

# **Uncle Sam's Army Boys in Khaki Under Canvas**

Major Andrew S. Burley



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# Uncle Sam's Army Boys in Khaki Under Canvas

**Major Andrew S. Burley**

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Uncle Sam's Army Boys in Khaki Under Canvas;  
or  
Bob Hamilton and the Munition Plant Plot

## CHAPTER I. WATCHFUL WAITING IN CAMP.

"THIS thing is getting some monotonous, Bob, and there's no use denying it!"

"None of the boys in camp seem to like it a whit better than you do, Sid, for a fact. I hear complaints all around about the inaction."

"We're still in Uncle Sam's service, though the job we were mustered in for—guarding the border while Pershing and his Regulars started on that wild goose chase down into Mexico, to round up Villa and his crowd—was long ago finished, and our regiment ordered back to Virginia."

"Just as you say, Sid, the Government decided not to muster us out. By turns most of us have been allowed brief furloughs, so as to run over and say 'howdye' to our home folks. We had to show up again in camp, though, when our time expired; and here we are still, doing a grinding duty."

"It's watchful waiting, all right, Bob. I wish they'd either turn us loose or else drum up something of account to do. We certainly had enough of this tent life down on the Rio Grande border."

"Excuse my laughing, Sid, but I plainly see that trip of ours across the ocean has spoiled you. After participating in those thrilling happenings along the Italian front near Trieste, in Austria, things that are just ordinary don't count for much with you nowadays."

The stout young fellow answering to the name of Sid, and who like his taller companion was dressed in a well-seasoned suit of khaki such as all Uncle Sam's army boys wear in these later days, smiled broadly in a good-natured way as he went on to say:

"It may be you are right, Bob. A fellow could never again be just the same, after hearing the roar of modern howitzers, and seeing monster shells bursting above, behind, in front, and on either side of him. Besides we've worked for hours like steam engines in a Red Cross field hospital. But I wish some one would tell me just why the Government is holding our regiment here while the days come and go, with Spring now at hand."

"I reckon you know the answer about as well as any one, Sid. Since you say you're looking for information, however, I'll try and oblige you by spreading it out in plain language."

"I wish you would, Bob, and hit the bullseye plum centre while you're about it."

"Then listen while I put all the rumors that have been floating around camp into a concrete whole. I make out Congress will soon declare that a state of war already exists between our country and Germany, because of the sinking of American ships going about their lawful business on the high seas. Now, we know that there are a big number of German sympathizers around, many of whom are in the employ of the Kaiser's Secret Service as spies and agents. It's been so in England, Belgium, France and Italy, as well as Russia. Uncle Sam is afraid that just as soon as the President says we're at war some of these slick parties will get busy, and try to start a reign of frightfulness all over the country. As our regular army is pretty much all down there in Mexico you can see that the State troops will have to be depended on to stand guard. We'll have to keep rioters from doing all sorts of terrible damage in cities and through the country sections."

Sid drew a long breath, while his usually florid face lost just a little of its healthy color. His eyes, however, sparkled with eagerness, as though the soldier spirit in him had been aroused by what he heard.

"What sort of trouble would these spies and traitors be apt to start, Bob?" he went on to ask, looking intensely interested.

"Oh! there might be all sorts of ways, Sid, in which they would hope to send a thrill of alarm and fear through the country, so as to make timid folks shake in their shoes. For instance, I imagine one of our first duties will be to stand guard over hundreds of important railroad bridges. These could be most easily attacked, and blown up with bombs, or else burned. In that way communication between North and South and East and West would be hampered terribly."

"Yes, that's so, Bob, it surely is. We depend like everything on free communication through the whole of the States. Our bumper crops and all the munitions we're shipping abroad must be allowed to reach Atlantic ports. But there are other ways, too, in which they could give us heaps of trouble. There are treacherous snakes who have been living among us as neighbors, and all the while being in the secret pay of the High German Government."

"Oh! dozens of ways, Sid, yes, scores, if you look far enough," Bob Hamilton continued. "All sorts of grain

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elevators might be destroyed, so as to produce a famine in the land. That would keep us from sending out any more wheat to feed Great Britain and her Allies, and in that way Germany might hope to win the war."

"Whew! I never thought of that!" muttered the other, with a whistle of mingled surprise and consternation.

"But," continued Bob, seriously, "I imagine the crafty plotters would make their grand-stand play against some of the numerous great munition works. They lie scattered all over the country, but are particularly located along the Atlantic seaboard. If a few of those were blown up it would cut the Allies off from receiving the badly needed ammunition. It might also give hundreds of thousands of workers such a fright that no amount of money could induce them to continue their labor when at any minute they might be destroyed by a terrible explosion. Yes, every such plant will have to be guarded by Uncle Sam's Army Boys from now on."

"But I understand they already have guards watching for trouble, paid by the companies?" objected Sid, really fishing for more information.

"That's true," his chum told him, "but something more than that will be needed to make a show of Government authority. When the khaki of *real* soldiers is seen on patrol duty around every such munition works the plotters will understand just what they're up against. And besides, it'll be a whole lot different, once war is declared."

"As how, Bob; please explain what you mean by that?"

"Why, you see, up to now, when a sneaking cur was caught trying to blow up some bridge he would try to get out of it. This he could do by claiming he was a German military officer, and that he professed to be within his rights while trying to injure the cause of the enemy. At the most he stood to stand against a charge of attempted arson. But once we are at war, such an act will be *treason*. You know what follows when martial law is declared in a district or a State, and an enemy is found guilty of conspiring against the Government."

"They stand him up before a file of soldiers, and pump him full of lead, which I take it is the only way to treat spies and traitors like we have among us. But, Bob, I think I understand the matter better, now you've spoken so plainly. I'll try to be patient, knowing that Uncle Sam isn't holding me here just for fun."

"I should say not, Sid; there's going to be a grim look to things before long. Nothing can keep America out of this terrible world's war now, I'm afraid. The hour is about to strike for us to throw off our aloofness and jump in. We've been believing that because an ocean three thousand miles wide separated us from the battlefields of Europe we could stand around and be lookers-on. The visit of that big German submarine to Newport and sinking of a fleet of cargo-carrying Allied vessels right off our coast, told us differently. Modern ingenuity has bridged space, and oceans no longer serve as a barrier to invading submarines and Zeppelins."

These two young fellows lounging there while off duty in the State camp "somewhere in Virginia" may need a brief introduction to such readers as did not chance to read the previous volumes in this series, so it might be wise to say a few words concerning them here.

The taller one was Robert Lee Hamilton, and as his name would imply, he came of a fighting family. His chum, Sidney Giles Oliphant, while possibly less intrepid by nature, had at least never been called a coward, and could hold his own with the ordinary young fellows of the Old Dominion.

Their homes were in Richmond, and most of the company to which they belonged also came from the city that far back in the days of the Civil War was known as the Confederate Capital.

The pair had passed through a wonderful experience across on the other side of the ocean. They had been dispatched on a special mission by an old inventor who was negotiating with the Italian Government with regard to a certain formidable invention which he called an "aerial torpedo." Their thrilling adventures while there were detailed between the covers of the first volume of the series under the title of "Uncle Sam's Army Boys in the War Trenches; or Bob Hamilton's Baptism of Fire."

After they arrived safely home it was to find that matters down along the Mexican border had reached a desperate stage. Villa had raided the town of Columbus and murdered some of the inhabitants. Consequently it was determined to send most of the Regular Army into Chihuahua in the hope of rounding him up; with the fighter, General Pershing, as leader.

So the President called upon the different States to mobilize their militia, and turn the same over to the Nation as units for the defense of the country against a foreign foe.

This took Bob and Sid into the mobilization camp, and eventually down to the scene of action along the Rio Grande. Here, as might be reasonably expected of such wideawake young fellows, they soon found themselves in the midst of new and exciting experiences, all of which are graphically narrated in the volume preceding this,

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under the title of "Uncle Sam's Army Boys with Old Glory in Mexico; or, Bob Hamilton Along Pershing's Trail."

Then about March many of the State troops were allowed to return to their base nearer home, though few regiments were actually released from service. This being held in camp as the days lengthened into weeks was proving very irksome to the boys. Many of them had left prosperous business engagements, and all had dear ones from whose society they had been separated now for many months.

All sorts of wild rumors were flying around, and these kept them from becoming actually discontented. Sometimes it was even said that war was about to break out, and they would be among the first to go aboard transports, bound for the fighting zones over in Europe.

It can thus be readily understood that there was a frequent buzz of excitement whenever some one would come into camp. Every new yarn was calculated to arouse their blood to fever-heat; for nearly all of them came of fighting stock, as do most of the boys down in Dixie.

With the rest Sid had pined for something to happen to break the dull monotony. As his chum truly said, he was no longer the easily contented chap of a year before. Then Sid had not known what it was to hear the frightful roar of a modern battle. He had certainly never dreamed of watching those Italian Alpine climbers make their way up a sheer cliff a hundred or two feet high, as though they were chamois or apes, and bayonet the Austrian gunners at their work. Even in his wildest dreams he could not have imagined himself enduring the awful drumfire while lying for hours in the Italian rock trenches. And then there was the later job of assisting to bind up the wounds of scores of valiant fellows who bore their anguish without a murmur, even gaily singing their songs, and talking of the time when they hoped to be back in the ranks, though some were dead before six hours.

These things were well calculated to make a man of Sid. He had lived half a lifetime in those few days over there. Among other things they had done away with his former languid way of looking at passing events. Life had taken on a new and impetuous vigor for him that amazed his folks and his friends at home. He no longer felt contented to wait for things to come to him, but showed a keen disposition to start out in search of them.

Bob Hamilton had kept his finger on the pulse of coming events, and he felt positive that it could not be long now before they would receive sudden orders to break camp and get busy. He was only curious to know what line of action this new order of things would develop.

Matters were in this shape at the time the two chums lounged there and chatted so entertainingly. Every fellow was constantly "on tiptoes" with the excitement. The appearance of a messenger bearing a telegram to headquarters tent would cause scores of heads to be turned that way, while eager queries passed around, and the suspense became almost unbearable.

Just as fortune would have it the long expected event came about on that identical afternoon when Bob and Sid exchanged confidences there in the shadow of their khaki-colored canvas tent. As had happened a number of times before, a messenger was seen hurrying toward the colonel's tent. When he waved a paper exultantly at the watching privates, though not saying a single word, they seemed to divine by some subtle instinct that at last the time for action had come.

All through the camp ran a buzz of expectancy. Every fellow hoped he might be among the first chosen for duty. It would mean a change of scene for one thing. Who could tell what opportunity for action might arise, if one-tenth of all those thrilling stories connected with murderous plots turned out to be founded on anything besides rumor?

Shortly afterwards an orderly issued forth, and there were evident signs of something unusual doing. Officers could be seen hurrying in to consult with the commander. As they later on emerged one by one and hastened away, to carry out some order received, their faces bore a strange mixture of grim seriousness and pleasure.

All this excited the anxious boys in khaki more than ever. The wildest and most improbable rumors floated through the camp. Some had it that the Germans had sent over a great fleet of their largest ocean-going submarines. This would be to force Uncle Sam to cease supplying the Allies with munitions, on pain of having New York City seized, and held for a ransom of billions. Other stories concocted on the spur of the moment, and without a shred of reason back of them, were just as preposterous. On account of the nervous strain under which the troops had so long been laboring all of them found ready believers.

An hour later and the truth was learned. Many were grievously disappointed because after all they were not about to take transports, and join the Allies over in France. Why, they were not even to be called upon to defend their native land against a horde of Teuton invaders landed from a fleet of vessels convoyed across the Atlantic by



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unnumbered submersibles.

The regiment was to be broken up into many fragments, each under the charge of a non-commissioned officer. These detachments, taking tents and all necessary stores along with them, would be detailed to certain sections of the Atlantic seaboard. Here for an unknown period of time to come they were expected to stand guard over numerous important bridges, trestles, munition works, and such other public property as might be endangered by an uprising engineered by daring alien sympathizers.

## CHAPTER II. THE CHOICE OF THE RED PEG.

AFTER the first disappointment passed there was more or less rejoicing in the camp. At least any change was preferable to being kept there week in and week out, doing nothing save routine drilling. If they were placed on guard, with a possibility of danger facing them, it would seem as though something of the stern responsibilities of a soldier's life had descended upon their willing shoulders.

So a buzz of animation ran through those tented streets. Men fraternized, and expressed their hopes of sharing the coming vigils in company; though doubtless the dispositions would be made without much regard for personal wishes.

Since coming back from the border Bob Hamilton had risen from a corporal to the highest non-commissioned rank of sergeant. Every one knew he easily deserved the honor, for there was no harder working member of the company. Besides, in the estimation of more than a few who knew all the facts it was eminently fitting that one who bore such an honored name as Bob did should be destined to make his way up in the army official scale.

Bob had once had a chance to go to West Point for a military education, but something had arisen to prevent his filling the vacancy. He still cherished the hope of later on getting there. Meanwhile he had succeeded in joining the local company of State troops, unable to resist the strong temptation of being in touch with military matters.

During the balance of that day there were consultations held, and orders handed out. A plan of campaign was figured upon. A certain number of points within the confines of the sovereign State of Virginia had to be carefully guarded against reckless vandalism, and there were just so many soldiers to be utilized.

In the end the map which lay before the colonel and his official advisers was completely covered. Pegs represented all vulnerable points, and the color of these pegs told of the relative value of each bridge or munition plant. A red one meant the highest stage of efficiency, and the greatest need of constant care. A blue peg indicated that while the object to be cared for was of more than ordinary importance still it could be taken charge of by a less number of men. A green peg meant that a corporal's guard would be sufficient to cover the ground.

When Bob Hamilton was called before the Board of course Sid showed signs of considerable excitement.

"Oh, I hope you have a chance to say a good word for me, Bob," he hastened to tell his chum just as the latter was about to hurry toward headquarters in obedience to the summons. "Please do everything you can to get me into your squad. Of course I'm soldier enough to go where I'm ordered, and without a grumble; but I just *know* I'll be a heap more useful if I can only keep in touch with you. I don't understand how it is, but somehow I seem to be inspired when in your company to do better work than at any other time. Bob, remember me, won't you?"

"I certainly will, old fellow," the other assured him with a squeeze of the hand; "because I'd be mighty sorry to know we were separated. I can't tell just how much chance I'll have to put in a good word for you; but I'll see you when I get through, Sid."

He came back in less than twenty minutes. Sid was waiting and looking very anxious, if his face could be depended on to portray his feelings, and as a rule it was a positive barometer.

"Am I in luck, Bob?" he asked, huskily.

"You're going with me," the other told him earnestly, with a look of supreme satisfaction on his face; for the two were the warmest of friends, almost inseparable in fact.

"Oh! joy! You make me happy, Bob, sure you do! And now, is it permissible for you to put me wise as to where we're to be sent?"

"Of course this is to go no further, Sid, though I'm permitted to tell the men who will be under me. Get wise to that, please, and mum's the word. I have been highly honored, Sid. You can understand how I feel when I tell you there were only four red pegs on the chart, indicating that many first-class places to be guarded, and that I was selected for one of them. In fact, it seems to be the chief of all, one of the officers privately assured me, in begging me to do the company credit."

"Well, I'm not much surprised to hear that," said Sid, brazenly; "in fact, I'd have been a whole lot disappointed if they stationed you anywhere but at the leading post. But what is it we're going to draw a cordon around, so that these alien anarchists can't make use of any destructive bombs?"

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"It's the largest munition plant in the whole section. It also stands close to one of the most important railroad bridges between Washington and Savannah, which of course will have its own guard, in addition to our working in touch with each other."

"To destroy such a plant would cripple the Allies, of course, because they're depending so much on the munitions they're receiving from America," said Sid.

"Listen," his chum told him in a thrilling whisper. "It would do even greater damage than hurting the Allies. It would give Uncle Sam a body blow if this great plant were destroyed, or even damaged seriously."

"Do you mean, Bob, that the Government is having shells and other munitions made there for its own private use?"

"The fact is kept pretty secret, but they fear some of these German sympathizers have found it out. And there's always a strong possibility that they'll hope to put Uncle Sam out of the running, by knocking this prop out from under his feet, right in the start."

Sid was duly "thrilled" by the intelligence, as his round eyes indicated.

"I think I catch what you mean when you say that," he told his companion, slowly, for often it took longer for an idea to pass through Sid's mind than might be the case with many other fellows more keen-witted. "With the U. S. threatening to break into this world war any day now, these sly German spies believe a disaster on a gigantic scale might appall the country. It would also cause Congress to think twice before slapping the Kaiser on the wrist. Huh! I reckon they misjudge the temper of the great American Nation, if they think a campaign of frightfulness could succeed any better here than it did in England."

"You are hitting the right nail on the head when you say that, Sid. Remember how after each terrible Zeppelin raid over the coast countries of England, and London too, recruiting took a great bound upward. Why, they always said the Kaiser was the most powerful recruiting officer the armies of Great Britain ever knew. Instead of getting frightened the people grew more and more furious, and rushed to enroll. They wanted to avenge the death of innocent women and school children, slaughtered by the dropping of bombs on peaceful communities."

"When do we start?" demanded Sid.

"Oh! don't look so anxious," chuckled his chum. "You've turned over a new leaf ever since coming back from our trip abroad, and nowadays it's always in a hurry you seem to be. We'll have plenty of time to make preparations. Tents and rations and such things have to be gotten ready. We don't shake the dust of this camp off our brogans until tomorrow noon after the midday meal."

"Well, it couldn't come any too soon to please me, for I'm mighty tired of this lazy camp life. We got more than our share of the same down there on the Grande, you know, Bob."

"You'll have to excuse me now, because I've got a lot of things to do in connection with our flitting. Better take a look over your own duffel, Sid, and get rid of such things as you don't really need. Two of the supply wagons will carry us, with our stuff, to the station, where we take the train at half-past one. Remember, not a word about where we're bound; that must remain a secret for the present. None of the men will know their destinations, except those in charge. It's enough that they are going 'somewhere in Virginia' on guard duty for the Government."

"Trust me, Bob!" was all the other said, though he seemed to swell with suddenly acquired importance to realize that he had been taken into the confidence of the leading spirit of the expedition.

During the balance of that day there was a bustle and stir in the camp. A number of tents were missing when the sun went down, for certain nearby points of considerable importance could be reached with little delay, and detachments of the khaki-clad young warriors had been dispatched to take up their position there as a beginning of the exodus from the big State camp.

On the following morning other squads left, and by the time noon came there was quite a gap noticeable in the messes. Everybody seemed filled with eagerness, for routine work becomes very monotonous. This is the case with young fellows in particular, who believe when enlisting that they are going to be speedily sent to the front.

Of course they realized that after a bit the job of standing guard for hours at a time day after day, would turn out to be something of a "grind" too. Still, at least they would be free from drill duties, and it would prove more or less of a lark. Altogether they anticipated a regular camping-out feast, consisting of the cooking of meals, and trudging back and forth when on duty, with regular times off for taking things easy.

Then besides, with a spice of actual danger in the air they would have something to remind them of the fact

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that their country was really at war with a potential Nation. These spies and mischief makers worked in the interest of one of the Great Powers of the civilized world; and that thought must help to make the hours drag less heavily.

When noon came, and with it the midday meal, Bob had his squad ready for leaving. The tents and supplies were packed in the wagons which were to convey them to the railroad station; and every man had his gun and blanket and pack handy.

