He identified himself to the satisfaction of the British officer, and Hal swung the car sharply south, heading for the distant American sector of the battle front.

They were forced to go more slowly now, as the ground came to life with soldiers, so it was almost noon when they came in sight of that section of the field where the American troops were quartered.

Leaving McKenzie and Stubbs in the car, Hal and Chester made their way to the headquarters of General Pershing. They were admitted immediately.

"Back so soon?" exclaimed General Pershing, getting to his feet. "I was afraid --"

From his pocket Hal produced the list of German spies in America.

"Here, sir," he said quietly, "is the list."

General Pershing snatched it away from him and scanned it hastily. Then, turning to the lads, he said very quietly:

"You have done well, sirs. Your work shall be remembered. You will both kindly make me written reports of your mission."

He signified that the interview was at an end. Hal and Chester saluted, and left their commander's quarters.

CHAPTER XIV

A GLANCE AT THE WAR SITUATION

The apparent deadlock on the western front from the North Sea, through that narrow strip that remained of Belgium, Flanders and France almost to the borders of Alsace-Lorraine, had been maintained for so long now that the world was momentarily expecting word that would indicate the opening of what, it was expected, would be the greatest battle of the war since Verdun.

It was known that Germany, confident because of the disruption of the Russian armies, had drawn heavily upon her forces on the eastern front. The world waited for some announcement of where the Kaiser would strike next.

The blow was delivered in Italy. Field Marshal von Hindenburg, the greatest military genius the war had yet produced, left his command on the west front and hurried into Italy, succeeding General von Mackensen, who had been in command originally.

The Italian troops fought hard to maintain the ground they had won from the Austrians the spring and summer before; but in two days the Austrians, reinforced by German troops, and commanded by, German officers, had won back all they lost in two years of war and penetrated to the heart of Italy itself.

The world stood aghast at the mighty Teutonic offensive, before which the Italian troops, seasoned veterans that they were, were like chaff before the wind.

The Allies became alarmed.

Von Hindenburg's blow in Italy, if successful threatened to dispose of one country entirely, and would endanger the French and British troops from the rear. It was decided to reinforce the Italians with French and British troops.

At the same time, it became a part of the plan of the general staff to strike hard in Flanders and in the Cambrai sector, while the Germans were busily engaged elsewhere. It would, indeed, be an auspicious moment to strike.

Since the days when the Germans had been beaten back by the French at Verdun, Teuton offensives had been few and far between. It had been the Allies who had advanced after that, with the one exception of the Austro-German offensive being made in Italy. The ground that the British and French had won, now they held. From time to time they pushed their lines farther to the east, consolidated their positions and made ready to move forward again.

It was plainly apparent that success was crowning the efforts of the British and French on the western front. The Germans now and then launched heavy local attacks, but these apparently were more for the purpose of feeling out the strength of their opponents than with any idea of concerted advance.

British troops in Egypt were pushing on toward Jerusalem and it seemed that it was only the question of time until the Holy City would fall. Once Turkish rule there had been broken, it was a foregone conclusion that the Ottomans would never regain a foothold.

The thing of chief concern to the Allies was the internal conditions in Russia. Revolt had succeeded revolt in the land of the Muscovite, and, as rulers replaced rulers, it was hard to tell what the next day would bring forth.

Conditions had not reached such a pass, however, that the German general staff felt safe in releasing the bulk of its great army on the eastern front. Therefore, although it appeared that Russia was about to give up the fight, a million and a half of the Kaiser's best troops were held on the Russian front.

It was known to the Allied governments that German efforts were at the bottom of the Russian troubles, and the diplomatic corps had been hard at work trying to offset this. As time passed, however, it was realized that Russia's aid could no longer be counted upon.

With the entrance of the United States into the war, with the American nation's unlimited resources in men and money, the cause of the Allies took on a more roseate hue. True, it would require time to put the American fighting machine into shape to take the field, but once its energies had been turned to making war, even Germany knew that America would put her best foot foremost.

The latest British successes had been in the vicinity of Vimy Ridge, which position, believed by the Germans to be impregnable, had been carried by Canadian troops in a single attack. German counter-assaults in this sector had failed to dislodge them, and there they remained secure.

The Canadians had launched this attack in April soon after the United States had declared war on Germany. Now, in November, their lines still held despite the pounding of big German guns and infantry and cavalry assaults.

As the Germans continued to push forward in Italy, threatening the city of Venice -- called the most beautiful in the world -- General Sir Douglas Haig, the British commander-in-chief, prepared himself for a blow in Flanders, and also for a drive at Cambrai, one of the most important German military centers.

Preparations for this attack were made quietly, and without knowledge of the enemy; so, when the attack came, the Germans were taken absolutely by surprise, and only escaped annihilation by the masterful direction of Field Marshal von Hindenburg, who hurried from the Italian front in time to stem the tide.

American troops in France at this time numbered not more than 125,000 men -- these in addition to several detachments of engineers who had been sent in advance to take over French railroad operations in order to release the French for service on the fighting line. Many of the Americans who had fought with the Allies in the early days of the struggle, before Uncle Sam cast in his lot with them had returned to America and joined their own countrymen in the expectation that they would soon return to the front.

The American Army was being put in readiness as fast as possible, but it was known that months of intensive training would be necessary to fit it for its share of fighting at the front. Preparations were being rushed, however, to send the national guard units across. These would form the second contingent of Americans to reach France -- the first having been composed only of regulars.

American troops in France so far had seen little actual fighting. Their activities had been confined mostly to beating off trench raids and launching an occasional bomb attack on the German dugouts so close to them. Several Americans had been killed in one of these attacks -- forming the first United States casualty list. Others had been wounded, and some were missing, believed to be prisoners in the German lines.

Hal and Chester had been in the midst of the Canadian advance and capture of Vimy Ridge. Immediately after the battle they had left the fighting front and returned to America, where they spent several months training reserve officers at Fort Niagara. Because of excellent service there, they had been honored by being numbered among officers who went with the first expeditionary force under General Pershing.

Both lads had been among the American troops who beat off the German trench raid which accounted for the first United States casualties, and they had performed other services for General Pershing, as have already been recounted.

Americans though they were, each felt that he would rather be where action were swifter than lying idle in the trenches with their countrymen. It was hard telling how long it would be before the British and French general staffs would consider the American troops sufficiently seasoned to take over a complete sector of the battle line, and for that reason, the "Sammies," as they were affectionately called at home, were unlikely to see any real fighting for some time.

In fact, it developed that when General Haig finally launched his drive, only British, Irish, Welsh and Scots were used. The Americans had no hand in the fighting.

Hal and Chester, after reporting to General Pershing following their return from the German lines, returned to the automobile where they had left McKenzie and Stubbs.

"There are no orders for us," said Hal, "so we may as well hunt our quarters and get a little rest."

Upon inquiry they learned that their own company, in the trenches when they left, had been moved back to make place for another contingent. This was in line with the policy of seasoning the American troops. Their own company, therefore, they found somewhat removed from the danger zone.

"Of course, it's better to be in the trenches, where there is a chance of action," Chester said, "but when a fellow needs sleep, as I do, I guess it's just as well that we're back here."

"Right you are, Chester," said Stubbs, "and if you have no objections I'll bunk along with you boys."

"Help yourself, Stubbs," laughed Chester. "Guess we can make room for you."

"It's daylight yet," said Stubbs, "but I'm going to bed just the same. Lead the way, Chester."

Chester needed no urging, for he could scarcely keep his eyes open. McKenzie hunted his own quarters, and soon was fast asleep.

Hal and Chester also soon were in slumberland, and Stubbs' loud snoring proclaimed that the little man's troubles were over for the moment at least.

CHAPTER XV

THE EVE OF BATTLE

"Good news, Chester."

"That so? What is it?"

Hal glanced about him. There was no one near. "Little work for us to do," he said quietly.

"What kind of work?"

Hal did not reply directly to this question.

"How's your side?" he demanded.

"All right. Why?"

"Wound hurt you much?"

"No. Hardly know it's there. But what's all this about, anyhow?"

"Well," said Hal, "there is about to be a battle."

"That so? Good. How do you know?"

"General Pershing just told me. That's why I want to know how your side is. We've orders to report to General Haig in person."

"Oh," said Chester, somewhat disappointed, "I thought you meant the American troops were going to get into action."

"Well, they may get into action, too. I don't know. But this, to my mind, is the biggest undertaking since the Somme."

"Sounds good," said Chester, greatly interested. "Let's hear more about it."

"I don't know much more about it. I was summoned to General Pershing's tent, and he gave me a message to carry to General Haig. Told me to have you report to General Haig also if your wound had healed sufficiently."

"It's healed sufficiently for that," Chester interrupted.

"That's what I thought you'd say, no matter how badly it might pain you. Anyhow, General Pershing said we might be in time to see some action."

"Did he indicate the nature of it?"

"No, but I drew my own conclusions. I'll tell you why. Remember those tanks we had here experimenting with?"

"You mean the armored tractors -- those things that climb fences, trenches, and things like that?"

"Yes."

"Sure I remember them. Why?"

"Well, they're all gone -- been ordered back to the British lines. Therefore, something is going on."

"Oh, pshaw!" said Chester. "That may mean only a local attack some place. I thought you knew something."

"Wait a minute now. I know more than you think."

"Well, let's hear it then."

"Infantry and cavalry are being massed in the sector that would lead to Cambrai, if a drive were successful."

"You're sure of that?"

"Perfectly. I have it from Captain O'Neill, who knows what he's talking about."

"That may mean something," Chester agreed, nodding his head.

"May mean something? Of course it means something. Besides, our aeroplanes are more active than usual, probably to keep the enemy back so they can't anticipate the attack."

"The Germans will suspect something then," declared Chester.

"Maybe. But there is something in the air. You can bank on that."

"Well, I hope so," declared Chester. "We haven't had any real fighting for a long while now."

"Don't forget you've a bullet hole in you still," smiled Hal. "You're not as good as new, you know."

"I can still answer for a couple of Germans," replied Chester with a smile.

"I guess you're right. But come, we must be moving."

The two lads left their quarters and sought their horses. As they mounted Stubbs approached.

"Where to?" he demanded.

"We've a mission to General Haig," said Hal. "Why?"

"Wait till I get a horse and I'll go along," said Stubbs.

He hurried away.

"I don't know whether he should go with us or not," muttered Hal.

"If you think that, let's don't wait for him," returned Chester.

"Good idea," Hal agreed, and put spurs to his horse.

Chester followed suit.

For ten minutes they rode rapidly, and then Hal slowed down.

"Guess we've lost him, all right," he said.

But they hadn't. A short time later Hal, glancing over his shoulder, made out the form of a solitary horseman hurrying after them. The rider made gestures as Hal looked, and the lad perceived that the man, whoever he might be, desired them to wait. Therefore, having forgotten all about Stubbs, the lad reined in. Chester did likewise.

"Hello," said Chester, as the rider drew closer. "It's Stubbs."

"Tough," Hal commented. "I had forgotten about him. However, we don't want to hurt his feelings. He's seen us now, so there is no use running."

They sat quietly until Stubbs drew up alongside.

"What's the idea of running away from me?" the little man wanted to know.

"Running away, Mr. Stubbs?" questioned Chester. "Surely you must be mistaken. Why should we run away from you?"

"That's what I would like to know," declared Stubbs. "Didn't I tell you to wait for me?"

"Did you, Stubbs?" This from Hal.

"Did I? You know deuced well I did. You're not deaf, are you?"

"Well, no," said Hal, "but your memory, Mr. Stubbs, how is that?"

Stubbs glared at the lad angrily.

"There is nothing the matter with my memory," he said, "as you'll find, if you ever have occasion to need me."

"Come now, Stubbs," said Chester. "You do us both an injustice. You must explain yourself."

"Great Scott!" Stubbs burst out. "Explain, must I? What do you mean, I must explain?"

"Hold up a minute, now, Stubbs," said Hal. "You're all tangled up here. You've forgotten what you are talking about."

"Tangled? Forgot?" sputtered Stubbs. "What do you think I am, a fool?"

"Well, I didn't say so, did I Mr. Stubbs?" Hal wanted to know.

"That means you do, eh?" grumbled Stubbs.

"Well, all right, think what you please. What I asked you was this:

Why did you run away from me?"

"What makes you think we ran away, Stubbs?" asked Chester.

"What makes me think it? Why shouldn't I think it, I ask you? Why shouldn't I think it? I ask you to wait till I get a horse, and when I come back, you're gone."

"Maybe we didn't hear you, Mr. Stubbs," put in Hal.

"And maybe you did," exploded Stubbs. "Now, if you don't want my company, all you've got to do is to say so."

"Stubbs," said Chester, "you know we'd rather have your company than that of - of -- of, well, say three wildcats."

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughed Hal.

"Think you're funny, don't you?" said Stubbs, gazing at Chester with a scowl.

"Not so funny as you and the wildcats, Stubbs." laughed Chester.

Stubbs wheeled his horse about.

"I can see I'm not wanted here," he said with dignity. "Therefore, I shall not bother you."

He rode back the way he had come.

"It's too bad," said Hal. "We've offended him and he's awfully angry. He raised his voice and shouted: "Hey, Stubbs! Come back here."

Stubbs did not deign to turn his head.

"He's mad all right," Chester agreed. "But hell get over it. Besides, it's just as well. We should not take him with us."

"You're right, Chester. Come, we have no time to waste."

The lads again put spurs to their horses and galloped rapidly along.

It was late afternoon when they rode up to General Haig's tent, and announced their errand. They were admitted to the general's quarters immediately, and Hal presented his message.

"General Pershing informs me," said General Haig at length, "that if I have need of you, I may use you."

The lads bowed.

"As it happens," said General Haig, "I do have need of you at this moment. You have, perhaps, surmised that we are about to strike?"

Again the lads bowed.

"Good. This attack will be made with the third army, under command of Sir Julian Byng. I have dispatches for you to carry to him. Also, you

will attach yourselves to his staff during the engagement. I will write him to that effect."

General Haig scribbled hastily, and then passed several documents to Hal.

"Deliver these immediately," said the British commander.

Hal and Chester saluted, left the tent, mounted their horses, and dashed rapidly away.

They reported to General Sir Julian Byng at 6 o'clock.

