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-Editor

**Chapter V  
Defeat**

Out of the awful holocaust,  
Out of the whirlwind and the flood,  
Out of old creeds to bedlam tossed,  
Shall rise a new Earth washed in blood,  
A new race filled with spirit power.  
This is the world's stupendous hour.

This chapter is captioned "Defeat" for the reason that that would undoubtedly have been the outcome of events had it not been for the intervention of the United States of America which averted a disaster that would have put the nations of the earth under the heel of Germany in a state of feudal vassalage, for—who knows?—possibly a millennium.

Woodrow Wilson became the twenty-eighth President of the United States in 1913. Prior to that he had been a scholar with an expansive academic background. He had studied law at the University of Virginia and practiced for a short time in Atlanta, Georgia. He resumed his studies and took his Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. He was next appointed Professor of Jurisprudence and Political Economy on the Faculty of Princeton University and soon became its President. He resigned and was elected Governor of New Jersey, ultimately to be nominated for the Presidency in 1912 and elected. He was re-elected for the second term largely by the pacifist vote—"He kept us out of war" was the slogan—and by his declaration of neutrality. The popular election slogan at the time was the United States is "too proud to fight."

Wilson did his best to demonstrate the efficacy of his philosophy that "The pen is mightier than the sword" by trying to end the war through negotiation, after which he would organize a League of Nations to promote a Permanent Peace, but Germany persisted in its policy of unrestricted submarine warfare. France, on the other hand, had had a growing thirst for revenge since its humiliating defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870.

Bismarck, the Chancellor and founder of the German Empire, had schemed to set up a Hohenzollern prince on the Spanish throne. But the people and the press, knowing the deep enmity between these two nations, could see that such an eventuality would threaten the very existence of France as a nation; it would be caught in a vise with the expanded German Empire astride its eastern and western frontiers. Germany continued blatantly determined to be the master race destined to rule the world.

It was well known, and particularly by Germany, that the British Empire had previously guaranteed the neutrality of the small and inoffensive Belgian nation. But now Germany was head of the Triple Alliance in control of the armies, air forces, and navies of Germany, Austria, and Italy. Germany was certain, when der Tag dawned, that she could again prostrate France as she had done in 1870. From that time until 1914, forty odd years later, she had been building up her military establishment to its maximum potential strength.

Austria also had illusions of grandeur under the Hapsburgs, and despotically planned to subdue Serbia and make Austrian subjects out of its Slavic people, although Serbia was allied with Russia. Austria was aware of this, but expected that Germany would take care of Russia in the event of hostilities. In truth, Germany had little to fear from the clumsy Russian organization, particularly as it had a few years earlier, in 1905, taken a humiliating drubbing from Japan.

The chief obstacle to Germany's ambition was the Triple Entente, based on a mutual understanding under which France, Russia, and Britain would pool their military resources in the event of attack. The land armies of Russia and France, conjoined with the British Navy—at that time the most powerful navy in the world—would assure the balance in favor of the Triple Entente. The British Army was a small, highly trained professional force of about 200,000 men.

This political chemistry in a very inflammable European hegemony was bound to end up in an explosion. All it needed was for some ill-advised chancellery to touch a lighted match to the mixture. The assassination of Archduke Ferdinand, the Austrian Crown Prince, at Sarajevo in Bosnia, lit the dreaded fuse in June 1914. It was declared to be a Slavic plot, and a month later Serbia was victimized. This reacted on the malevolent pressures mentioned, which triggered political and military events causing volumes to be written by authoritative exponents. Comparatively speaking, no political or military significance, or wisdom, can attach to the knowledge of a young soldier—to wit, the writer—not long out of college and, in the words of an observant wag "still wet behind the ears."

Nevertheless, a brief reference to the events that headlined the press in 1914 would seem to be appropriate in order to reorient readers' thinking with the global tragedy, focus it on an infinitesimally small spot thereof, and, consequently, transfer some importance to the experience of a boy in the ranks of one of the armies engaged in the holocaust. The following should suffice:

* Austria declared war on Serbia.
* Serbia called on Russia, its Slavic ally.
* Russia, to honor its commitment to Serbia, mobilized its army.
* Germany delivered an ultimatum to Russia, giving it twelve hours to demobilize.  
  This Russia refused to do.
* Germany declared war on Russia.
* Germany delivered an ultimatum to Belgium, demanding free passage for German arms in the event of war with France.  
  This Belgium refused to grant.
* Germany declared war on France.
* Germany invaded Belgium.
* Britain entered the war to honor its commitment to Belgium.

During the ensuing three years these further developments characterized the burgeoning conflict:

Germany defied world opinion and declared unrestricted submarine warfare on all shipping.

Turkey entered the war on the side of Germany.  
Germany made raids on England by Zeppelin dirigible aircraft.  
Turkey drove the British naval fleet from the Dardanelles.  
During 1915 the First Canadian Division landed in France.  
Germany introduced the use of poisonous gas as a military weapon.  
The United States challenged Germany's unrestricted U-boat warfare.  
Germany sank the Cunard liner *Lusitania* off the Irish coast.  
Italy deserted the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria, and Italy, and re-entered the war on the side of the Triple Entente, composed of Britain, France, and Russia.  
Bulgaria entered the war on Germany's side.  
In 1917 the United States declared war on Germany and her allies.  
On November 11, 1918, the contending nations subscribed to an armistice, bringing to an end the First World War.

At the beginning of hostilities Germany realized British sea power must be denied the use of the ports along the English Channel and contiguous to the North Sea, or "German Ocean."  
To neutralize these, not only for logistical reasons, but also as a factor in the campaign to destroy France, it became the German strategy to strike at the heart of France through Belgium. France did not anticipate such a violation of Belgian neutrality and gave the "Junkers," then governing Germany, credit for moral standards they did not possess. France expected Germany to attack through the Ardennes Forest in the south where the "French 75s," then said to be the most effective field artillery in the world, would afford an adequate defense.

When Germany invaded Belgium, it found itself confronted by the British Expeditionary Force, made up of highly trained professional career soldiers raised by voluntary enlistment. Every man in it had years of expert training. Compared with the Continental troops with less training it was as a “rapier to a scythe.” The Kaiser stigmatized it as England’s “Contemptible little army,” but it slowed down the massive German advance. It literally sacrificed itself as an advance guard, but afterwards by “brilliant rearguard action” it had to retreat to the River Marne, and to the city of Ypres (“wipers” to the British Tommy).

War correspondents reported that the British Expeditionary Force “displayed a fortitude rarely matched,” so that it became a badge of military honor to any British soldier to be able to claim to have been one of the “Contemptibles.”

These actions put an end to open warfare and ushered in trench warfare with all of its associated abominations, so that Bairnsfather’s “Ole Bill” could say, “If ye knows of a better ’ole, go to it.”

Nation after nation was sucked into the vortex of armies; navies with millions of men and women locked in a satanic struggle for survival; yet it is true that only a few of those millions were guilty of a crime. Innocent men on both sides sought to destroy each other.

*Der Tag*, the day the “Junker clique” in Germany had toasted, had dawned, and, as the Editor of *Source Records* declared: “Mankind took three years to become fully aroused and to gather its full powers into triumphant capability.” This was amply demonstrated by the heroic defense of Verdun that brought undying fame to the French poilu. Their cry, *Ils ne passeront pas* was their clarion call to patriotism.

Young men were enlisting and offering their lives to the cause, and the words of Sir Walter Scott were recited at British gatherings for recruitment:

Breathes there the man, with soul so dead,  
Who never to himself hath said,  
This is my own, my native land!  
Whose heart hath ne’er within him burn’d,  
As home his footsteps he hath turn’d  
From wandering on a foreign strand!  
If such there breathe, go, mark him well;  
For him no Minstrel raptures swell;

High though his titles, proud his name,  
Boundless his wealth as wish can claim;  
Despite those titles, power, and pelf,  
The wretch, concentred all in self,  
Living, shall forfeit fair renown,  
And, doubly dying, shall go down  
To the vile dust, from whence he sprung,  
Unwept, unhonored and unsung.

On the Eastern Front the Russians were defeated. The naval battle of Jutland had been fought in 1916 with the decision unconvincing. Even the Holy Land in Palestine had become a battleground.

In the formation of Kitchener’s Army, a form of conscription had, for the first time, been introduced into England. Born in Ireland, Lord Kitchener had become a famous general; he bore the epithet “Kitchener of Khartoum” and had a genius for organization. He decided to raise seventy divisions of British troops, and had actually succeeded to the extent of sixty-seven divisions when, at the pleading of the Tsar of Russia, he was prevailed upon to duplicate the plan of organization for that ally. The British Government allowed him to undertake the job on a temporary basis.

On June 5, 1916, Kitchener took his departure for Russia. From the British fleet deployed in the North Sea, he embarked on HMS *Hampshire*. During the voyage to Archangel, the *Hampshire* struck a German mine, was blown up, and sank with all hands aboard, including Lord Kitchener. This disaster had an electrifying effect throughout the British Empire. Few young men who were healthy and able-bodied now held back.

The Battle of the Somme began in 1916 and was Britain’s greatest offensive action of the war up to that time. It was fought by “Kitchener’s army,” with what help the French Army on its right flank could give after the agonizing, but glorious defense in the Siege of Verdun, so costly in blood and materiel. Reuter’s dispatch, recently published by the *New York Times*, recalled the engagement and a memorial service that took place at Thiepval in Flanders, in these words:

The 1,200,000 men who died fifty years ago in the Battle of the Somme in World War I, the costliest battle in military history, were saluted yesterday in a commemoration service near this northern French village.

One commentator wrote: “God grant that men may never again be plunged into such a frenzy of desolation.”

The 49th Battalion had “won its spurs” in 1916 during the Somme offensive in an action at Sanctuary Wood in which it lost over half its strength. After reinforcement, it was deployed in the Battle of Arras for the possession of Vimy Ridge. In November, 1917, it participated in the fighting at Passchendaele which ended the third battle of Ypres. Following that, it was withdrawn to Étaples for reinforcement, where in January, 1918, “The Club” was taken into Platoon No. 16 of Company “D.”

A battalion was usually “in action” for a period of approximately four to six weeks at a stretch before coming out for a similar length of time “on rest.” Being “on rest” meant that it was still at the front, but in the rear area where the reserves, headquarters, artillery, air strips, railheads, ammunition dumps, stores, field hospitals, and service corps were located, and where infantrymen for a time were comparatively immune from artillery fire.

While “in action,” a battalion generally occupied one of four different positions, each one for about a week at a time. Sometimes the exigencies arising out of the enemy’s movements would disturb the pattern; otherwise the four positions going forward towards the enemy from the rear were: the Reserve Line, the Support Line, the Front Line, and lastly, the Outpost Line.

Depending on the terrain and other factors there was, as a rule, anywhere from fifty to a hundred yards between each of the four positions, and beyond, in No Man’s Land, there might be anywhere from several hundred to a thousand yards. There were times when No Man’s Land was only a few yards away from us—so close in fact that we would have to use periscopes to keep watch. In such circumstances we dared not talk, and were in such close proximity to “Fritz” that we—and they—could, if ordered, throw hand grenades at each other.

Boys in the Outpost Line were considered expendable; they were not expected to survive an enemy assault. In small groups of four or five, they had to lie in shell craters, in which they could dig “bivies” (a corruption of the word bivouac), and without a moment’s letup day or night, keep a sharp watch on the enemy’s lines. A loose wire would be strung out from each Outpost to a man in the Front Line, and would be held by hand at each end. By pulling the wire, and having the pull similarly acknowledged, signals would be passed. For example, one pull would mean that a man was crawling back through the barbed-wire entanglements to the Front Line; two pulls would mean that a man, maybe an officer, was crawling out from the Front Line to the Outpost. Three pulls would precede an SOS, and would be a warning that the Outpost had observed unusual activity in the enemy lines, making it necessary for our Front Line to be alerted and to “stand to” in readiness to repulse an attack. In the “stand to” position the fire step had to be manned, every man with his bayoneted rifle held at the ready on the trench parapet.