As the wagons started off those aboard were greeted with more cheering and waving of hats than had been the case at any previous departure. This was partly due at least to the great popularity of the two chums, Bob and Sid. The one respected for his manly character and winning ways, as well as the honor of his family name; while on his part Sid was well liked because of his genial, sunny disposition. Every soldier loves an optimist, a comrade who brings good cheer with him wherever he goes, and dispels the "blues" by his very presence.

They saw the last of the camp without any regrets. While its associations had in a way been most pleasant, at the same time all of them had become weary of the same eternal grind. All welcomed any sort of change, with possibilities of their "seeing service," the heart yearning of every young soldier.

There was no hitch about getting aboard the train, together with all their dunnage. Later on that afternoon they were dropped within walking distance of a strange looking collection of buildings, surrounded with a high board fence. At stated intervals a regular blockhouse had been built, possibly for the working of a rapid-fire gun, in case of mob-violence, or an attack in force.

The train after leaving them here could be heard whistling for the long bridge which by this time doubtless also had its appointed guard. It was necessary to keep wilful trespassers off, who might seek to damage the indispensable railroad property, and paralyze transportation between the North and the South over this important artery of travel.

An hour afterwards and Sergeant Hamilton had taken up quarters for himself and protecting squad, the tents were in position, and things rapidly assuming a comfortable look. Since their stay here was indefinite, and might be extended far into the summer months, he meant to make their little camp as cozy as possible. So nothing was omitted to carry this out, the previous camping experiences of Bob covering numerous outings, and several years spent on a cattle ranch in the Southwest, aiding him considerably in surmounting all difficulties that arose.

### CHAPTER III. THE CORDON FOR SAFETY.

"THIS makes three days we've been at our new post, doesn't it, Bob?" remarked Sid, as they lounged in front of the cheery fire at a time when both were off duty.

"Yes, and things are gradually getting in machine order, I'm glad to say," the other replied. "I've fraternized with the sergeant at the bridge who in point of service outranks me, so that should we ever come to throwing our forces together for mutual defense or offense I'll have to take orders from him. But luckily Moyer is a pretty decent sort of a fellow, though a bit inclined to hold his head high. I think we'll get on all right. Besides, it may be we'll have no occasion to hitch our horses to the same wagon."

"Nothing exciting has happened so far," mused Sid; "though you did say something about suspicious characters having been seen around. For all we know they might be some of those enemy alien spies, with designs on these extensive works. The regular company guards have become doubly strict these days about letting any one inside the gates who isn't a known employee. Among the thousands who work here, though, I calculate there might be a few in touch with some of these cunning plotters, and who are carrying them news constantly."

"Well, we're keeping all sorts of avenues open so as to get a hint of any anticipated trouble," Bob assured him. "Keep it quiet, Sid, but I've even been told that Uncle Sam has several of his best Secret Service employees around here. They hope to ferret out these double-faced workers, who, pretending to be loyal to the Government, are really taking the gold of the German Kaiser to betray the secrets of this plant."

Sid looked duly impressed with this startling intelligence. He nodded his head, and presently went on to remark:

"Then a fellow can't tell but what he's talking with one of these keen agents of the Government when accosting some employee, man or woman. I reckon we'd all better be on our guard, and not talk too much. What with German spies, and American detectives. There's one thing I certainly do miss a heap, Bob; do you know what I'm referring to now?"

"Well, I know our grub isn't just what we're used to at home," began the other, with a wicked look at his chum; "but then that can't be helped, you understand."

"Oh! shucks! it isn't the lack of anything to tickle my palate that I'm referring to now, Bob. I'm pining for a sight of Jinks, my fine horse. How I'd love to run my hand over his silky skin, and hear him give a welcoming neigh at sight of me. I warrant that you sometimes let your mind run back to your Molly in the same way. The rides we had on their backs down along the border will always be one of the pleasantest of memories to me."

"Yes, especially that occasion when we bucked up against a sand-storm, and had the time of our lives trying to keep from being smothered. The horses suffered terribly in the bargain, as you must remember, Sid. But all the same I do miss Molly, and was thinking only this morning, when the sun shone so brightly, that I'd give a heap for a chance to gallop on her back over some of these Virginia roads."

"I wonder when we'll ever have such an opportunity again, Bob?" sighed the other. "What with war about to break out, we can look forward to a long and hard campaign. Perhaps, who knows, we may be transported to the other side before the year is out, and find ourselves once again in war trenches. This time it will be with guns in our hands, and a hundred thousand other American boys at our sides. We'll be fighting too for humanity, and the preservation of democracy on the face of the earth."

"If we do," said Bob, soberly, "depend on it, Uncle Sam's Army Boys will stand up and give a good account of themselves. Those Teutons will find they've made just the same kind of blunder about our not being able to get an army over there short of two years, that they did when the Kaiser called the small force of King George that 'contemptible little British army.' It's now some four millions, and they're still coming on from every part of the globe to fill up the gaps."

"I was thinking, Bob, that it's kind of queer you haven't had a line from your cousin Jack Warren since he was sent out on board one of the destroyers. It was just about the time that big German war submarine bobbed up at Newport, and after staying a short time to pick up some secret points, started off. You remember it immediately sank six Allied steamships almost within hearing distance of our biggest naval base in the North Atlantic."

"It makes many of us fairly groan whenever we think of that happening," Bob went on to say between his

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teeth, while a stern expression came over his sunburned face. "It was one of the most impudent things ever conceived. No other Nation would have stood for the insult, but your good-natured Uncle Sammy. To think of our naval vessels hurrying out close to our own shores, to stand by and watch that sea pirate deliberately sinking vessels that were loaded with our own goods. What makes it worse, they were in peaceful transit across the high sea, and not trying to run any blockade."

"Please don't mention it any more, Bob, or you'll make me feel qualmish about the pit of my stomach. I suppose if we'd had Teddy Roosevelt in charge about that time there'd have been one less submarine afloat today, no matter what came of it. But you didn't say anything about your cousin Jack?"

"If he's written me as he promised to do then his letters have miscarried, because I've had none of them. Every day though I keep on hoping they'll come along, relayed from Richmond to the camp, and then sent here. It may be Jack has been sent on some foreign job, because several of our war vessels are supposed to be over in the Mediterranean, you know."

During these three days the boys in khaki had taken up their onerous duties with earnestness. Sergeant Hamilton had laid out his programme, and it covered every minute of the day and night. Of course most of their anxious times would come when the sun had set (the employees operating the great munition works had crowded through the gates, and gone to their homes in the nearby settlement rapidly growing into a full fledged mushroom town where the night was far from quiet), and the shades of night gathered over the plant.

While day lasted the ordinary guards hired by the company, and dressed in khaki to inspire respect among the workers, could manage things well enough. They guarded the gates and patrolled the outside of the stockade, guns in hand, to deter loiterers from hanging around. Besides this they questioned all employees upon whom suspicion may have fallen, and some doubtless received their walking papers forthwith, when unable to prove their allegiance and loyalty to the cause.

The great peril was at night, when crafty lurkers might approach the "dead line" with more or less impunity, and meet in secret council, to plan some daring stroke. It was then that Bob and his squad got in their best work. They patrolled faithfully every rod of space, and used the searchlight they controlled, upon the least suspicion that there was any danger afloat.

There had been several little alarms, none of them turning out of any moment. At least they proved how thorough were the precautions taken by the sergeant in charge of the patrolling of the property, valuable to the owners, and to the United States Government as well.

Of course there were all sorts of rumors afloat concerning possible attempts to destroy the plant. These served to keep the sentries wide-awake and faithful to their duties when on guard. They also caused some of the men to liken their position to sitting on top of a powder magazine, where at any minute a stray spark was apt to produce wonderfully elevating results.

Iron clad rules were enforced among the hundreds on hundreds of employees. Of necessity there was always danger of an accident happening, that might have no connection with an alien enemy but simply be the result of carelessness. On this account it is said that working in a munition factory is as nerve racking as carrying on the role of a soldier might be, amidst the explosion of shells, and hand grenades, and the deafening din of innumerable monster guns.

It was not so long since they had read in the papers of a terrible disaster that had overtaken another munition plant not a hundred miles removed from this very spot. The gruesome accounts of the tragedies accompanying that explosion had been duly placed before every worker, in order that he or she might be additionally careful.

As each day passed and things went on in their normal way some of the guards at the works might begin to deceive themselves with the belief that there would not be any real danger. They argued that when the final test came those foreign spies would conclude it would not pay them to continue plotting against a plant so ably defended by Uncle Sam's boys, who would shoot straight if called upon.

Not so Sergeant Hamilton. Bob was hardly the one to allow himself to be lulled to sleep by any deceptive appearance of peace about him. Only too well did he know how schemers invariably wait until those they mean to harm have slackened their vigilance. Then the blow would fall just as suddenly as a meteor flashes across an unclouded sky.

Each morning he told himself that this might be the day when it would come. With the sinking of each successive sun he allowed that there might be something thrilling on tap for that particular night.

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Nor did he permit any one under him to shirk the slightest atom of his necessary labor. The patrol was warned continuously to be on the alert, as that particular night might see the anticipated stroke attempted. They knew exactly what they were to do in case of a sudden necessity, for Bob had laid all his plans, and he expected them to work with clock-like fidelity and exactness.

During the day there were more chances to secure much needed rest and sleep, because only a third of them went on duty at a time then. Once night came and the force of guards was doubled, so that every part of the stockade could be watched, with the assistance of the regular company guards.

Bob knew that several men had been discharged from the employ of the company on account of the fact that they were foreign born, and under suspicion. Some of them might be perfectly innocent of conspiring to do injury, but there were others whose actions made Bob distrust them. In fact in his own mind he set them down as having some sort of connection with that secret flow of Kaiser gold about which so much was being printed in the papers. Some men on trial had confessed that they handled hundreds of thousands of dollars in a year's time, all of which was intended to foment strikes where they would help Germany, or injure property belonging to the Allies.

This activity might take any one of many various forms. Bombs could be placed aboard ocean liners, or cargo boats, that would explode when the vessel was at sea, and bring about its utter destruction. Grain elevators filled to the brim with grain purchased for shipment abroad might be destroyed. Munition plants could be dynamited in some dastardly fashion. Even such a contemptible thing was possible as poisoning hundreds of horses and mules that were the property of the British purchasing commission.

Yes, there was certainly no lack of subjects to ponder over while walking his beat of a dark night. A sentry had to be peering to the right and to the left, and ready at all times with his gun to fire if called upon by some suspicious movement, and a refusal to quickly answer a hail.

Three nights had passed and up to now all was well. Far from believing this to be indicative of safety, Bob was continually trying to arrange matters so that their vigilance might be further strengthened.

## CHAPTER IV. MAGIC IN A NAME.

IT was closing time. The crowd had commenced to seethe through the big gates of the high stockade. This was always an interesting period, and several of the khaki-clad young soldiers of the republic, off duty just then, gathered to watch the workers go by; possibly to exchange a word of friendly greeting with some of the boys, or exchange smiles with the pretty girls who passed in be vies.

Bob too was standing there. His rank of sergeant, in the absence of a commissioned officer, made him looked up to by most of the workers; besides, his manner was always cheery, so that he was liked, as well as respected, by the main throng.

Still Bob was quick to notice that occasionally there came along one or two who frowned a little, and declined to return his friendly nod. He said nothing at the time, but mentally marked each one of these as fitting subjects for a closer investigation.

Bob, although not telling even his chum of the fact, was now actually in close touch with the Secret Service agents sent there by the Treasury Department at Washington to help look after the big munition plant. Their duties were to discover whether any truth actually lay back of all those dark rumors about the existence of a gigantic plot to hamper the carrying out of the Government contract for explosives, which might be needed sooner than most people not in the confidence of the president were aware.

So when he had marked these several parties it was Bob's intention to hand the facts over to those who would know best what to do in the matter. No innocent person should be injured, if it were possible to avoid it; but at the same time none who were guilty ought to be allowed to escape.

Among the crowds thronging out of the various buildings (some of them coming from quite a little distance, as certain parts of the plant were operated with a view to keeping them separated from the balance, on account of their being a higher risk, no doubt)—in the lot, Bob caught sight of one face that he had already come to pay more than passing attention to.

It was that of a boy, rather young in years to be doing a man's labor; but one that seemed to possess considerable resolution, and which had attracted Bob's eye on the very first afternoon he stood there at that same spot.

He had had a few words with the youngster, and learned that his name was Tommy Radcliffe; that he was the sole support of his mother, never very well, and also of his old grandfather, a survivor of the Civil War. There was nothing said about the latter being a pensioner, but somehow Bob took it for granted such must be the case, and that the sum he received helped support the little family of three.

He meant to see more of Tommy at a later date, perhaps even dropping around and calling on his folks, though he suspected they would be found in very humble circumstances.

Now as Bob stood there amusing himself by watching the many strange faces of the workers thronging by, and he waved his hand to Tommy, he was a little surprised to see the boy come to a full stop, and stand in a hesitating way. Plainly Tommy had been struck by a sudden thought, with which he was wrestling for the moment.

As though he had been finally swayed by some resolution he set his jaws together, and walked directly toward Bob, who, with a mixture of amusement and curiosity, waited to learn what it all meant, never dreaming of the strange maze of thrilling events of which this action on the part of the working boy was but a beginning.

"Could I speak with you about something, Sergeant?" asked the boy, and there was a wistful look on his rather peaked face, as well as a tremor in his soft Southern voice, as he said this.

"Why, to be sure, Tommy; go right ahead and tell me what's troubling you," Bob hastened to say. "If I can be of any help I'd like to know it. Any of the men been bothering you?"

"Oh! no, it isn't that, Sergeant, it's about"—with a great gulp, as though a lump in his throat almost choked him—"it's about my mother."

"Why, what's the matter with her, Tommy; she isn't worse, I hope?" asked Bob, beginning to understand why the boy was looking unusually sad, though his face had not seemed to be a smiling one at any time, telling of burdens that a lad of his age should never have had upon his young shoulders, when most other boys were having



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such jolly times, without one care in the world.

"No, sir, not exactly, only she's suffering a heap. You see, she had a nasty fall only yesterday, and got hurt. Grandpop he tried to doctor her up, but shucks! all he ever knew about such things he picked up away back in war times, and he's just about forgot how. I did my best, and first off she said she felt easier; but this morning I noticed that she was feelin' mighty bad,—though she just smiled when I said goodbye to her,—for I fetch my lunch, you see, and she told me it'd be all right. But it's bothered me, and I reckon sure this's been the longest day of the whole year, even if people do say it comes in June."

"I'm sorry to hear this, Tommy," said Bob, when the boy had halted to swallow that miserable lump again. "What would you like me to do for you?"

"I hardly know what, Sergeant, but somehow you seemed such a decent sort that I wanted to ask you if there was any doctor among your men. You see, we ain't got money to pay for anything, which makes it tough. All I earn here goes for grub, and things are so high it keeps my pocket drained all the time. I hate to ask this of you, 'cause we Radcliffes are an awful proud lot, even if we're as poor as Job's turkey, Grandpop says; but she's been ha'nting me all the day with her sweet smile and her brave way of sayin', 'It isn't anything much, Tommy, my dear; and like as not I'll be feeling myself when you come home this afternoon with the supper'—for I always stop at the store on my way, and pick up something, you know."

Bob found himself greatly affected by what the poor lad told him. In fact just about that time there seemed to be a lump in *his* throat that threatened to choke him even as in Tommy's case.

He took out his watch and looked at the dial.

"Why, you're leaving nearly half an hour ahead of the usual time, I see, Tommy; which I take it was caused by their wanting to get ready for the night shift they expect next week. I've got almost a whole hour at my disposal before supper call. About how far away do you live, and how long are you going there?"

"By fast walking I can make it in less'n fifteen minutes, Sergeant," came the quick reply, while the boy's misty eyes shone with sudden eagerness. "But do you mean to walk home with me, and see my poor mother?"

"Why, if you didn't mind I thought I would," said Bob. "You see, I've got a chum along with me here, who's had considerable experience with wounds and hurts of all sorts. He even worked for a while in the Red Cross field hospital behind the fighting lines over on the Italian war front, where an important business engagement took us last winter. I might get him to go along with us, Tommy. He could help your mother lots, I'm sure; and it wouldn't cost you a red cent either."

"Oh! thank you, thank you a thousand times!" cried the other, almost bursting into tears with the sudden reaction from despair and gloom to renewed hope.

"Wait here for me, will you, and I'll have Sid along in a jiffy!" With which remark Bob, catching the eye of his chum, who chanced to be passing not far away, made a movement with his hand that the other readily recognized as an invitation to proceed that way.

As soon as Sid joined them the hungry down in Mexico, by a display of his surgical abilities.

When Sid had been hastily put in possession of the leading facts he readily consented to accompany Bob and Tommy to the latter's humble home.

"Just give me two minutes to run over to our tent, Bob, so I can get a few simple things I'd like to take along," he exclaimed, most heartily. "Sure I'll be only too glad of a chance to help out. Any chap as young as Tommy here, who's the main support of his mother and grandfather, is going to get my sympathy. I'm proud to be in a position to lend a hand."

With those words he was off on the run, though sometimes when Sid ran he resembled a clumsy lumber schooner under full sail before a spanking breeze; or, as some of his school comrades who played ball with him on the Richmond green used to say: "an icewagon with the horses running away, and the lumbering vehicle swinging from side to side as it careened down the street."

He was as good as his word, and presently arrived bearing a small handbag, which Sid used as a receptacle for certain articles used in connection with simple operations, such as antiseptic cotton, linen bandages, soothing salve liniment, and the like.

Together they started off at a brisk pace, heading directly toward the mushroom town that had mostly sprung up in a night, as it were, after the great powder company had commenced to employ workers in this, their latest and most complete munition factory.

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"Course I could walk home and back at noon," explained Tommy, confidentially, as if he thought some sort of apology were necessary for his carrying a lunchbox; "but we're on piece-work right now, and every half hour means so much money to me. I get away with my grub in ten minutes, and then have nearly a whole hour for extra work."

Bob sighed. It seemed pretty hard that a boy of such tender years should find it necessary to be the real head of a helpless family, when most fellows of his age were playing during the time they were not in school, with never a care to worry them, and three bountiful meals every day in the week.

Plainly, Bob told himself, this queer old world is most unequally divided; and some get all the hard knocks, while other favored ones receive all the good things of life.

They entered the bustling town with its crowded streets, for the masses were getting home, and children ran to meet parents and older brothers and sisters in squads. Many of them were apparently foreigners, though coming from countries not in sympathy with the Teuton nations, mainly Italians, Russians, Poles and in some cases Greeks.

"If you please I'll step in here at the grocery and get my package," said Tommy. "You see, to save time, for there's always a terrible rush after hours, I leave an order in the morning, and pay for it, so all I have to do on my way home is to pick up the bundle and trot along."

Bob thought it showed considerable shrewdness. He felt sure this heavily burdened boy was being forced to display almost as much diplomacy as a general might on the field of battle; for where one had to conserve men and munitions to the best advantage, with Tommy it was making his time and money go as far as it might.

He quickly overtook his two new friends, running at a fast gait to come up with them. Tommy was looking flushed enough now, Bob saw; perhaps his efforts had something to do with the color in his hitherto wan face; and again it might be the consciousness that friends had been rounded up for the mother he seemed to love so well caused the flush.