CHAPTER XVI

THE ADVANCE

The advance of the British troops under Sir Julian Byng, who was to win in this engagement the sobriquet of "Bingo" Byng, marked a departure from rules of warfare as it had been conducted up to date in the greatest of all conflicts. Heretofore, heavy cannonading had always preceded an advance in force. Heavy curtains of smoke from the great guns had been flung over the enemy's lines to mask the movements of the attackers.

While this smoke curtain had protected, to some extent, the movements of the assaulting party, it also had the effect of "tipping off" the foe that an attack was about to be launched. Now the British were about to advance without the protection of the smoke screens.

But General Byng's army moved forward in the wake of even a more formidable protection than smoke.

British "tanks," armored tractors, showed the way.

General Byng's attack covered the whole length of what had become known as the redoubtable and supposedly impregnable "Hindenburg line," so called because it had been established by that greatest of all German military geniuses, Field Marshal von Hindenburg. From Drocourt, just to the northwest of Douai, the line stretched for forty miles in a fairly straight line down through Vitryen-Artois, Villiers, Cagnocourt to Queant and Pronville, thence on to Boursies, Havrincourt, Gour Zeacourt, Epehy and St. Quentin.

The first, or upper section of this line -- from Drocourt to Queant -- was called the Wotan line. The lower section had become known as the Siegfried line. Both together formed the general scheme of the Hindenburg front.

It was along this line, then, that the British struck on the morning of Nov. 20, 1917. The drive had for its chief objective the capture, or possible isolation, of Cambrai, one of the most important positions in this sector in German hands. Cambrai was a railroad center in those days, a terminus from which the German general staff supplied various points of the long line with munitions, food and men, the latter when

required.

The capture of Cambrai, it was apparent, would mean the ultimate fall of St. Quentin and Lille, both points of strategic advantage.

General Byng ordered his third army forward shortly before daylight so that when the moment came for the first blow his men would have daylight with which to go about their work.

As has been said, there was no preliminary bombardment of the enemy's positions sufficiently in advance to give the enemy time to prepare his resisting measures. Instead of the uprooting barrage, British tanks cleared the path for the infantry, and what few cavalry was used in the attack. Thus the enemy was given no warning.

The attack was a complete surprise -- and a surprise attack in this great war had been called well nigh impossible. Even the German air service was fooled. As a result of its inability to anticipate General Byng's movements, the German fighting machine naturally lost some of its efficiency.

As dawn broke, the British tanks bore down on the foe steadily and without the appearance of undue haste; in fact, the tanks could not have made haste had such been General Byng's plan. Formidable instruments of warfare that they are, they do not number speed among their many accomplishments.

Hundreds of these tanks, bearing every resemblance to mythical monsters of a prehistoric day, crawled across the ground that separated the opposing armies. What must have been the surprise of the German general staff when the break of day showed these monsters so near?

Having had no warning of the impending attack, the enemy naturally was taken at a disadvantage. The warning of the advance was flashed along the German first-line defenses the moment daylight disclosed the hundreds of tanks advancing to the fray. The second-line defenses were made ready to withstand an attack should the first line be beaten back, and, although it was not within the comprehension of German leaders that it could be possible, the third-line defenses also were made ready to repel the invaders.

Between the German first-line trenches and the British front at this point the distance was something under half a mile. Between the various German lines of defense, the distance was almost an even mile. As the British tanks advanced across the open ground, smashing down barbed-wire entanglement and crawling in and out of shell craters as though they did not exist, defenders sprang to their positions. Rapid-firers opened upon the British from every conceivable angle; but the shells dropped harmlessly from the sides of the armored tanks. The tanks just seemed to shake their heads and passed on.

Behind the tanks the infantry advanced slowly, flanked here and there by squadrons of cavalry, the horses of which could hardly be held back, so anxious did they seem to get at the foe.

The British tanks spat fire from the rapid-fire guns that formed their armament. Streams of bullets flew into the German lines, dealing death and destruction.

From the rear the great British guns dropped high explosive shells in the German trenches.

The German first-line defenses, prepared with days of hard labor, and formed of deep ditches, of concrete and pure earth, offered no difficulties to the British tanks. Straight up to these emplacements they crawled, shoved their noses into the walls, and uprooted them; then crawled calmly over the debris.

Into the gaps thus opened, the British infantry poured, while cavalymen jumped their horses across the gaps and fell upon the foe with sword and lance.

The Germans fought bravely, but they were so bewildered by this innovation in the art of warfare that their lines had lost their cohesion long before the tanks plowed into them, and they scattered as the British "Tommies" dashed forward, after one withering volley, with the cold steel of the bayonet.

Here and there small groups collected and offered desperate resistance, but their efforts to stem the tide of advancing British were in vain.

An hour after daylight first-line defenses of the entire Hindenburg line were in the hands of the British.

But General "Bingo" Byng was not content to rest on these laurels. He ordered his left wing -- those of his troops who had advanced against the Wotan line -- to advance farther, and also threw his center into the conflict again. Troops opposed to the Siegfried line he held in reserve, that he might strike a blow in that sector of the field should his main attack fail.

Again the British on left and center dashed to the attack. Again the tanks plowed over the uneven ground, and advanced against a second apparently impregnable barrier. Flushed with victory, the British "Tommies" cheered to the echo, as they moved forward gaily.

Many a man fell with a song on his lips, as he stumbled across the shell craters that made walking so difficult, for the Germans from their second-line defenses poured in a terrible fire, but the others pressed on as though nothing had happened. There was no time to pause and give succor to a wounded comrade, the command had been to advance. Besides, the Red Cross nurses and the ambulance drivers would be along presently to take care of those who could no longer take care of themselves. It was hard, many a man told himself, but he realized that the first duty was to drive back the foe.

Shell after shell struck the British tanks as they waddled across the rough ground. One, suddenly, blew into a million pieces. An explosive had struck a vital spot. For the most part, however, the shells fell from the armored sides like drops of water from a roof.

German troops lined the second-line defenses and poured a hail of bullets into the advancing British. It was no use. The British refused to be stopped.

Straight to the trenches the tanks led the way, and nosed into them. Down went emplacements that the Germans had spent days in making secure. The tanks rooted them up like a steam shovel. Men fled to

right and left, and there, at command from their officers, paused long enough to pour volleys of rifle fire into the Britons, as they swarmed into the trenches in the wake of the tanks.

From the second-line defenses the tanks led the way to the third line, where they met with the same success. This, however, took longer, and when the British found themselves in possession of these, with Cambrai, the immediate objective, less than four miles away. General Byng called a halt. He felt that his men had done enough for one day. There would be a renewed attack on the morrow, but now he realized that the most important thing was to straighten out his lines, consolidate them against a possible counter-assault, and work out his plan of attack for the following day.

Therefore, the "Tommies" made themselves as comfortable as possible in their newly won positions. Prisoners were hurried to the rear, and captured guns were swiftly swung into position to be used against their erstwhile owners should they return to the fight.

In these positions the British third army spent the night.

CHAPTER XVII

THE ADVANCE CONTINUES

The British losses had been heavy, as was only natural in view of the nature of the work they had accomplished. But the German casualties had been tremendously greater. This, no doubt, was because of the fact that the German general staff had been taken by surprise and had had no time to prepare against the attack.

The British, according to the report of General Byng, on the first day's offensive, had captured in the neighborhood of 5,000 prisoners. Of artillery and munitions, great stores had fallen into the hands of the victors.

It was a great day for Old England and all her Allies. The victory was the greatest achieved by the Allies since the Battle of the Marne.

Cambrai was almost in the hands of the British. The importance of the victory could not be estimated at that time, but every soldier knew that if the enemy could be driven from Cambrai it would necessitate a realignment of the whole German defensive system in Flanders and along the entire battle front. With the victory the British menaced the main German line of communications -- Douai, Cambrai and St. Quentin.

Around Lavasquere, formidable defenses, known as Welsh Ridge and Coutilet Wood, had been, captured. Flesquies had been invested and the Grand Ravine crossed. Havrincourt was in British hands.

Trench systems north of Havrincourt and north of the west bank of the Canal du Nord also had been captured. The Masnieres Canal was crossed, and the British had stormed and captured Marcoing Neufwood. East of the Canal du Nord, the villages of Graincourt and Anneux were now in possession of General Byng's men; while west of the canal the whole

line north to the Bapaume-Cambrai road was stormed. Bonaires hamlet and Lateau Wood had been captured after stiff fighting.

East of Epehy, between Bullecourt and Fontaine les Croisilles, important positions also had been captured by the gallant "Tommies."

"The enemy was completely surprised."

This was the laconic message sent to Field Marshal Haig by the man who had led the British to victory, as he rested until the morrow. Along the entire forty-mile line the attack had been successful.

There were no American troops in General Byng's drive. The forces were composed solely of English, Scots, Irish and Welsh -- a combination that more than once before in this war had proved too much for the Germans to combat successfully.

It was a happy army that slept on reconquered territory on the night of November 20, 1917. Men talked of nothing but the most glorious victory since the Marne. They knew that the offensive in all likelihood would be resumed the following morning, and most of the troops turned in early that they might be fit on the morrow to make the foe hunt a new "hole." There was no doubt in the breasts of the "Tommies" that the following day would take them nearer to Cambrai and, consequently, Berlin.

Hal and Chester had had no active part in the first day's fighting. They had stuck close to headquarters of General Byng, and several times, while the fighting was at its height and the general was short of aides, each of the lads had carried messages for him. Both chaffed somewhat because of the fact that they were not in the midst of the fighting, but they bided their time, confident that they, at length, would get a chance for action.

They had followed the advance of the British troops with admiring eyes. It was, indeed, an imposing spectacle.

"Wonder if our Canadian friends are in this attack?" asked Chester.

"I don't believe so," declared Hal. "I suppose they are still at Vimy Ridge. They're still needed there, you know."

"That's so, but they would be good men to have around at a time like this."

"These fellows seem to be doing fairly well, if you ask me," said Hal dryly.

Then the conversation languished, as the lads looked toward the fighting front.

As it developed, Hal and Chester soon were to see their Canadian friends again. During the night several divisions of Canadians were hurried to General Byng's support that he might have fresh blood in his ranks when he renewed his attack against the Hindenburg defenses. And, as it chanced, the commander of one of these divisions was the lad's old friend, Colonel Adamson-general now, however.

Hal and Chester were standing close to General Byng when announcement

of the arrival of the Canadians was brought to him. All of the general's aides were busy. He espied Hal and called to him.

"You will carry my compliments to General Adamson," he said, "and tell him to go into camp for the night. Instructions will be sent him before morning."

Hal saluted, mounted his horse, and dashed away.

General Byng summoned Chester to his side.

"Come with me," he said.

He led the way into a tent that had been erected hastily, and which served him as field headquarters. There the general scribbled hastily for some minutes, then passed a piece of paper to Chester.

"You will ride after your friend," he said, "and present this to General Adamson. Then you had better turn in for the night. You may stay with General Adamson's command and lend what assistance there you can."

Chester was soon speeding after Hal.

General Adamson recognized Hal instantly when the lad reported to him, and professed pleasure at seeing him again. He also saluted Chester, when the latter arrived a short time later.

"And so you are going to stay with me, eh?" he said. "Well, I have no doubt I shall be able to make use of you. However, you'd better turn in now. I suppose we'll be at it bright and early in the morning."

General Adamson proved a good prophet.

Hal and Chester met several men whom they had known when they were with the Canadian troops at the capture of Vimy Ridge, and these expressed delight at seeing the lads again. A young officer invited the lads to spend the night in his quarters, and they accepted gratefully.

They followed General Adamson's injunction and turned in early. They were very tired, and they were asleep the moment they hit their cots.

It seemed to Hal that he had just closed his eyes when he was aroused by the sound of a bugle. It was the call to arms, and the lad sprang to his feet and threw on his clothes. Chester also was on his feet, and the two lads dashed from the tent together.

They made their way to General Adamson's quarters, where they stood and awaited whatever commands, he might give them.

The Canadian troops were all under arms. Each and every man was eager for the fray. They had not been in the battle the previous day, but they had heard full accounts of British success and they were determined to give a good account of themselves when the time came.

And the time came soon.

It was just growing light when the British army launched the second day's drive.

Along the whole forty-mile line the troops under General Byng advanced simultaneously. This time, however, the Germans were not caught napping. They anticipated the second attack by the British, and a terrific hail of shells and bullets greeted the Allied troops, as they moved across the open ground.

But these men were not raw troops. Hardly a man who could not be called a veteran. They advanced as calmly under fire as though on parade. Men went down swiftly in some parts of the field, but as fast as one dropped, his place was instantly filled. The lines were not allowed to break or be thrown into confusion.

The Canadian troops advanced calmly and with a sprightliness that seemed strange for men used to the grim work of war. There was something in their carriage that told their officers that they would give a good account of themselves this day.

General Adamson eyed his men with pride, as they moved off in the semi-light. He dispatched Hal with a command to Colonel Brown, commander of one regiment, and Chester to Colonel Loving, commander of another. As it chanced, these two regiments were marching together, so the two lads once more found themselves together in the midst of an advancing army.

Their messages delivered, they did not return to General Adamson, and without even asking permission of their superiors, ranged themselves behind. Colonel Loving, and pressed forward with the troops.

Colonel Loving and Colonel Brown, besides Hal and Chester, were the only mounted men with the Canadian advance. Ten minutes after the lads had gone forward, Colonel Loving dismounted and turned his horse over to one of his men, who led it toward the rear. Colonel Brown followed suit. Hal and Chester did likewise.

"Good idea," commented Chester. "We make too good targets there."

Hal nodded, and looked toward the front.

The British tanks again led the way. Bullets whistled over the heads of the Canadians. Hal saw that the first-line German defenses were less than 200 yards away.

"Good," he told himself. "Now for the battle."

The first British tank nosed into the German trench.

CHAPTER XVIII

TANK FIGHTING

The early stages of the morning fighting were repetitions of the first day's advance. Success perched upon British standards from the first. Try as they would, the Germans were unable to hurl back the British infantry, which advanced steadily under the protecting wings of

countless armored tanks.

Every now and then one of these terrible instruments of warfare burst to pieces, killing its crew, as a German shell struck in a vital spot, but, for the most part, they advanced unharmed.