If an enemy attack was about to take place, it was the duty of the Outpost to fire certain colored signal rockets which would send the whole front into action, including the artillery at the rear. It was then up to the boys in the Outpost to get back to the Front Line as best they could. The Front Line would meet the shock of battle; the Support Line would merge into it to fill the gaps caused by casualties; and the Reserve Line would either advance into Support or fight a rearguard action, while the General Reserves would be set in motion and maneuver in accordance with the strategy determined upon at Division Headquarters to fit the fluid situation.

If a raid or an attack was to be made by our side, it was generally preceded by an artillery “box” barrage. If the sector was “quiet,” men in the Reserve and Support lines would be assigned to working parties to engage in cleaning trenches, garbage disposal, and the like.

On arrival at Étaples we were given our pay in French francs and set at Liberty for the day, which gave “The Club” an opportunity to look around and become familiar with the environment.

Hearing of a former seaside resort on the English Channel called Paris Plage, we set out on foot to spend the day there; it was only a few kilometers away. Because it was wintertime, the weather was inclement and the roads wet and slippery. Along the way we hailed a couple of old carriages of the open kind that in prewar days had thrived on the patronage of vacationers. Each was drawn by a rickety old horse that limped along; the elderly drivers wore stove pipe hats, obviously the worse for wear. For a franc apiece we rode in state. Robert Morgan, George Bruce, Johnny Gunn, and Frank Saffin occupied the leading carriage; Harold Toye, Frank Cushman, and I brought up the rear in the other.

*(Illustration of a horse-drawn carriage)*

In keeping with the decorum appropriate to this type of transportation, we immediately elevated ourselves to the peerage and, as we rode, bestowed knightly nods in courtly fashion, *sans largesse*, on other soldiers plodding along the dirty road in the same direction. Few of them were inclined to pay us the deference which we felt was called for by our new exalted station. Some abruptly stopped; one regarded us with amazement and ejaculated:  
“Jesus Christ! What the hell is this bloody war comin’ to, with buck privates ridin’ in open carriages!”

One group trudging along carried their disrespect a little too far; they ran after us, grabbed the back end of our carriage, and headed the decrepit old nag for the ditch. The driver, on retrieving his hat from the mud, cracked his whip and vehemently, in a torrent of French invective, threatened to fight single-handed the whole army of young barbarians from across the seas. Before anything untoward happened, and after a little pacification in French francs, we reached the seashore.

We loitered there in the inclement weather for a while; then, with the aid of a little liquid refreshment, trudged back to Étaples.

Next morning bandoliers of rifle ammunition, two hand grenades, and a rubberized ground sheet were issued to each of us. Without further ado, armed to the teeth, with sixty-eight-pound packs on our backs, we entrained for Colonne Riquart, a dismal little coal-mining village, the main street of which was little more than a muddy, ankle-deep gutter. We were billeted in stables and abandoned houses.

On being dismissed for several hours, “The Club” adjourned to the local estaminet, where we were waited on by a slatternly young woman; her face and figure were quite prepossessing, and she spoke broken English. She could well have been the inspiration for the then-popular war song, “Mademoiselle from Armentières—hinky, dinky parlez-vous.” She was taking care of her father’s business while he, a poilu, was in the French Army somewhere on the Western Front.

Back at our stable billets later that night, I lay in the damp straw (unturned since the last jaded old nag had used it) and smoked a cigarette, while my thoughts took me back about a decade to my home in Ireland. How tranquil and inviting it seemed at that moment!

Thus preoccupied, I realized that the folks at home were often more poignantly affected by the tragic barbarities of the war than the soldiers on the firing line. For us, familiarity with the hardships of warfare bred contempt for them which, combined with the amazing health and comradeship we enjoyed, made the whole tragic affair become a novel, beastly, but strangely exciting drama. Its content of laughter and ludicrously amusing situations mitigated the physical inconveniences. In contrast, we could envisage those at home scanning, with heavy hearts, the daily casualty lists.

We left Colonne Riquart in a few hours for a place called Ferfay. As we arrived, an artillery duel was in full swing. In the distance it resembled the low rumbling of thunder. The gun flashes on the horizon were like understudies to the lightning, and on that particular night, the natural phenomena of thunder and lightning joined in. We could hear the throb of aircraft in the sky, one or two of which burst into flames on being hit. They then cascaded to the earth with a sickening whistle. All of these noises, mingled together, produced a weird, unearthly cacophony of the most hellish dissonance.

Ferfay had suffered greatly from air bombardment and gunfire. Most of the houses were almost completely demolished. The superstructure of the barn in which we were billeted was blown away; not a door or window was left in place to check the biting wind and sleet that blew in, in gusts. It was wintertime and the straw in which we lay was blanketed in snow. It was such a scene as Bairnsfather, the British cartoonist, had immortalized in his “Ole Bill” series of drawings. During the night we were driven out by a snowstorm and had to find quarters elsewhere in the vicinity.

For five days, while there, we were put to work spreading shale on the icy roads. We began to realize—and subsequent experience confirmed—that navvying was the predominating activity for footslogging infantrymen. Even the officers, despite their relatively more comfortable billets and more palatable victuals, were as disgruntled as the men. They were indifferent to our discomfort and continually found fault with the unavoidable sloppiness of our uniforms. Frank Saffin’s picturesque epithets accurately reflected our feelings: “This goddamned war is beginnin’ to get my goat; they send a dozen men and a ten-ton truck to spread shale in front of an officer’s billet so that the son of a bitch won’t land on his ass.” Then, with a grunt, as he dug his spade into the pile: “And they’re makin’ the bloody shovels bigger every year!”

Several days later, on January 16, 1918, we were assembled in full marching order and were on our way to fill the gaps in the 49th Battalion, which was brigaded with the RCR’s (Royal Canadian Regiment), the PPCLI (Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry), and the 42nd Highlanders, known as the Canadian Black Watch after the illustrious Scottish regiment of that name.

The 49th Battalion was encamped in the Souchez Valley at Givenchy. We reached it about midnight, mud-bespattered and very thirsty. The indefatigable Harold Toye foraged and found water, and soon our empty water bottles were replenished. A labyrinth of trenches zigzagged over the area, and, farther south, stretched up over the slopes of Vimy Ridge, an eminence about a thousand feet high and seven kilometers in length. It had been consecrated by Canadian valor nine months earlier (in 1917), when it was taken by a frontal attack mounted from Arras. A beautiful monument had been erected on the summit to commemorate the action. The Ridge was later deeded to Canada by France.

My first memento of the war was taken from the timbers of a dugout occupied by a French or German officer in 1916 during or after the first onslaught of the invading army through Belgium into Flanders. It is a miniature watercolor, presumably of the village, signed and dated by the artist.

As we approached the battle lines, we could distinctly hear the rumble of artillery, and, after sunset, see the flashes of the field guns.

The purpose of our training over the past two years was now clear, and before dawn on January 18 we went “up the line” to go into action for the first time.

We were transported in small, shallow flat cars on a narrow-gauge military railway. We passed through what was left of the evacuated towns of Lievin and Lens. At Lens junction in the half-light of the predawn, our train collided with a similar one bringing a battalion out for “rest.” Miraculously, all the boys escaped injury, although both trains were derailed. Every flatcar was loaded with grenades and ammunition; the bandoliers of the men were full of cartridges, many of which were scattered—with the men—along the tracks by the impact. I was catapulted from my car and landed on the ground with my face driven into the mud.

The boys coming out had to clean up the mess as we of the 49th gathered up our impedimenta, reorganized ourselves and continued on foot. Soon we were walking through the communication trenches and reached the Reserve Line, behind the Support Lines, Front Lines and Outposts.

We were about 400 yards from the German lines. The exact spot had been a little hamlet. The cellars of the houses were connected by tunnels dug by the troops. While in this position we scarcely saw the light of day. We lived like sewer rats, venturing forth only at night in small parties to service the men in the Front Line and in the Outposts. One party would slog its way back through the communication trenches to a rendezvous in the rear to pick up the rations and carry them back in sandbags to the men in the Front Line. Another party would bring back water in petrol tins. Some would get ammunition for the machine guns. Others would be assigned to deepening dugouts or cleaning trenches.

Cleaning trenches was a nasty, dirty, backbreaking job; if a trench got waterlogged from the rain, the mud would be two or three feet deep. To dispose of the mud each man used a ladle at the end of a long wooden pole. It had to be filled, lifted out against the suction of the trench mud and hoisted over the parados, i.e., the opposite side of the trench from the parapet. Some of the mud would ooze down the handle, back into the filth and slime, thus frustrating the effort.

In the trenches we could take catnaps only. It was not permissible to remove any part of our clothing. Our rifles with fixed bayonets, must be clean, loaded, and in our hands as we worked. Dampness enveloped us and mud encased us, its clammy touch chilling our very souls. We had to adapt ourselves to these conditions and eventually tolerated their utter repulsiveness. There was a strange excitability in it as we crawled about in the daylight hours through the tunneling, which was not high enough to permit one to stand erect. We smoked cigarettes, chatted, and laughed in the candlelight which was screened against visibility from the outside by hanging our rubberized ground sheets over the entrances into the trenches.

We waged unremitting war against the insatiable appetites of the vermin that feasted on our bodies; rats, some of them as big as cats, infested the tunnels. They seemed to be attracted to the lobes of our ears, which were constantly being bitten. It was necessary to pull a woolen cap, furnished for the purpose, over one’s head, leaving only the eyes and nostrils exposed. These rats were almost domesticated; they even hesitated to run away. I have seen a man stick a piece of cheese on the point of his bayonet; then,

as a big rat nibbled on it, impale the beast with a swift jab and toss it away, probably to become a tidbit for its fellows.

Here we received our “baptism of fire.” Working parties would be detailed to deepen dugouts. Each party was made up of about nine men. Two were down below the trench level, digging to fill sandbags with dirt and clay; three were in the shaft, passing the bags up to two in the trench. These in turn lifted them up to two outside on the parados. The contents were dumped into shell holes and the empty bags were passed back for refilling. This job could not be done in daylight.

As we worked, German machine guns were “traversing” the area. We could tell at what moment, in circling, their aim would be directly at us. As the rat-a-tat-tat of their fire approached its loudest, we would drop to the ground, to resume working only as it died away. This jumping up and down was strenuous. We were novices and nervous.

Before dawn, to conceal the dumped chalk and clay, we had to camouflage the excavation with surface dirt; otherwise it would be seen by the enemy from his sausage-shaped observation balloons during the daytime. In that event a howitzer registered on the spot would open up, not only increasing the danger to us in doing the job, but also undoing the work that had already been laboriously completed.

At the whistling of a shell overhead, someone would ask, “Is it ours or theirs?” forgetting momentarily that any shell that could be heard was harmless, because it traveled faster than sound and would be beyond us when its whistling reached our ears. If it died off in the direction of Fritz, we would sigh with relief—“Ours.” If one detonated with a crash in our area, we flopped down, gasping in unison—“Theirs.”

We developed a fatalistic contempt for the shelling, bred by continual exposure and the futility of trying to dodge it. Shellfire from trench mortars, *minenwerfers* and field guns continuously harassed us. We called them “darts,” “minnies,” and “whizbangs.” In the daytime when “minnies” came over, because of their almost vertical trajectory and slowness, we could see them hurtling through the air. They would explode in our midst with a terrific crash like a carload of crockery dropped from a great height, followed immediately by a sound like the buzzing of swarms of bees, caused by the flying splinters. Then—smack! thud! zing!—as they fragmented and struck the ground, our helmets, and the metal parts of our equipment. Occasionally the groans of wounded men would bear testimony to the accuracy of the German gunners’ judgment of the distances, because they could only have a foreshortened view of their targets.

The hazards of being in the front lines were not always the result of enemy action. Our own artillery at times made errors in “registering”; even our outposts made mistakes occasionally. At this position Captain Mead was killed by one of our own outposts. He was prowling around in No Man’s Land when a German machine-gun burst chased him and his runner. (A runner was a man who accompanied an officer to run back and forth with messages.) In crawling back, the Captain failed to give the password to an outpost, startled it by his hasty approach in the darkness, and drew its fire. His body was retrieved and buried; his wounded runner was taken back to the dressing station.