On the outskirts of the new town they came to where Tommy lived. It was only a building that looked as though at one time it may have been a barn, and an enterprising farmer had made it over so as to house human beings at a profit to himself. Just how anybody could have passed the cold Spring days and nights there in half-way comfort Bob found it hard to understand; but then the really poor do not know anything about the meaning of that word "comfort" as those well off in this world's goods do.

"We did it in just twelve minutes," remarked Bob, again referring to his dollar watch, which gave him full satisfaction, and answered all practical purposes.

Tommy ushered the pair into the hovel, for it was hardly more than this. Looking quickly around, Bob and Sid took it all in. The room was fairly cheerful, and seemed to be scrupulously clean. An old man with a white beard and long hair was bending over the stove in which he seemed to have started a fire, made out of scraps of wood, possibly gleaned somewhere outside by his own crooked and rheumatic fingers.

Seated in a rocking-chair was Mrs. Radcliffe. Bob could see that she was a lady, for her whole appearance indicated as much. Fine clothes are not necessary to put the stamp of refinement on any one. Bob saw that she looked as though her troubles had made inroads in her health; she was pale, and one of her arms was rudely bandaged. Poor old "Grandpop" had done his very best, but it must have given Sid a wrench to notice what that best stood for.

The old gentleman turning was amazed to see that Tommy had come home accompanied by a couple of young fellows dressed in khaki. Bob thought he trembled with some odd emotion, and that there flashed across his wrinkled face a look that might be likened to *fear*, though why he should have any occasion to feel that way it would have puzzled the other to say.

"Mother, dear," said Tommy, hurrying over to the figure in the chair and bending down to kiss her tenderly, "I've brought a doctor to see you, and help fix your poor arm the right way."

"Doctor!" almost snorted the veteran, staring hard first at Bob and then Sid, as though filled with disdain.

"Well, my chum here, Sid Oliphant, hardly claims any right to such a title, you see, sir," Bob hastened to explain; "though his heart is set on being a surgeon one of these days; and he's really had a lot of practical experience for a chap of his age."

"Why, Grandpop, you ought to know that both these young gentlemen have been over on the other side of the ocean where the war is so terrible," broke in Tommy, as if to pour oil on the troubled waters, for evidently he

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knew what a testy temper his grandsire possessed; "they were with the Italians, and worked with the Red Cross after a battle that they had a share in, too."

The veteran of the long past Civil War looked keenly at Bob now. Possibly for the first time he began to notice what a resolute face the young fellow possessed; and it might be there was still another reason for that stare of his, because family resemblances often carry through several generations, and people did say Bob was a true chip of the old block.

"Is what Tommy is saying the truth, and were you spectators of one of those amazing battles along the Adriatic?" he demanded, harshly, frowning as though he more than half believed they had been "yarning" to his grandson, for some reason or other.

"It is every word of it true, sir, I assure you," responded Bob, with a smile; "and some day perhaps, when we get to know each other better, I'll be glad to show you certain things we treasure highly, one of which is a pass signed by General Cadorna himself; and also the signature of the King. We met them both, and talked with them. All this may seem strange to you, and you wonder why two young Americans should have been allowed to visit the front; but we represented an old inventor friend of mine, who was negotiating with the Italian Government for the exclusive use of his wonderful aerial torpedo, turned down by our own authorities at Washington. It may be one of the means of ending the great war, sooner or later, too."

Captain Radcliffe's look of wonder increased.

"I begin to see you are a very interesting young gentleman," he ventured to say, with more respect than he had hitherto shown toward the visitors; "and I hope to hear more of your remarkable experiences across the water a little later on. Tommy means well, though I don't see why my bandaging of his mother's hurts shouldn't have answered the purpose. But you must be soldiers camping here to guard the big munition plant. And I can see from your chevrons that you are a sergeant. Ah! that takes me back again to the old days, for I too filled that office, before the battle of Antietam, when something I did brought about rapid promotion. But I hope now neither of you are Yankees; for though more than fifty years have flown since the war closed I've never quite grown to love the Yanks."

Bob smiled. He knew of many Southern men who still felt a trace of the old bitterness, born amidst the rack and ruin of Sherman's destructive march to the sea.

"Well, sir, you will hardly believe that when you know that we were born and bred in Richmond. As I told you, my chum's name is Sidney Giles Oliphant; my own is Robert Lee Hamilton, sir."

To the surprise of the two, the old veteran instantly drew his bent figure up and raised his hand in salute, while his watery eyes beamed on Bob's resolute face.

"Ah! General Robert Lee was my beloved commander all through that bloody war," he went on to say, huskily. "He was also my personal friend, and the memory I cherish connected with him is my most valued possession. Then you are a Lee; but why should I ask it when I can trace the resemblance? I salute you then, young Robert, for the heroic blood that runs in your veins!"

## CHAPTER V. ONE MYSTERY AFTER ANOTHER.

"AND, sir," said Bob, promptly, "I salute you, and also that honored flag of the Lost Cause which I see you have hanging there on the wall, along with the glorious Stars and Stripes. It is right they should rest together at last. More than fifty years passing have healed the old wounds; and now there is no North and no South, only one united country, under whose flag we boys of Confederate ancestors expect to march to war!"

He proudly accepted the trembling and warped fingers of the agitated veteran in his warm young grasp, and squeezed them to show the extent of his own feelings.

"Let us forget these things for a while, sir," Bob went on to add, "and allow my chum here to do his part. Madam, we have made the acquaintance of your Tommy, and because of his manly way of trying to stand up under the load hard luck has placed on his young shoulders we want to be of all the assistance to him, and to you, we can. Please allow my friend Sid here to take a look at your injury; and I assure you he can and will lighten your suffering."

By now the wan looking mother had recovered her tongue; for during the thrilling events just enacted she had only been able to sit there and stare, and wonder at the swift change that had come about in her checkered fortunes.

She aroused herself. A trace of color even appeared in her hollow cheeks—Bob had a choking sensation come over him as he figured it was lack of sustaining that made her face look so pinched. Like many other self-sacrificing mothers of the South in those old days of which she knew only through hearsay, she may even have been stinting her own diet in order that her hard-working boy and the poor almost helpless veteran might be given more than their scanty share of food.

So she hastened to assure Bob she felt very grateful to them both for the interest they had taken in the fortunes of a wretched family so long struggling to keep their heads above the flood. If the young "doctor" felt inclined to take a look at her arm, and treat it, she would be very glad indeed to obey his instructions.

Sid waited for no further authority, but started to work. He would be wonderfully gentle, as his chum had seen on other occasions. These big, clumsy fellows often surprise others by the deftness with which they can use their hands; and indeed their feet as well, for Sid was a clever dancer, though a failure at the manly art of self-defense in the way of boxing.

It turned out that there were no bones broken, though quite a gash had been cut by the ugly fall the lady had taken when her foot slipped in going down the cellar stairs.

"If you have some warm water in the kettle, sir, please pour some in that tin basin and fetch it here to me," Sid presently started to say, as his first order; and although it may have seemed strange for a veteran, and a captain at that, to obey a private and a stripling, the aged hobbling relic of the Civil War did as he was told. Times had changed, and what Grandpop had heard in connection with the remarkable war experiences of Bob and Sid impressed him duly with a sense of the importance of young blood in these later days.

It did not take the expert Sid long to finish his labors.

"I'm glad to say," he remarked, smilingly, as he bandaged up the lady's arm, so thin and wasted Bob felt shocked, "that there's nothing at all serious going to happen. It's not a day's job for it to get well, but by tomorrow you'll be feeling a heap easier, ma'm. I'll be around then and dress it again for you. Be careful not to use it for anything until I give permission.

She thanked him with a sincerity that admitted of no doubts. And Tommy, when he was showing his two new friends out, held his hand to them without being able to express the deep feelings of gratitude that surged through his heart.

"It's all right, Tommy," said Bob, easily understanding how the boy felt; "you're a thousand times welcome, and we'll see you through it all, make your mind easy on that score. I heard your grandfather was a veteran, and took it for granted he must be a Union man, drawing a fat pension; but now I understand why he isn't so well off. Still, Virginia has not entirely forgotten those of her sons who did what they could to uphold the cause she backed. He must be receiving from the State something to help tide you over."

Tommy looked queerly at him and shook his head.

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"No, he never has received a red cent, sir," he told them. "I don't just know why it's that way, whether Grandpop is too proud to accept what he calls charity; or if there's some other reason. And please don't say anything about it, because you see he always fires up so when mother mentions the word 'pension,' and forbids either of us from applying in his name. Indeed, no one ever comes to see him; and often I more than half suspect they think he's dead. You see, his name isn't Radcliffe at all, for mother is his daughter. What it is perhaps I may tell you some other time, but please don't ask me now."

Bob somehow felt strangely. It seemed then there was some sort of a mystery connected with the aged veteran. What was it that prevented him from applying for the pension that was his honest due, as a symbol of the respect in which his devoted services to the State was held by those in authority, from the Governor down? Could pride alone keep him from accepting assistance when he daily saw the ones he loved working so hard, and suffering privations through lack of sufficient means? Bob confessed that it was beyond him, but at the same time he made up his mind he was bound to know more about this matter before he was many days older.

So he and Sid left the queer little old house with its trio of interesting occupants. The veteran had waved them good-bye from the window, though it would be hard to tell whether this was intended most for the young surgeon who had so greatly relieved the suffering of his daughter, or in honor of the other who bore the name so honored above all others, in his estimation.

"An interesting experience all around, eh, Sid?" questioned Bob, as they stalked along through the main street of the mushroom city, and gazed upon many strange sights—it was hardest of all to understand that six months before this region did not boast of twenty houses within a radius of a square mile, and yet the place now had a population of ten thousand and more.

"I should say it was!" declared Sid, with animation. "But I'll have her all fine and dandy shortly. Bob, that family has been in want; she's stinted herself in food, I'm dead sure of that. I believe, too, Tommy suspects as much, which is one reason that haunting expression is always in his eyes. He looks at his mother as if he might be afraid she would soon leave him, poor chap. We *must* do something for them, that's flat, Bob!"

"We will, depend on it," said the other, simply, as though his own mind had been made up to that before then. "I'll look into matters and see what Tommy is getting. Perhaps I can coax the superintendent to increase his wages, to begin with; and there will be other ways we can give their fortunes an upward push."

Sid fairly beamed with delight. He was never more pleased than when doing some one a good turn. This sprang partly from his own big generous heart; and then again some of the credit might be laid at the door of the cardinal Scout principle he had vowed to uphold some years back, that of never allowing the sun to set on a day that was not marked by a helping hand held out to some one in distress, or in need of assistance.

Later on, as they were drawing nearer the munition works, Bob spoke again of the family whose humble home they had recently left.

"That old fellow interests me a whole lot, do you know, Sid."

"Same here," chirped the other, blithely. "He seemed struck all in a heap when he heard your name. Why, in spite of his rheumatism he stiffened his back, and stood at attention, just as he might have done fifty-five years ago when he was being made a lieutenant on the field for gallant action at Antietam. Yes, he's quite an interesting character, and I hope to get to know him better. I warrant you he can tell some mighty interesting stories of those old days. And he keeps the flag there on the wall, while in most Southern houses it's hid away in a chest in the attic, and only shown when Decoration Day comes around, or else Lee's birthday."

"I'm wondering what it can mean," mused Bob.

"Why, surely you don't dream the poor old fellow has ever done anything to break the law, and that for this reason he keeps his real name hidden, and has never even applied for a pension, much as they need the small sum the State pays Confederate veterans?"

"I shouldn't like to put it as strong as that," Bob admitted; "but without having anything else to found a theory on I'm only certain it looks queer. On the whole we'd better not mention a word about this to any one else."

"I wouldn't dream of doing that," asserted Sid, hastily. "We can go over again tomorrow to look at the wound; and perhaps on our second visit the old fellow may thaw out enough to tell us a little more about himself. I warrant you he's got a story worth listening to; but I doubt if even Tommy knows the truth about him."

So it seemed that the more they came to talk about Tommy and his folks the deeper their natural curiosity and interest grew; though Bob determined that he would not be inquisitive to the point of any lack of courtesy; for he

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had good bringing-up, and knew the line at which he must stop.

They had made the entire trip there and back, inside of three-quarters of an hour, counting the time spent in dressing the wound, which Bob considered very fair. He would thus know how to gauge the time on future occasions; for already it seemed Bob figured on seeing the inside of that same modest little home frequently; there were numerous things that would draw him there besides the interest he felt in hardworking, devoted Tommy, staggering under his load without a murmur of complaint; and particularly the mystery hanging over the head of the veteran piqued Bob.

As they drew near the stockade surrounding the main buildings of the munition plant, a man not in uniform, a stranger to Sid, approached them.

"It's come from the station, sergeant," he announced, with a confidential air that made Sid wonder what was up, for thus far he had not been taken into the confidence of his chum, so that he knew of no expected arrival.

"I left orders with Hunter to have it put where it is going to be used; do you know if this has been done?" Bob asked the man.

"Yes, sir," the answer came, "alongside the big searchlight on the elevated concrete platform that I calculate was built for some other purpose, but which you've been using for your powerful electric light."

"All right, Ridley; after supper I expect you and Hunter to be on hand ready to take the boxing off. We'll see then if it can be put in place. It's fortunate both of you have had experience along those lines, so we may hope to get everything in readiness before midnight comes along. Unless I miss my guess we may need it about that time. That's all, Ridley; let Hunter know; and not a word to any one else, though of course there's a whole lot of curiosity about that big heavy case. After once we start to making use of it the truth may be published abroad, but until then it's a dead secret."

As the man wheeled and walked away, Sid looked at his chum with a couple of deep lines denoting bewilderment across his usually placid brow. And there was a slight vein as of mild reproach in Sid's voice as he went on to say:

"Am I in this, Bob? It isn't very often you have a secret from your old pard; though of course I mustn't forget that right now you're also my commanding officer, a full-fledged sergeant, and in charge of the squad quartered here to guard the munition plant."

Bob threw an arm affectionately across the broad shoulders of the other.

"I only wanted to spring a little surprise on you, that's all, Sid," he hastened to say. "Besides, I had to do considerable wiring in order to inform the authorities at Washington of what was going on down here, so they might lay their plans accordingly. And the result has been speedy. I think they must have sent a special train here from Annapolis with it."

"With what, Bob? Please open up and tell, because you're just killing me with curiosity. Why should Annapolis bother to send a special down here to this place that was never heard of until the powder company bought hundreds of acres, and began to put up all these manufacturing buildings, as well as hundreds after hundreds of cottages for the workers to live in?"

"That's just what started it, Sid; but come with me, and I'll let you into the secret. It's all been put through with an awful rush. I didn't believe they'd be able to get the thing here until another day or so, when it might be too late to do any good."

"Whew! you're twisting me all up, sure you are, Bob," ejaculated the bewildered Sid; but when the other started off he trotted at his side, and even forced the going at times, such was his eagerness to hear the facts.

They entered the grounds and passed to the rear, where there was a small elevated space, surrounded by a low board stockade of its own, being a fence which would not allow of even a peephole. A padlock hung from a staple, though this was not now in use. A sign tacked alongside the door bade every employee and guard keep out on penalty of being arrested.

It was known to many that the searchlight had been installed inside that enclosure. It was mounted on some sort of movable pedestal that could be elevated at will, allowing the powerful ray to be sent toward any one of the four points of the compass, as well as lifted toward the clouds in an emergency. On two previous nights that broad pathway of intense light had been seen shifting across the heavens apparently in one way or another, and doubtless evoking considerable comment among the dwellers in the nearby overgrown town.

The two comrades in khaki entered the enclosure, and Bob shut the door after him. Sid already knew about the

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searchlight; indeed, he himself had helped work it on both nights. His gaze instantly focussed on the several cases that lay near by, some of them apparently exceedingly weighty.

"So that's the mystery, is it, Bob?" he asked, pointing as he spoke.

"I reckon you're right, Chum Sid," the other replied, cheerily.

"Nothing about the outside tells the story, except that they seem to contain some sort of machinery or munitions; what's in there, Bob, if it's a fair question?"

"Listen," said Bob, impressively, yet with eyes that glistened strangely; "that's what we saw working over in Italy—an anti-aircraft gun!"

## CHAPTER VI. READY FOR THE SPY IN THE AIR.

"AN anti-aeroplane gun, Bob!" gasped Sid, staring helplessly at his chum.

"That's what I said," continued the other.

"But I'm all up in smoke, because I can't guess what you expect to use the same for, here in Virginia," expostulated Sid. "So far I haven't seen a single sign of any hostile plane hovering over this place."

"All the same there has been one right above the plant," asserted his comrade, with quiet conviction in his manner.

"What! do you mean to tell me you saw such a thing, Bob?"

"No, hardly that, but I *heard* it," he was told, firmly.

"That sounds as if it came at night; do you mean me to understand it that way?" asked Sid, showing the utmost zeal in his cross questioning.

"It was at night on both occasions," Bob assured him.

"Two visits then, and I never knew a thing about it!" almost reproachfully.

"Somehow it happened that you were on guard earlier in the night," explained the sergeant. "When the news was brought to me by the guards who were on post at midnight I ordered them not to say a word about it, and I reckon they kept their lips closed. The first night they reported that something queer had certainly passed overhead, making a clanking noise. They had not seen anything, but one chap guessed it might have been an airship; and I agreed with him."

"But on the second occasion, which must have been just last night—you stayed up yourself to listen, didn't you, Bob?"

"Just what I did, Sid, because I felt that this was something out of the common, something weird, something that ought to be looked into. Well, just about midnight it came again. First there was a distant murmur, like the rising wind. Then it grew louder and louder, and we strained our eyes as we stared overhead. I plainly made out the whirr of an engine, and somehow it took me back again to that time we stood in the street of Venice and saw those Austrian planes drop bombs; only they were of course much higher in altitude, because they had to dodge a shower of shrapnel."

"But you said you didn't see the machine," pursued Sid.

"We weren't altogether certain about that," Bob explained. "Two of us believed we could just faintly manage to see some moving object flitting past pretty well up; but the clouds were heavy at the time, and it was hard work to pick out anything. But the sounds circled the whole plant, as if the pilot wanted to make sure of his bearings."

"Do you mean so he could come a third time, and perhaps drop an incendiary bomb that would start a terrible fire, and a series of explosions, when the working force was out of the plant; is that it, Bob?"

"I figured it that way," replied the other, quickly; "and so I wired to Washington, giving all particulars, and asking for orders."

"You heard from the War Department?" continued Sid.

"Yes, they sent me a telegram telling me an anti-aircraft gun that belonged to the navy had been ordered rushed on here direct by special train, and that as soon as it arrived I was to get it in position; and meanwhile several mechanics accustomed to handling such things would be dispatched here to work under my directions, so as to get the heavy piece of ordnance mounted, and be in shape for service when the time came."

"And did they get here, Bob?"

"Yes, I've sent for them to come and start work; they will show up at almost any minute now. The secret has been well kept, and I felt that I mustn't let out a hint, even to you, Sid, until it was time."

"You are expecting a third visit tonight, are you?" persisted the other.

"The chances are that way, and we'll try to be ready for our friend the pilot, so as to give him a warm reception."

"What staggers me, Bob, is the fact that they find it so easy to fly in from their mother vessel, which may be a hundred miles away from here, and out on the ocean at that; because I hardly believe the Germans could have crept up one of the many bays along the Virginia coast, do you, Bob?"



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"Now I reckon you're away off your base, Sid. None of us have even dreamed that this aeroplane came inland from any enemy vessel. We're not at war with Germany yet, you know. Whatever is attempted to paralyze munition plant work in our country is being done by secret sympathizers with the Teuton cause, men living here, and in the pay of the German Secret Service."