Over the German trenches they plowed their path, as though there was nothing in the way to bar their progress. Walls, earth, and human bodies were crushed beneath them, and they passed on as though nothing had happened. In vain the Germans charged straight up to their sides. There was nothing they could do when they reached the monsters, except to fire ineffectual rifle shots in an effort to penetrate the apertures and reach the gunners, or to hurl hand grenades, which had no effect.

Each time the enemy charged it was never to return. While they wasted their energies attempting to put the tanks out of commission, British infantry mowed them down with, rifle fire. At length these attempts were given up.

The Germans, after an hour's desperate fighting, deserted their first-line trenches, and sought the shelter of the second; from these they were driven to the third.

Hal and Chester found themselves in the midst of the fighting, alongside the heroic Canadians of Vimy Ridge fame. The part of the field in which they found themselves was to the extreme north of the Hindenburg line, almost opposite Douai.

Time after time the Canadians drove the foe back at the point of the bayonet. The Canadians, it appeared soon after noon, had been the most successful of the entire British army. They had pushed their lines almost to Douai. To the south, General Byng's forces had not advanced quite so far.

Suddenly there was an explosion inside a tank scarcely a hundred feet from Hal and Chester. Great clouds of earth ascended into the air. The tank stopped stock still. Apparently it was undamaged, but it proceeded no further. A moment later, the armored door swung open, and the half-dozen men who composed its crew got out.

"Something the matter with the engine," one said in reply to a question by a Canadian officer.

Members of the tank's crew secured rifles and joined the advancing infantry. Hal pressed close to Chester.

"I've a hunch I can fix that thing so it will run," he shouted to make himself heard above the din of battle.

"Let's have a try," Chester shouted back.

The boys left their places in the line, and approached the tank. Hal climbed inside first. Chester followed him.

He bent down and tinkered with the engine. It was not the first time the lads had been inside a tank, so they were fairly familiar with the mechanism.

After some tinkering, Hal gave an exclamation of satisfaction.

"She'll go now," he cried.

He opened the throttle, and the machine moved forward. Hal brought it to a stop almost immediately.

"We can't man all these guns," he cried. "We must have a crew."

Chester alighted and approached a captain of infantry who was passing at that moment.

"We want a crew for this tank!" he exclaimed. "Can you give me four men?"

"Take your pick," the captain called back.

Chester motioned four stalwart Canadians to follow him. They entered the tank not without some foreboding, for it developed that none had been mixed up in such warfare before. But they were not afraid and took the places Hal assigned them.

"You can handle these guns, can you?" Hal shouted.

The men nodded affirmatively.

"All right. Take your places. Looks like there is ammunition enough there for a week. Ready?"

"Ready, sir," one of the men answered.

Chester made the door secure, and Hal now moved the tank forward.

Straight over the German trench plunged the car tilting first to the right and then to the left, as one side or the other sunk into a deep hole. But, although it jostled the crew considerably, it did not roll over, as it seemed in imminent danger of doing.

The other tanks had gone forward some time before; so had the mass of the infantry. Hal's tank now lumbered forward in an effort to overtake the others. It moved swiftly enough to push ahead of the soldiers afoot, and gradually it overtook the others, which went more slowly in order that the infantry might keep pace with them. At last the lads found themselves on even terms with the most advanced tank.

Perhaps a dozen of these monsters, pressing close together, now made a concerted attack on the second-line German trenches. Down went barbed-wire entanglements directly in front of the trenches. There was a loud crash as the tanks pushed their noses into the trench itself, and threw out rocks, boards, and earth in shattered fragments. The troops poured into the trenches behind them.

Half an hour's desperate fighting in the trenches and the Germans fled. As the tanks would have pushed along further, a bugle sounded a halt. Instantly the infantry gave up pursuit of the enemy, and all the tanks came to a stop -- all except the one in which Hal was at the throttle.

"Whoa, here, Hal!" shouted Chester. "Time to stop. Can't you see the others have given up the pursuit?"

"I can't stop!" Hal shouted back. "The blamed thing won't work."

Every second they were approaching where the Germans had made a stand.

"Come about in a circle then and head back!" shouted Chester.

Hal swung the head of the tank to the left. It moved perhaps two degrees in that direction, then went forward again.

"Something the matter with the steering apparatus!" Hal shouted. "I can't turn it. I can't stop it. I can't shut off the power, and the brakes won't work."

"Let's jump for it, then!" cried Chester. "We'll be right in the middle of the enemy in a minute."

The tractor was still spitting fire as it advanced. It was plain that the Germans took the advance of the single tank as a ruse of some kind, which they were unable to fathom. They could not know that the occupants of the tank were making desperate effort to stop its advance or bring it about and head back toward the British lines.

From the British troops shouts of warning arose. Crews of other tanks had now dismounted, and these men added their voices to those of the others calling upon the apparently venturesome tank to return. These men could understand the advance of the single tractor no more than could the Germans.

"The fools!" shouted one man. "They'll be killed sure; and what good can they do single-handed against the whole German army?"

But the tank driven by Hal took no cognizance of the remarks hurled after it; nor did it swerve from its purpose of waddling straight up to the foe.

"Let's jump!" called Chester again.

"We'll be killed sure, or captured if we do," said Hal.

"Well, we'll be killed or captured if we don't," declared Chester.

"Exactly. It doesn't make any difference just what we do, so I'm in favor of seeing the thing through."

"By Jove!" said Chester after a moment's hesitation, "I'm with you!"

He explained the situation to the man.

"Let's go right at 'em, sir," said one of the Canadians, grinning. "Maybe they won't hit us with a shell. We'll shoot 'em down as long as we have ammunition - - and it's about gone now."

"Suits me," said Hal quietly.

The other men nodded their agreement.

So the tank still waddled forward. With but one foe now to contend with, the Germans braved the fire of the single gun, advanced and

surrounded the tank.

"Surrender!" came a voice in German. "Surrender or we shall blow you to pieces."

Hal smiled to himself.

"Can't be done, Fritz," he said quietly.

At the same moment one of the crew fired the last of the ammunition.

"Well, we've nothing left but our revolvers," said Chester. "Here goes."

He poked his weapon out one of the portholes, and emptied it into the foe.

"Give me yours, Hal," he said.

Hal obeyed, and the contents of this also was poured at the enemy.

"That settles it," said Chester.

One of the Canadians drew out a cigarette and lighted it.

"Might as well be comfortable," he said.

Outside, the Germans danced wildly around the car, shouting demands for surrender, all the while bombarding the tank with rifle and revolver fire.

"No use, Fritz," said Hal. "We just can't, whoa!"

The tank had stopped abruptly.

CHAPTER XIX

PRISONERS

"Now what do you think of that?" Hal muttered to himself. "Must be a German tank, I guess. Seems to know when it gets home. Well, what now, Hal?" asked Chester.

"You know as much about it as I do," said Hal grimly. "See all that merry gang outside dancing around us? Guess we'll have to surrender. We can't fight with nothing to fight with."

"You're right, Sir," said one of the men. "No use staying here and being blown up when we can't fight back."

As the occupants of the tank so far had made no signs of complying with the German demand for surrender, bullets were still being rained upon the tractor. Hal now took a handkerchief from his pocket, put it on the end of his empty revolver, and poked it through the porthole.

A cry of triumph went up from the outside, and the firing ceased.

Chester threw open the door of the armored car, and, with Hal and the four members of the crew, got to the ground. An officer approached them and saluted.

"You are my prisoners, Sir," he said.

"So it seems, captain," said Hal with a smile. "Well, it can't be helped now."

He passed over his empty revolver, the only weapon he possessed. Chester followed suit. The members of the crew had no arms. They had discarded their rifles when they entered the tank.

"I shall conduct you to Colonel Hertlitz," said the German captain. "Come."

The four followed the German officer far back into the German lines, where the officer ushered them into a tent where sat a German officer whose insignia proclaimed him a colonel of infantry.

"These are the men who manned the armored car, sir," said the captain.

"Take the men and lock them up safely," was the reply. "Send my orderly to attend me while I converse with these officers. See, too, that the captured car is made safe."

The captain withdrew and the colonel's orderly entered, and stood at attention. The four Canadian members of the tank's crew were ordered to the rear, but for the night they would be kept in the lines behind the trenches.

"You are brave young men," said the colonel to Hal. "I watched you advance into our army single-handed. At the same time, it was a fool's trick - or a youngster's."

"We're not so brave as you would think, sir," said Hal with a slight smile. "Neither are we such fools. We would gladly have turned about, but the thing wouldn't work; neither could I stop my engine."

"Oh-o! I see," said the colonel. "I took your deed for an act of bravery, and for that reason I had planned to have you particularly cared for, so it was only an accident, eh? Orderly, have these fellows locked up with the others."

"We're officers in the United States Army, sir," Hal protested, "and, as such, are entitled to treatment as becomes our rank."

"You are American pigs!" was the angry response. "So American troops are really in France, eh? I never believed they would come. America is a nation of cowards."

Hal took a threatening step forward.

The German did not move from his chair, but called to his orderly:

"Take them away."

A moment later a file of soldiers entered and Hal and Chester were escorted from the colonel's quarters. An hour later they found themselves in a tent behind the German trenches together with the four Canadians who, such a short time before, had formed the crew of the tank that had advanced single-handed into the German lines.

"You went and spoiled it, Hal," Chester muttered when they were left to themselves again.

"Well, I was just trying to be honest. They say 'honesty is the best policy,' you know."

"That's all right," said Chester, "but you don't have to go around telling how honest you are."

"I'll admit I put my foot in it," Hal admitted. "But here we are, six of us, captured by the enemy with the chances that our days of fighting are over."

"Never say die," said Chester. "We've been in some ticklish places before now and we're still alive and kicking."

"We'll hold a council of war," Hal decided. "I don't know your names," he said to the Canadians, "but I take it you'll all be glad to get out of here if possible."

"You bet," said one. "I've no hankering for a German prison, sir."

"Good! Now what are your names?"

"Crean, sir," said the man who had spoken.

"Yours?" said Hal, turning to the next man.

"Smith, sir."

The other two men admitted to the names of Jackson and Gregory.

Hal then introduced Chester and himself.

"This is not the first time we've been captured by the enemy," he explained, "and we've found that because escape is looked upon as such a remote possibility, it is much simpler than in days when wars did not cover so much territory as the whole world."

"We're with you in anything you decide, sir," said Smith. I

"You can count upon us to the finish," Crean agreed.

"I was sure of it," said Hal quietly. "Now, we'll take stock. Of course, we've no weapons."

"Nothing that looks like one," Chester agreed.

"The first thing, then," said Hal, "is to secure weapons. Makes a fellow feel a bit more comfortable if he has a gun in his hand."

"Or even a sword, or a knife, sir," said Gregory.

"Well, I'm not much of a hand with a knife," Chester declared. "I have been slashed a couple of times, but every time I think of a knife being drawn through my flesh it makes me shudder. Now, a gun is another matter."

"I agree with you, Chester," said Hal. "However, if we can't get guns we won't turn down knives if we can get our hands on them."

"Right you are, sir," said Gregory. "Now, I've lived long enough in the northwest to realize the value of a good knife when I get my hands on it. A weapon is a weapon after all, sir."

"Only some are better than others," Smith interrupted.

"We won't argue about that," said Hal, "since we have decided that the first thing we need are weapons. Of course, that means that first we must have one weapon. One will mean others. Now, I'll suggest this: I'm no pickpocket, but someone will come in here directly to give us food or something, and I'm no good if I can't, relieve him of a gun or a knife, providing I get close enough to him."

"And then what?" demanded Chester.

"One thing at a time, old man," said Hal. "We'll have to leave most of this to chance."

"Anything suits me," Chester declared. "Listen, I think someone is coming now."

Chester was right. A moment later the officer to whom the lads had surrendered entered the tent. He greeted the lads with a smile.

"I've heard of your treatment," he said. "I won't presume to criticize my superior officer, but I just want to say that I admire your bravery no matter what brought you into our lines."

"Thanks," said Hal. "We appreciate it. I suppose I should have kept my mouth shut, but I guess it won't make any difference in the long run. What will be done with us, do you suppose?"

"Well, you are prisoners of war, of course," was the reply. "You'll probably be sent to a prison camp until peace is declared -- and nobody knows when that will be."

"You're right on that score," said Hal. "Oh, well, I guess we should consider ourselves fortunate that we are prisoners rather than dead soldiers."

"And yet you don't," said the German with a smile.

"Well, no, that's true," Hal admitted. "I just said we should."

"I must be going now," said the young German, "So I'll say good-bye. I hope I may see you when the war is over."

"Thanks," said Chester.

He extended a hand, which the German grasped. Hal pressed close to the

man's side with extended hand, which he offered as the German grasped Chester's fingers.

As the lad stood close to the German, his left hand stole forth cautiously, and dropped to the revolver which the German carried in a holster at his side.

He removed the weapon so gently that the German did not feel his touch. Quickly Hal slipped the revolver into his coat pocket, and then grasped the man's hand as Chester released it.

"Good-bye," he said quietly. "I'm sure I second your wish."

The German bowed and left the tent.

Chester turned to Hal and said in a low voice:

"Get it?"

Hal nodded.

"You bet!" said he.

CHAPTER XX

A STRANGE PROCEEDING

"Lieutenant," said the Canadian named Gregory, "before I joined the army I was considered somewhat of a detective in Montreal. I've had some experience with pickpockets. It's a pleasure to see you work."

"That sounds like rather a left-handed compliment," said Chester with a smile, while Hal and the others laughed.

"Nevertheless, it was very neatly done," said Gregory.

"Well, Hal," said Chester, "you've got one gun, what are you going to do with it?"

"Hold your horses, old man," returned Hal. "Nothing was ever gained by too great haste. Something will turn up."

Something did a moment later in the form of the German officer who so recently had left the tent. He came in quickly, looked around, and stood undecided.

"Why, I thought you'd gone, captain," said Chester, though his heart sank.

The lad realized the import of the other's return.

"I've lost something," said the German.

"What was it?" asked Hal.

"Well, it's my revolver," said the German. "I thought maybe I had dropped it here."

"Hope you didn't expect to find it if you had?" said Hal.

The German laughed good-naturedly.

"Maybe not," he said. "However, I'm going to ask you if any of you have it."