After four days and nights, we were relieved, and this ended our first experience “in action.” It had made us familiar with the sight of dying and dead men, and with the loathsome conditions in which millions of young men were living in a state of senseless desolation.

On emerging from the communication trenches, the battalion assembled in column of route, accompanied by the band which had been waiting there to serenade us. We were an unshaven, unkempt-looking lot as we marched westward until we reached Aix Noulette. The trek brought us at last to a place called Hersin-Coupigny. At this location we could be reached only by long-range artillery and by air bombardment. Now and then shells from enemy naval guns would crash annoyingly close.

Private Laffonier, a French Canadian, morose in the trenches, would burst into song, out of sheer joy vocalizing at the top of his voice.

Someone would call, “Come on, Laff. How about a little ‘Grand Uproar’?”

He would promptly oblige with something like:

Oh, it’s nice to be a soldier fightin’ fer yer queen,  
Marchin’ thru a country where the enemy’s never been.  
Oh, it’s nice to git up in the mornin’, but it’s nicer to lay in yer bed.

Laffonier had a considerable repertoire of such jingles; some were his own composition; a few were quite censoriously unfit for publication. His favorites were “The Old Gray Mare,” “Goin’ to the City,” and “Old Soldiers Never Die.” “Dan, the Lavatory Man” was frequently requested and, although indelicate, it induced the greatest applause, even by those who took umbrage at it. One verse went like this:

Dan, Dan, the lavatory man.  
He sits all day near the crappin’ can.  
He hands out the soap and he hands out the towels,  
And he listens to the rumble of the people’s bowels.

Occasionally I tried to recall some of the lyrics of Laffonier’s ebullience, because he gained such a hold on my sense of gratitude. He rescued me from certain death a couple of months later, then gave his own life in the cause to which we were all committed.  
While training in England, I had become enamored of the English people in general (and of Harold Toye’s sister Gladys in particular). Their hospitality and the friendly cooperation of their unarmed ‘bobbies’ were very unusual. People who can crack jokes about themselves have a mature sense of humor.

As we lounged around at the close of the day, “on rest” at Hersin-Coupigny, Harold Toye would join in our fun in a typically serio-comic sedate manner. His stories were always clean enough for any drawing room, in the presence of polite ladies. For example, this one comes to mind and, of course, Harold’s Oxford accent gave it “class” with the necessary ingredient of gravity:

Colonel Higginbottom was an army officer recently retired from his regiment, which was on active foreign service in India. All he could now look forward to was fraternizing with others in the same circumstances, at the Officers’ Club downtown in London. There they could swap stories about their many experiences. But this daily regimen became very boring. Then one of his cronies suggested he should sail across the Atlantic Ocean on a visit to the United States, and there witness opulence and dynamism such as could not be found anywhere else.

The colonel decided to go. He duly arrived. He checked in at the Astor Hotel on Times Square, New York City.

To get his bearings he went out on the street. He accosted a newsboy, purchased a paper, and in so doing, noticed the boy had a patch on the seat of his pants. “How is it, young man, in this rich country you have to wear pants patched and in such disrepair?” he asked.

The smart little city slicker, with a roguish smile, answered, “Oh, the answer to that, Sir, is, ‘Notwithstanding.’”

On his return to London and his Club, the Colonel told of the incident with the newsboy and declaimed, “Do you know what the young blighter replied when I asked him why he had to wear disreputable pants?”

“No” the members chorused.

After a pause the Colonel, with air of mysterious discovery, announced, “He said, ‘Nevertheless.’”

The subtlety of English humor fascinated me, especially if couched in the genteel speech of the well-bred Englishman.

Frank Saffin, a diamond in the rough at the other end of our social gamut, from a seemingly inexhaustible repertoire would release one of his sexy and sleazy stories, told in the colorful profanity of the stable. Despite Frank’s rhetoric some of them were very funny. Told by almost anybody else they would have been offensive, but somehow not so when spewed out by Frank. Even George Bruce couldn’t resist risibility on hearing Frank’s blasphemous “subversions of the moral code.” Censorship forbids a sampling.

In contrast, George, still in his teens—pure in character as the driven snow as a result of his puritanical upbringing, to whom the war was a crusade against ungodliness—would also make his contribution to our fraternizing. “Hi fellows, who is the first man mentioned in the Bible?” he would ask.

“Adam,” somebody would shout. “C’mon, George, none of yer conundrums. If that’s not right, who is it?”

George’s countenance would light up with a bewitching grin. “It just goes to show you fellows haven’t read that Book. Why, it is *Chap I.*” It should be added here that George Bruce was not a “sissy.” He amply showed during his training in England that he was “all man”—a fact to which his steadfastness in action bore witness.

At Hersin-Coupigny our heavy boots, muddy and wet from the inclement weather, pounded the earthen floors of the huts into quagmires. Although “on rest” nothing dampened the ardor of our officers, who made us deploy and maneuver with tanks for an offensive to take place some months later in an expected great life-or-death struggle to bring the war to an end.

*(Illustration of a tank)*

On March 6, 1918, we went into the line again for the ensuing four weeks. We were billeted in the debris of what, in prewar days, had been known as La Coulotte Brewery. Only the sub cellars remained intact after continuous bombardment by our own and the enemy’s artillery, depending upon which side occupied it. It became a redoubt that afforded very good cover, except of course from a direct hit by a large-caliber shell. Now and then one would strike close enough to cause ground vibrations similar to those of a small earthquake; our wooden and canvas bunks would rock and sway momentarily as the big howitzer shells (my recollection is they were described as “nine point twos”) thudded into the floors above, but during our occupancy failed to pierce the lowest cellar occupied by us.

While at the Brewery, it was my ill luck to be victimized by a somewhat macabre joke. A large bomb crater full of rainwater lay in front of the entrance. Somebody got the idea that it should not be wasted and arranged that lots be drawn to choose a man to risk taking a bath in it. I was not only disinterested, but also unlucky. The water-filled crater could be seen by Fritz from his captive observation balloons, but to welch on a stunt like this was verboten. Two or three men were posted to see that no officers or NCOs were nearby, while I, screened by several others, disrobed, ran out, jumped into the water and jumped out again as fast as possible. To say that I executed the silly stunt kaleidoscopically would not be stretching the truth too much. In the vernacular of today, the feat may have qualified me as one of the first “Streakers.”

From his observation balloons, Fritz must have seen me enter and ripple the water. We knew he had guns registered at all times on the Brewery; he knew the location well. In fact, he had occupied it some months earlier. Within seconds he expressed his disapproval of my temerity with a salvo of shrapnel. Fortunately no damage was done, but there and then I decided not to tempt Fate again, or be a party to any such shenanigans.

*(Illustration captioned "Interrupted bath at the Brewery")*

We were in the Support Line during the following week, and during the third week we manned the Front Line known as Avion Trench.

As soon as we took over from the retiring battalion, and got organized, a man was standing on the fire step of each bay of the battle trench, looking into No Man’s Land, hunched down with his rifle on the parapet and his finger on the trigger. Immediately, the NCOs came along the trench, doling out the rum ration from large jars labeled SRD. What those letters officially signified has escaped my memory; in the parlance of the troops they stood for the legend “Soon Runs Dry.”

It was dusk; the order was “stand to” and be alerted for attack. Captain MacQueen, our company commander, every inch a soldier, got up on the parapet with his runner and, thus exposed to machine-gun fire, went along the company front peering down at us—“his boys.”

“Are you all right down there?” he inquired. “Have you a good field of fire?”

We replied, “Yes, sir. In the mist we can see about a hundred yards.” He was anxious to ascertain that we had unobstructed vision in case an attack took place; he also wanted to inspire us with confidence and boost our morale.

Fritz seemed to know when our troops were “changing” over with retiring units. He knew the trenches would be crowded with men coming in and going out, particularly the communication trenches running at right angles to the battle trenches. These would present good targets for shrapnel and enfilading fire—but no such attack developed. Instead we were subjected to a barrage of gas shelling.

Suddenly the atmosphere was supercharged and under great pressure. A riot of flame and detonation was bursting around and over us; the exploding shells thudded into the parapets and parados, filling the trenches with the heavy, pungent smokiness of chlorine gas, reducing visibility almost to zero.

Every man hustled to get his gas mask adjusted. To do this, the steel helmet had to be jerked off; the mask had to be pulled

over the head; the clamp had to be fastened to the nose to shut off breathing with that organ, forcing one to breathe by mouth through the chemically prepared canister attached to the mask. After the beastly mouthpiece was inserted, the helmet had to be readjusted on the head. I forgot to jerk mine off; the chin strap got entangled with the straps of my gas mask. Fortunately, Lieutenant Wyndam was standing beside me and saw my predicament. He came to my aid, but not before I had inhaled some of the abominable gas, which nauseated me.

When the shelling stopped, the gas diffused and left the trenches as daylight came. The “all clear” signal was passed along and the men, with saliva dripping from their mouths, tore off the damnable contraptions and breathed normally again.

Sickness from the chlorine gas bedeviled me for several days; it was like an attack of ague. I did my best to hide it. I was anxious to avoid being separated, possibly for good, from “The Club.” Food was for a couple days, unwelcome, but I could drink plenty of rum. My comrades plied me with their rum rations, which were issued to us twice daily at “stand to” and “stand down.” Probably as a result of this semi-inebriated condition the chlorine sickness was eventually driven away.

A rumor was circulated on March 25, 1918 to the effect that the WCTU (Women’s Christian Temperance Union) was protesting against the use of rum in the army, claiming that it demoralized the boys. These ladies almost succeeded in having us deprived of the heartwarming and cheery little ceremony that we looked forward to twice each day. Harold Toye expressed our sentiments in this little bit of doggerel which he wrote that day:

Reformers in your hours of ease,  
W.C.T. U.’s and stern T.T.’s,  
Why do you try to make us “good”  
By pointing out the way we should  
Travel along, because you think  
The army cannot stand a drink  
Of rum, but through it will our wives  
And homes forsake, and e’en our lives  
**WILL RUIN.**

Just list to me and you will hear  
The reason why we prize so dear  
That murky liquid, golden brown,  
The army gives us at “stand down”;  
That is, if no one’s been there first  
With an unmitigated thirst,  
Like sergeants have, and C.O.’s too,  
To steal it as they often do.  
**CONFOUND ’EM!**

When we have been out on patrol,  
Or listening post in damp shell hole,  
And through the long night vigil kept,  
Mind you in feather bed had slept,  
While we had not a wink of sleep,  
But constantly to arms did leap  
At each alarm, with bated breath  
And nerves aquiver, braving death  
**FOR YOU.**

Then in the morning cold and gray  
The haggard men in every “bay”  
Show on their faces the awful strain  
Of war, but yet they hope to gain  
Some rest and sleep with coming light.  
But no! For see that fearsome sight  
Of bursting shell, above, below,  
Before, behind; think you to go  
**TO SLEEP!**

To sleep, with death on every side,  
As shivering with cold we hide—  
Wondering where the last one went  
And where the next one will be sent,  
Then down the trench there comes a call,  
“Rum up, boys!” And back we crawl  
To where the sergeant holds a tin  
Of liquid sleep. We down it in  
**ONE GULP.**

Yes, golden liquid from a jar  
Marked S.R.D.—what spells there are  
Within thee, that each tired limb

And aching nerve is filled with vim  
And rosy glow. With sweet content  
To sleep and dream, through magic lent  
By you, scorned rum, of home and love  
And friends—Forgot the strife above!  
**KIND RUM.**

Reformer, if you wish to do  
One kindness, and I think it true  
You this intend, then have the grace  
To come out here and hold my place  
And send me back home again,  
Back to the farm amid the grain,  
And I will promise not to drink  
Ought stronger than—what do y’think?  
**BUTTERMILK!**

**\*\*Pfc. Harold G. Toye\*\***

**\*\*March 25, 1918—Avion Trench.\*\***

At dawn one day a German reconnaissance plane flew directly above us; it was flying very low, at an altitude of less than a thousand feet. We could see the pilot, and his observer in the seat behind him. It flew three times along our Front Line, presumably photographing the position. It neither fired a shot nor dropped a bomb. As soon as it reached us, we received it with rifle fire; the machine gunners joined in. It kept flying back and forth despite our fire. The Lewis gunners then began firing incandescent tracer bullets; the streaks of light from these were clearly visible and showed how accurate, or otherwise, our aiming was. The plane, although flying slowly, was nevertheless a fairly fast-moving target; at that stage in the development of aviation it was probably going about a hundred miles an hour. When the tracer bullets began to find their mark, we noted the trajectory and corrected our sights accordingly. Presently the plane began to lose altitude and at last to plummet like a wounded bird toward the ground. The pilot was shot; we could see his observer bending over him to take hold of the controls in an effort to get away or to avoid crashing.