"Oh! now I begin to smell a rat!" exclaimed Sid, explosively. "Then this flying machine has some sort of secret base on land. Now that you've given me a hint I can easily understand how they'd be likely to find a splendid hide-out in one of the hundreds of little marshy tracts lying along the coast, where from one end of the year to the other not a living man would be run across, unless it might be a lone muskrat trapper; or some oysterman looking for new fields up some of the saltwater creeks."

"You're on a warm scent this time, Sid," chuckled the other, "for that's what we figured it out to be. Perhaps the machine has a secret hangar not twenty miles distant from here; and what is that to a speedy flier that can make a hundred miles an hour in a pinch?"

"There are some men at the gate, Bob, and I reckon now they may be your chaps who came from Annapolis to help set the gun in position, and show you how to work the same. Of course you'll keep them around for a night or so, to kind of get the hang of things, and incidentally give an exhibition of what the gun can do?"

"I had settled all that in my mind, Sid; but excuse me now, for I'll have to pay full attention to what they do and say."

"Oh! don't mind me, Bob; I can hang around, and use my eyes and ears too," remarked the other, coolly, with a look on his face that told of intense interest.

Three men had quietly entered the fenced enclosure. One of them wore the khaki of an army man, but the other pair were evidently mechanics from the workshops of the naval base; men accustomed to handling all manner of machinery, from the big sixteen-inch guns in the turrets of a superdreadnaught battleship, to toys like this anti-aircraft gun, modeled after the type so universally used in England and France to fight off attacks from bombing air fleets.

Bob talked with them for a couple of minutes, and then opening their tool bags they commenced to get busy ripping off the casing surrounding the concealed contents of the various packages.

When this had been speedily accomplished the wondering Sid could see that the gun sent on by a special car by the Navy Department was exactly similar to those which he remembered examining with interest over across the water. Perhaps Uncle Sam, then, was not *quite* so fast asleep as some of the critics claimed; it might even be that in secret he was himself manufacturing a few of those useful weapons of offense and defense, in order to be prepared against the day when German planes might attempt to strike terror into the hearts of dwellers in New York City, or the Capital itself.

The two men worked with a will. When occasion demanded they called for assistance, and not only the private, but Bob and Sid as well, lent a willing hand with the block-and-tackle which was necessary in order to swing the weighty mass into position.

Supper time came and went, but none of that busy set thought a thing about eating; which indeed was rather remarkable when Sid was concerned, for he had a healthy appetite that demanded attention three separate times each and every day. But he was wrapped up completely in this new and novel experience. He only hoped Bob was meaning to allow him to stay on guard around the critical hour, so that if anything came to pass he might be a witness. Already in imagination, doubtless, Sid was picturing a thrilling scene when the searchlight was turned upward to disclose a speeding 'plane darting athwart the sky, at which those machinists would turn the gun that could point directly overhead when required; and then would come the report, with a possible "hit!"

Sid trembled with anticipation as he next pictured the aircraft turning over and over in its downward plunge, with the luckless pilot unable to recover his level, and heading toward destruction.

Sid was gifted with a most wonderful imagination, for following up his line of speculation he found himself wondering whether they might discover any clue about the person of the unfortunate aviator to tell just who he was, and why he paid his mysterious nightly visits to the munition plant, perhaps dropping lower on each successive occasion so as to get his bearings more accurately.

This was a weakness on the part of Sid, and his chum had often taken him to task on account of it, even telling him that when he meant to have rabbit stew for dinner it was *very* essential first of all to "get your rabbit."

Finally it seemed that everything had been completed. Those mechanics knew just how to go about things, and

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had made many of their arrangements beforehand in order to save time.

"She's all ready to spit it out, sir," announced the shorter man, who seemed to be the boss of the pair; "and now we'll open the case of shrapnel shells here."

Apparently those who managed the affair down at the naval base had omitted nothing that would be essential to the success of the undertaking. Here was the gun; the men to put it together, and handle the weapon when occasion arose; and last, but far from least, the ammunition required to make it effective.

When assured that everything was in working trim, Bob told the two mechanics to go and get their supper, after which they were to report to him there for duty. He gave the same directions to the private, who seemed quite pleased with the possibility of being allowed to be around when the test came off.

"And now we'd better be taking the same advice ourselves, Sid, for it's going to be a long vigil, and the night air gets pretty cool so early in the Spring; I reckon a hot supper will help us to stand it out."

"Why, that's a fact, we didn't stop for a bite, did we? And for once I actually forgot that you have to eat to live. Now that you mention it I really believe I am a bit hungry. So those two mechanics are named Hunter and Ridley, are they? When one of them met us on entering the grounds I wondered who he was, because I didn't remember ever seeing him before. Good reason why, if he only dropped in here today, and had his little private interview with you, Bob."

Sid noticed that this time his companion fastened the padlock at the heavy gate of the enclosure. Evidently Bob did not mean to take any chance of having a prowler enter the same, and, it might be, do some material damage to the anti-aircraft gun.

He even called to a guard who was walking up and down near by.

"Make it a particular point to take this enclosure in your circuit," he told the man with the gun; "watch and see that no one climbs over the fence. We've got a little surprise inside there now, and some people might like to investigate it right well. See that such a thing doesn't happen."

"Yes, sir, you can depend on me to do the same," replied the sentry, saluting in the regulation way.

Perhaps more than one curious pair of eyes roved in the direction of the pair as they partook of the delayed supper that had been kept piping hot for them; for it must have become known that there were doings on foot out of the common. The arrival of those heavy cases, and the mystery surrounding them, as well as the appearance of two strangers loitering about the grounds with a pass from the superintendent that allowed them free access to every part of the works—all these things hinted at something out of the common rut being in the air. If any of the fellows in khaki, regulation guards, or Uncle Sam's soldiers, managed to give a shrewd guess concerning matters they kept it religiously to themselves.

After satisfying the demands of their appetites Bob and Sid hurried back again to the enclosure. Each of them carried his warm blanket along, and was also careful to don his overcoat. There was a good reason for this, because, just as Bob had said, the nights were very cool, it being still early Spring, and unusually late at that; and sitting up until after midnight could be called no joke, especially when not allowed the privilege of a fire.

The three men were waiting close to the gate of the enclosure as they had been directed. Bob unfastened the padlock, and they all passed silently in, after which the heavy door was closed again.

A lantern was lighted, and for a short time the men from the naval shops worked around the gun that had its sharp nose pointed upward at an angle of more than forty-five degrees, and which could be instantly slung around so as to cover any point in the starry heavens above.

Finally they announced that the last word had been said, and the gun was ready for business, loaded with its first charge.

During this time Bob and the other two khaki-clad army boys had seen to it that the big searchlight was in condition for immediate use. When the proper time came it was designed to sweep the heavens with its piercing white shaft of light, so as to show the gunners how to aim when discharging the gun.

All was now ready, though some hours must pass before midnight arrived. But they meant to keep constantly on the watch, for it might come to pass the mysterious voyager of the upper air currents would change his programme on the occasion of his third visit, and appear much earlier in the night.

The great munition plant lay there, brooding in silence; though before many more days passed arrangements for the night shift of workers would have been completed, when the bustle might continue twenty-four hours of each and every day; and eventually on Sunday also if the need of extreme haste warranted such a departure from

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ordinary rules and regulations. Armies often fight furious battles on Sunday, and so in an emergency munition plants that have to supply the sinews of warfare may also keep running in full blast.

## CHAPTER VII. A SURPRISE FOR THE NIGHT RAIDER.

WHEN Sid had cuddled down to take things as comfortable as the conditions allowed, his mind was still in a whirl. Indeed, considering the fact that they were in the heart of one of the greatest munition plants in the whole country, and that a bomb dropped upon a certain selected spot was apt to start a series of dreadful explosions such as would work havoc with property and human life, Sid might easily be pardoned for feeling a thrill pass through his frame every little while as the full significance of his position swept over him.

He was almost awed by the novelty of the scheme adopted by this secret band of plotters. He agreed with Bob that they must be aware of the fact that most of the product of this plant was in reality being made for the U. S. Government, even though the people engaged in the works fully believed the Allies alone were involved; and that if indeed there was a vast plot on foot to destroy the works it was with the hope of paralyzing the plans of the authorities at Washington, and causing a change to take place in the now known intention of the President to declare that a state of war already existed between America and Germany.

Really only one of those clever German spies could have thought up such an amazing scheme as making use of an aeroplane in order to first learn the lay of the land, and then, when ready, dropping the spark that would start a conflagration, followed by explosions, and the complete demolition of the plant.

Perhaps those schemers had already endeavored to gain entrance to the grounds through ordinary channels. They may have had their secret agents among the employees, but careful "spotting" must have weeded these suspicious ones out from the mass.

Guards on duty day and night could prevent hostile forces from gaining entrance inside that high stockade with its barbed-wire coping; but there were other more ingenious ways in which the same object could be attained; and certainly with this aeroplane spy at work they had hit upon one of the most remarkable.

So Sid lay there, wrapped up like an Esquimau, and pondered, amusing himself by inventing all sorts of weird ideas, and then promptly dismissing the same as absurd and unreasonable.

He knew Bob did not want any of them to carry on a conversation, and though it was always hard work for Sid to keep from talking, even in whispers, he resolutely refrained from saying a single word for at least an hour.

All was silent around them, for the plant lay idle during the night. Once in a while the faint "clink" of a hammer striking metal could be heard, telling that some repairs to machinery were being made in a distant building.

But when the night wind rose, as it did at intervals, it brought to their ears the murmur of the town lying beyond; for those who were receiving such fat wages, as might be expected, were bound to enjoy themselves nightly in dances and such pleasures.

Twice during that hour Sid had imagined he caught a distant sound that made him think of the hovering 'planes when that Italian city was bombed so mercilessly by the daring Austrian airmen. Each time he had sat up, and held his breath to listen more carefully, only to decide that he had been mistaken, for whatever the noise had been it died away again.

The time dragged. Sid found his eyes getting exceedingly heavy. Again and again he had to shake himself violently to keep from going to sleep. In fact he was beginning to endure agonies in his constant fight to remain awake.

Then he started another form of amusement to keep his mind active. The stars were unusually bright in the heavens, although clouds also drifted across from time to time, coming up out of the southwest. Sid decided to learn what time it was from the position of the heavenly orbs. He had practiced this considerably in times gone by, and could usually figure quite accurately, once he got a fair start.

It pleased him when he figured the time out to be almost eleven. Why, if he had not made a mistake that would mean only one more hour until midnight arrived; and according to Bob, that was the time they might anticipate something was likely to be doing.

The two machinists were whispering close by, perhaps comparing notes concerning their chances of winging any birdman who challenged their skill with the naval gun.

Sid yawned for the twentieth time. How difficult to stay awake when it seemed as though a heavy weight

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pressed each eyelid, and there was a sense of oppression on the drowsy brain.

There was Bob moving now. Could it be possible he had detected some unusual sound that excited his suspicion? Sid again lifted his head, and turned to see what his chum was doing.

Yes, sure enough, Bob had sat up and appeared to be listening. That seemed a bit encouraging, for a beginning. Sid again strained his own hearing. He could detect the faint sound of music from the direction of the town. Lights caused the sky to lose some of its sombre appearance in that quarter, just as it is always easy to detect the presence of a city by the glow in the heavens.

Then Sid caught a sound that sent a wave of feeling through every nerve. It was not the metallic chink of a hammer smiting steel; nor yet the strains of music thrown out by an orchestra in some hall where a dance was in progress.

Plainly it sounded like the fretful rattle of a swiftly driven propeller, borne through space. Sid recognized it as a familiar sound, though of course it might have puzzled any one less acquainted with aeroplane work.

He reached out his hand and touched Bob.

"Do you think that can be it, Bob?" he asked, in a stage whisper.

"Sounds mighty like it," and with the low-spoken words Bob commenced to get out of the folds of his blanket.

Forgotten now was the chilliness of the night. Why, Sid seemed to be burning from head to toe with a sense of warmth, which of course was brought about by the pumping of blood through his arteries by his rapidly beating heart.

All of them were quickly on their feet, listening with every sense on the alert. Again the sound was wafted toward them, though it undoubtedly came from quite a distance still, and only the favoring air allowed them to catch it at all. But on this occasion it corroborated their former suspicions, so that now they were inclined to look upon it as a conviction. An aeroplane was swinging through space at some point not a great way off; moreover it kept constantly approaching the plant.

Seconds that were fraught with intense anxiety dragged by. Louder grew that clanking, whirring sound. There could no longer be any mistaking it; even one to whom the strange racket was most unfamiliar could easily have decided that its origin must lie with the craft of a birdman.

Bob gave low orders. Every one was keyed up to a pitch of tremendous excitement. Every one was also at his particular post, for of course it had been a part of Bob's plan that each should have a certain work to do, in which he was drilled, so when the critical moment arrived there might be no confusion.

"He's higher up than last night," Bob was heard to remark, and of course Sid immediately took it for granted that this was intended principally for him; at least he proceeded to take advantage of the opening to say:

"Perhaps he knows about the searchlight, Bob, and means to keep well up so as to avoid being seen, if it's possible?"

"That may be, Sid. I was thinking along the same lines myself. But one thing's in our favor, it'll give us a bigger chance for reaching him with the shrapnel. You know it's meant to burst at just certain distances, which can be regulated by those in charge of the gun."

The two machinists were listening, and conferring. Evidently they must be trying to decide at just about what height the 'plane was traveling, so they might adjust the shells to that distance. It was a part of the game. As the firing proceeded of course it would be possible to remedy any defects in judgment shown in the earlier charges sent upward. If they went beyond, a shorter range would be necessary; and if they burst short of the mark that too could be quickly changed.

Louder still came the strange sound. Doubtless the guards about the plant must have caught it before now, and would be halting on their respective beats to listen and wonder, perhaps to try and figure out what was in the wind.

"Ready, everybody!"

Sid drew a long breath. The crisis was upon them, and now they would soon discover what the immediate future had in store. But if their nerves were shaken what of the spy in the pilot's seat of that approaching 'plane, when without warning he suddenly found himself in a blaze of dazzling light, and almost immediately afterwards heard a deafening explosion close alongside or below him, that would tell the story of the bombardment! Sid almost reached the point of feeling sorry for that adventurer up there, for he had a very tender heart; but he shut

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his teeth together and made up his mind it was no time for any such feeling, with that air pilot meaning to do such a dreadful thing as bomb the great plant worth millions, and reduce it to a scrap-heap, perhaps taking several lives in the bargain, for some of the employees or guards were apt to be caught by the explosions.

Then Bob gave the order for the light to be turned on. The powerful machine could be easily manipulated by a single hand, such was the delicacy of adjustment in connection with the machinery.

Instantly the ray shot upward in a gradually widening path. It soared aloft to the very clouds that were floating across the heavens, and with such force that even such a small object as an aeroplane might have been detected at an altitude of ten thousand feet, with a good glass to magnify things.

Bob commenced to weave lanes through space. He kept the light almost overhead, as the clattering sound came from high up toward the zenith by this time. And his industry was quickly rewarded for there they discovered a speeding object that took on the shape of an advancing aeroplane.

It was less than a thousand feet above the earth, Bob saw. This told him that the intention of the unknown aviator must have been to swoop over the munition plant at a certain height, which possibly he had also attained during those two previous night flights. He may have gotten his exact bearings, so that even though lights below were scarce, he would know when directly over the largest buildings of the plant; at which time he could let go his bomb, if it turned out that such was his intention.

Bob kept his light full upon the whirring object that was now drawing terribly close. Sid, impatient for results, wondered why the gun did not instantly blaze out and send their respects up to that wildly advancing 'plane. He fancied he could even see the pilot bending over, and that he must have a bomb in his hand ready to hurl down upon the object of his spying.

Then came a deafening crash! Sid at first thought the bomb had struck, and that some doomed building must be crumbling in ruins before its blast.

Then, still looking upward in awe, he saw a puff of white smoke burst out quite some distance above the speeding 'plane. Why, of course it must have been the gun close beside him that had thundered forth its compliments, and the splash of smoke aloft was caused by the explosion of the shrapnel shell!

But the range was altogether wrong, for they were wasting their ammunition in sending the shells so far beyond the target. This fault would have to be remedied instantly, if they hoped to block the daring game of the airman.

He guessed, rather than saw, that the two machinists were even then making the necessary change, with the intention of having their next shell explode close to the moving 'plane. In this way they would stand a chance of striking a vital spot, or it might be, disabling the pilot, so that the same end might be attained.

Whatever it was they had to do they mastered it in speedy time, and then again the gun belched out. Sid gave a start when he saw the tell-tale puff of smoke break loose dangerously close to the 'plane; indeed, unless his eyes deceived him the delicate contraption of metal, light wood, and canvas careened far on one side as though in receipt of a mortal wound. The expert handling the wheel managed to bring his charge once more on the level.

A third time came a dreadful sound, and Sid felt as though something had slapped him directly in the face, though he guessed this must be the wind accompanying the discharge. He suspected that it must have been an unusually heavy charge; and wondered why he did not see the customary splotch of smoke close by the 'plane, to mark where the shrapnel had burst.

"They've sheered off, and are going away, Bob!" Sid cried out just then; but the other made no reply, being too busy just then manipulating the searchlight so as to keep the fleeing aeroplane in the lane of illumination, and thus enable the two who managed the antiaircraft gun to get in at least one parting shot.

It was true, what Sid had cried; the spy of the air was ready to call the adventure of the night off, and quit. Such an unexpected and hot reception must have shaken the nerves of the two men who occupied seats in the hydroplane; for long ere this Sid had taken note of the fact that it was a big seaplane, capable of alighting on the water, and also rising again from the surface if the waves were not too boisterous.

Once more the gunners had to change their range, so that the next shell might stand some chance of hitting the vanishing aircraft.

"Oh! hurry, hurry!" exclaimed Sid, and hardly had the words passed from his lips when there was a deafening crash close by.

"You almost got him then, boys!" Sid exclaimed, trying to clap his hands, although possibly quite unconscious

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of the fact, such was his tremendous agitation at the time.

Afterwards they plainly heard a loud jeering laugh from the speeding 'plane; as though the pilot or his comrade felt it incumbent to let them know that even the bursting of the shrapnel bombs so close by had not disturbed the nerve of the adventurers.

"Well, it's over, and we didn't get them after all our trying!" said Sid, sadly, when from the actions of the two machinists he knew they did not expect to fire another shot."

"But we gave them a good scare," remarked Bob, grimly, "and perhaps they'll be a little slow about trying that dodge again. But come, Sid, let's go and see if they did any damage when they dropped that bomb! It exploded with a terrible crash, and almost took my breath away for the second!"

## CHAPTER VIII. THE LESSON OF THE BOMB.

"OH! was that what the big shock meant; and did they really drop down one of their terrible bombs, Bob?" exclaimed Sid, freshly thrilled.

"Listen!"

When Bob said that one word all of them fell silent. They could detect all manner of exciting sounds now. Those who had been doing repairs in one of the plant buildings had rushed forth, doubtless under the belief that a German army had landed, and was terrorizing the country, even as they had Belgium, Serbia and Rumania. Men shouted and swore, while the astonished guards also called out to each other.

Nor was this all. From over in the mushroom town there began to break forth the queerest sort of noises, among others the crash of guns and revolvers fired in rapid succession. It was almost as if the place had been attacked by a mob of Teuton sympathizers, in an organized riot.