"If we had," said Hal quietly, "I'll guarantee we wouldn't stay here half an hour."

The German looked at Hal keenly. Apparently he took the lad's answer for a denial, for he said:

"Well, all right. I just thought I'd make sure. I know you wouldn't lie about it."

He bowed again and was gone.

"Well, by George!" exclaimed Hal. "I didn't tell him I didn't have his gun, did I?"

"You did not," said Chester, "but you seem to have convinced him that you didn't have it."

"It's just as well," said Smith.

Five minutes later a German soldier entered, bearing a tray on which was water and dry bread.

"Well, well," said Hal. "What a feast for the hungry, eh?"

He took the tray from the man's hands, while Chester edged closer to him. When the man left the tent, Chester produced an object which he held aloft.

"Something for you, Gregory," he said.

Gregory eyed the object in surprise. It was a long-handled knife.

"I just happened to see it sticking in his belt," said Chester.

"I believe that you two fellows have been fooling us," said Gregory with evident sincerity. "Come, now. What was your occupation before you joined the army?"

"Well, it wasn't picking pockets, if that's what you mean," said Chester with a laugh.

"If this thing keeps up," said Crean, "we'll soon have weapons enough to equip a first-class arsenal."

"And that's no joke," said the man called Jackson.

"We can't hope for any more such luck," said Hal quietly. "We'll have to create what opportunities come to us now."

"You take this knife, Gregory," said Chester. "I wouldn't know what to do with it."

Hal approached the canvas door to their prison and poked his head out.

"Get back there!" came a guttural command in German.

Hal spied a sentry standing before the tent.

"Hello," he said pleasantly. "Didn't know you were there. All by yourself, too, eh?"

"Not much," was the reply. "There's a man in the rear, too."

"I just wondered," murmured Hal.

"Get back inside," commanded the guard.

"Oh, all right," said Hal, "if you are going to be nasty about it. But, say, do you have a pack of cards you can lend us?"

"No, I don't," said the guard.

"Well, all right," and Hal would have withdrawn but the German halted him.

"I didn't say I didn't have a pack," he said.

"But I heard --"

"No, you didn't. I said I didn't have a pack to lend."

"Well, what's --?"

"I've a pack to sell," said the guard.

"Oh, I see," said Hal. "Rather hard up, are you."

"If you mean I have no money, yes."

"I've a few German coins, I believe," said Hal, and explored his pockets. "I'll give you these for the pack of cards."

He held forth two coins.

The German grunted.

"All right," he said.

He produced a pack of cards, and took the money Hal extended.

"Times must be getting hard in Germany," said Hal suggestively.

Again the German granted.

"We don't have any bread, and we don't have any meat," he declared. "I haven't had a good meat for a year, it seems."

"It'll be worse before the war's over," said Hal pleasantly.

The German grounded his rifle with a thump. "Don't you think I know it?" he demanded with some heat.

"Well, don't get angry," said Hal, struck with a sudden idea.

"You've got some money," he said.

"Not very much."

"Well, I'll tell you something. We're going to have a little card game inside. I don't have any too much money, either, and I'd be glad to win some. What's the matter with you sneaking in and getting in the game? Your money's as good to me as anyone else's."

"And an officer'll come along, and I'll face a firing squad," grumbled the German.

"Pshaw!" said Hal. "Nothing risked nothing gained, you know. Besides, we're in an out of the way place here. When will you be relieved?"

"Not before 10 o'clock."

"And it's only a little after six now. However, if you won't, you won't. You know your own business best."

The German smiled an evil smile.

"Have you any objection to my inviting another in the game?" he asked.

"Not a bit. Who?"

"The man who is guarding the tent in the rear. He will come in handy, too. If you should try to escape, we'd do for you. We will be armed, and you won't."

"Who said anything about trying to escape?" demanded Hal. "This is to be a little friendly game of poker."

"Poker?" exclaimed the German.

Again his eyes gleamed.

"You go back in the tent," said the guard. "I'll probably be along later with my friend. I need the money, and will take a chance."

"Good!" said Hal, and disappeared within.

Hal explained the situation to the others, and added:

"Of course, the man's idea is that he and his friend, by playing together, will win by cheating. Well, that doesn't make any difference to us. Let them have the money. All we want is to get out of here. I don't know much about playing cards, anyhow. But let no man make a move until I give the word."

The others nodded their understanding of this to him.

"We may as well get started, so it won't look bad," said Chester.

The six seated themselves on the ground, and Gregory dealt out the cards.

"I can't understand how a man will take a chance like this guard," said Chester.

"He says he needs money," declared Hal.

"But even so," said Chester, "he should have sense enough --?"

"You haven't forgotten he is German, have you?" demanded Jackson. "I was brought up among them to some extent. One idea is all a true German's head will hold at one time. That's the truth. And if he gets an idea in his head, you can't get it out.

"Shh-h!" said Hal. "Here comes someone."

A moment later the guard with whom the lad had conversed entered the tent. A second man followed him.

"Quiet!" whispered the first guard.

The two men sat down among the others. Each laid his rifle within easy reach of his hand, and each loosened a revolver in his belt.

"Go on with the game," said the first German in a low voice.

Gregory dealt out the cards.

CHAPTER XXI

FLIGHT

It was not Hal's intention to attempt a break for liberty as soon as the Germans entered the tent. He knew that the two men would be on their guard at least until their interest in the game had overcome their vigilance.

Neither Hal nor Chester were proficient in card playing. The game of poker had not been included in their education. Nevertheless, each knew the value of the cards, and they felt that a situation like this would justify their taking a hand, considering the ends in view.

The German with whom Hal had conversed just outside the tent had poor luck from the start, but his companion won. So far the men had made no attempt to play together, thus taking advantage of their prisoners. But it wasn't long before they did.

There came a time when Gregory noticed this. He grew angry.

"Here!" he exclaimed. "That kind of playing won't go. This is a friendly game, and I don't stand for that kind of work."

The Germans looked up in well-simulated surprise. They indicated by

gestures that Gregory was doing them an injustice; the game proceeded.

As time passed both Germans won now, Naturally, both grew more and more interested in the game. And at last the moment for which Hal had been waiting presented itself.

The Germans still had their rifles close to their sides, and from time to time their hands toyed with the revolvers in their belts.

Hal, after a hand had been played out, arose and stretched himself. The German eyed him suspiciously for a moment, but, as he appeared about to sit down again, they turned their attention to the cards, which Chester dealt them.

Suddenly Hal whipped out the revolver he had taken from the German officer earlier, and, taking a quick step forward, covered the two men.

"Hands up!" he exclaimed in German.

The cards fell, to the ground, as Chester and the Canadians got to their feet. The Germans sat still. Then, slowly, their hands went into the air.

"Quick, men!" said Hal. "Get their revolvers and guns."

This was the work of an instant. The six friends now were armed with three revolvers, two rifles, and one long knife.

"What'll we do with these fellows?" demanded Chester.

"We'll tie 'em up and gag 'em," said Hal without hesitation. "We can't afford to have them raise the alarm."

"We've no rope, nor anything that looks like rope," said Chester. "What'll we tie 'em up with?"

"Their own clothing will have to serve the purpose then," said Hal.

Quickly the Germans were stripped to their underclothing. Their shirts were torn in strips, and they were securely bound. Handkerchiefs were used as gags.

"There," said Hal, when this was accomplished. "I guess that will hold them safe enough."

"It'll have to hold them," said Chester. "Now what?"

"Now to get out of here," said Hal.

"Look here, Lieutenant," said Jackson, "we can't go far in these uniforms, you know."

"Of course I know it," Hal declared. "We can go far enough to tap a few Germans over the head, though, maybe, in which event there will be uniforms enough of the proper kind to go around."

"Right you are, sir," agreed Crean. "Lead the way."

Making sure that the Germans who had been bound would be unable to release the improvised ropes, Hal moved to the entrance of the tent and looked out. It was very dark outside, and Hal could see nothing.

"Guess the way is clear," he whispered, "but it's so dark out there you can't see a thing. However, we'll take a chance, and we'll head toward the front, for that's the direction in which we want to go."

The others followed him from the tent.

For perhaps five minutes they walked along without interruption, but at the end of that time Hal, still in advance, made out a form approaching them. He stopped in his tracks, and the others also stood stock still.

Hal now perceived that there were two figures advancing instead of one. He reached back a hand and pulled Chester to his side. The two lads moved forward together.

In the darkness it was impossible for the men who moved toward them to make out the lads' uniforms, so, though they perceived the approaching figures, they naturally took Hal and Chester for their own kind.

They moved slightly to one side in order that Hal and Chester might pass. Instead, the lads stepped quickly up to them and shoved their guns in their faces.

"Silence!" said Chester quietly. "Silence or you are dead men!"

Chester's tone left no room for doubt, and the Germans stood still without a word. Hal now made out that they were officers -- both lieutenants.

"Take off your clothes," said Hal briefly.

The Germans understood the lad's plan, but under the muzzle of two guns, they did not protest, and quickly stripped to their under-garments. Hal and Chester each took possession of one of the officer's revolvers. Then, covering the two men, Hal said:

"Get into one of those uniforms while I keep them covered, Chester."

Chester obeyed promptly, and then he, in turn, covered the men while Hal changed clothes.

The lads now escorted their prisoners back to where the four Canadians still stood in the darkness. There they explained the situation. Willing hands tore the clothes that the two boys had discarded, and the Germans, still in their underclothing, were hastily bound and gagged.

The party of British moved on again.

"Four more uniforms and a couple of more guns, and we are O. K.," said Chester quietly.

Fortune again smiled on them a few moments later. A party of three German soldiers approached. These were quickly covered, and the same procedure gone through with. A few moments later all except Gregory were attired in German uniforms.

"Don't worry, old man," said Chester with a laugh. "We'll soon have one for you, too."

"It's not that I am fond of a German uniform," said Gregory, "but I just like to be in style."

The friends now passed several groups of Germans, but the latter were in such large numbers that they did not accost them.

"What we want is just one man, or possibly two or three," said Chester. "We don't want to tackle so many that there may be a fight."

At length their patience was rewarded. A solitary figure came toward them. Hal stepped forward and accosted him.

With a gun poked under his nose, the German gave back a step.

"What's the matter?" he demanded. "Are you crazy?"

"Not a bit of it," said Hal, "but I want your clothes."

"Well," said the German, "you won't get them. This is no time of the year for a man to be walking around with no clothes."

"Nevertheless, I must have yours," said Hal.

Chester came up at that moment, and his revolver, glistening in the darkness, lent added weight to Hal's words.

"Oh, well, of course, if you insist," said the German.

He quickly stepped from his uniform, which Chester tossed back to Gregory, who donned it hastily. As hastily the German was bound and gagged, and Hal, Chester and the four Canadians moved forward again.

"We're safe enough for the moment," said Hal, as they walked along. "The enemy will have no suspicion that we are other than we pretend to be until

daylight, when one look at your Canadian faces will give the whole thing away."

"That means," said Chester, "that we should be beyond the German lines before daylight."

"Exactly," said Hal, "though how we shall do it is still the question."

"We've come along pretty well so far," said Gregory. "We won't give up now."

"Who said anything about giving up?" Chester wanted to know. "Of course, we won't give up. Have you any idea where we are, Hal?"

"Well, I should judge we are pretty close to the town of Cambrai. Personally, I believe the best plan would be to head in that direction. I judge it to be directly south."

"But it is within the German lines," Chester protested.

"True, but once there we may be able to find a hiding place. In the open we wouldn't have much chance if we failed to get beyond the lines before daylight overtook us."

"You may be right," said Chester. "Once in Cambrai, providing we can find a hiding place, we can figure out a means of leaving the German lines."

"Exactly," said Hal, "and with a better chance of success."

"Suit you, men?" asked Chester.

"You're the doctor," said Gregory. "Lead the way. We'll follow." Hal and Chester turned abruptly to the left. "South it is, then," said Hal.

CHAPTER XXII

INTO CAMBRAI

As it developed, the distance to Cambrai, one of the chief points in the German line of communications, was comparatively short.

As the six plodded along through the darkness there was no conversation. None of the Canadians spoke German, and Hal and Chester had instructed them to be silent, for the sound of a few English words would have done more to destroy the success of their venture than any other possible thing. As for Hal and Chester, both of whom spoke German fluently, neither felt like talk.

It was almost midnight when the lads saw before them what appeared to be the lights of a small town. Approaching closer, they saw that they were, indeed, approaching a settlement of some kind.

"Cambrai, do you suppose?" asked Chester.

"Don't know," returned Hal. "Probably is. I understand that Cambrai is about the largest place around here, and this seems to be quite a sizable village."

Half an hour later they set foot in the streets of the little French city, in German hands now for more than three years.

"We'll hunt a house with a light and see if they'll put us up for the night," said Hal.

Down a side street they saw a house somewhat larger than the others. Several lights showed from the windows.

"Somebody up, at all events," said Chester.

"Trouble is, Germans may already be quartered there," said Hal.

"Well, we'll have to take a chance," said Chester grimly.

"Right. So the sooner we try the better."

Hal led the way, and knocked on the door. Came the sound of hurried footsteps within, and a moment later the door was thrown open. An old woman poked her head out.

"What do you want?" she demanded.

"A place to sleep," replied Hal, in excellent German, although the woman had spoken in French.

"There is no place here for you!" exclaimed the woman, and would have shut the door.

But Hal was too quick for her. He shoved a foot in the door, and thus prevented its closing.

"Come, my good woman," he said. "We mean you no harm, but we must have a place to spend the night."

"How many of you are there?" asked the woman.

"Six," replied Hal briefly.

The woman threw up her hands in a gesture of dismay.

"I can't possibly take care of so many!" she exclaimed.

"But we are all coming in," declared Hal, who realized that the sooner they were off the streets the better.

He pushed the door open and went inside. Chester and the four Canadians followed him.

"Which way, madam?" asked Hal. "Upstairs?"

The old woman nodded, and led the way up a flight of winding steps.

"I've only one room," she said, "so you will have to make the most of it."

"That will be satisfactory," said Hal. "We don't like to inconvenience you."

"You don't, eh?" exclaimed the woman. "You're the first who wear that uniform who haven't gone out of their way to inconvenience me, and all other French women."

"Come, come," said Hal. "I'm afraid you are too hard on us."