We learned that afternoon that the plane had been riddled with bullets, that the pilot was mortally wounded, and that his observer, although shot in half a dozen places, survived and was taken to our field hospital. Maybe these airmen were bravely making a fruitless attempt to carry out orders to bring back data and pictures of our fortifications, but it was so brazenly executed we could not help feeling that perhaps they had had enough of the war and were risking their lives to get out of it.

That same afternoon Lieutenant Wyndam was wounded and shipped back to “Blighty.” He was succeeded by Lieutenant Thomas Tipton who had come up from the ranks. Protocol was dispensed with and he became “Tommy” to us.

Here we were in the Front Line where our only job was to man the fire step and to be ready to act as a welcoming committee if Fritz decided to call on us. Tommy, after checking the platoon, threw a clod of dirt back at our Support Line about ten yards behind us. This started a miniature battle, in which we all enthusiastically joined. The clods flew back and forth. There we were, at the gates of hell, so to speak—at any moment the whole front could have become convulsed with the shot and shell preliminary to an offensive that would have wiped us out—and we were playing games.

Our battalion took over the Outpost Line. It was the first time “The Club” had experienced this type of duty. Frank Cushman, Harold Toye, Robert Morgan and I crawled out at night and occupied the same “hole”; Johnny Gun, George Bruce, Frank Saffin, and a fourth man occupied another. There were only a few yards between us and the nearest German outpost.

In our hole it was my turn to hold the signal wire. In the half light between nighttime and day, two pulls told me somebody was coming out to us from the Front Line. It was Tommy Tipton. In a few minutes he and his runner, on their hands and knees, murmured the password—which was “Mud”—as they rolled in beside us. Tommy greeted us, “Gee, it’s nice and quiet out here. It looks like it is going to be a lovely morning.”

Tommy peered over the lip of our outpost with his field glasses. He surveyed the torturously ravaged, shell-pocked terrain in front. He sighted a German outpost ahead and spotted the helmet of a soldier who was also peering out, doing the same thing that Tommy was. We could have fired at him and his comrades, or we could have thrown hand grenades to reach them, but that was not what we, or they, were posted there to do. There was a sort of unwritten “gentleman’s agreement” between outposts—**that we leave each other alone.** Our responsibility was to herald something of greater consequence in its effect than the taking of a life or two.

Although the men on outpost were expendable, they were not much annoyed with shellfire. Our outposts and those of the enemy were too close to each other for artillery registration. But there was no immunity from snipers and machine-gun fire coming from the battle trenches beyond. There was an eerie sort of serenity out there on the fringes of No Man’s Land.

Tommy Tipton could not return to the Front Line until twilight when the troops in the trenches would be at “stand to” again, so he and his runner had to spend the sunshine hours with us. When darkness fell, the wire was pulled to signal their return.

After bidding us a warm “good night,” he and his runner crawled back to the Front Line, but, before leaving, Tommy told us that Germany had started a general offensive about a week earlier on a gigantic scale.

*(Illustration captioned: Cushman, Toye, Morgan, Maxwell on outpost duty)*

One afternoon on this post, Harold Toye, with his penknife, fashioned a little weather vane from a piece of wood. He stuck it up on the lip of our shell hole to show how the wind was blowing and to see if gas shelling could be anticipated. A rifle bullet from a German marksman clipped it off. Harold then tantalized the sniper by waving the “wash-out” signal and drew a few more shots. He seemed to be imbued with a fatalistic submission to what he regarded as the inevitable, which made him careless of his own safety.

Every night the enemy would send up magnesium Very lights over No Man’s Land. They were shot from pistols and would hang in the air like little parachutes and drift slowly to the ground, lighting up the area on the way down. Men working “on top,” fixing barbed-wire entanglements, for example, were trained to “freeze” instantly and remain transfixed until the Very lights sputtered out. Otherwise, the slightest movement would be magnified by the shifting shadows as a result of the descending lights, and would reveal what Fritz was looking for—machine-gun targets. Unlike the Germans, we did not use Very lights. “Theirs” doubled also as “Ours.”

Thus “The Club” spent the Eastertide of 1918 in a couple of shell holes. On relief we expected to go out from outpost duty to a back area and be “on rest” for a spell, but things were not going too well on the Western Front; instead of “rest” we were ordered back into the Support Line.

That same night Frank Cushman was on patrol and had to go back through the outposts into No Man’s Land. This was a pretty tough assignment immediately after having spent a jittery week out there. When the patrol came back about three o’clock in the morning, there was a letter from the United States waiting for Frank. It apparently contained discouraging news; as he read it, he exclaimed, “Goddamit.” A few hours later, after “stand down,” in the daylight he sat on the fire step and indited these verses. They may not qualify as classical poetry, but they do reveal a soldier’s reaction to a complaining letter from home:

I just came in from off patrol out there among the wire.  
The same can be relied upon to rouse a fellow’s ire,  
But when I hit my dugout a-feelin’ in funk  
I spied in there a hometown letter a-layin’ in my bunk.

“Here’s where I glean a smile,” says I unto a nearby pal.  
“That letter sure is bound to raise my little old morale.”  
I ript ’er open right away to get at that good news,  
But really, mate, the line o’ stuff would give a guy the blues.

I don’t recall it all just now, it seemed my firm belief  
They had the market cornered on the product known as Grief.  
The cow was ill, the pig was out, and dad had sprained his toe,  
While Uncle Jack’s new roadster just simply wouldn’t go.

And Neighbor Brown’s minorcas were revelin’ in the corn,  
In fact they had more troubles than had hitherto been borne.  
I searched that letter thru an’ thru—top, bottom, sides and end.  
But not a single cheerful word did anybody send.

My reason may be faulty; it sometimes is, I know.  
To me a pal fresh-blown to bits eclipses Dad’s sprained toe.  
It’s tough indeed that roadster’s a-botherin’ Uncle Jack,  
But tougher still it seems to me is humpin’ with a pack

Some ‘umpteen’ weary kilomets, and when you think you’re done,  
The word comes sailin’ down the trench, “Stand to” for the Hun.  
I know there’s heaps o’troubles both here and over there  
But when we make our letters smile, it only just seems fair

That you forget your little woes and do your little part.  
Remember, only cheery words can cheer a lonesome heart.  
**Pfc. Frank C. Cushman (Easter 1918)**

*(Illustration of a soldier writing in a trench captioned with a scene of trench life.)*

If Frank sent his brainchild home, some red faces doubtless appeared in the family circle when it was read.

Choosing men for working and raiding parties was not done on a basis of aptitude; they were selected in numerical rotation. One night that week I was one of a group of about twenty men detailed to make a raid. The object was to capture a prisoner in order to identify the enemy troops in front of us. In the briefing each man was instructed as to his individual job and we were given a generous rum ration before setting out. We were protected by an intense “box barrage” that completely enclosed a small segment of the enemy’s front line.

As soon as such a barrage started Fritz would know what was imminent. His troops and artillery would quickly prepare to receive us as inhospitably as possible. Every move was timed to the moment—even to the second—when we would jump out of Fritz’s trench to negotiate the return trip, with or without a prisoner.

We synchronized our watches with that of the officer and, at the appointed moment, clambered out and crawled past our own Front Line as the barrage crashed down ahead. It cut the enemy’s barbed wire, neutralized his outposts, and cleared a path for us. We gave the password to our outposts, rushed forward, and jumped into the German trench. Sometimes gory hand-to-hand encounters took place on such expeditions. On this occasion we found the trench practically deserted. A trembling, shell-shocked German soldier—who had not been able to get away in time, but who had survived the barrage—came out of his “bivvy” with his hands up. He was yanked up over the parapet, and shared with us the attentions of his own artillery and machine-gun fire.

My job required me to pull the detonator pin of a Mills bomb, toss it into the nearest dugout, then to wait for the signal to climb out of the enemy trench for the race back “home.” I hope now, as I did then, that there were no occupants in that dugout. . . . Making our way back was a horrifying experience.

In the Front Line our officers were quite communicative. They told us what was doing elsewhere and what our objectives were. Parade-ground rigidity was not observed; we could be candid with them and not obsequious; we knew the difference between opinion and an order; there never was any hesitancy about obeying orders.

About the fifteenth of April, relief troops were in our communication trenches infiltrating the position we held. We joyfully looked forward to a rest from the nerve-racking howitzers. As we straggled back to the rear and formed up for the march to Lières, we learned from our officers how the war was going. (At the risk of boredom, some of what we were told is passed along to the reader, pending a flashback to April 9 on which date I experienced a climacteric.)

The Battalion was halted on the road by two mounted staff officers, distinguishable by the red bands on their service caps and red facings on the lapels of their tunics. Accompanied by their orderlies, they pulled up in front of Colonel Palmer, our commanding officer, who was on foot. An altercation took place; the upshot was that in a few minutes we were despondently on the way back to the battle lines in a southerly direction toward Arras. We ended up on the summit of Vimy Ridge.

On arrival, it seemed that the entire Canadian Army was already stationed there. Each battalion occupied a shorter front than was the custom, which increased the density of manpower, and was equivalent to reinforcement. It suggested that something unusual was taking place.

We had heard from Tommy Tipton that a German offensive had been launched at the end of March. A debacle was the result on the British-French front. With binoculars, we could see from the ridge the “Big Show” down on the plains on our right flank.

Hindenburg and Ludendorff had unloosed the onslaught, which was aimed at the heart of France. It was to smash through the Western Front, split the British and French armies in two, destroy them separately and gain the victory before the increasing American forces under Pershing could be mobilized and deployed.

Every type of weapon was brought to bear in the assault; small arms, machine guns, hand grenades, poison gas, tanks, aerial bombing, “booby traps,” mines, and artillery of every caliber, including the super-howitzers known to us as the “Big Berthas,” which could—and actually did—from this area, throw shells into Paris.

All of this, plus about three million young men, were locked in a bloody struggle for survival.

Before the offensive was halted, the enemy had penetrated fifty miles into the defenses of the British, French, and American armies. The offensive smashed all opposition; it defeated the British Fifth Army and the French forces on its right flank. It was also expected to spread north and dislodge the Canadian Army on the Ridge. General Currie declared that civilization was at stake; he issued orders that there must be no retreat from Vimy Ridge, and that every Canadian soldier was expected to fight to the death.

The earlier battles of Ypres and the Somme had depleted the British reserves to such an extent that, while they had prepared for this test as best they could, the preparations were not adequate.

The Germans at one point were actually in our rear; we, on the ridge, could turn and see them in back of us; but we were not completely surrounded. The Canadian Army was now in a salient jutting into the German lines. We were told that we occupied the most easterly segment of the Western Front, and that it was the only part of the line that was not thrown back. A postwar newspaper boasted that the Canadian Army occupied the only spot in Europe that did not give way in the German offensive. But I can testify that scarcely a shot was fired at our position during that period.

Vimy Ridge was one of the strongest spots on the Western Front. It was impregnable to frontal attack. It was coveted for its pivotal value, and the enemy hoped to possess it by outflanking us. As we manned the fire steps, we learned that complete disaster for Allied arms had been averted by a brilliant action of the American Army under Pershing at Château Thierry.