"What can be happening over in the town, Bob?" the appalled Sid broke forth with.

"Oh! I reckon it doesn't mean anything serious is the matter," answered the other. "They've heard our bombardment here, and it's caught like wildfire. Many of those foreigners carry pistols, you know, and they're so inflammable that if they thought there was an attack from sympathizers with Germany they'd rush to the windows, stick their beads out, and yell, as they blazed away as fast as they could shoot; after which, having done their duty as they saw it, they would go back to their cards or their wine, or dancing. It's already dying down, you notice."

"I began to think something awful had broken loose over there," explained Sid, in apology. "Most of those foreigners are queer people, and Americans can't always get on to their ways. But, Bob, hadn't we better be going now to find out if those air spies really did throw down one of their miserable old bombs?"

"Yes, we'll soon see," said Bob, after which he gave directions to the three who had been with them through the adventure to stick to their posts until relieved, and if the aeroplane again ventured to show up, to continue the bombardment after the style already begun.

He and Sid left the enclosure.

"Do you have any idea which way we ought to go to look?" asked the latter, after the gate had closed behind them.

"Yes, I took particular pains to note the flash, and it was over this way," came the ready response, which showed again how Bob Hamilton never lost his head, even in a sudden emergency.

He stopped to ask a question or so of one of the guards they came upon. He, too, had noticed the bright flash, and heard the stunning report that seemed to make the earth tremble under him. He had also noticed the hovering aeroplane as disclosed by the glowing path made by the rays of the searchlight; and being capable of figuring things out for himself, had arrived at a very creditable explanation of the mysterious occurrences.

It proved he had noticed that the light flamed up at the time of the great explosion from the same direction as Bob had mentioned. This was corroborative evidence, Sid determined, and his faith in his chum received fresh impetus.

They hurried along. Several men came rushing out of a building and joined them, one carrying a lighted lantern in his hand, and all of them greatly exercised, as their exclamations proved.

Bob, thinking it best they should know the truth, quickly put them in possession of the facts, and explained the use made of the anti-aircraft gun to frighten off the mysterious spying seaplane that for three successive nights now had paid the munition plant a visit. He also explained how it was believed that extra loud crash must have sprung from the explosion of a bomb thrown from that same 'plane before its alarmed pilot turned tail and fled.

Bob was thankful there had been no further crashes. Whatever damage the descending bomb may have done it ended with the initial effort. This led him to hope that a miscalculation had been made, owing to the sudden confusion at having the searchlight turned on them, and the anti-aircraft gun projecting shrapnel so industriously in their direction.

Now all the buildings had been passed, and none of them seemed to have been injured, that they could see. Beyond lay the open ground, with here and there at intervals some small shanty in which explosives were stored; these were purposely kept away from all the beehives of industry, so that in case of an explosion through



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lightning, or some other cause, the disaster might not be extended by too close contact.

"I can see something queer ahead there, Bob!" suddenly announced Sid, his voice quivering with emotion.

They were soon on the spot, and when the lantern was held up its feeble light gave them something of a view of what had happened.

A great hole gaped in the red earth. It was as though some enormous rock had been blasted from its bed where it had lain ever since the glacial period thousands, and perhaps tens of thousands of years back. The hole in the earth was large enough to hold a fair-sized cottage, and then leave room.

Two trees that had stood near the spot were lying prostrate, and one of them had its trunk badly shattered, just as Sid remembered seeing on another occasion after a bolt of lightning had come down from the clouds and struck a locust.

He gazed into that yawning void with a sense of awe. What terrible power there must have been in that bomb to have created such a monstrous gap in the earth. How little chance any one of those beehives of buildings would have had if struck by such an explosive! Sid shivered, thinking how in another week the night shift would very likely be at work from evening to dawn; and that in such a case frightful havoc must follow the dropping of such a bomb.

Bob looked angry, in fact his chum could not remember ever seeing him frown so.

"What bothers you, Bob?" he asked, edging closer to the other, who was still staring at the crater formed by the exploding bomb.

"I'm sorry we didn't fetch that seaplane down, with both its occupants, that's what ails me," gritted Bob. "The fiends, to try and drop such a frightful thing on a sleeping plant. It's true the workers were supposed to have gone home, but there are always some men around here, fixing things for the next day's work, or serving their bit as guards. They didn't care a red cent whether some of the poor fellows were blown to shreds or not, so long as they carried out their infernal programme of destruction. And so I say I'm bitterly disappointed because our gunners failed to shoot that machine to splinters."

"And I'm with you in that, every time," affirmed Sid, trying to grind his teeth savagely together, though it was always a difficult task for him to look furious, because Nature had made his round genial face for sunshine, and smiles, and all that sort of thing. "I suppose though we'll have to get used to all such things if we start in on this war against the Central Powers; it's a part of German kultur to frighten people with a showing of frightfulness. We're expected to have our knees knock together and our faces turn white with fear. But shucks! the only result will be to make us get our good old Anglo-Saxon blood up, and fight twice as hard. Germany's one great blunder is in judging all other Nations by German standards; she has managed to cow her own people, and thinks others can be treated in just the same way; but she's dead wrong."

"Well, there's no use of our staying here any longer," remarked Bob, giving one last look at the gaping chasm in the earth, scooped out in the shape of a monster bowl. "I'm glad though no one chanced to be close by here when that thing struck."

"The chap who hurled it couldn't have been much of a baseball pitcher," chuckled Sid, "or he would have come closer to a building than this."

"Well, you understand he was more or less rattled by finding us prepared for him," explained the other, sagaciously. "When the searchlight picked them up, and then our gun commenced shelling the seaplane it sort of took their nerve away. That was shown plain enough by the hasty way they swung around, and tried to get out of range. It might be the fellow flung down one bomb just to show us as an object lesson how easy it would be for him to demolish these buildings any night he chose to sail back this way, higher up, and perhaps out of range of shrapnel."

"Well, we proved how easy it would be for us to knock him to smithereens if he came snooping around this way again," chuckled Sid. "Two can play at that game, don't you know; it's a case of bomb against bomb, one going up, the other coming down. And I reckon the end hasn't come in sight yet."

"I'm expecting to sleep out in the open the rest of the night," remarked Bob.

"I rather expected you'd say that, Bob; and if you don't object I'd like to keep company with you. If by any chance those pirates of the air did come back again we ought to be able to improve on our first attempt."

"The chances are five to one we'll see no more of them this night," he was told, "but of course, Sid, if you care to spend the balance of the night in such an uncomfortable bed you're welcome to do it. I'll be glad of your

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companionship, old fellow."

"I'd never forgive myself if he did come and you got him, with me asleep through the whole rumpus, and never seeing him take his tumble. So thank you for the permission, sergeant; I'm game to toe the chalk line to the finish."

Accordingly they went back to the enclosure. Here they found the trio who had been left in charge. Bob informed them with regard to what they had discovered, and how it had turned out to be a bomb dropped from the Fleeing seaplane that had made such a fearful detonation.

"But no one was hurt," he concluded by saying, "and all it did was to blast a hole almost ten feet deep in the ground, three hundred feet away from the nearest building."

Then he proceeded to tell how he wished them to remain on duty during the balance of that night.

"Both of us mean to stick it out, in hopes they'll return," he went on to explain, "and I want to be ready to give the pilot a warm reception if he should have the nerve to come back. You can make up for it tomorrow, because you'll have nothing else to do but lay around, and eat, and sleep."

All of them declared themselves as being fully in sympathy with his desire to omit no act calculated to bag the daring aeronaut in case of a return engagement; and so it was settled with good feelings on both sides.

Gradually things were quieting down again. Even over in the town the excitement seemed to have utterly died out, since there was no more firing heard, and the shouting only broke out spasmodically, possibly when backed up by the contents of certain flasks carried in hip pockets.

Around the plant nothing was to be heard save low-toned conversation. Lights continued to flit about, however, and it was plain that from time to time parties of the guards or workmen were visiting the scene of the explosion to satisfy themselves that the amazing story related by those who had been ahead of them was founded on actual truth.

Bob meant to have a talk with the superintendent early in the morning. Possibly it might be wise for them to have that hole in the ground filled up before the flood of workers began to pour in through the open gates; the sight of such a suggestive tragedy was apt to alarm some of the women who were employed in the primer department, and influence them to throw up their jobs. With extra work contracted for with the U. S. Government it would be handicapping the company to curtail the list of employees at this juncture.

This time they arranged for a series of watches, one being on duty at a time. Such a programme allowed the other four to snatch some sleep, and at the same time their schedule was such that a most careful lookout was maintained. No aeroplane could approach within a mile and more of the works on such a still night, without being discovered through the rattle of its propeller. Until some device is found for making planes noiseless in their action when darting through space, such a thing as secrecy is utterly out of the question, for they always herald their approach long before within striking distance.

There came no further alarm. Undoubtedly those in the hostile and mysterious seaplane must have considered they had a wonderful escape from destruction when both the searchlight and the anti-aircraft gun, capable of shooting straight up in the air to an incredible distance, were turned loose upon them so unexpectedly. They would certainly be wary how they again approached the munition plant, even on the darkest night.

But then the clever minds that had planned this secret attack would not be apt to stop work because of one defeat. Other tricks could be expected sooner or later. There would really be no safety for the great munition plant that had drawn down the hatred of these treacherous unknown plotters, until their identity was discovered, and the strong arm of Uncle Sam had seized them in a grip of steel.

Bob thought many of these things over as he lay there, when Sid believed him to be calmly slumbering. He conjured up plans, only to throw them aside as useless junk. Through it all, however, he clung to just one idea, which was to ask permission of those higher up to start out on a search for the base from which the mysterious seaplane must have come.

"It was somewhere nearer the coast, of that I feel dead sure," he told Sid, as the two of them talked matters over the next morning, while waiting for the breakfast summons to reach them; "I say that for two reasons, the first of which is it came from the southeast every night, so far as I can learn, and retreated in the same quarter too. Then no one would think to construct a seaplane for exclusive use in the uplands, and among the Virginia hills."

He echoed Sid's views to a dot.

"We agreed on that before," remarked the latter, nodding his head affirmatively, "when figuring it out; and

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said that scores of bully hiding places could be found among the saltwater marshes near the coast. There they lie, lonely stretches of land, flooded during great easterly storms, but at other times above sea level, and where not a living person would come to bother them if they kept well hidden daytimes. If so be you go out looking for the land pirate, Bob, you'll find him down there toward the coast."

Shortly afterwards the sergeant took up his duties of the day, and first of all sent off an account of the attempted destruction of the munition plant, wiring the Secretary of War direct.

## CHAPTER IX. PLANNING AN AGGRESSIVE CAMPAIGN.

THE dingy khaki-colored canvas tents of every, little detachment of Uncle Sam's Army Boys presented a snug appearance those days. They were to be found scattered all over the Eastern country, wherever some important railroad bridge, trestle or munition plant was located.

Sturdy young chaps, the bone and sinew of almost every city and town of importance, clad in the regulation uniform of both militia and regulars, were to be seen as trains whirled past, faithfully keeping watch lest some dastardly enemy of the republic strike a blow meant to paralyze industry, and stop the traffic that was congesting the lines of steel east and west, north and south.

When the call first went forth these young men had answered it without hesitation. Most of them had only recently returned from guarding the long Mexican border, in that torrid country where the lawless followers of a Villa, and the troops of Carranza maneuvered and fought battles, and both threatened to unite against the gringo Yankees when their sacred soil was invaded.

Now a new and much more gigantic task confronted them. The republic was on the threshold of war with the mighty German empire, that had with the aid of Turkey, Bulgaria and Austria for two and a half years defied the whole of Europe. Tremendous events were in the forming. No one could look into the future and see what amazing changes were in store for the country they loved, "the land of the free, and the home of the brave."

Up to recently it had been confidently believed that America, separated by three thousand miles of salt water from battling Europe, need never have a fear of being drawn into the whirlpool. Most people fancied that our part was to sit calmly by, trying to remain neutral and supplying food and munitions to any one that had the ships to come after them.

But by degrees this smug sense of security had taken wings and flown away. The long voyages made by those monster airships known as Zeppelins was the first rude shock received. Some fine day one of these immense air fortresses would drop down on American soil, bringing mail, and securities, and shattering a life-long dream of isolation which Americans had relied on as a bulwark of defense.

Then one fine day the *Deutschland*, a commercial submarine, visited a port on the east coast, bearing a cargo away that was greatly needed by the munition and gun-makers of Germany.

The visit was repeated. There was even talk of a regular line of commercial submarine vessels being inaugurated. And finally came the sudden appearance at Newport of the fighting submersible; following which "friendly visit" the boat started forth, and as a terrible object lesson to us immediately attacked and sank six steamers of the Allies, just outside our territorial waters.

That same "object lesson" had more to do with America preparing to enter the war than any other one thing that happened. Like many other schemes of the Teutons it had just the contrary effect to what they had figured on. Instead of alarming Uncle Sam so that he would strive to keep the peace, and cringe under the lash of the Kaiser, it simply awakened him from his foolish Rip Van Winkle sleep, and showed him where the path of duty lay.

When some of the guards were off duty at the munition plant, and lying around camp taking things easy, of course the conversation was almost wholly connected with the war, and the probability of America being soon hand-in-glove with the Allies in their gigantic task of preserving Liberty throughout the civilized world.

By now these young chaps had become well seasoned to their work. They were bronzed and rugged, and the picture of health. Some who had been perhaps pale, and inclined to be hollow chested at the time the call went out on the preceding early Summer could not have been recognized as the same fellows, so robust had they become. In many ways that campaign down on the border had been the making of thousands of the militia participating in the same.

Bob, having sent a full account of what had happened during the preceding night, was hoping to receive some sort of reply from Washington, although it was Sunday, and he feared this might be delayed twenty-four hours. Still, as the Capital was seething these days, there seemed a possibility that certain important business might be taken care of, despite the day.

There was work going on at the munition plant buildings. Advantage was being taken of the absence of the hands to do extensive carpenter and mason work in connection with extensions, meant to accommodate a further

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increase of toilers, as well as allow of three shifts of eight hours each inside of another week, when the plant would be working at full capacity on "rush orders."

Bob and his squad of enlisted men had it fairly easy daytimes, for the regular company guards took almost full charge then. It was when night came that the chief danger hung over the place, and secret conspirators would be apt to try and accomplish their ends.

There were times when Bob wished he had twice the force that had been given in his charge. So numerous were the particular spots that had to be watched that he felt as though too many chances were being taken. He even asked that his detail be increased in order that the danger be cut down to a minimum.

It was afternoon now, and the sun was heading far down the western sky.

No one would believe it to be Sunday; for over in the town that day usually given to rest and worship was pretty much devoted to noisy celebrations. Made up for the most part of foreigners, the mushroom city partook of the idea of a Continental Sunday, which meant a period of picnics, dances and gaiety.

Possibly later on things would settle down, and the chime of church bells be heard at intervals during the day; but if any such sounded during the day their sweet call was muffled under the loud laughter, singing, and even firing of pistols as some birthday celebration took place.

Sid had been walking around and observing what work was being done. If the enormous plant seemed like a bee-hive of industry now, with thousands of workers going and coming during stated hours, what must it appear when there were three shifts engaged, with not an idle hour from midnight on Sunday until the same hour came on the ensuing Saturday?

"Well, when you see what's going on these days, Bob," he observed to his chum, as he threw himself down beside him, "it makes you believe the sleeping giant must be waking up for keeps. Talk to me about Gulliver and the Lilliputians, I can hear the cords with which they bound him hand and foot snapping like firecrackers going off in a bunch."

"Yes, the giant has never been aroused fully before, and it comes slowly," Bob went on to say, in reply; "but just wait until he stretches and yawns and is fully awake, and then the world will see something that is going to make it sit up and take notice. It will be billions on billions of dollars, and millions on millions of fighting men, with the brains of a hundred Edisons working night and day to invent startling devices calculated to bring the war to a speedy end."

"That sounds good to me, Bob, and I'm hoping as hard as I can that our getting into this awful scrap will be the means of shortening the dreadful war, as well as bringing about the only kind of peace that will endure for ages—a peace founded on the right of every nation, big and little, to live its own life within certain lines; just as the States in our own Union do now."

"It will all come that way in good time, never fear, Sid. This thing had to happen. It is just like a boil that threatens, and the sooner it reaches a head and breaks, the better. We're going to get everything bad in national life out of the world's system this time. How many of our folks thought the Civil War was the greatest calamity that could have befallen the South; and yet see what finally came of it. Who'd want Virginia, for instance, to go back to owning slaves, and the life of those black days?"

"Well," laughed Sid, "I believe there are a few obstinate old chaps who never will admit that the times have changed for the better. They'd dearly love to have us back there again. They talk everlastingly of the 'glorious days before the war' when the South was in the saddle and dictated to the rest of the U. S. Yes, and unless I'm greatly mistaken our friend, Captain Radcliffe, the white-bearded Confederate veteran, is just such a fossil, who can't be drawn out of his shell."

"Speaking of the old gentleman," remarked Bob, thoughtfully, "I somehow find myself wondering what his story can be; for there's certainly some sort of a mystery connected with his past, of that I feel dead sure."

Sid seemed to agree with him, judging from the way in which he immediately nodded his head, and then went on to say:

"He certainly does act kind of queer, Bob. He eyes us both so suspiciously, just as if he had some reason to be afraid of any one who was in uniform. But then it's none of our business. There was also a dignity about him when he drew himself up, that impressed me. He's no ordinary man, of that I feel sure. But see there, isn't that a chap on a wheel from over at the station? He's got a telegram for somebody, Bob; perhaps your answer has come from Washington!"

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"I hope so," muttered the sergeant, as he hastily beckoned to the boy, who was looking about as if in search of some one.

It turned out to be so, for the name on the buff envelope was that of "Sergeant Robert Lee Hamilton." Sid fell back a pace after discovering this, so that his chum might glean the contents of the message uninterrupted.

The boy had jumped on his wheel again after receiving a generous tip from the recipient of the message, and was already passing out of the guarded gate of the high stockade.

Trying to read Bob's emotions by the expression flitting across his face, Sid came to the conclusion that, taken in all, the contents of the long message must be of a fairly satisfactory nature. This caused his heart to beat with pleasure, because everything that concerned Bob had more or less to do with his own happiness or misery, so closely bound up in each other were the two chums.

"Looks as if it made you feel good, Bob?" he remarked, slyly, after seeing the other reading the message for the third time.

"Why, yes, that's right, it does, Sid," he was told. "In fact, all that I asked for has been granted. I can tell you that much, although perhaps I'd better not let any one actually read this telegram from the Secretary of War, just now."

"Whew! we're flying high these days, eh, Bob? Having personal communications with one of the President's cabinet! Oh! well, fellows who have shaken hands with such eminent people as General Cadorna of the Italian army, and the King himself, are in the swim. And how about their giving you more help here, Bob; did your argument impress Headquarters?"

"The daring attempt to play havoc with this big plant must have shown them how important a task they had committed to my charge," Bob replied, soberly; "and what ends the unknown enemy was prepared to go to, so as to strike the Government what might be a staggering blow right at the time war was going to be declared by Congress in answer to the President's appeal. Yes, there will be another batch of men join us right away. Fact is, they may arrive before dark today, for they are already on the road here."