"I'm not half as hard on you as the French and British will be when they get hold of you!" exclaimed the woman angrily.

Hal looked at her in surprise. He supposed that all women in territory conquered by the Germans had long since realized the value of keeping a silent tongue in their head. Aloud he said:

"I would advise you to be more careful of your speech. If words like

those came to the ears of the general staff, you probably would be shot."

"You can't frighten me," declared their hostess. "I say what I please, Germans or no Germans."

"Well, suit yourself," said Hal, "but don't forget that I have warned you."

"Thank you," sneered the woman. "Here's your room," kicking open the door at the top of the stairs. "You can sleep there if you wish, but I hope the British have arrived when you wake up again."

She waited for no reply, but descended the stairs hastily.

"By Jove!" muttered Hal. "The Germans snared a Tartar when they caught her."

"They certainly did," Chester agreed with a smile. "Great Scott! Seems to me she could have given us a candle or something. It's as dark as pitch in this room."

"You fellows stay here," said Hal. "I'll go down and remind her that she has been negligent in her duty as hostess."

Hal descended the stairs quietly. As quietly he passed through the room that in days of peace apparently had served as a parlor, and moved toward a door beyond, under which a light streamed.

"Guess she's in there," said Hal.

He laid a hand on the knob and opened the door.

As he did so there was an exclamation of alarm. Hal, in the light beyond, saw a form disappear into another room. The old woman ran toward him

"What do you mean by coming in here without knocking?" she exclaimed furiously.

"Why --why, I didn't know --" Hal began.

"Of course you didn't know," shouted the woman. "But I'll have you understand that you can't make free of my house, though you be the Kaiser himself."

From the folds of her skirt she suddenly produced a large revolver, which she leveled squarely at the lad. Hal stepped back.

"Here, my good woman," he said. "Put down that gun. Don't you know that a single shot will arouse the whole German army. You couldn't escape."

The woman hesitated, and the revolver wavered. Before she could bring it to bear again, had such been her intention, Hal seized her arm, twisted sharply, and the revolver fell to the floor with a clatter.

"I'm afraid you're not to be trusted with that gun," the lad said quietly.

He stooped, picked up the weapon, and stowed it away in his own pocket with this mental comment:

"One more weapon for our own little army."

"You're a brute," gasped the woman. "You're just like all Germans."

"Silence," said Hal. "I have heard enough from you. What I came here for was to tell you that you had neglected to furnish us with a light. Now I shall have to look in yonder closet, where I saw a man secret himself as I came in."

The old woman flew across the room and stood defiantly in front of the closet door.

"You can't go in there!" she exclaimed.

"I can't, eh?" said Hal. "Why can't I?"

"Because I say you can't."

"That is a very poor reason," said Hal. "Either you will stand aside now, or I shall call my men."

The woman realized the force of this reasoning. With a gesture of resignation she stepped aside. Hal advanced.

"I hope he shoots you through the door," said the woman to Hal.

"Thanks for the hint," said Hal dryly. "I'll keep out of the line of fire."

He approached the door from the side, and, standing close, called:

"Whoever you are in there, come out."

There was no response, and Hal called again.

"I've got the door covered," the lad shouted, and if you don't come out I shall fire through it."

Slowly the door moved open. Hal stepped quickly aside, for he did not wish to be taken unaware. He seized a chair and sent it spinning across the floor. The ruse succeeded, for the man inside, taking the noise made by the chair for the sound of Hal's feet, stepped quickly forward and pointed a revolver in that direction.

This meant that Hal stood directly behind the newcomer. Smiling to himself, Hal raised his revolver and said quietly:

"Drop that gun or I'll bore a hole through you. No, don't bother to turn first."

Realizing that he was absolutely in the other's power, the newcomer obeyed. The revolver fell clattering to the floor.

"Now," said Hal, "I'd like to have a look at you. Please turn around."

Slowly the other turned, and, as Hal caught sight of the man's face, his own revolver dropped to the floor and he sprang forward with outstretched hand.

"Major Derevaux!" he cried.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE MAJOR EXPLAINS

The man who had emerged from the closet gazed at Hal in amazement.

"Who are you?" he exclaimed, taking a step forward.

"What! Don't you know me?" exclaimed Hal.

The other peered at him intently. Then he uttered an exclamation of pure astonishment.

"Hal Paine!" he cried. "Is it really you? And what are you doing in that uniform?"

"I might ask you, major, what you are doing out of uniform?" laughed Hal, as he grasped his old friend's hand.

"Well, I'm here on business," explained the major.

"And I'm here trying to get out of the German lines," said Hal.

"And where is Chester?" asked the major.

"He's upstairs, waiting for me to bring up a candle that he may have light," said Hal. "By George! It's good to see you again. Let me see, it has been almost two years since I last saw you in France."

"Yes, it's been all of that," agreed the major.

"And what of our old friend Anderson? Do you know what has happened to him?"

"No," said Hal, "the last indirect word I had of him he had been sent to Mesopotamia. I have not seen him for many months. But, tell me, what are you doing here?"

"It isn't a very long story," said Major Derevaux. "As you perhaps know, General Byng's drive against the Germans has been one of the greatest successes since the Battle of the Marne."

Hal nodded.

"Well," the major continued, "I have been stationed with General Pitain at Verdun, where I last saw you. Now we know that the Germans have drawn heavily from other fronts to make possible the Italian invasion. Other fronts now will have to be weakened to hold back General Byng -- even to launch a counter-offensive, for we all know that Hindenburg

will strike back. That leaves the Verdun situation somewhat in the air."

"I see," said Hal. "If you can make sure that the Verdun front of the enemy has been weakened, the French will strike there."

"Exactly," said the major. "Then there is another possibility. It may be the plan of the German general staff to make a show of force here and then, when we are feeling secure before Verdun, to deliver a lightning-like blow there. Those are the things I am commissioned to learn."

"I see," said Hal again. "But how does it happen I find you here?"

"It's very simple. This woman here is a distant relative of mine. She is a patriot to the soul. Under the gruff exterior which you have seen she is the most kindly soul in the world. She is risking her life every minute she remains here, for she is accounted one of the most successful of French spies."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Hal. "You don't mean it. Why, her very actions toward us, if used toward other Germans, it strikes me, would mean a firing squad for her."

"That," laughed Major Derevaux, "has been her greatest asset. The Germans are not particularly fond of her, that's a fact. She attacks them with a sharp tongue, but for that very reason she is looked upon as harmless. Come, I'll introduce you."

Major Derevaux led the way across the room to where the woman had been eyeing the two in the utmost astonishment.

"Lieutenant Paine," said the Major, "I take pleasure in presenting you to Mademoiselle Vaubaun. Mademoiselle, this is Lieutenant Paine, of His British Majesty's service."

"I must correct you, major," said Hal, smiling and acknowledging the introduction. "Lieutenant Paine, U. S.A."

"Oh -- oh!" said the major. "So you are fighting with your own countrymen at last, eh?"

"I am, thank goodness," said Hal. "But can this indeed be Mademoiselle Vaubaun? I have heard of her before, but I judged that she was a young woman."

Major Derevaux smiled.

"And a consummate actress," he said. "Mademoiselle, will you grant my friend the lieutenant a look at your true self?"

"If this young man is a friend of yours, Raoul, he is a friend of mine," said the woman.

She removed a cap from her head, straightened herself up and shook down her hair. Then she passed a hand several times over her face, and when Hal looked again there stood before him a girl in her teens.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Hal, and started back.

In a few words he now explained his own presence in the German lines, together with that of Chester and the four Canadians.

Mademoiselle Vaubaun, in turn, told the lad how she had been left in Cambrai when German troops had swept across Belgium and France in the early days of the war, and how, from time to time, she had found it possible to send word to the French and British staffs of impending German movements.

"But how about me and my friends?" inquired Hal.

"I can hide you all, too. Beyond the room in which your friends are now is a second room and beyond that a false wall. It is there, I will hide the major. I was about to take him there when you came to the door tonight. There is room for all."

"Then I shall return to my friends," said Hal. "I have been gone so long Chester will fear something has happened to me. Will you go with me, major?"

"To be sure. I shall be glad to see Chester again. May we have a light, Antoinette?"

"I will lead the way myself," said the girl. "It will be as well that you go to your hiding places now."

She lighted the way upstairs with a candle.

In the darkened room above, Chester and the Canadians had been waiting impatiently. Chester had come to the conclusion that something had happened to Hal and was about to go down and hunt for him. As the light came upstairs, however, he drew back.

"It's all right, Chester," Hal called. "Here is the light and an old friend to greet you."

"Old friend," said Chester in surprise. "I didn't know I had any friends on this side of the line."

"Well, have a look at this man and see if you recognize him," said Hal, and pushed Major Derevaux forward.

Chester took one look at the major and then dashed forward with hand out.

"Major Derevaux!" he cried.

The two clasped hands warmly.

"Now, Chester," said Hal, "I want you to meet our hostess, Mademoiselle Vaubaun."

Chester bowed in acknowledgment of the introduction, then added: "I suppose it was your mother who admitted us some time since?"

The girl laughed lightly.

"Why, no," she said. "I admitted you myself."

"But - but --" said Chester, nonplussed.

"I'm not surprised at you, Chester," said Hal. "Cannot a woman or a girl wear a disguise as well as you?"

"By Jove!" said Chester. "I hadn't thought of that. So that was it, eh?"

"Yes, that was it," said the girl.

The Canadians now were introduced around, after which the young girl said.

"Come. I may as well show you to your hiding places. It is as well for you to be there as here.

There is no telling when some of the Germans may arrive."

I

"But aren't you afraid to be among them alone?" asked Hal.

"Pshaw!" exclaimed the girl. "Who would hurt a harmless old woman?"

She led the way into the room beyond, walked across and pressed a hidden spring in the side of the wall. Instantly a secret door moved open.

"It can be opened from within as well," said the girl. "You may have a light here if you wish. The door is so constructed that the rays cannot be seen from without. I shall leave you now. My only injunction is, do not talk too loud. I'll bring you food and water in the morning."

She bade them good-night and took her leave.

The friends talked in low tones for some moments, then stretched out on the floor and soon were fast asleep.

CHAPTER XXIV

ANTOINETTE "MAKES GOOD"

True to her word, Antoinette appeared with food and drink early the following morning. She was again disguised as an old woman, and Hal and Chester could scarcely believe that a wig and a few dabs of paint could possibly conceal the girlish face they had seen the night before.

"I have had word to prepare a big dinner for a dozen officers of the general, staff," the girl informed Major Derevaux, "so it may be that I shall have the necessary information by nightfall."

"Let us hope so," said the major devoutly.

"And let us hope that you are not risking your life in getting it,"

said Hal.

"Thank you," said Antoinette. "I assure you I shall be very careful. Now, you must all remain here quietly today. You may be able to leave soon after dark."

She left the hiding place and closed the secret door behind her.

"And after we leave the house, then what?" asked Hal of Major Derevaux.

"Don't you worry," said the major with a smile. "All that has been taken care of. Ten minutes' walk from here is a large army airplane. It brought me here and it will take us all back again."

"All of us?" exclaimed Hal.

"Yes," the major replied. "I have made trips in it before. The machine will carry ten passengers beside a pilot."

"And you do the driving, eh?" said Hal.

"No," said the major. "I have never learned the art. The pilot is with the craft."

"You mean he is in hiding in the woods?"

"Exactly."

"Great Scott!" cried Hal. "I wouldn't care about his job. Your job now isn't so bad, because you've a chance of action. But just think of sitting in a woods and waiting - waiting -- never knowing what minute you are likely to be discovered."

"It is hard," agreed the major. "And here I am refreshed by a night's sleep, while he must remain there in the cold with his eyes open every minute."

"If he is discovered, then what?" asked Chester.

"His instructions, if discovered," said the major, "are to attempt to escape, leaving me behind."

"In which event," said Chester, "you'd have a hard time getting away."

"That's true. But nothing risked nothing gained, you know."

"True enough," said Hal. "Well, we must take what comes, but I hope Mademoiselle Vaubaun does not get mixed up in any trouble."

"You seem to take rather a great deal of interest in the fair Antoinette," said Chester slyly.

Hal's face turned red.

"Well, why shouldn't I?" he demanded. "No one likes to see a girl or a woman mixed up in this kind of business."

"Are you sure that is it?" demanded Chester. "Or is it just because it

chanced to be Mademoiselle Vaubaun?"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Hal angrily.

"Oh, no offense, no offense," declared Chester. "I was just talking to hear myself talk -- maybe."

Major Derevaux smiled.

"Antoinette is a very nice girl," he said. "I'm sure she would appreciate Hal's interest in her. I'll tell her about it."

"I say! Don't do that!" exclaimed Hal in some confusion.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Chester.

Hal sat down again, his face still burning.

Even the Canadians joined in the general laugh, and Hal himself smiled. The joke was on him, and he was not the lad to get angry.

"Oh, well, have it your own way," he said. "It does no good to deny it."

The day passed slowly.

Antoinette did not appear at noon with food and water, as the others had expected she would.

"Probably busy serving the German officers," said Hal. "What's the difference, though. We can get along very well without one meal."

Night came, though to those in the little secret room it was not apparent that darkness had fallen. Hal glanced at his watch. It was after 7 o'clock.

"It's funny she hasn't come yet," he declared.

"Who do you mean by she?" asked Chester.

"Why, Antoinette," said Hal. "I --"

"Oh, sure," said Chester. "I know who you meant, all right. So you are calling her by her first name already, eh?"

"Look here," said Hal, "I don't think that is a bit funny."

"I apologize, old man," said Chester quickly. "I shouldn't have said it."

"Say no more about it then," said Hal. "I am afraid, though, that there is something wrong downstairs."

"I am beginning to think the same thing," declared Major Derevaux. "I wonder if it would not be well for one of us to sneak out and have a look?"

"I don't believe it would do any harm," declared Hal. "I'll go."

Chester was about to joke Hal again, but he changed his mind and held his tongue.

"I agree," he said. "If you want to go, Hal, we'll wait here."

"Good. If I have not returned in fifteen minutes you will know something has happened. In that event, I would advise that you all come down together, lend me a hand if I'm still in the house and in condition to be helped, and we'll all make a break for the airship."

"That is satisfactory," said Major Derevaux.