Germany failed to realize its objective; despite a succession of brilliant military successes, its offensive was stopped. Allied defenses gave way in many places, but there was no surrender. The cost in lives and materiel for both sides was appalling; so much so that the capability to strike another blow was, for the time being, thwarted.

We left the trenches on May 3 and were transported to Frevilliers. From there, we proceeded on foot past an encampment of other Allied troops. Their officers and men stood in groups by the roadside, laughing at us as we went by; we were in rags from our long sojourn of two months in action. We were also dirty, be-whiskered and vermin-infested. In my case, the left leg of my pants had been torn to ribbons.

We halted near a cemetery at Burbure, and finally wound up at a battle stragglers' post near the crossroads for Coulotte and Angres. We were told to keep a sharp lookout for German spies, that a few in Canadian uniforms had been captured.

While there, Frank Cushman gave us an unforgettable lesson on what is really meant by "esprit de corps"! His father, a well-known Federal Judge of Tacoma in the state of Washington, probably regretted, since the United States had become involved, that his son was then a soldier in the Canadian Army. Judge Cushman no doubt had considerable influence with the U.S. Government functionaries and hoped to have his son transferred to the American Army. He had completed all the necessary preliminaries, and the Canadian authorities agreed to release Frank, who was to be accepted as a cadet in training for a commission in Pershing’s Army. He could have left the filth, navvying, and dangers that were the lot of a private soldier in the Canadian Army, and could have been installed, with more remuneration, in the pleasant environment of an American military college. But Frank declined the alluring prospect rather than give up the comradeship of “The Club.”

Under the circumstances, it would have been very difficult to imagine a more magnanimous act of self-denial, and we were unanimous in our admiration. As Harold Toye put it, “Frank was a magnificent hunk of American manhood.”

Our tour here lasted about a week. After that, in the middle of May, we went out “on rest” to Lierre, where we remained until the twenty-eighth of June. In lounging about, we had to keep helmets and gas masks where they could be reached in seconds.

“The Club” suffered its first casualty at this location and mourned the death of Johnny Gunn. A large-caliber shell exploded so close to him that he was killed by the concussion. It was a merciful death; there wasn’t a mark on Johnny’s body.

About four months later, Frank Cushman wrote me from a hospital in England: “You appreciate how I feel in regard to Johnny Gunn.”

What Robert Ingersoll said of his dead brother was true also of Johnny: “He added to the sum of human joy. Always cheerful, thoughtful, generous. He approximated ... what a soldier should be in the highest sense of the word.”

We occupied the Lierre area until June 28, 1918, being moved about from place to place, bivouacking at St. Hilaire, Aire, Aubigny, Habarcq, and Beaumetz. Our activities consisted of drills and musketry. The emphasis was on night maneuvers supported by tanks, during which, by signals, we would deploy from column of route on a road and fan out into the countryside. At first, we would get almost inextricably mixed up in the darkness; after some trouble we would eventually get untangled. The movements were repeated until executed to the satisfaction of our commanders.

It was here that we were reviewed by Sir Douglas Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Empire forces. Other high-ranking officers were present; some were from the French and American armies. The entire Third Canadian Division was inspected and, as we marched past, on the command “Eyes right” we turned and saluted Sir Douglas Haig, who looked intently into our faces. He seemed to be trying to determine whether or not we could be depended upon to give a good account of ourselves in actions we had no inkling of, but which he doubtless knew were to come.

Our battalion was relieved on July 25 by the Welsh Guards, a British regiment that had distinguished itself in many battles. Its men were jittery and “trigger happy.” Apparently, they had not been properly informed about our troop disposition and outposts.

As they took over, they opened fire on some of our boys coming in from the outposts. SOS rockets were sent up, which brought our artillery as well as that of the enemy into action. Soon “all hell was poppin’.” Tommy Tipton, our irate lieutenant, ran from one trench bay to the next, yelling at them, “What in God’s name is the matter with you fellows? Can’t you see you’re firing at yer own kind!” When the “take-over” confusion was ended, we of the 49th filed out into the communication trenches on our way to Berneville.

It was during this period of “rest” that the Colonel and other officers kept us informed of what was going on. They gave us some of the details of the big German push which might have ended disastrously in defeat for the Allies. It brought about the appointment of the French Marshall Foch as Generalissimo and Supreme Commander of the Allied armies.

The events and routines described in this chapter are typical of what was happening in the various sectors, for miles along the Western Front, involving millions of young men. Although bloodied, with their backs to the wall, morale was high and we were assured that Foch had the resources to wrest victory from defeat.

When Ralph Waldo Emerson, the illustrious American philosopher, composed that single-stanza poem with the same title as this chapter, he was apparently confronted with an insoluble dilemma. It reads as if he threw up his hands in surrender, so to speak. “Aging” seemingly did not confer wisdom, nor did grieving develop “know how.” Yet all the while life’s opportunities loitered from childhood, awaiting seizure. At last he plaintively laments, in retrospection, his inability to anticipate and enjoy their fulfillment. So it is with most of us, especially with the writer on the occasion to which your attention is now invited.

Reverting to the preceding chapter, it will be recalled that on April 9, 1918, in the evening at “stand down” I was one of ten assigned to a working party; the platoon sergeant, as he doled out the rum ration, told me to snatch a catnap and to meet nine other men, already assigned, at a certain bay in the trench at midnight, where an NCO from the Engineers would be waiting and would give us instructions. We were to be equipped with unbayoneted rifles only.

At the trysting spot we were fortified with another shot of rum and briefed by the engineer. We were to go out in the darkness beyond our outposts into No Man’s Land to where the old Somme trenches fanned out in a parabola around what had once been a little French village. I cannot recall its name; in fact, I do not think any of us knew what it was, except perhaps the Engineer in command.

The terrain and opposing trench systems were laid out in a manner suggested by this crude little diagram.

We were to hunt in demolished buildings for timbers that could be used to shore up and strengthen dugouts in our own Front Lines in anticipation of renewed enemy attack. A number of roofless houses and other buildings were still standing. Some streets continued to be identifiable as such and could be trod upon.

The password that night was “Beer.” To know that word was very important. It assured passage through our own lines and outposts, going and coming. The password was whispered to every man before setting out. His life and the lives of his comrades might depend on it. He was also expected to know how to locate and approach the outpost from which he had entered No Man’s Land, in order, if separated, to be able to get back to his battalion. To become careless is a human frailty, even under the hazardous circumstances we were in. Orders were not always rigidly observed. On this occasion, not only did I forget the password, but I had also failed to memorize the location of the outpost that let us come through. My carelessness induced the thought: “I’ll just let the Engineer worry about getting us all back.”

On entering No Man’s Land we stealthily followed the Engineer, in single file, duck fashion. We stole along in the shadows, sometimes on all fours. We hugged the buildings and took advantage of the available cover. Soon we came to the rear of a row of partly demolished houses. The Engineer climbed through the back window of one. The sill was four or five feet above ground level and, with the exception of a few jagged fragments, there was no glass left to cope with. Each man followed the Engineer, noiselessly, through the window, into the rooms, and to the street beyond.

When it came my turn, as the last man in the group, my rifle, which was slung across my back, caught both jambs of the window and threw me to the ground outside off balance. Regaining my feet, then climbing through the window again, delayed my effort to catch up with the party, which could neither be seen nor heard when I reached the street beyond. Apparently they had not missed me.

Had they gone to the right or the left? In a quandary I turned to the left. That was the wrong direction. The momentary pause not only added to my delay but also took me farther away from them.

I proceeded as quietly as possible for a distance of five or six blocks, but there was neither sign nor sound of my comrades. I came to what, even in the darkness, was discernible as having been an intersection. To steal across it would have been risky. It would have exposed the movements of my shadows, especially if a German Very light ignited above me. A German patrol might have been on the prowl, or I might have stumbled into an enemy outpost or "pillbox." In either event I would probably have been "terminally" disposed of, or taken prisoner; the latter at that particular time was feared as the worse fate. Moreover, having forgotten the password, as well as the location of the Outpost of entry, I would have been in deadly peril from my own lines.

I realized I was lost—*Lost in No Man's Land!* The feeling of being abandoned in such a hostile predicament was overpowering. Just as I was about to get panicky and do something unwise, a voice startled me. It spoke these words: *"Be seated and await deliverance."* Implicitly, in obedience, with an irresistible sense of compulsion, I sat down at the base of a conical-shaped mound of bricks and building debris, and waited.

A feeling of resignation immediately possessed me, superseding that of abandonment. It was so real that I actually became interested in the pattern of the Very lights igniting everywhere along the German lines. Sitting seemed to be more in keeping with a sense of serenity than standing up in an alert posture.

The shriek and whistle of howitzer shells and other types of projectiles held my interest as they passed high overhead from east to west and from west to east. I gazed skyward, expecting that two missiles from opposite directions might collide and provide an exciting spectacle.

How long my vigil lasted I do not know, but I would describe it as eternity of minutes... Suddenly, from behind me, my name was spoken—just above a whisper. I turned and there—silhouetted against the dark midnight sky—a helmeted head was visible behind a rifle, a few feet away and aimed directly at me; my head was in its sights.

I whispered back, “That’s me,” then stood up. Whoever he was, he was taking no chances. In the darkness he couldn’t be sure whether I was friend or foe. After hearing my response, he got down from the pile of rocks and debris and came around to where I was standing. He gestured for me to follow him. He identified me, and I of course recognized him. It was Laffonier, my French Canadian comrade! How he got up on top of the bricks and debris without being heard I don’t know. He told me afterward I should have been able to hear him.

(Illustration)

With Laffonier leading the way, we got back to our battalion without further mishap, having negotiated the distance partly on our hands and knees.

When I told Frank Cushman about it, his reaction was, “C’mon now! What are you giving us?” Neither he nor Harold Toye had been in the working party, and Harold suggested that an ad hoc committee should be appointed to investigate the incident.

At times during the passing years when I have had occasion to recall and to discuss the phenomenon with an interested enquirer, I have been asked to describe the Voice, but it was not possible beyond the more or less hazy recollection that it had the timbre of a male voice somewhere between baritone and bass. The entire episode was an important topic for my father who had an insatiable thirst for definition. To him it was a supernatural manifestation.

In my effort to rationalize the episode I asked myself some questions:

**Why did Laffonier come to my rescue? He was not a member of “The Club.”**

In answer, it occurred to me that he probably missed me first and called the Engineer’s attention to my absence; he had been in front of me in the party. He was also an expert scout from boyhood membership in the “Boy Scouts” of Quebec, as shown by the regimental profiles.

**Could the voice have been the figment of an overheated imagination? Was I awake?**

Well, No Man’s Land could hardly be considered a salubrious spot in which to become lethargic. I was very much awake, and to suggest that I was enjoying some sort of mental euphoria under the circumstances would not be realistic.

**Was I a neurotic person as a result of the unusual experience?**

At first I resented the suggestion that I suffered from neurosis, but ultimately admitted the possibility of autosuggestion despite the absence of a hypnotist.

**WHAT DID MY COMRADES OF “THE CLUB” THINK ABOUT IT?**

It was discussed with them quite frequently. But I was the only member of “The Club” involved, which was perhaps fortunate. Otherwise they might, in an attempt to rescue me, have done something very dangerously imprudent. It was also to be expected that they would be inclined to adopt an attitude of scepticism. Laffonier readily confirmed the facts of his search and rescue, but he “knew nuthin’ ’bout any voices.”

I brooded over the episode in an effort to resolve it from a standpoint of reason. In so doing, certain self-evident truths from my study of Physics were recalled. For example, Laffonier said he did not hear any voices. If what I heard had been an ordinary human voice, he would have heard it. So would any German outposts or patrols within earshot, in which event it would be quite improbable that this story would now be encroaching upon your leisure.