"Bully for that!" ejaculated Sid; "the more the merrier. They'll have to make you a lieutenant if the number is increased much more. If we have twice as many to man the stockade, and work the several searchlights they're putting in place, why, of course the work will be easier. But then don't imagine for a minute, Bob, I'm growling about hard work. I'm only thinking that the safety of the plant will be better served with enough guards on duty."

"Well, that part of my worry is lightened, for one thing," the sergeant said, as if he meant to throw it off his mind.

"But see here, Bob, I hope now there isn't any mention of you being superseded in command by some stripling of a second lieutenant, a West Point chap who's had no actual experience, and only knows war through theory; while you've been in the trenches, and taken part in a battle that will go down in history?"

The other laughed softly.

"No such mention, Sid, so don't get alarmed," he went on to say, confidently. "In fact there's even a little hint of official commendation toward the end of the message. I won't tell you the exact words, but I'm going to keep this document to hand down to posterity. Some day some young Hamilton may be proud to show it, and tell how his *grandfather* fought in the Great World War. There are Sons of the Revolution, and there are Spanish War Veterans, so there will be the Sons of the War with the German Powers."

Sid grinned with approval.

"I'm tickled half to death to know the Secretary of War really knows a good thing when he comes in touch with it," he laughed. "But how about fighting this menace from the air, Bob; was there any order or suggestion along those lines in the message?"

"There was," the other answered. "I am ordered to take several of my men who are best fitted for such duty, and to scour every rod of ground to the east and southeast of this place, trying in every possible way to discover the hidden base from which that mysterious seaplane comes nightly, to try and attack the munition plant. The Secretary doesn't believe wholly in trying to defend the plant against such attacks; his policy is to go out and destroy the base from which the plane is working, perhaps capturing the daring aviators in the bargain."

"Bully again!" cried the exultant Sid. "That's the aggressive policy I admire. It is what the British should have done in the start—hunt out the U-boat bases, and destroy all such, together with the submersibles. To simply work on a system of defense is poor policy. A lot of the energy spent in trying to save steamers should have been

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devoted to destroying U-boats. Wait till Uncle Sam gets after them, and I reckon there'll be some queer things doing. We're bound to invent some method of paralyzing the business, so that the pirate undersea craft will be afraid to poke their noses out of port. And, Bob, of course you'll pick me out first thing to be a member of your hunting party?"

## CHAPTER X. STARTLING NEWS.

"MAKE your mind easy," Bob assured his chum; "I wouldn't think of leaving you behind on such a big hunt, Sid. Besides our friendship, there's the fact that you've had more or less experience in woodcraft, and may know more about hunting through marshes, and salt water lagoons, and even in patches of woodland, than most of the other fellows in our crowd."

"All the same," spoke up the delighted Sid, "there are a couple of our boys who would make a mighty good addition to the bunch. I refer to Chauncey Fosdick and Leonard Randolph."

"Yes, I'd certainly take them along, and that would probably be enough to answer our purpose," Bob musingly added, apparently settling certain matters in his mind.

"And of course we'll have to go armed and equipped for business, Bob, because those are desperate men who handle that seaplane, and if we ran on them we might have a stiff fight on our hands right away."

"It would be foolish to think of anything otherwise," his chum told him. "I'm trying to settle who I ought to select to leave in charge here when we're away."

"If I might be so bold as to offer another modest suggestion, sergeant," piped up Sid, with a grin that belied his servile tones, "I'd like to say that you could trust John Atherton to do his duty conscientiously. He's a serious-minded boy, and means to do his bit to the limit. What do you think of my suggestion, Bob?"

"I reckon he'd be my choice," came the reply. "I'll have a good talk with him before we take up the night's duty, and put him in possession of all the facts concerning the seaplane, how our plans are arranged to keep it from dropping any bombs on the plant, and a lot of other things that are connected with my work here."

"And when can we start off?" asked Sid, eagerly.

"I see no reason why we shouldn't get away some time tomorrow morning, Sid. I've got a good map of Virginia, showing all the little creeks and bays, as well as the marshes along tide-water. Besides, I'm informed that the Government is sending me by special messenger the charts issued by the Geodetic Coast Survey. These as you know are wonderfully accurate maps, showing every little inlet, as well as the depth of water along the coast, and up the various bays and rivers. They may be of value to us, for perhaps these spies have their concealed base on some deserted island, and we'll know where the channel runs when we want to get there, so as not to stick on a mud flat or bar."

Sid rubbed his hands together like a miser gloating over his stock of gold.

"Well, the plot thickens, doesn't it, Bob? And the deeper we go into this thing the more exciting it promises to become. I'm glad you mean to let me go along with you; and I'll only hope and pray we corral those two pesky aviators who have taken such a novel way to strike at this big plant, without running much danger, as they believe, of being caught in the act."

Bob put his precious message carefully away. He really felt proud of its wording, and meant to keep it as a heritage of honor, showing that he had done his duty by the Government, than which no patriotic young American can do better.

After that he proceeded to have a long talk with John Atherton, who also came from Richmond, and had been a schoolmate of the chums. While John took matters coolly, showing no great enthusiasm over the trust that was to be handed over to him, at the same time Bob, able to read character fairly well, knew from the look on his firm face, and the tightening of his lips, that he was determined not to prove a failure in his first elevation to a position carrying some measure of authority.

After John, having been duly instructed in the use of the searchlight, and also talking with the two men who remained to work the anti-aircraft gun, had departed to seek his tent, Bob smiled as though satisfied.

"John is what I'd call a square fellow in a square hole," he was saying to himself as he walked back toward the camp-site where the several khaki-colored canvas tents stood in a straight row, with a cheery fire crackling in front. "After seeing the serious way he took things I'd feel safe about leaving him in charge."

It lacked about two hours of sundown. Sid expected to walk across to town and pay a professional visit to his patient. Bob had meant to go with him, being deeply interested in the little Radcliffe family, consisting of Tommy, his mother, and the old Confederate veteran; but he began to fear that he would hardly have the time to



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spare now.

There were so many things he had to think of in connection with his intended scouting trip of the next day, when he might be absent for the better part of a full week, that an hour meant much more than it would under ordinary conditions.

There was Sid coming out to meet him now, and no doubt wanting to know whether he expected to accompany him on his errand of mercy.

"I hardly think I'd better go along today, Sid," he remarked, after his chum had put the question.

"But the veteran will be asking after you, Bob," remonstrated the other; "for somehow he's taken the greatest fancy to you. I suppose the fact that you are of the famous Lee family has something to do with his admiration, for he fairly worships the memory of the greatest man on the Confederate side of the Civil War. He'll be a whole lot disappointed, especially when I tell him you're meaning to go away tomorrow, to be gone for an indefinite period."

"Sorry, Sid, but really I oughtn't to go, with so many important things on my hands. It would be different if any good purpose could be served by my keeping you company, but you see it would only be for my pleasure. I'll expect to see them all when we get back again."

Sid looked disappointed.

"Of course," he went on to say, "if you really can't break away there's no use of my talking any more about it. I'll have to trot over there alone, and explain to the old gentleman. He'll be disappointed too, Bob. Some of the admiration he's always had in his heart for his one great hero has descended on your shoulders, I reckon. See what it is to have a glorious name. Whoever heard of an Oliphant doing wonderful things, huh?"

"I have!" snapped Bob, quickly. "I've known a fellow bearing that same name to risk his own life in order that he might help a poor wounded Italian soldier who lay there bleeding to death in the trenches; I've watched him sacrificing his own comfort so that another less luckily situated might be made temporarily happy; I've seen his temper tested under a score of ordeals, and he'd always come out the same bright, shining, jolly chap his comrades love. Oliphant, Lee, Hamilton, Farragut, what does a name matter; it's the *individual* back of it that counts every time; and those are my sentiments, Sid, old chap!"

Sid blinked several times as he reached out and squeezed the digits of his chum.

"You're the best fellow in the whole wide world, Bob Hamilton," he asserted with emotion. "And I consider myself the luckiest because I have you for my chum. After this I'll never complain because I don't happen to bear an honored name; no, I'll just do my level best to make Oliphant respected in the annals of Red Cross work; because something tells me that's going to be my strong hold. I can leave the fighting part to those better fitted for such work; while I look after the wounded, and save human life."

"I hope you'll have many glorious opportunities, dear old Sid, to practice your principles; and that you emerge from the war that is coming down on Uncle Sam, with the name of Oliphant known far and wide. But see here, talk of an angel and they say you'll hear the rustle of his wings. Look what's coming in through the gate of the stockade right now, Sid!"

"Why, it's Grandpop, as sure as you live, and all alone!" ejaculated the other in more or less surprise; "I hope now my patient hasn't taken a turn for the worse, and just when I was feeling that all danger of blood poisoning was past."

"I don't know what to think," muttered Bob, still looking toward the gate where the figure of the white-bearded Confederate veteran could be seen arguing with the young fellow in khaki who stood guard there. "It strikes me as queer he would come all the way over here, when Tommy could have made the trip so much easier and quicker. There may be something wrong, something that doesn't have to do with Mrs. Radcliffe's injury."

"I never thought of that," admitted Sid. "There, Grandpop has convinced the guard that he ought to be admitted. I suppose he must have also told Dick Alpers how in the years long gone by he too used to shoulder a gun, and march in the ranks of those immortals who followed Lee through the Wilderness to Petersburg, and up to Appomattox where the war ended; for I could see Dick salute him respectfully, because Dick is a Virginian the same as you and I. There, Grandpop is heading this way, so I reckon he was directed toward us. That shows he has come on *important* business."

Bob had his curiosity fully aroused. He knew that it would have to be something above the ordinary to

## Uncle Sam's Army Boys in Khaki Under Canvas

influence the ex-Confederate to seek out a camp of Government troops; for there still rankled in his unregenerate heart a slight feeling of animosity against Uncle Sam that even seeing Virginia boys in uniform, and saluting Old Glory as their flag, had not fully succeeded in rooting out, strange as it might seem.

He was looking about him as he came along, and chief of all the row of tents seemed to chain his attention, for he even stopped briefly, and surveyed them, with the cheery fire burning in front of the canvas shelters.

"Say," blurted out Sid, as if an idea had struck him, "I warrant you, Bob, the sight of those tents and uniforms so like the old Confederate gray, together with the glisten of guns has stirred those sleeping memories of his into fresh life. See how he takes it all in as if in imagination he could once more see those camp grounds of the old days, and again look on the thin faces of his mates who are pretty nearly all gone by now. There, he's broken away now, though it was only with an effort, and is coming along again. We'll soon know what's in the wind."

As Grandpop arrived he made a stiff military salute, which the two youngsters as gravely returned. Somehow the old man had eyes only for Bob. It must be as Sid had said, that in this chip of the old block he could in his imagination see some trace of the "Mars. Robert" whom he had adored as a hero of heroes in those days that "tried men's souls."

"Glad to see you, sir," remarked Bob, extending his hand, which was instantly taken by the visitor. "Is this just a friendly visit, or can we be of further assistance to you and yours, Captain Radcliffe?"

He winced at hearing Bob use the name which did not really belong to him, but was that of his son-in-law, Tommy's dead father; but as Bob knew no other he had no choice in the matter.

"I would not have come here, sir, if it had not been absolutely necessary," the old man said, sturdily. "I had my citizenship restored to me after the war, but never once have I walked under the flag against which I fought for four long years. My bitterness has gradually cooled, but I am feeble now, and I cannot entirely reconcile myself to new thoughts and new ways. But forgive me for saying that, because if one who bears your honored name can glory in the Stars and Stripes it is hardly fitting that I should complain."

"You wanted to see me, particularly, did you, sir?" continued Bob, noticing that the old man was laboring under more or less emotion, which may have been caused by conflicting sentiments, or possibly had a foundation in more recent happenings.

"Yes, my daughter was afraid that you might fail to accompany the young doctor when he made his professional round this afternoon, as he promised he would walk over; and it was of the utmost importance, sir, that she should have a talk with you, as you are in charge here, and should be put in possession of certain astonishing facts coming to our notice in a strange way."

Sid pursed his lips up as though he might be going to whistle, although no sound escaped; his face took on an expectant look, for what the veteran had just said aroused his dormant curiosity to the limit.

Bob considered a minute. He would have to change some of his plans then if he accompanied Sid and the veteran to the humble cottage home of the widow. He of course found himself nonplussed concerning the motive that had influenced Mrs. Radcliffe to demand an interview with him. From what the veteran said it would appear that she had important news for him bearing on his work as guardian of the munition plant. If this were so why had she not sent Tommy, who would be a much faster messenger than the limping veteran?

"I suppose I can go over with you, sir," he went on to say, slowly, "though I am very busy, as I expect to go away tomorrow on business, and my chum will accompany me, so he expects to make this his last visit for a short time. But pardon me, how does it come that you didn't send Tommy with the message?"

"Ah! that is the trouble, sir," exclaimed the old man, his face lighting up with mixed emotions, "for Tommy isn't at home. It is in connection with his strange kidnapping that my daughter wishes to see you!"

"Wheel!" exclaimed Sid, unable to wholly restrain his feelings, though he immediately pressed a hand over his mouth so as to prevent a further slip.

"This is a queer thing you're telling me, Captain," observed Bob.

"Then you will go back with me, both of you," ventured the old man, and then craftily adding: "she will tell you the full particulars when you see her, sir. I might only make a jumble of them, for my mind fails me sometimes; though strange to say I can remember incidents of fifty-five years ago and more just as plainly as though they happened yesterday; yes, and see the faces of those with whom I fought shoulder to shoulder under the Stars and Bars."

Bob smiled.

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He readily guessed that this was merely a subterfuge calculated to insure his going with Sid when the latter started for the town and the Radcliffe home. But as his mind was already made up, he was content that the veteran should make use of a tempting bait in order to draw him on.

"Wait a minute, sir," he told the other. "I notice that the party owning that big car is about returning to town. I think he's a contractor who has charge of some of the enlargements taking place here. At least as he has plenty of room in his car I am quite sure he will only too gladly carry us over with him. Wait here for me, both of you, please."

After he had gone the veteran turned to Sid to say half shamefacedly:

"I have been something of a recluse, and this will be my first ride in an automobile; which confession will show you how far behind the times I am."

## CHAPTER XI. VIA WINGED WIRELESS.

A FEW minutes later and the big seven-passenger car came rolling toward the spot where Sid and the old man stood talking. The veteran got in rather gingerly. Modern ways of travel were beyond his comprehension, apparently; and he would much rather that they were going behind a spanking pair of horses.

He had the entire rear seat to himself, for Bob sat with the owner and driver, while Sid, taking one of the side seats, leaned forward so he could exchange words with his chum if the other met his advances.

But apparently Bob considered there was no need for further talking; that must be reserved for such time as they found themselves face to face with Tommy's almost distracted mother; for the old man had given them to understand that the lady was very badly disturbed on account of the strange thing that had happened.

He tried to imagine what its nature could be, but failed miserably. Why should any one kidnap a half-grown boy like Tommy Radcliffe; and above all others those who were concerned in the plot against the munition plant? It was a puzzle to Bob, he frankly admitted, and one that without more of a clue he could not solve.

He went back and repeated to himself every word the veteran had used in making the announcement, which was not a difficult task for one who had practiced having a retentive memory. This satisfied him that the old man had refused to commit himself wholly because he feared Bob might decline to come over, but send some one in his place.

They were quickly in the town. The veteran had sat there holding on tightly to the padded leather side of his seat. Sid, matching him out of the tail of his eye, really believed the soul that had never quailed when Longstreet charged at Gettysburg, or Grant's legions broke against the sturdy defense of Petersburg, actually felt timid because he was being borne along the road at a whizzing pace, and in a modern vehicle that was beyond his reckoning.

At any rate he was certainly quivering with some emotion when the pair helped the old man out, after they reached the town. He gave one look back at the powerful car that was trembling with the purr of its engine, and shrugged his shoulders; his whole air was that of a man who gave thanks after passing safely through the greatest peril of a long life.

Now they started on foot for the cottage. It was only a short ways off, beyond the border of the town, and on the further side. And the closer they drew to the Radcliffe home the higher mounted Bob's desire to learn what had happened to Tommy, for he was certain it must be out of the common.

Arriving presently, they allowed the veteran to precede them inside. When they saw Tommy's mother it was to discover that she had a most worried look on her pale face; she must have been crying too, for her eyes were suspiciously red. That began to look as though there could be no humbug about the message they had received.

Sid noticed that she too seemed to have eyes only for his chum. Apparently for the time being her own injuries took a back seat; and also the fact of his having proven so expert in handling her lame arm was forgotten. Well, if trouble had come to her only child Sid could hardly blame her for ignoring him; he felt sure she meant no disrespect in doing it.

"Oh! I am so glad you have come," she told Bob, after shaking hands with them both. "I was afraid you might send some excuse, and we need you so, indeed we do. Such a remarkable thing has happened, I can hardly believe it. Indeed, only for the evidence of that paper with his writing on it I might think I had only dreamed everything. But it is real, it is true!"

"Captain Radcliffe was telling us," Bob started in to say, "that Tommy had mysteriously disappeared, though he refused to speak further, and only said you would explain, and that you asked me to come over."

"Yes, yes, and now I mean to tell you everything, beginning with his leaving home this morning with a last kiss for me, because Tommy never goes out even to his daily work without that. How little did I dream such a terrible thing was going to happen to him, and that perhaps I might never, never see him again."

She had some difficulty in holding back her tears, Bob saw.

"Please calm yourself, madam," he hurriedly told her, fearing an attack of hysterics, such as so many women are subject to, and which would of course only delay their becoming acquainted with the facts. "We are waiting to hear about it all. At what time of the day was it Tommy left home?"

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"Somewhere close to nine in the morning, sir," she replied, beginning to get the mastery over her weakness.

"And where was he bound?" continued Bob, one of his objects being to keep her attention away from that feminine desire to give in to tears.

"He had arranged to pay a long promised visit to a boy friend of his who lives some seven miles off," she told him.

"If he was expecting to foot it all the way," remarked Bob, "it meant fourteen miles, there and back; for I suppose he expected to return home today?"

"Oh! yes, he has never stayed away from home one night in all his life, sir," the mother told him, with a touch of pride in her trembling voice. "And as for the distance, Tommy would think that a small matter, because he's a fine walker. But he never got there to his friend's house, sir. He was waylaid on the road, and kidnapped by a couple of bad men."

Bob and Sid exchanged rapid glances. There was a significance about the story that was growing by degrees, as piece-meal Tommy's mother was induced to relate what had happened.

"But this is a strange thing you are telling us, Mrs. Radcliffe," said Bob; "for of course you have set us to wondering how under the sun you could have learned this. Did any one happen to see it done, and fetch you the particulars?"

"Oh! no, sir, it was Tommy himself who sent us the terrible news."

"That makes it more remarkable than ever, madam. Is Tommy an expert wireless operator, that he could send such a message through space?" continued the astonished and genuinely puzzled Bob.

"He never saw a wireless outfit in his life, sir, though both of us have read about them, you must know. But Tommy had a way of sending word, and through the air at that. Please step this way with me, sir, and you will see."

She led Bob to a window. Sid crowded close behind, eager to see everything that was going on. He looked fit to burst with the curiosity that seemed to make a thousand interrogation marks on his plump face, and in his questioning eyes.

"There, you can see the loft from here," she told Bob, pointing as she spoke.

"Oh! it's pigeons you mean?" ejaculated Bob.