"And if I'm not in condition to be helped," said Hal, "go along without me. You will not have time to be burdened with excess baggage."

The others nodded and Hal gently slid open the secret door.

"Remember," he whispered back, "fifteen minutes."

The door closed behind him.

Hal made his way quietly through the two rooms that led to the stairs, and as quietly descended. As he passed through the parlor and approached the room in which he had met Major Derevaux the night before he heard the sound of voices. He paused and listened.

One he made out was a male voice, which he took to belong to a German officer. The second was that of Mademoiselle Vaubaun. Then a third voice boomed out. This, Hal knew, was that of a second German.

Hal approached the door and put his eye to the key-hole. Then he started back and whipped out his revolver.

In the center of the room sat Antoinette Vaubaun. She was no longer attired as an old woman. She was the girl that Hal had seen the night before. Her hair hung down her back. It was perfectly plain to the lad that she had been discovered. Her face, though pale, was set sternly. Hal listened to the conversation that ensued.

"So you are a spy, eh?" said a big German officer who sat on her right.

The girl made no response.

"Why don't you answer?" demanded the third occupant of the room, a heavily bearded man, and shook his fist threateningly in her face.

"I'll answer only what I choose to answer," returned Antoinette quietly. "Neither you nor the whole German army can make me talk."

"Is that so?" sneered the first man. "I suppose you've heard of the fate that came to an English nurse called Edith Cavell, eh?"

"I have," replied the girl angrily, "and it was crime for which Germany will have to pay some day. But you can't frighten me."

"You, too, will be shot as a spy," declared the larger German.

"And do you think that frightens me? I have done a whole lot for my

country. Many times I warned my countrymen of an impending German attack. I am only sorry that I shall no longer have the opportunity."

"What!" exclaimed the German. "You admit it!"

"Of course I admit it. Why not?"

The German took a step toward the girl and raised a hand as though he would strike.

This was more than Hal could stand. He sent the door crashing in with a swift kick and dashed into the room.

It would have been possible for Hal to have shot the German where he stood, but the lad was so angry that he wanted a word with him first.

"You big, hulking coward!" he cried.

Both Germans dropped their hands to their revolvers.

Hal's revolver flashed fire.

The German nearest the young French girl clapped a hand to his forehead and sank to the floor.

There was a flash as the second German fired.

CHAPTER XXV

A FIGHT FOR FREEDOM

Hal felt a stinging sensation in his left side. He paid no attention to this however, but, dropping suddenly to the floor, turned to face his adversary. He saw in that instant the reason the German's bullet had not penetrated a vital spot.

As the German had fired, Antoinette, with a quick movement, had grasped at his arm. She had not succeeded in turning the revolver from its victim, but she did manage to spoil the man's aim. Therefore, the bullet had glanced off one of Hal's ribs.

He now held the advantage, and yet it was not an advantage, for, realizing that he was facing almost certain death, the German had swung the girl in front of him and was using her as a shield.

"Shoot! Don't mind me!" Antoinette called.

But Hal would not fire without first making sure that he would not hit the girl. The German had succeeded now in freeing his hand, and, pointing the revolver over the girl's shoulder, pulled the trigger again.

Hal escaped this bullet by a quick spring aside, and, before the German could fire again, he had skipped forward, darted back of his opponent, and gripped him with his left hand by the throat.

Antoinette clawed so furiously at her captor that the German suddenly released her with a cry of anger, and swung about to confront Hal. He struck out so viciously that Hal stepped back to avoid the blow. The German again raised his revolver, but Hal, moving quickly forward, again struck at the German's revolver with his own -- he had no time to raise it to fire. The German's revolver was knocked from his grasp, but Hal also lost his grip on his weapon and both went clattering to the floor together.

Realizing that he was no match for his heavier opponent if they came to hand grips, Hal stepped quickly back and threw himself into an attitude of defense. It was the lad's plan to stand off, if possible, and spar.

But the German had no mind to indulge in this kind of fighting, of which he had not the slightest knowledge. He came forward with a rush. Hal side-stepped and planted his right fist with great force above his opponent's left ear. The German staggered, but he did not go down. Before he could recover, Hal struck twice again -- right and left, but neither blow found a vulnerable spot.

The German uttered a terrible roar of anger and charged again. This time Hal was not successful in avoiding the rush and the man's arms went about him. Hal felt his breath leaving his body as the German squeezed.

In vain the lad struck out right and left. Several times he felt his blows land, but there was no power behind them now.

As Hal struggled with the German, Antoinette had picked up one of the revolvers and circled around behind the struggling figures, trying to find an opening that she might fire without risk of hitting Hal. None presented itself.

Hal was gasping for breath. His mouth was open and his tongue hung out. Suddenly the lad's struggle relaxed and he became limp in the German's arms. The latter threw the boy's inert body from him roughly, and as he did so Antoinette fired. The German staggered as the bullet struck him in the side. As he turned to face her the girl fired again.

The German dropped to the floor and the bullet passed over him. Before the girl could aim again, the man had seized a revolver from the floor and covered her.

"Drop that gun!" he cried.

There was nothing for Antoinette to do but obey. She dropped the revolver.

"Sit down!" the German commanded.

Again the girl obeyed.

Her captor now saw signs of returning consciousness in Hal. He walked across the room, and, still keeping his revolver ready in one hand, stooped and picked Hal up with the other.

He deposited the lad on a sofa near the girl.

"Now I've got you both, so there'll be a double execution," he growled. "I'll just sit here and guard you till some of my men turn up."

Meanwhile, upstairs, Chester, Major Derevaux and the four Canadians had waited impatiently. The sound of revolver shots below had not carried to their ears. Chester closed his watch with a snap.

"Time's up," he said quietly. "They must have nabbed Hal. Let's go down."

There were no objections offered, so Chester led the way.

The American lad, the French officer and the four Canadian troopers descended the stairs as quietly as had Hal, and as quietly approached the door to the room where the German officer now guarded his captives. Chester peered through the key-hole and took in the situation at a glance.

Chester, however, used more caution than had Hal. Also he chose to proceed with strategy rather than force. Now, the lad realized, was a time when his German uniform would stand him in good stead. He explained his plan in whispers, and as the others stood back out of the way, Chester walked calmly into the room.

The German officer rose to his feet. He did not know Chester from Adam, of course, but he recognized the uniform.

"Glad you've come, lieutenant," he said. "I've had a deuced hard time here. As you may see, I have been shot in the side. Colonel Brewsterberg has been killed. I'll ask you to take charge of my prisoners."

"Very well, sir," said Chester, and produced a revolver.

The German officer returned his revolver to his holster and made as though to leave the room.

"One moment," said Chester sharply.

The German stopped in his tracks and eyed him in surprise.

"I'll thank you for your gun," said Chester.

A great light broke upon the German.

"I see! I see!" he exclaimed. "Another one!"

His hand groped for his revolver.

"Be sure you keep your finger off the trigger," said Chester pleasantly.

For a moment the German hesitated and it was apparent to Chester that he was considering resistance.

"I wouldn't if I were you," said the lad quietly.

The German shrugged his shoulders, then took out his revolver and passed it to Chester, holding it by the muzzle.

"Thanks," said Chester. "Now sit down over there."

He motioned to a chair and the German sat down.

"All right, major," called Chester. "You can come in now."

Major Derevaux entered the room, followed by the four Canadians. The German prisoner looked at them in amazement. Apparently he thought the whole Allied army was about to follow them in.

"Major," said Chester, "you stand guard over that fellow. I'll have a look at Hal."

"I'm all right," said Hal, as Chester approached him. "Bullet struck me in the side, but it is nothing dangerous, I guess. That big German there nearly choked the life out of me, though. He's a hard customer."

Chester staunched the flow of blood in Hal's wound, and the latter announced that he was fit as a fiddle.

"The thing to do now is to get out of here," he said.

Under Major Derevaux's direction, Gregory and Crean had securely bound and gagged the prisoner.

The major now approached Antoinette.

"Have you learned anything?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the girl quietly. "The next German attack will be made day after tomorrow on this front, in an effort to recapture ground won by General Byng. There will be no activity now in the Verdun sector."

"But will the enemy weaken his lines there?"

"Such is not the plan. The general staff believes that there are enough men on this front to go through."

"Good!" said the major. "That's what I came all this way to learn. But how were you discovered, Antoinette?"

"My wig came off," replied the girl. "One of the Germans tapped me playfully on the head, and his ring caught in my hair. The next thing I knew I was a prisoner."

"It's too bad," said the major. "We have lost a valuable assistant now. Of course, there is no use in your remaining here longer. You must go with us."

"But I would so like to stay," murmured the girl.

"But you can't," said Hal eagerly. "You can see that, can't you?"

Antoinette nodded her head.

"Yes, I must go," she said quietly.

"Then let's be moving," said the major.

The girl got to her feet. Chester led the way to the back door. But as he would have thrown open the door and stepped out, he moved back inside with an exclamation.

"What's the matter?" demanded Hal in some alarm.

"Matter?" exclaimed Chester. "The yard is full of Germans!"

CHAPTER XXVI

NEW ARRIVALS

Hal gave a long whistle.

"Now, that's what I call hard luck," he said. "Do they know we're in here?"

"I judge not," replied Chester. "They seem, to be waiting for something."

"Maybe they're waiting for our friend, whom we have tied up here, said Major Derevaux.

"By Jove! I hadn't thought of that," said Hal. "We may be able to make use of him."

The lad stepped quickly across the room and lifted the German to his feet.

"I'm going to remove your gag," he said quietly, "but I want you to understand that if you make an outcry you'll never live to make a second. Do you understand?"

The German signified that he did.

"All right, then," said Hal, "out comes the gag. Chester, keep your gun in the middle of his back. We can afford to take no chances."

"Now," said Hal, "I want you to show yourself at the door and order your men there away."

The German eyed the lad angrily.

"So you want me to help you escape, eh?" he said. "Well, I won't do it."

"We're desperate," said Hal quietly. "If you don't I give you my word you shall be shot."

"Pooh!" sneered the German. "One shot and you will all be killed."

"But you won't be here to see it done," returned Hal. "Now I am not going to waste time with you. I shall count three, and if you have not decided by that time to do as I order, you will die. Chester, do you understand?"

"You bet I do," declared Chester.

"Very well," said Hal. "One! Two!" Still the German made no move. "Three!" said Hal.

The hammer on Chester's revolver clicked.

"Hold on!" cried the German. "I give in!"

Chester drew a breath of relief. He couldn't have shot the man down in cold blood and he knew it. He lowered his revolver a trifle, but still kept the man covered.

"Go to the door and order your men away from here," Hal ordered the prisoner.

The German strode toward the door.

"Careful," said Chester in a low voice. "One false move and it will be your last."

Again he pressed his revolver against the German's back.

"Do you think I'm a fool?" exclaimed the prisoner. "I'm not going to be killed if I can help it. Take that gun away."

"Not until you have done as commanded," returned Chester quietly.

The German opened the door and stepped outside. Chester, still feeling perfectly safe in his German uniform, accompanied him.

"Men," said the German, addressing the soldiers, "I find that I shall not have need of you tonight. You will a return to your quarters."

The soldiers, who had stood at attention as the officer addressed them, at command from a minor officer, wheeled and marched away.

Chester marched his captive back inside.

"There," said the latter. "That's done; now what are you going to do with me?"

"We'll have to tie and gag you again," said Chester. "You will be found and released in the morning."

"And probably court-martialed and shot if this night's proceedings ever leaks out," muttered the German. "However, there is no help for it."

He suffered himself to be bound and gagged without opposition, and Hal then stretched him out on the floor again.

"Now," said the lad, "I guess our way is clear once more."

He moved toward the door, with the others following. Glancing out, he raised a hand suddenly and motioned the others to silence.

Outside two figures approached the house cautiously.

Hal called Chester to his side and the two watched the approaching figures. It was too dark outside to distinguish the features of the men who approached, but there was no room for doubt that they were enemies.

"Back inside and put out the light," whispered Hal. "They're coming in." The light was extinguished promptly. Then Hal added: "Be ready to grab them and stifle their cries the minute they are inside and I have closed the door behind them."

Those in the house stood silent.

A moment later the door moved cautiously inward. Then two shadowy forms stepped inside. Immediately Hal kicked shut the door behind them and sprang forward to lend a hand to Chester and Major Derevaux, who had pounced upon the strangers as they entered.

"Don't let them cry out and don't kill them if you can help it," the lad cried.

The struggle raged furiously in the darkened room for some moments. Then Hal and Chester found themselves sitting upon one of the intruders, the latter with a revolver pressed to the man's forehead.

Gregory and Crean also had taken a hand in the struggle, and, with Major Derevaux, now held the other man helpless.

"Strike a light, Antoinette," called the major.

The girl obeyed, and then for the first time the lads were able to get a look at their prisoners.

"By the great Horn Spoon!" ejaculated Chester, after one look at his prisoner. "I'll take my oath that this man is Stubbs."

At the same moment a cry of astonishment was wrung from Major Derevaux.

"Anderson!" he cried.

Chester and Hal got to their feet. The former twisted his hand in the collar of his prisoner and lifted him to his feet.

"Stubbs!" he said severely, "you should know better than sneak upon a fellow in the dark. You are liable to get hurt."

"I wouldn't have sneaked up, if I had known you were here," growled Stubbs. "I would have come up openly and with my gun shooting."

"My, my!" said Chester. "Little man's getting bloodthirsty. But didn't I hear someone mention the name of Anderson?"

"You did," replied a voice, and Chester found his hand gripped by none other than his old friend, the British colonel. "By George! I'm glad

to see you again," continued Anderson, "though I must say that this is rather a strenuous reception for a couple of old friends."

He also shook hands with Hal. Major Derevaux and Stubbs expressed pleasure at seeing each other again. Then Hal demanded:

"Where did you get hold of Stubbs, Anderson?"

"I found him back in the British lines," said the colonel. "I was detailed to come here to see a woman who lives in this house and to bring a companion for the journey. I asked Stubbs to accompany me, and he was glad of the chance."

"What!" exclaimed Hal. "You mean you brought Stubbs where there was danger and he didn't protest."

"No, I didn't protest," declared the little war correspondent. "But I protest now. I didn't sign up for any adventures in your party, and neither will I; you can bet on that."

"If you didn't know him, you'd think he was afraid," laughed Colonel Anderson.