An ordinary human voice to be audible must result from the impact of atmospheric sound waves on the auditory nerves of a listener. Sound waves can perhaps be described as oscillatory motions of vibrations in the air, the rapidity of which determines the “pitch.” For a high note on a musical instrument, or for a high voice. Analogous to this are the little waves eddying in the water when a pebble is thrown into a pond. They ripple in widening circles until they reach the shore. Similarly sound waves undulate in the air until they strike somebody’s auditory nerve. The nerves transmit the vibrations to the brain and there the miracle of hearing takes place. The mind, not the brain, creatively converts the vibrations it receives into what becomes manifest to the owner of the brain as sound.

Thus my cogitation brought me to the conclusion that the sound I heard did not originate with atmospheric sound waves, for which reason no one but myself heard the voice, and that my mind reacted to and was stimulated by an agency other than physical sound waves.

This little bit of rustic philosophizing was quite satisfying to me. It also clarified and made sense out of stories and literary pas**sages which formerly had struck me as mere—and unbelievable—fantasy.**

Shakespeare apparently had no difficulty in assuming that sounds could be heard and visions seen without physical vibrations. An excerpt from *Hamlet* is illustrative. The Prince is admonished by his father’s ghost to avoid offending his mother, the Queen:

**GHOST:**But, look, amazement on thy mother sits.  
O, step between her and her fighting soul!  
Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works.  
Speak to her, Hamlet.

**HAMLET:** How is it with you, lady?

**QUEEN:** Alas, how is’t with you,  
That you do bend your eye on vacancy  
And with th’incorporal air do hold discourse!

**HAMLET:** Do you see nothing there?

**QUEEN:** Nothing at all; yet all that I see.

**HAMLET:** Nor did you nothing hear?

**QUEEN:** No, nothing but ourselves.

The foregoing is, of course, only fiction, but a great genius, such as Shakespeare, would avoid destroying the realism and credibility of one of the greatest plays in our language by a fanciful irrationality. At all events, he obviously held the opinion that the mind is capable of *hearing and seeing* without the physical stimulus of nerves and vibrations.

A more scientific opinion is given by the eminent Swiss psychiatrist Doctor C. G. Jung, who among other things, wrote as follows: “... this spontaneous activity of the Psyche often becomes so intense that visionary pictures are seen or inner voices heard. These are manifestations of the Spirit, directly experienced today as they have been from time immemorial.”

Doctor Jung also asks, “Whence does the consciousness come; what is the Psyche?”

And he replies, “At this point all science ends.”

In conclusion, it should be added that, in my case, the opinions of authors and scientists are not required to authenticate the hap**pening. I was there, wide awake, and have long felt an obligation to divulge the incident.**

As a young man, leaving college, I was an agnostic, but the occurrence in question completely reversed that attitude. It became obvious that there was more to life than food, clothing and shelter. It engendered the conviction that each and every one of my friends and acquaintances were busy, whether they knew it or not, in making a Personality. If so, why? For what purpose and for whom?

George Bruce, a religious boy—often seen reading his Bible as he stood on the fire step, when quiet prevailed at the Front—was deeply moved by my telling of the incident. He said it was very strange, but that many such occurrences are recorded, most of which are “signs” attributed to the Supreme Being, Who makes appearances without being seen or heard, except by the immediate beneficiary. He told us of a similar happening, perhaps the first such, narrated presumably by Moses in the third Chapter of Exodus, in which God spoke to him (Moses) from a burning bush, saying, He was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

George’s concern, on several occasions led to much argument in which every member of “The Club” got into the act. “Who or What is this God you are talking about?” was the theme. Finally a definition was arrived at, doubtless not adequate, mainly enunciated by George Bruce in these terms: God is a Spirit, infinite and eternal in His holiness, wisdom, justice, goodness, and truth; omnipotent, omniscient, yet with a personal and individual interest in each one of the trillions of human beings He has created, and will yet create.

Even Frank Saffin joined in the debate, as best I can recall, and would unburden himself of this thought: “If youse guys are figerin’ to dope out a new religion, count me out. That *Chap* I what George called Him back there in Hersin-Coupigny is sumpin’ I ain’t got no schoolin’ fer. I ain’t got no tamboreen nor drum neither, but I’ll say this about ’Im—if He’s a good guy like George says, everybody’ll get a fair shake.”

There was something refreshingly beautiful about the simple faith of a young man like George Bruce who was still in his teens.

In contrast, the stalwart Laffonier, a French Canadian soldier, would burst into song and entertain the platoon with his ribaldry when we were on “rest” at Hersin-Coupigny during February 1918. Laffonier, who was the instrumentality of my rescue on April 9, six months later gave up his life in the frontal attack on the fortress of Cambrai. He will be forever enshrined in my memory with a deep sense of gratitude. His heroism is memorialized in this “Climacteric.”

CHAPTER VII  
VICTORY

By oppression’s woes and pains!

By our sons in servile chains!

We will drain our dearest veins

But they shall be free!

BURNS

From Berneville, on or about July 26, we marched 28 kilometers to Saleux. There we entrained and bivouacked in tents in a forest near the cathedral city of Amiens. We were surprised to find it was also occupied by French, Algerian, and American troops. Frank Cushman enjoyed fraternizing with the American boys; to him it was the nearest thing to a visit home. They also evinced a kindly regard for Frank and for us, his “buddies,” as veterans. The tents, illustrated below, were comfortable because it was the summer season.

*(Illustration of a tent appears here)*

On August 3 we were assembled for church parade. Before dismissing us, the Colonel addressed us and said the Canadian Corps had been singled out for a compliment by the High Command; henceforth it would be classified as “shock troops.” It would have the opportunity to show its mettle in the counteroffensive that would soon set the Western Front aflame. We were admonished not to talk about our drills, especially with civilians whom we might meet in the estaminets. Each man was given this notice for his wallet:

***To be pasted in A.B. 439 and A.B. 64.***

**KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT!**

**The success of any operation we carry out depends chiefly on surprise.  
DO NOT TALK.—When you know that your Unit is making preparations for an attack, don’t talk about them to men in other Units or to strangers, and keep your mouth shut, especially in public places.**

**Do not be inquisitive about what other Units are doing; if you hear or see anything, keep it to yourself.**

**If you hear anyone else talking about operations, stop him at once.**

**The success of the operations and the lives of your comrades depend upon your SILENCE.**

**If you ever should have the misfortune to be taken prisoner, don’t give the enemy any information beyond your rank and name. In answer to all other questions you need only say, “I cannot answer.”**

**He cannot compel you to give any other information. He may use threats. He will respect you if your courage, patriotism, and self-control do not fail. Every word you say may cause the death of one of your comrades.**

**Either after or before you are openly examined, Germans, disguised as British Officers or men, will be sent among you or will await you in the cages or quarters or hospital to which you are taken.**

**Germans will be placed where they can overhear what you say without being seen by you.  
DO NOT BE TAKEN IN BY ANY OF THESE TRICKS.**

*Ptd. in France by A.P. & S.S. Press C. X177. 50,000. 7/18.*

There is little doubt that these instructions were faithfully observed by all.

On August 6, at night, we stole up to the advanced area. We were in the open with no cover, and we knew we were going “over the top” on the morning of August 8, 1918.

Our Air Force had cleared the skies; no German planes were overhead. The enemy knew what was about to happen; he had witnessed our preparations from his reconnaissance aircraft and captive balloons. Next day, August 7, we were given double rum rations and, of all things, a bar of chocolate. We could light up and smoke; concealment was no longer enforced.

Late that night we crawled up to the jumping-off place. Private Chalmers found an old silk top hat and, with a sense of humor we had not suspected he had, declared he would dress up “in his best,” and would wear it going “over the top.” As we lay on our stomachs in the open, we knew that we would be fully exposed to the enemy when daylight broke.

At 4 A.M. on August 8 the covering barrage opened up along the front with a vengeance that heralded the carnage to come. It was a sight dreadful beyond description. The detonations were ear-splitting. The colorful, lightning-like flashes of guns, exploding shells, and signal rockets lit up the scene with a shimmering weirdness that was fiendishly magnificent. Captain Macqueen told us there were batteries of a thousand field guns behind our segment of the front, and that other sections were similarly serviced.

We were lying down side by side, rifles at the ready. Chalmers was next to me wearing his silk hat at a rakish angle; his steel helmet was slung over his shoulder, in violation of orders. We were as taut as violin strings. Waiting became agonizing. We wanted to get it over with.

We were almost within range of our own fiery artillery curtain that was shattering everything ahead of us. The batteries moved forward and corrected their sights to coincide with the plans and progress made.

How any assemblage of living things could survive the holocaust was incomprehensible! Yet there were thousands of young German boys out there taking it, all of them just as innocent of the desolation being wrought, and as guiltless individually, as we were, and wasn’t our own Frank Cushman, the most popular man in “The Club,” a stalwart young German? The barrage lasted about an hour and a half.

Officers consulted their watches. The “moment of truth” soon arrived. The barrage lifted and jumped forward, inviting us to follow. The officers, with their service revolvers in hand, rose, and spoke in a very matter-of-fact tone of voice: "All right, boys, let's go."

We knew a hail of bullets would greet us as soon as we arose, but we got up and with jaws set, followed our officers "over the top" at a sharp walking pace, as if in an extended drill order. We were escorted by tanks that came through the smoke, seemingly from nowhere; we had to jog to keep up with them, just as in the rehearsals at Hersin-Coupigny.

As we advanced, we saw the devastation wrought by the deluge of fire and steel. Barbed-wire entanglements were ripped from the ground; trenches were leveled; the ground was pitted and tortured by the shell holes that in places almost touched each other.

The most gruesome sight was the number of slain or wounded horses lying around. There were many. Evidently a cavalry charge had been made before we arrived. (Later we were told that such had taken place the day before and probably would be the last time that cavalry mounted on horses would be sent into action.) These unfortunate dumb animals, lying around disemboweled, with their entrails oozing out and blood flowing from their broken bodies, offended our sensibilities even more than the sight of dead and wounded soldiers. At least we knew the causes of the carnage; we were responsible and understood what had brought man and beast to such a pass.

Farther on, as we advanced, grotesque sights excited our sympathies. There were groups of dead German soldiers in machine-gun redoubts. Many had been killed by concussion and showed no wounds of any kind. Some were in a crouching posture, as if tending their guns. They looked as if they were still alive; some resembled wax figures. One that especially caught my attention was in the act of lighting his pipe, his hands still cupped around where the match had been... and there he knelt, stone dead.

As we infiltrated the groups of German machine gunners, some with fight still in them were overpowered; some threw up their hands and were spared. The wounded were unmolested and left for the attention of the Medical Corps following us.

There were instances—rare, I trust—when a man, in the welter of bloodshed and emotional upheaval of the moment, would do something for which he would later suffer the pangs of remorse. One man, ordinarily a taciturn fellow, succumbed to a nervous compulsion and bayoneted a defenseless German soldier.

Later he confessed he had committed the dastardly act, and exclaimed, "Jesus! Will I ever forget it? I stuck the poor bastard with his hands up!" He felt his guilt acutely; he realized how monstrous it was, but some exculpation perhaps is admissible. Although reprehensible in the extreme, personal animosity was usually absent. Momentarily, the victim became just what a bunch of fagots was in training; the unhappy soldier was pressing forward, overwrought like most of us, through shell-shocked enemy soldiers who had survived the murderous barrage. One can do nothing about the nervous strain engendered, especially in those on the "receiving end." It is a reaction to tragedy, to a concern for self-preservation and to the impossibility of trying to escape from it.

As we advanced, a "whizbang" scooped the helmet and part of the head off one of our boys on my right, exposing the brain matter, but the blood was flowing from his mouth. Mercifully, he didn’t know what hit him.

A rifle bullet pierced Frank Cushman’s helmet and tore it off; fortunately, it was deflected. Frank rolled over into a shell hole, holding his head with both hands, as blood dripped over his face. As I went by I heard him moaning, "Good old dome… good old dome!" He had sustained a nasty scalp wound, for which he subsequently passed away after being invalided to England.

With Frank Cushman and Johnny Gunn gone, the membership of "The Club" was reduced to five.

German infantry reserves soon advanced and joined in the battle. We ran into the hard core of their resistance and encountered withering machine-gun and rifle fire. Here and there men were falling. When hit, they would seem to toss their rifles into the air and be jerked backward or forward as they fell. Those who were wounded would crawl into the nearest hole for cover. Visibility, in the pall of smoke, was almost zero.