"Yes, homing pigeons," she told him, simply. "It's my Tommy's only hobby. He bought a pair a couple of years ago, and has raised a dozen from them. Often he takes one with him to the works, and liberates it with a scribbled message to me, which it pleases me to receive when the bird enters the trap. He sold a pair to this boy friend some time ago, and one of them died. Tommy promised to replace it, and when he started off this morning he had his best bird with him, one that came home when a gentleman took him to Richmond, and sent him aloft."

Again did the two young fellows exchange interested glances. The story was beginning to grow very exciting, and they could easily imagine it would prove of intense interest as it progressed further. Both of them began to have a yearning to know the contents of the message Tommy had dispatched back home to his mother on that bright Sabbath day.

"Please go on and tell us more," Bob urged; and while Sid said nothing his face spoke eloquently enough, and seconded the desire of his comrade warmly.

"I chanced to go out to feed the birds, as was my custom, about half an hour or so ago," she continued, now in a steady voice, "when to my surprise I noticed Phil in the coop. I remembered plainly that Tommy had said he meant to take that particular bird, although he hated to part from Phil. So I was just saying to myself that his heart must have failed him at the very last, and he had substituted another bird, when I felt a thrill at noticing how there was a little red string about Phil's wing where it connects with the body; because Tommy always uses red thread to show that the bird is carrying a message."

"Whew!" grunted Sid, mopping his forehead, although up to then no one had considered that the weather was at all warm, certainly not torrid.

"I managed to catch the bird," Tommy's mother continued, "and found as I expected that there was a little roll of tissue paper fastened under his wing, just as Tommy always managed. He never goes anywhere at any time without carrying some of that paper with him, and also his indelible pencil and the thread, so as to be prepared, because he has taken that word for his motto.

"When I had managed to make out the message he sent home I hardly knew what to think of it; for my first

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explanation was that Tommy must be playing a practical joke. Then I remembered that he had never done such a thing in all his life; and would not act so cruelly toward his poor mother. And after I had talked it over with Grandpop here, we decided that it must all be true, and that since Tommy begged us to see you, and tell you all, it must be done without delay. Oh! my heart grows cold within me when I find myself wondering what those bad men may do with my poor boy, because by accident he learned of their terrible plan for blowing up the munition plant!"

"Oh! my stars!" gasped Sid, his jaw dropping.

The "cat was out of the bag" now; and Bob began to get an inkling of how matters stood. It seemed to clear away all doubt, too; for if Tommy had by some queer accident overheard those schemers laying their atrocious plans, and later on been captured by them, it stood to reason they would want to hold him secure until their plot had either succeeded or proven a failure.

"Please show us the message, Mrs. Radcliffe," urged Bob, purposely including Sid in the sweep of the investigation, as he did not want his chum to think himself of no account.

Thereupon the widow opened a book that lay upon the table, and from between the leaves carefully plucked a small piece of tissue paper that had recently been rolled up, if appearances went for anything.

"Here it is, sir," she told Bob, holding the flimsy paper out to him. "It is of stronger texture than you might think, just to look at it. Tommy says it is used exclusively by homing pigeon fanciers to carry messages. I smoothed it out the best I could before reading it, and then pressed it here in this dictionary."

Bob glued his eyes to the writing. It was apparently hurriedly done. More than that Tommy apparently, having to go to work at a tender age in order to help support the family, had not learned to spell infallibly; but on the whole it was a very good message, and the boy had shown commendable skill in telling what he had on his mind with little waste of words.

This then was what Bob read, and Sid over his shoulder also managed to make out, barring a few little slips of grammar and spelling:

"Mom:—I chanced to hear two tough men plotting how they meant to blow up works. They caught me and say they mean to keep me a prisoner for a long time, p'raps forever. Tell Mr. Hamilton. Tell him they've taken me to the big Shattuck Marsh, where I think they have a hideout. Heard them talk of some kind of aeroplane. Kind of hoping I'll see one. But they are mad at me, and make all kinds of threats. I'm not afraid, Mom, but all the same I wish I was well out of this scrape. Send this by reliable Phil. Please see Mr. Hamilton *right away*.

Your boy TOMMY."

He might have written ten times that much, and still have said nothing more, Bob thought. The message was brief, and to the point. He could see that the boy must be alarmed for his safety, because his captors had evidently made some hard threats in the hope of frightening him into giving them a solemn promise not to betray them, if they should let him go free.

"Madam, your Tommy is made of the right kind of stuff," he told Mrs. Radcliffe, which remark caused her eyes to glisten with motherly pride; while Grandpop straightened his bent figure, and looked as though he considered it a personal compliment, since the line descended from him.

"And will you try to do something for him, sir?" she pleaded earnestly, wringing her clasped hands, as though conjuring up all sorts of dire things happening to Tommy on account of his misfortune in overhearing what was never intended for his ears.

"I shall start out and search high and low for him in Shattuck Marsh, wherever that place may chance to lie. You see, we are looking for those two men, ma'm. They are wanted by the United States authorities very badly, on account of wilful attempts to destroy the munition works. I have orders even now to take a squad of men and search the swamps and marshes, as well as the islands in the mouths of the rivers, and along the bays. Those plotters are dangerous men, and Uncle Sam is bound to cage them before they can execute any more of the mischief they have planned out. So in searching for your son I shall also be carrying out my orders."

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"Well said, Sergeant Hamilton!" exclaimed the veteran, who had been listening carefully to every word spoken; "and we only hope, sir, that you may be successful in both your enterprises. Listen, young sirs; the first thing you will undoubtedly wish to know is in connection with this same Shattuck Marsh. There is one man in this town who knows all about every swamp and marsh and quagmire within a radius of fifty miles. I can put you in touch with him, and he will be happy to place his knowledge at the disposal of any friends of mine."

"Thank you, sir, a dozen times!" exclaimed Bob, gratefully; "that sort of work will save us a whole lot of bother. I'll learn by degrees, and you can depend on it there'll be no hiding place within fifty miles of here safe to the enemies of the Nation. We'll start out with the grim determination of weeding them out, root and branch, until the country is free from such detestable scoundrels."

## CHAPTER XII. THE GUIDE TO SHATTUCK MARSH.

REALIZING that he would have his hands filled with work, if he expected to get an early start on the following morning, Bob concluded it would be wise to "kill two birds with one stone."

"While my chum here is taking a professional look at Mrs. Radcliffe's arm," he said to the veteran, "would it be possible for you to lead me to this party you just mentioned? I may not be able to come over again before leaving, and I'd like to arrange with him for his assistance in the hunt."

"I am ready to go instantly, Sergeant," replied the aged man. "It is true that I seem to be unable to walk as well as formerly, but believe me there is yet some of the old-time grit in the wasted frame, a flash of the former fire in the heart of one of Lee's men. When you say the word, sir, I am ready. I hope we may not meet the hosts of citizens on the street at this hour of the day. Sunday is a time of merrymaking for most of them, you know. Somehow I seem to dislike crowds more and more as I grow older."

Again Bob had that queer feeling flash over him, and he found himself wondering if there could really be any reason why the veteran should experience such an aversion to running across strangers. He certainly acted as though he continually *feared* to come face to face with some one whom he dreaded to meet.

Nevertheless he eagerly led the way. Undoubtedly it was love for his grandson, more than any deep-rooted desire to serve the Government, that urged him on.

Reaching a certain obscure quarter of the rapidly growing city, which had almost sprung up from a small village in a night, after the big munition plant opened, the veteran pointed to a man working in a garden.

"There he is, Sergeant, Jasper Scott, the man who will lead you to Shattuck Marsh. I myself have heard him speak of such a place, and tell how he had had an adventure in its miles upon miles of lonely morasses. You see, Jasper in the winter times has all his life made money trapping such little animals as live in swamps and marshes, so he has come to know every place of that sort within a radius of fifty and more miles. He is a quaint character, and I have enjoyed his company of evenings exceedingly. In fact, Jasper is my only friend around this section; for I do not seem to make acquaintances easily these days."

A call brought the man making a garden on Sunday to the picket fence. Bob studying his face saw that he must indeed be an original character, for his lineaments indicated as much. When he spoke it was with the accents of an uneducated Southern man. He called a marsh a "ma'sh," drawling the word out in a way that had to be heard to be appreciated. Somehow Bob "took" to Jasper from the start; he believed the muskrat trapper straightforward in his character, and to be wholly trusted as a guide.

At the invitation of the veteran Bob told what he wanted of the other party. He wondered whether Jasper chanced to be of the same type as Captain Radcliffe, as he still styled the other in lieu of any knowledge concerning his true name; and entertained a secret dislike for everything pertaining to the U. S. Government. But he soon learned his mistake there.

The man listened silently while Bob told of the strange visits of the seaplane, how it had hovered over the great munition plant several nights in succession; what means he had taken to interfere with the dreadful plot that would have laid much of the place in ruins; and finally the measure of success that had come during the preceding night when the air terror was beaten off.

Then he suddenly branched off and explained what had happened to Tommy Radcliffe. Jasper listened more eagerly than before. His leathery face took on a grim look as though his mind had already been made up. As soon as Bob came to the point of asking him plainly if he would undertake to serve as pilot to the expedition he nodded his long head in assent.

"Yuh c'n count on me tuh see yuh through, suh," he said, warmly. "I sure do think a heap o' that younker Tommy, my friend's grandson. Besides that, suh, I'm loyal tuh the Government, even if I've been a listenin' tuh some mighty hard knocks from my friend hyah, the Kunnel, who never has got ovah his bad feelin's aftah the wah. As fo' me, suh, I ain't ashamed tuh say I'm a reconstructed Johnny Reb. Yes, suh, I fit in the ranks too, as a boy, but I seen it wa'nt no use in the kentry bein' divided, an' so I jest flopped ovah 'bout the time my ole leader, John Mosby, did; an' became a Black Republican. Me 'nd the Kunnel don't jest agree on that subject, an we've fit the old battles ovah and ovah; but it's all done in friendliness, yuh know. Tell me jes' what yuh want me tuh do,



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suh, and I'll agree tuh anything."

It was easy sailing after that. Bob had already figured out his plan for starting, and the rest could be taken care of while they were on the way.

"I'll secure some sort of car to take us as far on the route to Shattuck Marsh as you think advisable, Jasper," he went on to say, with the confident air of one who had his finger on the pulse of passing events. "Then we can go the balance of the way afoot."

"In course, suh, yuh expect tuh take some fightin' men along with yuh; fo' I ca'clate from all you-uns has told me those birds are desperate whelps, an' might turn on we-uns?"

"I shall have three with me, and all heavily armed in the bargain," Bob explained. "That would make five in the party, and as it's hardly likely there can be more than two or three of these schemers we ought to be able to master them."

"I'd figger on lookin' after jest one o' the same, suh," chuckled the old fellow. "Fo' well nigh fo'ty years now I've done spent my winters aroamin' around them same swamps and ma'shes, and as I always tote my gun along I reckon I know how tuh use the same. Will yuh pick me up hyah at my house, suh, and at what time in the mawnin'?"

"Between seven and eight, I think, Jasper," replied Bob. "It might be possible we shall be delayed a little, because I can't tell just what may happen to take up my time; but be ready at seven, and then just wait."

So it was arranged. There had not been said one word of compensation. Jasper did not seem to give the matter the slightest thought; but Bob had already made up his mind the old man should profit well by his services.

Upon arriving at the Radcliffe home he found that Sid was still working with a bandage. The veteran went to draw some fresh water from the well, and Bob, sitting down, amused himself in idly glancing over several old books that lay on a side table, relics of former days, no doubt, for they bore the marks of much usage.

Twenty minutes later and the two chums were on their way back to camp. It was getting on toward supper-time, and they walked briskly, for Bob knew he had a number of important things which he wished to clear up before leaving his post temporarily.

"Well, this has been a strange coincidence, hasn't it?" remarked Sid.

"It certainly has," Bob admitted. "The two incidents have dovetailed so closely that it looks as if the hand of Destiny had taken hold of things. Besides finding the plotters who are wanted by the Government we are likely to effect the rescue of poor Tommy Radcliffe."

"How queer that he should have accidentally overheard those men laying out their plans, and then fell into their hands?" mused Sid.

"That isn't one-half as remarkable as his way of communicating with his folks!" declared Bob. "That homing pigeon racket goes away ahead of anything I've run across for a long time. The only thing that puzzles me is how he managed to keep the bird after he fell into the clutches of those men. It strikes me they must have guessed what sort of pigeon it was he had, and in that case they would have quickly wrung the bird's neck."

"You'd think so," Sid continued, thoughtfully; "but then he may have had it inside his coat, or even in the bosom of his flannel shirt. Boys chuck all sorts of queer things in such hidingplaces, you know, Bob. Anyhow, he *did* manage to hide it from his captors; and later on, when he found a chance, set the bird free with a startling message under its wing. It tickles me to know his first thought was about getting the news to you."

"Oh! he remembered that I had been placed temporarily in charge of the guards at the plant," explained Bob. "And then again, Tommy seemed to fancy both of us, for you've been of considerable assistance to his mother."

"While Captain Radcliffe has taken a great liking to you, Bob, as a link connecting him with his beloved Mars. Robert of the old days he dreams about."

Bob turned and gave his companion a strange look.

"By the way, Sid," he said, "I rather think I've solved one little mystery that bothered us a bit."

"As how?" demanded the other, seeming interested and expectant.

"I believe I know just who our old unreconstructed Confederate is," continued Bob. "Happening to glance at the fly leaf of an old and well worn copy of Poe which lay on the table I could see that a name had been erased, but enough of it still remained for me to make out that it was Colonel Geoffrey Peyton, of a Virginia regiment; which would indicate that he had carried that beloved volume with him through his campaigns."

"Whew! that was a big discovery, Bob!" ejaculated the other, "and so he's a real colonel, is he? Then Jasper

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must know his identity, for he plainly spoke of him as 'Kunnel,' you remember; though at the time I thought it was just the Southern way of calling every citizen by a title, as they do in Kentucky and such States. Colonel Geoffrey Peyton, is it? That sounds like an illustrious name, Bob. Some of the Peytons are among Virginia's best sons. They did their bit in the Civil War, too, unless I'm mistaken. But whatever can the old chap mean by keeping himself in the background, and making no acquaintances?"

Bob shrugged his shoulders whimsically.

"You'll have to go further to find an answer to that question, Sid, because I don't know a bit more than you do. But depend on it he has some reason for it. One thing sure, it's none of our business, and it would be rude for either of us to want to pry into family secrets."

"I reckon you're correct, Bob, and I take that as a rebuke. I'll keep my fingers out of the whole affair; only it's too bad that the old man doesn't get a pension from the State on account of his faithful services to the Southern Confederacy. It would help keep the wolf from the door, and make him feel that he was doing something to tide things over in these days of high prices."

They turned to other matters while continuing on their walk home, and with so many things to engage their attention it can be readily understood that there was no lack of subjects to consider.

That was a busy evening and early night for Bob. He first of all concluded arrangements for safeguarding his trust, for his mind would not have been at ease did he have to leave the munition plant exposed to danger while he was so far removed.

Still, he was acting strictly under Government orders, for which he had full authority in that dispatch received from Headquarters. Complete directions were given in writing to John Atherton, by following which he would be able to protect the million-dollar plant just about as well as Bob himself could have done.

Then there was the matter of the newcomers, for another batch of boys in khaki had arrived while Bob and Sid were over at the widow's—eight of them, and members of Bob's own company at that, he was delighted to learn.

They were told just as much connected with the danger menacing the plant as Bob thought necessary and wise; and then given their orders, being instructed to look to John Atherton in lieu of the sergeant while he, Bob, was absent on Government business connected with the finding of the seaplane base.

All of them displayed extraordinary interest in the affair. It appealed to their imagination, this strange method of attacking a munition plant from the air; and Bob felt that their zeal in the cause would make these newcomers a valuable addition to the defending force.

Now that the extensive works could be better guarded he felt considerably relieved, and believed he could start off with a clear conscience.

Bob hardly expected anything serious to happen on that particular night, though he did not neglect the slightest precaution with regard to vigilance. Doubtless after their hot reception on the preceding night the plotters of the air would go a little slow about making another attempt to injure the munition plant; allowing some time to elapse, when perhaps by making a sudden attack they might hope to catch the defenders napping.

The morning came, and all was well. Those who slept under canvas were early astir, for they lived under military organization, and a bugle sounded the reveille long before the laggard sun peeped above the eastern horizon; indeed, when his first rays came in sight breakfast was ready, with over a score of hungry young chaps to be taken care of.

Several more dingy looking but serviceable tents had been erected, forming a second street in the canvas camp. Those same tents had seen good use down along the Mexican border through the long months when Uncle Sam's Army Boys lay watching for Villa raiders. Now their kind was scattered all over the country, where squads of fellows in khaki guarded threatened property. If the veil that concealed the future could only be raised, no doubt those same tents would be seen back of the French war trenches, where the American army was receiving its last polish and instructions before taking its place in the fighting line, to carry Old Glory across Belgium it might be, and up the historic Rhine, if Fate were kind.

Bob kept everlastingly at it, and managed to clear the decks so well that when eight o'clock arrived he was all ready for his departure. A car had been hired to carry the little contingent on its way and into this was dumped such material as his judgment told him they ought to carry with them on their strange search.

## CHAPTER XIII. A HALT AT THE COONEY SHACK.

"I'M glad we're off at last," remarked Sid, after they had left both the camp and the munition plant behind, and even picked up old Jasper Scott, with his gun, a ditty bag and a dingy blanket, the last, perhaps, a relic of ancient campaigning days.

The guide of the expedition could not have been as much a stranger to modern ways of conveyance as Tommy's grandfather; certainly this was not his first ride in an automobile, for he seemed quite at home there.

Leonard Randolph and Chauncey Fosdick were two young fellows with whom Bob and Sid had gone to school in the home city. They had been soldiers in the service of the Government long enough to know when to draw the line between boyhood friendships and the customary military respect to be shown to those placed in authority over them, even though the comrade might only be a non-commissioned officer like a sergeant.

Of course, while there were others present the chums were not likely to indulge in any conversation upon personal matters; nor would they be apt to mention the affairs of Tommy's folks.

Incidentally, Sid had been quite deeply interested in the news which had been conveyed through Bob, after the other's accidental discovery of that name in the book. He had even gone to the trouble to write to some one in Richmond to make cautious inquiries concerning a Colonel Geoffrey Peyton, his record as a Confederate soldier, and what was supposed to have become of him. In this way Sid, without betraying the fact that he knew where the party in question could be found, anticipated learning facts that would at least allay his curiosity.

The man who owned the car had a garage in the mushroom town. The workers in the big munition plant were making double wages, many of them, and spending their money freely; so that joy rides on Sundays had become quite a feature of their lives, now that Spring was at hand, and the wintry weather gone for good, it was hoped.

The car made fair progress, considering the fact that in places the road was far from good, since the frost coming out of the ground had done more or less damage to most country highways.

Jasper sat beside the chauffeur so as to keep him going right. No danger of any mistake in direction so long as he remained on duty; for he had lived in this part of the country, as he told the boys, for over forty years, and "circulatin' around all the time."

It took them an hour to make ten miles, although part of this time was spent in repairing a puncture, it must be confessed; the difficulty of getting along poor roads accounting for the balance of the sixty minutes.

Sid showed signs of impatience, but Bob did not worry. If they did as well as this in the next hour he knew they would be getting close to the border of the great Shattuck Marsh. And they had a long day ahead of them in which to work, and show what they could accomplish.

Luck was with them, for when the second hour had passed they were at the point where, according to old Jasper, it would be necessary for them to say good-bye to their conveyance, and go forward afoot.