"I am afraid," declared Stubbs. "I'm afraid to go fooling around with these two," and he indicated Hal and Chester with a sweeping gesture. "I'd rather fool around with dynamite."

"Well, we can't stay here any longer," said Major Derevaux, and in a few words explained to Colonel Anderson what had happened. "What was the nature of your business here?" he asked.

"About the same as yours," returned the colonel with a laugh. "But, as you say, there is no need to linger now. You have learned what I came to find out. We may as well be moving."

"How'd you come, an airship?" asked the major. "Yes; and you?"

"Same way."

"Then we may as well get both machines back. I'll take half of your party. My plane is only about a hundred yards from here."

"My plane is not much farther -- in a little woods there."

"By Jove! So is mine. Wouldn't be surprised if they were near the same spot. Well, let's be moving."

Colonel Anderson led the way from the house, and the others followed him through the darkness.

CHAPTER XXVII

A NEW VENTURE

It was three days later and Hal and Chester sat in their own quarters

in the shelter of the American lines. The flight from the German lines had been made safely. The aeroplanes had been found where Colonel Anderson and Major Derevaux had left them.

These had ascended without knowledge of the Germans, and had started on their homeward flight before being discovered. Then there had been pursuit, but they had landed without being so much as scratched.

"Well," said Hal, rising and picking up a pile of papers, "I've studied these maps until I know them by heart. Now if someone can tell me what it's all about, I'll be obliged."

"Same here," Chester agreed. "Funny, when you stop to think about it. Here they give us these maps and tell us to stuff our heads full of them. Well, my head is full, all right."

"And mine -- Hello, here comes someone."

"It's Captain O'Neill. Maybe he'll be ready to explain now," said Chester.

A moment later the American captain entered the tent. The boys saluted. The captain came to the point at once.

"You are both familiar with airplanes?" he asked.

The lads nodded.

"So I understand," said the captain. "Also I hear that several times you have landed upon unfamiliar ground, and in the dark. I am informed, too, that you are always willing to take desperate risks. Am I right?"

"We are glad to do what we can," returned Chester quietly.

"Understand," said the captain, "you will be asked to land not only in the dark but behind the enemy lines, not knowing who or what is below."

"We understand," said Hal quietly.

"I have come to offer you this opportunity," said Captain O'Neill quietly. "Tonight -- the exact time is 10 o'clock -- we attack in force. In comparison, the assaults before this have been as nothing. I say we, but I mean chiefly, of course, the French. There will be some American troops in the advance, however. The mission I am now offering you was turned over to us by the French general staff."

"We shall be glad of the opportunity to aid, sir," said Hal.

"Good!" said Captain O'Neill, and continued: "One element alone is uncertain; one only is to be ascertained. The force and disposition of the defending troops in shell holes, in their concrete 'pill-boxes,' in their flanking trenches all have been ascertained. They will be blasted out by our artillery. But they have additional forces below the ground, in great caverns too far down to be reached by our shells; they are tremendous underground works concealing whole battalions, many thousands of men, whose presence is known; but the entrances and the means of egress from those great caverns have so far eluded us."

"We have discovered some of these entrances," he continued, "but immediately they have changed. At present we do not know them. But at 10 o'clock tonight the points from which the German reserves will emerge must be instantly and accurately marked. When our infantry goes over the top and the Germans order their shock troops out from the safe underground refuges to meet our men, we must know the points where the enemy battalions are coming up. Some of these points will be cared for by French already in position to inform us. I offer to you the opportunity of marking others of those points."

"We shall be glad," said Hal simply.

"Very well. You understand, of course, that you will be killed if discovered. Both of you come with me."

He arose, and Hal and Chester followed the captain to his motor-car, which they entered and drove to the main road, over which German prisoners captured early in the day were still streaming to the rear. Overhead a few aeroplanes still buzzed -- combat and fire control and staff "observation" machines seeking out their aerodromes in the dark. It grew dark so quickly now that Hal, looking up, saw the colored flash of the signal lights from a pilot's pistol; they burned an instant red and blue and red again as they dropped through the air; and, in response to the signal, greenish white flares gleamed from the ground to the right, outlining the aviation field; then the flying machine, which had signaled, began to come down.

From far beyond the drum fire of artillery rumbled and rattled.

The car ran up a side road and halted before a little hut. Captain O'Neill alighted.

"We had the misfortune, in the attack this morning," he said, "to lose one of our most useful people. The enemy had employed him, recently, in excavating certain of their great underground stations, which I have mentioned; but last night they had him in a front-line trench, which we took this morning. He has volunteered to return to his post, if we can place him behind the lines, but, I regret, he is in no condition for further service. Therefore, we must send a substitute."

Captain O'Neill led the way into a candle lighted room, where a man was lying in bed. Civilian clothes -- the rags of a French refugee from the other side of the lines -- hung on the wall beside him. The man was very weak, with hands which drooped from the wrist as he half sat up as the captain entered. The man's name, the captain informed the lads, was Jean Brosseau.

Captain O'Neill produced a map, a duplicate of the ones which the lads had been given several days before. The man in bed now detailed to them the exact nature and purpose of the markings and spots. It was all lined off into little squares and oblongs, each described with a letter and number. These were for the guiding of the guns -- because, for each tiny square on the German side of the lines, there was a battery or a couple of batteries behind the French front, whose business was solely to sweep that square with high explosive shells, gas shells and shrapnel, when the battle was on.

To escape those shells, the Germans again were burrowing, Brosseau pointed out. Some places they had burrowed far too deep to be

endangered by shells; but their ways of egress were not known. These were covered with camouflage.

Hal took down the shirt from the wall; vermin crawled in it. Captain O'Neill had not made the mistake of having it steamed or washed or disinfected; vermin and filth of underground communications soiled the rags of Jean Brosseau's jacket, his trousers, his cap. Hal, without ceremony, stripped off his uniform and underclothes. His body was clean and without calluses; the cleanliness was soon remedied. Then he dressed, to give him all the time possible to become accustomed to the garments of a French citizen in the hands of the enemy.

The reverberations of the guns outside had increased mightily; they seemed to double again to topmost intensity. Captain O'Neill frowned a little as he heard them and glanced at his watch. A motorcycle clattered up and stopped outside; a man knocked at the door, delivered a message to Captain O'Neill, and departed. Captain O'Neill read the message and tore it to bits. Hal and Chester waited without question; but the sick man had to ask:

"We have lost ground, sir?"

"No, no! All goes well -- very well, except for us here," Captain O'Neill replied. "The time is moved forward; that is all."

He bent again over the map.

"There will not be time now if you are taken far back of the German lines where an aeroplane may come down unobserved. There will not be time," he repeated to Hal, "for you to work forward to the position where you must be."

"What's the matter with coming down near the position where we're wanted?" asked Hal.

"Near their lines?" Captain O'Neill questioned. "There will be men all about, of course; you will be observed."

"What's the matter with coming down observed sir?" said Chester.

"Observed," repeated the captain. "How do you mean?"

"It is something we have talked of before," said Hal. "We have often considered this method of getting a man down inside the German lines, even in a section where discovery is certain. A machine goes up carrying bombs, perhaps; it drops them and attracts anti-aircraft fire. It appears to fall, sir, and comes down in that way."

Captain O'Neill's brows drew together, puzzled, but he was patient.

"But I do not see the advantage," he said.

"It falls in flames, sir," said Hal. "The pilot ignites it when it begins to drop."

"Proceed," Captain O'Neill bade.

"The men found in it are killed," continued Hal "killed by the shrapnel fire -- also, of course, they burn with the aeroplane. It is,

to all observers, a bombing biplane shot down in flames."

"And you think such a plan will succeed?" asked the captain.

"I feel sure of it, sir."

"Well," said Captain O'Neill, "you are the two who must take the chances. You have my permission to adopt your own plans."

CHAPTER XXVIII

OVER THE LINES

"You will carry these with you, of course," said Captain O'Neill, "those who will be found in, the plane?"

"Yes, sir," said Hal. "They need not be aviators, but merely in uniform."

"You drop from the machine as she strikes, I suppose?" said the captain. "She will run after that, of course."

"Certainly it will leave us unsuspected," said Chester. "It will aid our escape. Certainly no one would suspect a man had planned to fall in flames."

"You have suggested enough," said the captain. "Your idea alters much. Meet me in half an hour. Everything will be prepared."

He named a place and left the hut.

Jean Brosseau bent forward in bed, his eyes burning.

"When Captain O'Neill gives you final instructions he may tell you to employ certain people on the other side. Here!" he motioned for the map again, "I shall point out to you where they are."

He took a pencil and made a dot toward the corner of one of the squares.

"In the old military maps a house stood there," he said. "My father's house it was. There was also a stable; there was also a cellar, which the Germans have discovered, but beyond it was an old cellar quite concealed. Our people, at different times, have hidden there. There are both men and women there now. They will help you if they can."

Jean Brosseau fell back on the bed and closed his eyes.

An hour later Hal climbed into the pilot seat of the biplane that Captain O'Neill had placed at their disposal. He felt somewhat uncomfortable in his ragged attire, but he knew that he could not be attired in better costume for the undertaking. Chester also had discarded his civilian clothes and donned rags.

The big "bus," as the airplanes were called, with propeller whirling,

lumbered over the ground; the smoothness of flying came to it and, deafened to everything but the clatter of the motor and the thrash of the air-screw, Hal gazed down. Points of light, yellow and red and some almost white, glowed on the ground. Some of these marked villages, encampments; others signified nothing at all -- decoys to attract the "eggs" of the German night flying falcons.

They neared the lines, and the strip of "No Man's Land," with the pocked and pitted streaks of defenses on both sides, gleamed white and spectral green under the star-dashed shells. An infantry attack was going on; Hal could see the shapes of men as they flattened; they were pinched to dots when they jumped up and then they spread out again.

Before them burst the frightful fireworks of their own barrage; behind them, and above, that of the enemy.

Hal shivered in the cold; it was very chill there flying high above the lines, and he wore but the rags of Jean Brosseau. Directly below them the land had become black again, specked only by little points of light, yellow, ruddy, white; some of these, like the lights behind the French lines, perhaps marked hamlets, encampments; others were mere decoy-lights; others -- they showed but for the briefest second when the biplane passed overhead were the guiding lights for the French and American pilots. These were set in chimneys by the French behind the German lines; any light, if seen by Germans and recognized, might cost the annihilation of a family, or a neighborhood; many times such lights had cost such savage penalty. Still, they were set.

Hal and Chester warmed at sight of them this night as never before. They were going to the people who had set those lights.

The biplane banked and circled. Below was the square where the airplane was to be shot down. Troops were moving through those fields, undoubtedly, advancing in single file through communication trenches or dashing from shell hole to shell hole; other troops lingered in dugouts underground. The French batteries played all over those fields, spraying down shrapnel, detonating the frightful charges of high explosives. But at an hour before the appointed time -- at 9 o'clock -- the French batteries would remit their fire for ten minutes upon the square where the biplane should fall. Hal looked at the clock fastened before him. It was two minutes to 9; he could see, directly below, the crimson splash of the great French shells; a little way to the side showed the flashes of the German heavy batteries making reply.

Now, as though smothered by the German fire, the French batteries ceased. It was 9 o'clock, and Hal circled above the German batteries, which were firing, and Chester released the first bomb. Before it struck and burst, he let go another. He laid a third "egg" close beside a German battery -- so close that the battery ceased to fire; but before the fourth dropped the anti-aircraft guns were going. Chester could hear, above the racket of the motor and the air-screw, the "pop, pop" of smashing shrapnel. They ran through the floating smoke of a shell, the acrid ether-smelling stuff stinging their nostrils. The beams of searchlights swept into the air. Hal circled more carefully and deliberately dropped lower; Chester let two more bombs drop near the batteries; he cleared the frames of the last pair of "eggs," and, leaning forward, struck Hal's shoulder to tell him so.

The phosphorus-painted face of the altimeter showed the pointer

registering less than 2,000 feet; before the breaking German shells should do, in fact, what it was to be pretended they had done, Chester reached up and ignited the preparation smeared over the top plane. Yellow flames flared up, and, to keep them above and behind, Hal pointed the nose of the biplane far down and let her fall.

He turned, as he let the machine dive, back toward the French lines. Then, as the German antiaircraft gunners saw their target flashing clear in flames and they strewed their shrapnel closer before it, the biplane fluttered and fell, no longer diving under guidance, but out of control.

Chester jerked about to Hal; over the forms strapped between them, he saw Hal's face in the light of the flame. Hal was not hit; he had merely let go of the controls. It was part of the plan to let the machine fall out of control. But, for a moment, it was too much as if Hal had been hit.

The biplane side-slipped, "went off the wing," sickeningly, dropping down spinning. Then, suddenly, with a catch of a well-made, well-balanced plane, the inherent stability asserted itself, and the planes caught; the big "bus" fluttered like a falling leaf, "flattened out," and rested; now, it side-slipped again and fell, and Hal did not touch the controls.

Chester, looking down, saw that the flashes of the guns off to the side had come halfway to him; if the falling plane caught itself again after the same amount of drop, side-slipping, it would hover not too far from the ground before going "off the wing" again. That is, it might.

Anyway, the flames which had caught the wing fabric and were blazing the breadth of the wings above and jumping back now to the rudder and the tail were kept above; and to anyone on the ground the illusion of a machine shot down, burning and out of control, must have become complete.

Chester held on, not breathing. The momentary flutter and hover of the machine was over. It was dropping down again in a wild, sliding swoop -- yet Hal made no move to stop it even when it half turned over.

Soon, however, he made a move, and, before the slide had gone too far, he caught it as before it had caught itself; it fluttered, hovered, the flames streaking up straight above it; the ground now just below. Then it went "off the wing" again and crashed.

Chester, leaping clear at the instant of the impact, stumbled and fell on his face and rolled down a shell hole. He caught himself, half stunned and dizzy, and tried to crawl back toward the burning plane. But Hal blundered against him and carried him back.

"All right," Hal whispered. "Are you?"

"All right," said Chester. "Great landing. I've fixed things back there. Time to be moving. Got your grenades?"

"You bet."

"All right. Good luck."