Realizing the hopelessness of the struggle, some German soldiers would straggle up to us unarmed, emotionally shaken, and with their hands up. We went past them, sometimes giving them a salutary, “Good luck, Fritz.” They looked so dejected, so anxious about their safety; and of course it was not hard for us to appreciate that in the reverse situation, with the “shoe on the other foot,” as it had been for some of our boys in the past, we would have looked as despondent as they, and would have been possessed with the same hope that the treatment meted out would be tempered with mercy.

Where we were, there were no trenches for cover; there were fewer shell holes; the close and fluid firing line, with no distinct demarcation, deprived us of artillery support. On reaching our predetermined objective, each man with his entrenching tool dug a shallow hole to lie in, as succeeding waves of infantry passed over us on the way to their objectives.

The initial assault at Domart-Demuin was proclaimed to be an outstanding military success. The Canadian Corps had penetrated the fortress of a reportedly invincible German army and had advanced 20,000 yards. We were told that the Corps had captured 6,000 prisoners, 80 field guns and much other military materiel. In other sectors American, British, and French troops had commensurate success.

Ludendorff, the famous German Field Marshal, declared that August 8, 1918 was the “blackest day in the history of German arms.”

We of the 49th Battalion were soon on the march again; then, fatigued from the debilitating reaction to the battle just described, we were halted and permitted to tarry for the night. We were allowed to lie down under the stars and to invite sleep. In the semidarkness I chose what looked like a bundle of straw under a covering of some sort. It was soft. On awakening in the light of day, I was dismayed to find that that night my head had been pillowed on the back of a dead German soldier lying under a blanket.

On August 9, we reached Quesnoy as a stream of wounded Canadians and Germans, and unwounded prisoners passed us on the way to our back areas. The German prisoners assisted the walking wounded and carried stretcher cases. We stepped aside to let them pass, as the Fourth Canadian Division went through us to the attack.

The element of surprise was now missing. Following the usual terrifying barrage, it was our turn to go “over the top” again. Open warfare now characterized the conflict. We chased the remnants of the enemy’s forces through the fields and valleys with our preponderance of effectives and superabundant “hardware.”

Dead and dying German soldiers were strewn around awaiting the medical and labor battalions. Some of them killed by concussion, were beside their gun emplacements with expressionless eyes wide open. If one was pushed, he would topple over just like a bale of hay thrown from a wagon.

We bivouacked along the Amiens Roye road. Before going forward in this action, Harold Toye asked me to accept his last twenty francs, thinking he would not need them. With forced jocularity, I suggested he keep them until we reached a barroom in Belgium... Harold never did need them.

I had a psychological advantage over my chums; the climacteric on April 9 had made me somewhat of a fatalist and invested me with a strange feeling of invulnerability.

On August 12 we entered the old Somme trenches of 1916. We deepened them and dug “bivvies” in the parapets.

While we were digging, Robert Morgan undertook to get the rations for both of us. These, as usual, had been brought up from behind by the Service Corps. Robert had just received our portions when a “whizbang” plowed into the parados where he was standing. Mysteriously, he was almost completely buried, but unhurt. When I reached him, his bald head, from the neck up, protruded. It was the only visible part of his body. Despite his narrow escape, the situation was amusing. Even Robert’s face expanded into a wan smile as he exclaimed, “Come on now, dig me out of here if you want anything to eat.” This was of course given priority.

On August 15 we again went “over the top,” got beyond our objective, and were ordered to retire in a hurry. We lost some men in the effort. An Indian boy named Nosti was shot through the head as he leaped into the trench behind me. Robert Morgan felt the back of the boy’s head, and said it was “as soft as mush.” The Corporal wanted to leave him, but the Sergeant said, “No, we’ll bring him back and bury him in our own lines.” We carried his body back, but Nosti had already joined his ancestral braves in the Valhalla for Red Indians.

On the road from Amiens to Wailly Wood, near Demuin, we halted for rest, during which I indulged in a “pipe dream.”

*Illustration depicting the pipe dream*

On August 19 we bivouacked in Boves Wood where my extracurricular efforts were assiduously devoted to making a little sketch of my mother from a tiny snapshot. She treasured it and gave it back to me after the war.

The collective actions of the Canadian Army from August 8 up to this stage became known as the Battle of Amiens. After the battle, I picked up from an abandoned command post several artillery maps. A portion of one is given here to illustrate how the countryside was mangled and tortured by trenches, gunfire, and bombing. It is of interest to note that some of the trenches were given English names, e.g., Scottish Avenue, London Avenue, and so on.

*Map illustration*

The battalion moved forward from Ivergny, where it participated in the general Allied advance and penetrated an additional eleven miles into the German lines. The British assaults east of Arras advanced from the River Scarpe and along its banks to the point where they joined the famous Hindenburg Line. Our officers told us the French, British, and American armies were delivering attacks at different sectors all along the Western Front, forcing Ludendorff to shift his reserves continuously from one sector to another. On August 28 we went "over the top" at Pelves Wood south of the River Scarpe.

The rough sketch below is an attempt to convey what took place in the advance from Pelves Wood on August 28, 1918 as it was halted by counterattack from Jig-saw Wood. Before advancing Jig-saw Wood had to be cleared.

*Illustration: Sketch of battlefield*

At Pelves Wood an exciting incident occurred. About a mile away a regiment of German infantry, in column of route, was approaching. Obviously they did not know how close they were to the firing line or about the rapidity of the Allied advance. We dispersed them with machine-gun and rifle fire. They broke and made for cover. On merging with their retreating troops in front of them, who were surrendering in droves, they did likewise.

During a pause in the action our Major Hale went out to meet a German officer, unarmed and leading a number of his unarmed men toward us. The officers shook hands. Major Hale complimented the German officer and paid tribute to the valor of his men, who had been outnumbered, outgunned, but who had done their utmost until it became hopeless. It was indeed pleasing to witness this little bit of courtesy. It indicated that a vestige of the chivalry of bygone days still existed.

We managed to reoccupy the trenches from which we had, several hours previously, driven the enemy; now, momentarily, they were being used as an assembly area for the enemy soldiers being captured. Suddenly Fritz seemed to come to life again. It appeared that we had again advanced too rapidly and had over-reached our objective. A counterattack was anticipated. Under orders we all rushed back to get cover in those same trenches. As I jumped over the parapet, I landed in the midst of about twenty unarmed German soldiers and there in that particular trench was Robert Morgan jabbering away with them in German, which he spoke fluently. The incongruity of the situation did not occur to us, incredible as it was.

I was favorably impressed with those German soldiers, now our prisoners. They were young, stalwart, good-looking, and friendly young men. Luckily for them, they were now out of the war; no longer were they our enemies; they had fulfilled their duty to the Fatherland and could look forward to an early repatriation because, even to the footslogging infantryman in the field, the end of the conflict was now in sight.

There in that ditch, Robert and I, two Canadian infantrymen, armed to the teeth with loaded rifles, bayonets, and Mills hand grenades, were fraternizing like pals with unarmed German soldiers. They could easily have overpowered us, but I do not believe the thought entered their heads and certainly not ours. Instead, they were showing us snapshots of their families, friends, and fräuleins, and they enjoyed looking at pictures of ours. Robert, the interpreter, told me they hoped we would be as lucky as they then were, that they had lost hope, so far as the outcome of the war was concerned, when they learned that two million Yanks were coming over, and because their fleet and U-boats had been vanquished by the combined British and American navies.

In a dugout in this trench a wounded German soldier lay. He had an abdominal wound and was probably dying. He murmured faintly in a mixture of broken English and French—"Tommie, Vatter... hospeetal ce soir." I was about to give him a drink from my water bottle when Robert indignantly told me not to do it, that it would be dangerous, possibly fatal. The only safe thing was to allow the poor fellow to endure his thirst until he received the attention of a medical officer. I hope he was soon cared for, and that he lived.

To the right of our position there was a sector known to us as Jig-saw Wood. It was defended by enemy machine gunners, some of whom were on platforms erected up in the trees. They were holding up the advance and determined to make a last stand. Eventually the Princess Pats had to go in and clear them out with hand grenades.

The Third Canadian Division of which we were a part was relieved on August 28, and sent back to the environs of the cathedral city of Arras for “rest.” While there I received a letter from Frank Cushman. “The Club” was happy to learn from it that he had safely arrived in England. His letter said:

**Blighty Aug. 13, 1918**

**Dear Bunch**

Just a line to let you know that I am between the sheets and smiling from ear to ear. Got along pretty well after I was hit. Got down to the coast on the eve of the 9th and left there the eve of the 12th. Got in here early this morning. The old bean is a bit shook up, but as I never used it to think with that don’t matter. The old skull is slightly fractured but I suppose a few well-placed rivets from some first class quack will have me back in France soon.

Please let me know particularly about Toye, Morgan, Bruce, Saffin and yourself. George, please send that sketch to me when it is finished, and I will forever call you blessed.  
This dive I am in is situated on the midlands not far from Birmingham. Healthy location. Splendid view. Cultured people. No children or dogs. They are all Australians in this hospital. I guess they think they are fighting this war single-handed—"How Australia saved Europe" is their line.  
Remember me to Mr. Tipton and Captain MacQueen if they are still in the running.

I hope you fellows all have the best of luck and that this "goddam war" will soon be over. Au revoir for the present.  
**Pte. Frank F. Cushman  
No. 2109879  
Southern Gen’l Hospital, Block F  
Stourbridge, England.**

I replied to Frank’s typically American epistle and gave him the news of "The Club."

The news released to us now was that the German High Command could see the handwriting on the wall. It was their hope to escape unconditional surrender and to achieve a compromise. Talk at the time was the United States was in favor of an armistice.

I was at Third Division Headquarters as a runner for Captain Cartwright when we moved to a place called Warlus. One day two German bombers appeared in broad daylight. It was September 23, 1918. They swooped down as a battalion "on rest" was on its way to the field showers for a bath. It had wheeled so that two companies were almost at right angles to the other two. The German bombers, with amazing accuracy, or good luck dropped "spring bombs" that landed squarely in the angle. These bombs were equipped with a spring in the warhead which prevented them from deeply penetrating the ground, so that on exploding, fragments would be diffused over a wider area. In this battalion alone, fifty-four men were killed and over a hundred wounded.

One young soldier had both legs blown off; the fleshless bones protruded from his thighs. Although incredible, he was fully conscious; even the color had not left his cheeks; apparently he was not suffering physical pain. He shook the dust and dirt off his helmet, replaced it on his head, and asked me for a cigarette. I lit one and gave it to him. Then, as he looked at where his legs had been, to my amazement he calmly remarked, “I guess my number is up.” That boy was so magnificent in his tragical condition! I patted him on the back and tried to hold back the tears that were coursing down my cheeks. He was so wonderful! He died there before finishing the cigarette.

A number of us were sent to clean up the gory mess. Severed arms and legs and other bodily organs were gathered up in sacks, identification tags were collected, and the dead were separated from the living. Those not seriously wounded, who had a chance to live, were given priority in medical attention. It seemed heartless, but it was a military necessity. The two planes were brought down in flames by the antiaircraft batteries, shrieking as they plunged to destruction.

The following afternoon, September 24, Frank Saffin ambled into my station. I happened to be off duty, as he was also. “Hello there!” he hailed me. “Can you take time off for a drink?”

Captain Cartwright, a gentlemanly staff officer who knew my background, permitted me to be absent from my post, so Frank and I found a cozy estaminet that had reopened (being now about ten kilometers behind the battle lines) and there we chatted about old times, our training in England (now “Blighty” to us as veterans), and about Johnny Gunn and Frank Cushman.

On this occasion Frank Saffin insisted upon paying for the several drinks of Cognac we imbibed. “I want to get something out of this goddamned money before the war ends,” he said. I had the same idea, but he was adamant. . . .