Their orders were to part now. Chester crawled one way, Hal the other. The biplane was burning with a great deal of smoke, which smothered the glow on the side they had leaped. And no German was near; they could be very sure of that. The gasoline now was ignited, and the wreck was blazing beautifully. The machine was known, of course, to be a bombing machine, shot down during operations. No one would know how many bombs had come down with it; no one would come close until after the flames had burned down. Then the Germans would find the "pilot" and the "bomber," the two still forms the lads had strapped to the machine before leaving their own lines. Everyone would be accounted for; no search for more would be made.

Both boys now were ready for their desperate work.

CHAPTER XXIX

DESPERATE WORK

Chester, having crept a hundred yards, hugged down into another hole and waited. The Germans who had been about now approached the glowing heap of the biplane. What they found seemed to satisfy them. At least they raised no alarm. The shells from the far-off trench guns, which had been breaking in the fields both to right and to left, began searching about here now and scattered them. Chester moved forward toward the lines. And, as he moved, the shells which had been bursting in that direction, ceased.

The feel of the far-off hand of Captain O'Neill and of his superiors -- the men who had planned this desperate venture -- thrilled through him. Until five minutes to 10 o'clock he would be cared for, Captain O'Neill had promised. The French artillery, opening a path through its fire, would throw its shield around him. Simultaneously, it would be opening another path to Hal, advancing off to the right. Where all the Germans, who held that ground, burrowed below in dugouts or crept and ran through the deep defiles of communication trenches, Hal and he could go at will over the ground and so far as the shells from the French batteries were concerned, be perfectly safe.

Chester stole on through the blackness. Shells were breaking a hundred yards before him, behind him, off to both sides, but no shell came closer. Now, if he remembered rightly, the shells would cease in the square ahead and to the left; he moved that way -- and they stopped. Over the ground which he had crossed, shells were bursting again now. When he halted once more, the frightful hurricane of high explosives swept before him, on both sides and behind -- but not close to him. So for many minutes he advanced.

It was strange, when used to dodging shells behind his own lines and when accustomed to twist and turn and dive and tumble in the air to avoid the burst of anti-aircraft shrapnel, to feel shells falling like a bulwark about him. That was what they were. For the present, at least, the shells gained for him and gave to him the sole use of the surface of the earth there behind the German lines.

Troops were all about, of course; but all were hiding. They could not

imagine anyone purposely advancing through the open there; they could not imagine anyone surviving if he tried it. They noticed, undoubtedly, that the fall of the French shells intermitted for a moment in this direction and that; but when any of them went out the shells burst upon them again and annihilated detachments. The cease and the start again of the French fire seemed merely capricious, to tempt them out to destruction. Not having the pattern of the pass by which the two boys advanced, they could not suspect any pattern about it.

And now Chester no longer could trust his own memory of that pattern. He went to the bottom of a deep shell crater, and, lying upon his stomach, he took a scrap of map from under his shirt and spread it below him. He took a tiny electric torch from his pocket and illumined the sheet dimly. A series of squares, into which that sector was divided, marked his path for the front -- each square of the series numbered in ink and designated by a time, such as 32, 24, 19, 16, 10 and so, forth. They told the moment before 10 o'clock, at which, upon the square marked, the French fire would cease, not to start again until the fire ceased, at the next lowest minute, upon the next square. Down to five minutes to 10 o'clock they showed the safe path, after that friend and foe alike on this side of the German lines must shift for themselves.

Chester's mind caught the pattern of the next numbered square; he repeated to himself the time intervals. He climbed up out of the shell hole and swiftly passed the next square as the shells began falling behind him. Had Hal, off there to the right four squares away, now, as good luck as he? Or, was the French fire opening a path for no one there now?

By the ceasing of the shells on this square it was 24 minutes to 10 o'clock -- the hour when the French forces would stream over the top. And for ten minutes, upon the square, the French fire would cease. That was because it was upon this square that Hal and Chester -- if both survived to reach it -- would meet. It was under the ground in this numbered ten minutes to 10 o'clock -- that the French were hidden, of whom Jean Brosseau had told. And as Brosseau had expected and hoped, Chester and Hal - or whichever of them survived to this square -- were ordered to employ those people.

Chester crept forward, searching for the ruins of the house to mark the spot. There was a communication-trench some yards away to the left of it, he remembered. He could hear them working upon it now, calling to each other as the shells had given them a few minutes respite. He crept by them and came upon stones -- the square stones of the walls of a house demolished and scattered. Only one house had been at that point, and, crawling carefully, he dropped into the pit of the cellar. There, in that cellar, Hal and he were to meet, if Hal yet lived.

Hal was not there; he had not been there. The heap of old charred beams and rubbish, which covered the opening of the tunnel to the French hiding in the old cellar deeper and beyond, was undisturbed; he heard no sound except that of the shells and the scraping and voices of the Germans at work thirty yards away.

Chester flattened down upon the rubbish of the cellar; he raised a black beam a little and thrust himself under. Feeling ahead, he found more rubbish, which he cleared; and then, beyond, his hand found

emptiness and the smell of earth -- and the odor of people and the closeness of foul air. But there was no sound ahead.

He crawled his length and then spoke quietly in French:

"I come for the redeeming of France," words which he had been ordered to use upon his arrival.

He got no reply. from the silence ahead; so he said again:

"I am not Jean Brosseau; he sent me. I come to ask your aid."

"Aid?" a voice repeated; "aid?"

Chester lighted his little torch again, and men's faces showed before him.

"Quick!" one of the men said. "Get away. It's a trap!"

"The Germans have taken us," said a second voice. "We --"

His voice stopped and choked. It was stilled forever, Chester knew. He could not see -- he had extinguished his light.

A revolver was fired in his face, but the bullet went over him. He pressed to one side of the tunnel as he pushed back, and the next bullet went into the sand where he had been. He was back under the beams; and the Germans, choking, fired no more.

Someone pulled at his leg. Someone jerked him out and pulled him up -- it was Hal.

"The people in there were taken," said Chester quietly. "They -"

"You've still got your grenades," said Hal. "I've got mine. We can do it alone, with luck!"

The Germans, working on the tunnel off to the left, yelled at each other to jump for cover, for the French shells were coming again. They burst all about -- except now, just ahead, where Hal and Chester were running. Two minutes they had to run and crawl and run again across the square, three minutes for the next one. Then, again, they parted. Two squares to the left, two minutes for one, three for the next -- Hal was to go; two squares to the right -- for three minutes and two the French fire was to be remitted -- Chester must travel. There were two other small squares to be spared for five minutes to provide for help which might have been gained from the refugees' dugout.

Those squares were being spared now, anyway.

But the minutes of respite for all were finishing fast.

It was five minutes to 10 o'clock and Chester, running bent over, stumbled and fell; the frightful concussion of great high explosive shells, bursting close to him, shook and battered him. He hugged down into a hole, and from about his neck, he drew a flat bag, which held a gas mask; he adjusted it quickly. Shells were striking about him, which did not break; but from the butts of these fumes were floating. The Germans, showing in the light of the star-shells, had become

snouted creatures in their gas helmets.

They appeared only for an instant, as, jumping up from one trench, where the shells were falling, they rushed to another deep defile. Half a score, who had shown themselves in one group, vanished; and Chester was buffeted again by the shock of high explosives.

Gas and still more gas followed high explosives again.

Chester, creeping now, got, even through his mask, smarting, searing twinges of the gas. He was among bodies and wounded men. Their masks, when, they fell, had become torn or broken. The gas had got them.

Five minutes to 10 o'clock had passed.

CHAPTER XXX

THE ATTACK

It was three minutes to the attack or less, and the hurricane fire of the French artillery swept cyclonic over the German lines.

A thousand yards away, more or less, as the ground gave advantage, the French front-line trenches were filled with men awaiting the hour of 10 -- two minutes off now -- to go over the top.

The German batteries, behind, knew that the time was near; but just when it would be, in two minutes, or in ten or in an hour-they did not know. When the fire of the French guns lifted, they did not know whether it would be to let the poilus assault, or whether it would be only to trick the German infantry and machine-gun men out of their tunnels and dugouts to meet the frightful fall of the French hurricane fire again.

But the German guns doubled their response now when the French trebled theirs.

One minute to 10 o'clock!

Chester, lying in a shell hole with, his bag, of grenades open before him, felt a shock on his back. A bit of shell or shrapnel had struck him, but he moved his arms and, except for the stinking pain, he was all right. He choked -- and instantly held his breath. A bit of metal, flying from somewhere, had pierced his gas mask. The tear was right before his mouth. He thrust the fabric into his mouth and bit it, holding it tight between his lips. That patched the hole; there was no other. He breathed again without choking.

Ten o'clock!

From over the German front-line trenches, a half mile or more forward, the storm of the French artillery fire had lifted -- lifted to add to the cyclone of shells sweeping the reserve lines. The German star-shells, rising and floating and glaring constellations, spread their garish light over the front, and showed the French charging

forward in the open.

They rushed onward, few falling, almost unopposed. For the Germans in the front-line trenches -- those who had not been withdrawn under that hurricane of shells--were dead or crouched down, stunned, and in stupor.

The French took the advanced trenches, the second supporting, and came on.

Now, from the "pill-boxes" -- the few scattered points for machine-gun support which the artillery had not found -- resistance came. The French, though fewer, came on.

Before Chester, lying with his bag of grenades open at the edge of a shell crater, the ground suddenly opened and, a great causeway gaped down into the earth. Where solid ground had seemed to be, men were rushing forth -- German infantrymen with rifles and bayonets fixed to the counter-attack.

Off to the right twenty yards another such gap yawned in the ground. And Chester, rising, hurled a missile from the bag he had carried.

It burst among the emerging men; he hurled another. A leap of blue flame, which flared high and blinding, followed its detonation. He hurled at the other causeway, first halting by a bomb the out rush of men; and thus he marked the mouth of this second causeway the next instant by a sheet of blue flame.

Off to the side, 200 yards, blue flames shot up and glared. Hal was alive, that meant -- at least, he had been alive a moment ago, calling shells upon himself from the French batteries, as well as attack from the Germans coming from the ground.

For the shells already were arriving; one burst just beside the great causeway and blocked it.

The shell annihilated the men rushing at Chester. He rolled over, deaf and unseeing. Shells were coming true and straight. An aeroplane appeared overhead so close down that Chester could see it plainly in the light of the star-shells when his sight came back. Aeroplanes were guiding the guns and dropping aerial torpedoes.

One landed in the mouth of that other causeway and blew it out of shape, and this was the last thing which, for a long time, Chester remembered.

When Chester opened his eyes, he lay on a bed with the whitest of sheets. For a moment he could remember nothing, then the details of the great battle carve back to him.

His first thought, naturally, was of Hal. He sat up in bed. There, in another bed in the center of what Chester now recognized as a hospital tent, lay Hal, his head swathed in bandages.

"He's safe, anyhow," said Chester to himself.

The lad passed a hand across his head, and ascertained that his head also was wrapped tightly, and that there were more bandages around his

body.

"Wonder what's the matter with me?" he muttered. "I don't remember being hit, and here I am all wrapped up like a baby doll. I must be in pretty bad shape."

Nevertheless, now that his mind had been eased regarding Hal's safety, Chester soon closed his eyes, again and slept.

It was late the following day that the lad was aroused by the sound of voices at his bedside. One voice he recognized as Hal's, the other came to him later. It was the voice of Stubbs.

Chester opened his eyes, and gazed at the little war correspondent. The latter spoke first.

"The sleeper awakes," he said to Hal. "See, Chester thinks it's time to get up, and I'm not a bit sure he isn't right. He's been in bed for four days now. That's longer than I ever slept"

"I'm not so weak I can't get out of here and pull, your nose," declared Chester, sitting up.

Anthony Stubbs grinned.

"I feel pretty safe right here," he said.

"What's the matter with me, anyway?" demanded Chester. "Hello there, Hal. What's the trouble with you? You seem to be pretty well bunged up."

"Guess neither of us is going to die," said Hal with a smile. "The doctor tells me that we both have holes in our heads, and that we have a few pieces of shell in our legs and bodies. He says we are about the luckiest pair he ever saw."

"How long does he figure we must stay in bed;" Chester wanted to know.

"He said something about thirty days," said Stubbs, with another grin.

"Then he's barking up the wrong tree," Chester declared. "I don't feel exactly lovely, but I know I'm not going to stay here a month. Any broken bones, Hal?"

"No; and neither have you, according to the doctor. He said that we should be able to get about in a week or two."

"Well, that's a little better," Chester grumbled. "What do you mean by telling me a month, Stubbs?"

"I didn't say he said a month," Stubbs protested. "I said the doctor said something about thirty days, and so he did. He said that most men would have to lie in bed thirty days with your wounds, but that he felt you would be able to leave the hospital sooner because of a pair of remarkably fine constitutions."

"I think you were trying to have a little fun with me, Stubbs," Chester declared.

"You know I wouldn't joke with a sick boy," said Stubbs.

"No, I don't know it, either, Stubbs; and when I get out of here, I shall make it a point to get even with you."

"To get even?" Stubbs exploded. "You listen to me. You're even and a long ways ahead right now. In fact, you're so far ahead that I couldn't get even with you in a life time. However, when you get well, I'm going to have a try."

"You'd better not fool with me, Stubbs," said Chester. "I'm liable to get out of here right now and have a little bout with you."

"Well," said Stubbs, "I can lick you now."

Chester grinned.

"Guess you're right," he said. "Maybe I had better postpone it. By the way, did the attack succeed?"

"Did it?" exclaimed Stubbs enthusiastically. "I rather think it did. The French have advanced from four to five miles into the enemy's lines; and I overheard a man say if it had not been for your work in bottling up the enemy underground the French would have been surprised and hurled back."

"Well, I'm glad we helped," said Hal simply.

"And I'll be glad when we can help some more," declared Chester. "It won't be long before we are up and doing again."

"I should think you had had enough," said Stubbs.

"We haven't, though," said Hal. "Now, run away, Mr. Stubbs, and come back later. I want to take a little snooze."

"Same here," said Chester.

Both made themselves as comfortable as possible under the circumstances. And while they are taking a much-needed rest, we will bid them a brief adieu, only to meet them later on in a succeeding volume, entitled: "THE BOY ALLIES WITH PERSHING IN FRANCE; OR, OVER THE TOP WITH UNCLE SAM'S WARRIORS."

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