The next morning, as our contingent was hustling on the road to catch up with the Brigade and the Battalion, Frank, who was up front, was caught in a burst of machine-gun fire. One of several bullets went through his heart. . . . Now there were only four in “The Club”—Toye, Bruce, Morgan, and myself.

As our contingent hurried forward, we came under direct fire. We had just reached Bourlon Château, overlooking Cambrai, when the NCO commanding our separated little party ordered us to take cover in its cellars until a lull developed in the artillery fire.

We did not yet know that that morning the Canadian Corps had made a frontal attack on the besieged fortress of Cambrai which was only a few kilometers distant from the château. The 49th Battalion participated in the action, but the temporary halt caused our party to miss the final charge into Cambrai, which German artillery, planes, and infantry were desperately trying to hold.

On reaching the city, I found, with unspeakable sadness, that George Bruce had been shot through the head and killed instantly, and that Harold Toye had literally been riddled by machine-gun bullets. Laffonier, my French Canadian friend, was fatally wounded in this action, so my rescue by him on April 9 was now a sacred memory. Robert Morgan had been wounded in the frontal attack and was among the stretcher cases that passed us earlier in the day.

It was on September 29, 1918, that these occurrences—tragic for me, even under battle circumstances—took place and left me unutterably depressed. A few months earlier "we were seven" in "The Club." Now I was the only survivor.

A couple of weeks before the Cambrai assault our officers had told us that Generalissimo Marshal Foch had instituted a series of simultaneous offensives that joined the enemy forces in battle all along the Western Front, in a pattern that forced them to move their reserves rapidly from one sector to another. The Belgians were fighting in Flanders; the British, Canadian, and Australian armies were engaged on a front extending from Cambrai to St. Quentin. From there to Paris the French were fighting valiantly to wrest France from the invader; the American Army, numbering over a million men, was on their right flank, west of the River Meuse, achieving great progress in the actions embracing the Argonne Forest. Our officers were agreeably communicative and, in talking to us, explained our movements and the feints involved in the Generalissimo’s strategy designed to keep our adversary off balance. After Cambrai, our unit, the 49th Battalion of the Canadian Army bivouacked in Bourlon Wood where we received reinforcements and joined the British offensive in its advance through Raismes into Valenciennes on November 2.

The victorious Allied armies were now after Fritz "in full cry," advancing rapidly and meeting with very little resistance. We were told on the night of November 10, by word of mouth passed along with the rum ration, that the war would probably end the next day.

On the morning of November 11 the Canadian Army, under orders from General Currie (for which he was severely criticized later) stormed the City of Mons. We suffered some casualties before the last shot was fired at eleven o'clock that morning.

The buglers called us in from the countryside and we assembled on the main highway. The regimental band, coming from the rear, struck up, and, in column of route, we marched into the city to the stirring strains of "Colonel Bogie," as if we were on ceremonial parade.

As if by some sort of magic, the populace of Mons appeared in the streets. They strewed flowers in our path, and the demonstrative Belgian women wept for joy. Bonfires were lit in the streets. Taverns opened up to do a "land office" business. After payment and dismissal, the townspeople mingled with us, singing and dancing by torchlight throughout the night.

Tiring of the jubilation, my thoughts turned to the six absentees of "The Club," with whom I had hoped to share the rejoicing on this occasion. **IT WAS ARMISTICE DAY.**

I withdrew disconsolately to my billet about 4:00 A.M. Before going to sleep I picked up an aerial photograph of what may have been the barrage prelude to the advance into Mons, or possibly into Valenciennes.

Later in the day I composed the following little verse in a letter to my girlfriend at home which was returned to me after demobilization in Canada.

*Days spent with pals like jewels are,  
They may, when lived, as naught appear  
Until relived, and from afar  
Are contemplated—then they're dear.*

Our battalion was billeted in Mons for some weeks before returning to "Blighty." We were given only very light duty and could roam around at will in the afternoons and evenings after the orders for the day were taken care of.

One day, with several others, I took the train to Bruxelles (i.e., Brussels), the capital of Belgium. It was approximately forty kilometers from Mons. While taking some refreshment at a local estaminet I met a kindred spirit from the 8th Canadian Field Ambulance in which my brother had served. My new acquaintance, also preoccupied with a little sight-seeing trip, had acquired a number of souvenirs and mementos. From his collection he gave me a copy of a photograph of Kaiser Wilhelm II, supposedly taken just before his abdication and flight to Holland.

My newfound companion, Corporal Elliot by name, suggested that we hire two bicycles and ride down to Waterloo, about twelve kilometers south of the capital. Soon we were astride our bikes, pedaling away to get there.

Waterloo was a battlefield of the Peninsular War, one of the most significant in modern history. About a hundred years earlier Napoleon, the great French general, commanding the armies of France—**now our ally**—was defeated by the British led by the Duke of Wellington and his ally, the German Army—**now our enemy**—under General Blucher.

We climbed to the summit of the huge Lion Monument, 200 feet high, to get a closer look at the great lion cast from the guns captured from the French and erected to commemorate the British participation in the historic battle.

Our interest was next attracted to the Prussian Monument at Plancenoit nearby. It was a tastefully designed memorial, constructed of iron, surmounted by a large military Iron Cross and enclosed in a heavy iron fence.

I purchased a postcard locally, on the reverse side of which a description was given in Belgian French. An English translation of the original inscription as it appeared in German on the monument was also given. The memorial was a study in **iron** and my sense of humor was tickled because the printer erroneously used the word “rust” when the sentiment expressed called for the word “rest.” The postcard read:  
*“The King and Country honour with gratefulness the fallen heroes. May they rust in peace.”*

Our last call took us to the circular building known as the *“Panorama de la Bataille de Waterloo.”* The renowned murals by a French artist depicted about a dozen incidents in the unfolding and ultimate outcome of the famed military engagement. Life-size paintings and stage props that gave realistic perspective to the spectacle showed how different warfare had been a hundred years earlier, around 1815. It was, at that time, made to appear glamorous. Field marshals, generals, and strategists, from a safe distance, hurled hussars, lancers, and dragoons—in fancy uniforms, and plumed headgear; mounted on spirited chargers and carrying drawn sabers—into action against equally ornamented “enemy” cuirassiers and horse-drawn field guns. It would be more correct to use the word “adversary” instead of “enemy,” because there was no hint of enmity between the individuals on opposing sides.

As we viewed the different scenes, we were constrained to compare them with the repugnant, filthy, degrading, and inglorious kind of genocide we had had to endure, despite the wonderfully spiritualized comradeship of the trenches.

Before leaving Waterloo to ride back to Brussels, we could not resist the temptation to pay a short visit to the hotel where the illustrious French novelist, Victor Hugo, did some work on his tremendous story, *Les Misérables*. He lived from February 1802 to May 1885, and was a Parisian, our “adversary” in the Napoleonic campaign but a mute representative of our principal ally in World War I.

We mounted our bikes, rode back to Brussels, turned them in, and caught the train to Mons.

My application for the burial notices of my comrades had been attended to. They covered Johnny Gunn, Harold Toye, George Bruce, and Frank Saffin. I cut them in half and attached copies hereto to show how such obsequies were announced. The fates of Frank Cushman and Robert Morgan were not determinable at that time.

Similar notices told where the bodies of George Bruce and Frank Saffin were laid.

English-language newspapers could now be purchased in Mons; in them, we avidly read about some of the preliminaries to the Armistice.

The German High Command had asked for a hearing. The instrument of Armistice had been previously prepared and was based on President Wilson's "Fourteen Points." These placed great emphasis on the requirement that strict justice must be meted out.

French and Belgian soil; millions of young Allied and German lives had been sacrificed; incalculable damage had been done to the treasures, properties, and physical resources of the countries involved. For France, Belgium, and Britain, it was a Pyrrhic victory.

On reaching my billet in Mons that same evening, I found a letter from Harold Toye’s sister Gladys in which she wrote of the dreadful impact Harold’s death had on the family, especially on his saintly little mother. An excerpt from it brings to mind that possibly those who kept “the home fires burning” suffered more than the boys in the trenches.

During garrison duty at Mons a spirit of jubilation continued. One day King George V of the British Empire arrived. In a gay ceremony he ended British occupation and officially returned the city to its rightful Belgian owners.

The gaiety recalled a procedure I had seen when, as a child, I attended the funeral of my grandfather, who was an officer in a kilted Scottish regiment. On the way to the burial, the regimental band played a slow march—it was the “Dead March” from *Saul* by Handel—but on the return to barracks it was quick march to “Johnny Comes Marching Home, Hurrah.” It appears to be admissibly proper from a military point of view.

A few days afterward, the Canadian Army withdrew from the Continent for encampment in “Blighty.”

World War I was over. Startlingly one of the first emotions was of an inexplicable letdown. A sense of irreparable loss was felt. A loss of the mystical comradeship of the barrack room, the billets, and especially of the trenches and the eerie stillness of the nights on Outpost duty. The sensation was quite difficult to understand because it went counter to the hopes and joys that were anticipated on a cessation of hostilities. The letdown, on the other hand, conjured up many men and officers who would not be present at demobilization, especially those who had been one’s closest pals in the Front Lines. One hoped the sensation would not recur, yet there lingered an insatiable desire it would do just that... It did many times until it mellowed into a warm recollection, which, to me, promised an eventual reunion.

*Photocopy of segments of a letter from Harold Toye’s sister in London  
14, Woodside Road  
Wood Green  
N 22*

*22nd October ‘18*

*Dear Mr. Maxwell,*

*At last I am trying to write you a few lines. Your kind letter was the first we received telling us the sad news of Harold’s death. I cannot describe to you what a terrible blow it is to us all. We really feel unable to bear it and that it cannot be true. I suppose there is no possible hope of it being a mistake, dear Harold… It seems impossible that we shall never see him again in this life. I dare not dwell upon it; it makes one feel so hopeless.*

*We should be so glad if you can give us any more definite information as to where Harold is buried. We have none.*

*And I am sure you must feel it very keenly, being the only one left out of your little crowd. It does not seem possible in so short a time that so much could have happened. It seems such a little while ago that you were all here with us. It is very sad.*

*We hope you are keeping well and send kindest regards to you from all at your London home.*

*Yours sincerely,  
Gladys H. Toye*

Here we were back at Bramshott in the south of England where, a year earlier, the personalities of “The Club” members were so closely melded that our individual identities were almost irretrievably lost.

During this stay at Bramshott, old haunts were revisited—Drum Inn, the Royal Oak, and the Beacon Hotel. In deference to Harold Toye, the architect, I paused at several of the cathedrals he had admired so much. (Nothing could have been farther from my mind at that time than that a quarter of a century later the name of one of my own sons, an Air Force pilot killed in World War II, would be inscribed on the Honor Roll in the beautiful American Chapel of St. Paul’s Cathedral.)

After a few weeks of light duty at Bramshott, the 49th Battalion, in February 1919, sailed across the Atlantic on the *Carmania*, the same Cunarder that had brought us to Europe in 1916.

A tedious train journey across the Canadian prairies took us to Edmonton where the battalion had been organized in 1915. A municipal holiday was declared, flags were unfurled, and bunting was strung out as we detrained. We heard the plaudits of the townspeople who thronged the railroad station as we listened to the welcoming speech of the Mayor. In battle dress and rifles, with fixed bayonets, “at the slope,” we paraded ceremoniously, in column of route, through the town. The band led the way, playing the regimental march, “Bonnie Dundee,” and it was followed by the Colonel and his staff mounted on well-groomed young stallions.

The Battalion halted at the Armory, where our weapons were repossessed by the Government, in exchange for the clothing we parted with three years earlier. The regiment was immediately demobilized. *We were civilians again.*

At this point in time, it seemed impossible to think of another World War. Some fanatical religionists declared these were the “last days”; that humanity had already endured Armageddon and was witnessing the fulfilling of the prophecy of Isaiah:

And it shall come to pass in the last days … for out of Zion  
shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.  
And he shall judge among the nations … and they shall  
beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

On being restored to civilian status, my fondest hope was to seek a placid home life and congenial companionship and then to pursue objectives that would not only be in accord with the opportunities presented but also with what personal potentials might be developed.