He led them through a woods by means of a narrow trail that evidently he must have helped make, in his many trips to the marsh during the trapping season; for he was continually pointing out little interesting things as he went on. Bob knew from this that the old fellow must be of a very observing nature, and that much of the happiness he found in this world came from seeing the wonders distributed by the bounteous hand of Mother Nature in wood, swamp, and marsh.

Jasper seemed to be on familiar terms with every woodchuck that had a hole in a bank; and even the gray squirrels frisking around the trunks of trees at their approach thrust out little curious heads when the old man spoke softly to them, and made queer sounds between his thin lips, as though he were talking with them in their own language.

Then finally, after negotiating this big woods they struck another road. This was even worse by far than the main highway, and the wisdom of abandoning the car instead of trying to keep on with it became apparent to Bob; for they never could have made decent progress over such ferocious ruts and projecting stones.

"Now, thar's a cabin ahead o' us, yuh kin see, suh," remarked Jasper, pointing as he spoke to where they could detect a lazy column of blue wood smoke creeping upward. "I knows the folks thar right well; fact is, I makes it a practice o' eatin' many a meal with the Cooneys when I'm workin' in the big ma'sh Winters. Kinder takes away a bit from the loneliness, yuh see, suh. If so be you-uns'd like to drink a cup o' coffee such as we-uns uses, they'd

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be on'y too glad tuh 'commodate yuh."

Sid hastily spoke up, for he knew fairly well what sort of "coffee" this was likely to be; and as a rule Sid was mighty particular about his "brand" of the bean, always buying the best in the market.

"We've got plenty of coffee along with us, Jasper, you see, and wouldn't think of depriving your friends, the Cooneys, of any out of their store, which may be limited. If the sergeant here thinks it worth while to stop for ten minutes, I can brew a pot that will warm us up, and give us fresh vim for tramping."

There was a pleading vein in Sid's voice, which Bob caught, knowing the weaknesses of his chum so well. He smiled, and nodded his head encouragingly.

"We'll see about that, Sid," was all he said, but the other looked his thanks, for he knew this was about as good as agreeing to his request.

As they approached the cabin from the slab chimney of which the blue smoke was issuing a couple of lean hounds came barking toward them. They looked quite ferocious, too, and Sid, who had a little fear of strange dogs, was glad when Jasper spoke to them in his wheedling tones, so that recognizing an old friend they immediately transformed their angry barks into joyous greetings.

Then a slatternly looking woman issued from the ramshackle old cabin, and she was smoking a corn-cob pipe with evident satisfaction. Following at her heels trooped forth a trio of barefooted youngsters, with heads that looked as if they might be unacquainted with comb and brush; but at least their faces were fairly clean. Then Cooney himself lounged forth, dragging one foot after the other, in the manner of the poor underfed whites who are afflicted with the "hookworm," that causes them to appear lazy and shiftless, as Bob well knew.

They stared, as they had good reason for doing, at sight of a party of young fellows in khaki uniforms, and armed with guns. No doubt few rumors of the war penetrated to the isolated Cooney cabin, and possibly the man did not even know that the Virginia militia had come back from guarding the Mexican border, and that war with Germany was liable to break out any day now.

He shook hands all around as Jasper introduced the party. Sid felt as though he had hold of a cold-blooded frog when he took the cracker's digits in his own warm clasp; but then he had run across just such characters before in his wanderings through his native State, and was not at all surprised.

"If so be yuh got a fire agoin', Miss Cooney," Jasper was saying, "we-uns mout like tuh brew a pot o' coffee, while we rest a bit. Now, don't think we're gwine tuh rob yuh o' anything, 'case we-uns hev plenty o' the stuff along with us, an' yuh see folks kinder git to likin' their own brand. All we'd want'd be bilin' water."

"I reckons now, Mistah Scott, we-uns hev a plenty o' the same, 'case the kittle's hangin' over the fiah; if so be yuh'll step inside, suh," she said, facing Bob, who she somehow guessed must be in command of the detachment, possibly because of his sergeant's chevrons.

Each of them had been carrying certain things in so many packages, including a blanket apiece, for they expected to have to sleep outdoors while on their mission. Sid had taken possession of a portion of the culinary department, which was limited to a frying pan, a coffee pot, some tin pie pans, tin-cups, and knife, fork and spoon all around. The supplies were neither bulky nor burdensome; indeed, if their stay was protracted they would have to forage with earnestness in order to pick up new additions to the larder.

So when Bob stepped inside the shack Sid followed at his heels, beginning to free himself from his bundle so that he might get at the coffee, which was carried in a small canister that just fitted in the fairly large pot for boiling.

It was frightfully gloomy inside the cabin. The two small windows had glass in the sashes save where in several instances it had been broken, and the aperture was filled in with an old discarded article of wearing apparel, a fragment of a dingy shawl, or anything that came handy; for trouble was the one concern that gave the Cooney family no anxiety; if they did not have a thing they simply did without it, and that was the end of the matter.

"Help yuhselves!" said the lady of the house, jerking her thumb toward the open hearth, where a big black iron kettle swung on a chain was singing a merry song over the wood fire; for kettles can be just as cheerful in an obscure Virginia shack, given plenty of blaze underneath, as in the most palatial kitchen the land boasts.

Sid did not wait on ceremony. He soon had his coffee pot fixed, and held over a corner of the fire, drawing some of the red embers forward to carry out his ideas of a camp cooking heat. And when the delicious fragrance of that prime Java and Mocha began to permeate the atmosphere of the cabin Sid noticed with considerable glee

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that the old woman first started sniffing, and then deliberately emptied her corn-cob pipe, as though she realized the mixture of odors was a bad one.

The coffee was quickly prepared. Meanwhile the others had been asked to come in by Bob, who meant that it should be more or less of a democratic crowd while they were working in common; though at times, of course, he might have to exercise his authority as a leader, and give necessary orders.

"Plenty to go around, and then some," remarked big-hearted Sid, anxious to note just how his choice brand of bean affected these humble folks, who were doubtless accustomed to the cheapest and strongest coffee to be bought in the nearest local store; "so if you please, ma'm, join us in a cup."

The Cooney woman did not wait for a second invitation. Her watery eyes fairly sparkled with delight, because she was about to have a taste of the real coffee, such as aristocrats used. She hastily produced two cracked cups and placed them on the bare deal table where one of the soldiers had arranged their own tincups.

Even a supply of condensed milk had been brought along, for those who liked it; though both Sid and Bob really preferred to take their coffee "black," that is without cream or milk, in the Turkish and Arabian fashion, though a little sweetening was demanded by Sid, when sugar was handy.

Bob, it seems, had an object in view. He had agreed to Sid's request for a brief halt because he felt that a cup of coffee would invigorate them all; but there was something further than that in his mind.

These people lived close to the border of the great marsh. If there had been any strange happenings taking place around that section of country latterly it might be possible they could give some important information concerning the same. And Bob was only waiting until the insidious coffee had gotten in its work before opening his batteries upon Jasper's humble friends.

He already guessed that it was the woman who was to be depended on to yield any information, for Cooney seemed to have lost his tongue, owing to this influx of khaki-clad citizen soldiery; apparently he had never set eyes before on any of their species, for he kept staring at them continuously, and even quaffed his coffee regardless of its scalding his throat, still watching every move one of the unexpected guests made.

Sid was pleased to note that when Mrs. Cooney allowed the first swallow to pass down her throat her face expressed complete rapture. This told him that she appreciated a good thing when she struck it. Some people might have preferred their own strong brand of drink, their palates being unable to enjoy a milder brew.

"I kind of reckon," Sid was telling himself, "that mebbe now long long ago she may have visited some of her folks in Richmond or Lynchburg, and there tasted real coffee, so that old memories are recalled. And say, if things turn out all right with us I'm going to see to it that a packet of my coffee finds its way to this same shack; though mebbe it'll just about spoil them for their regular stuff."

Bob saw his opportunity when he filled the woman's cup a second time. He smiled genially and went on to say:

"There's something queer going on around the big Shattuck Marsh, ma'm, and we've come down here to investigate the same, having received our orders from the Government at Washington. All of us are from Richmond, as Jasper failed to inform you, and native Virginians, the same as you are. Would you mind telling me now if you've seen or heard anything out of the common rut lately, either on the land or in the air?"

He knew immediately that he had struck "pay dirt," because of the way the woman cast a quick look toward her "man." Cooney, too, evinced just a particle of interest, for he was seen to wink his eye, and give a faint encouraging nod.

"Why, yes, suh, we-uns hev hed somethin' o' a skeer lately," she admitted.

"What was the nature of your fright, may I ask, ma'm?" continued Bob, with the intention of coaxing her on to commit herself wholly.

"We been a seein' things as never entered our heads tuh think cud be," she went on, with a half-awed air; "things as flew through tuh air with the wust kind o' screechin' n'ise yuh ever heerd; things thet looked like they was darnin'-needles bigger a thousand times as any thet ever cud be; things that sometimes flied sky-high; things that talked like humans when they clipped jest over the roof o' our shack. An', suh, we got so we'd jest cower hyah under the roof whenever we-uns 'd hear thet rattle and bangin' acomin', 'case we spected it'd drap down an' kerry one o' the kids off tuh make a meal outen the same. It's got so a woodpecker don't durst tap on a hollow treetop but what them younkens they start a whoopin' fo' the cabin; an' as fo' me, I done lost my best pipe a runnin' so hard."

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Sid laughed, not that he thought things so comical as with satisfaction, because he realized that Bo . It was of course positive that this monstrous "darning needle," known also as a "snake-feeder," among boys, which the Cooney family had fled from so often must be the aeroplane used by the artful plotters who, with malice toward the United States Government, and in the interest of a hostile foreign Power, were employing it as a means for dropping bombs on the big munition plant, and putting a stop to its bustling energies.

"When did you first begin to notice this strange visitor in the heavens, I'd like to know, ma'm?" Bob went on to say.

"I shore reckons it mout a been as much as two weeks back, suh," she told him, after a brief spell of cogitating; and meanwhile fingering her black pipe nervously, as though somehow her brain did not seem to work just right when she lacked the soothing influence of her smoke.

"And it's been coming and going ever since that time, has it?" he continued.

"Off'n on it has, suh. Sometimes we'd hev tuh make the run as many as six times a day; then agin it mout be two days afore we'd be skeered onct moah. Why, them ere hounds got tuh know the sounds clar off, an' they'd kim a rompin' home with thar tails atween their legs like they'd met a skunk; yessuh, they'd hide under the cabin, an' we caint hardly coax 'em out agin fo' nigh an hour, they be thet bad skeered. It's shore somethin' unearthly, we reckons."

"Have you heard it in the night as well, ma'm?" Bob questioned.

She immediately nodded in the affirmative, and hastened to say:

"Plenty o' times, mistah, shore we has. On'y last night it kim along makin' the ornariest nises yuh ever heard on airth; and afore I got tuh sleep agin I hears it comin' back agin' floppin' right over our cabin roof, seemed tuh me. I thought sure it mout be tryin' tuh come down the chimbly, an' I reached out tuh git my man's gun, but it went on, an' never touched we-uns at all."

What more conclusive evidence would any one want, for of course this covered the going and return of the mysterious seaplane at the time of the attack on the munition plant, and the dropping of the bomb in the wrong spot.

Now Bob got down to facts of greater importance, up to which his questions had been leading.

"I want to ask you another question, ma'm, if so be you'd feel inclined to help us out. Stop and think, has this queer flying object that buzzes overhead back and forth, generally taken a *regular* course; or have you noticed that it just goes any old way?"

"Huh! sumtimes it does, an' agin it don't, suh," she told him, which of course was not a very satisfactory solution of the problem for Bob; but changing his mode of address, he returned to the attack again.

"That is to say, I understand you to mean, ma'm, that sometimes it flew around in great circles. That was when it was climbing up toward the clouds, and getting further away all the time. But when it flew low down, and seemed to be coming and going, did it seem to come from one particular direction, and go back that same path again? You see, what I'm trying to learn is the location of the spot where that aeroplane makes its start!"

"Oh! laws sake alive, is that what it be?" exclaimed the Cooney woman, in evident surprise and relief. "I do 'member hearin' sumthin' about them contraptions. They kin fly like birds, caint they, suh; and go miles an' miles thru the air?"

"Yes, they can travel a hundred miles an hour, ma'm; but please answer my question about the track it seemed to take—did you notice where it always appeared in sight when starting out of the marsh?"

"Now I reckon I cud show yuh thet same, right easy, suh, if you comes with me tuh the spring whar we-uns gits our supply o' drinkin' water. Three times anyways I jes' happen tuh be thar w'en I has tuh scoot fo' the cabin like a hen thet sees a hawk swoopin' daown arter her."

"As we're all through with our coffee let's adjourn to the open air," suggested Bob; "I think Mrs. Cooney is going to give us a clue that will count for something when we break into the marsh."

Accordingly all of them went forth. The woman stopped long enough, however, to push hastily a wad of black looking tobacco, known as "nigger-head," into that corncob pipe of hers; and picking up a glowing ember from the fire, utterly regardless of how it might burn her fingers, she was soon puffing again delightedly; all of which amused the observant Sid exceedingly.

They speedily reached a spring that bubbled up from the ground. At least Sid told himself, no one on earth could have purer water than this obscure family living in the lonely lands adjoining the big marsh; for it was so

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clear that the pebbles and grains of sand could be plainly seen several feet under the surface of the pool.

"Now, suh, if so be you—uns turn an' looks thet way yuh kin see a bunch o' water maples jest gittin' ther leaves on, an' lookin' so green. Wal, every time I seen thet ere airypine comin' scootin' along over the tops o' the woods it was thar it poked up fust thing, always in the same place; and I reckons as how it follered the same track when it was a gwine back home agin."

Bob looked carefully.

"Thank you very much, ma'm," he went on to say, after he had made a mental note as to the quarter of the compass that the water maples mentioned by Mrs. Cooney occupied; "you may have helped us much more than you think. A knowledge of direction may keep us from trying to explore many square miles of the marsh, and wasting a heap of valuable time."

A flicker of a wan smile crossed the thin countenance of Cooney's woman at being thus complimented by such a nice spoken young fellow; she tried to give Bob what was evidently intended as a curtsy, though it hardly passed the limit of a nod of her head; and then she smoked more furiously than ever.

Bob turned to the guide.

"Please take note of the direction she pointed out to us, Jasper," he went on to say. "I make it out to be just a point or so off east from here, which is a fact to be remembered. The James river must lie over there, too, though miles away."

"I got her down quite smart in my mind's eye, suh," responded the other confidently. "Thar aint gwine tuh be any trouble 'bout keepin' along thataways; on'y, yuh see, suh, onct we gits in the ma'sh we caint foller our noses the same as outen hyah. 'Case why, the trails run every—which—ways, an' yuh sure has tuh foller 'em if yuh don't want tuh find yuhself in mud an' slime up tuh yuh neck, an' agoin' down right smart."

Of course Bob understood what he meant. A marsh is different from a swamp. It is not the same kind of a gloomy place, with interlaced branches of trees overhead, calculated to shut out the sunlight, and making it dark even at midday. But it is a bog, with here and there some firm ridge either just above the surface of the ooze, or often underneath, and the hidden location of the trail only to be guessed at.

Bob had often navigated such bogs when hunting. He knew how easy it was to make a misstep that would precipitate trouble; and once in his life he had come near losing his life in just such an oozy mess, a companion succeeding in getting him out, acting under Bob's own orders, after he reached the spot.

They were now ready to pass on.

Sid had made up his package again, and slung it on his stout back. He looked particularly determined latterly, as though the responsibilities and anxieties of a soldier's life might be transforming the fun-loving boy into a thoughtful young fellow, conscious of the arduous duties he had assumed when giving his oath to the Federal Government to serve during the continuance of the war that even now loomed on the near horizon.

They were soon off.

Jasper showed considerable zeal in taking the lead. He was so well acquainted with the whole region that such a thing as their getting lost while traveling through the great marsh was never to be considered; at least while they were in his company as guide. If any one chanced to be so unfortunate as to get separated from the rest, why of course there might be another and more serious story to tell.

Ten minutes after quitting the Cooney shack they were actually over the border and in the marsh itself. Even Sid could tell this by looking around him on every hand, for the same apparently illimitable expanse of green-coated deceptive mud greeted his vision; with occasionally a bunch of trees growing on a hummock, or it might be a range of bushes temporarily shutting off the view.

Of course there were numerous open places where doubtless the aviators could make a safe landing, and when they chose, start upward again; tracts where the floor of the marsh was actually firm, and nothing stood in the way of the necessary run before mounting.

But Bob was smart enough to remember that so far as they could tell the machine that had attacked the munition plant seemed to be a seaplane, built along the lines of what is known as a hydro-aeroplane; that is, it had a small boat underneath which would float it when on the water, and the powerful plane was fitted to skim over the surface and mount when sufficient momentum had been acquired.

That must necessarily mean there must be a fairly large patch of open water located in the heart of the morass, where the seaplane could descend and rise at the pleasure of the pilot. He mentioned this fact to old Jasper, and

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was immediately informed that there were numerous bayous or sloughs of that type scattered about in the big marsh, any one of which might be large enough for the purpose.

Sid had heard a few things told about Shattuck Marsh on the preceding night, as he sat at the camp fire and in a casual way mentioned the name. Some of the boys seemed to be well posted in connection with the place of ill omen, although none of them had ever been there.

Two different members of the company declared it was the worst region within the limits of Virginia, not even excepting the notorious Dismal Swamp. They recited numerous instances of unfortunate persons who had been known to venture into the trackless morass on hunting trips, and were never heard of again, the bottomless pits of mud having proven their graves.

Sid just shut his teeth together, and smiled through it all. He would not let himself even think of such a thing as drawing back, now that he had enlisted in the game; that had never been his way of doing. No matter if the dose proved as bitter as aloes Sid would swallow it, and try to keep from making a wry face.

All the same, he told himself, this was no child's play, and that while it might look like fun to invade such a bog, those who grew careless were apt to turn the event into a sad tragedy.

Yes, Sid was determined to keep constantly on the alert; and watch his steps carefully. He had no desire to finish his earthly pilgrimage amidst such dismal surroundings; if he had to go, he preferred being surrounded by members of his family and the friends of his boyhood who were dear to him.

Besides, this would be a good introduction to some of the things they might have to endure when across in Belgium, or Northern France. Sid had read more or less about the mud of the trenches, and the overflowed lands, where the dikes and canals had been cut so that the sea might serve as a barrier.

They were now strung out in single file, with Jasper leading. He would turn his head every little while to say something to Bob, who in turn passed it on, if, as usually proved to be the case, it took the nature of a suggestion that might turn out to be of value to the others.

"I don't suppose, now, Jasper," Bob was saying, presently, "that this is the only trail leading into the marsh?"

"Not by a long sight, suh," the guide assured him, without the slightest hesitation. "I knows as many as seven on my own hook; and I've done heard they was yet others. But it's the track as seemed to kiver the ground yuh wanted to explore, so I kim this ways."

"I was only wondering how these men got the parts of their 'plane into the marsh, without being seen by the Cooneys, or some one else," resumed Bob; "because I take it for granted they carried it there in sections, and assembled the parts when able to work without being seen. But if, as you say, there are many different ways of navigating Shattuck Marsh, I suppose it wouldn't be so difficult a thing to accomplish. Then, too, the river must be within a few miles, and some winding creek, seldom, if ever used, could have been taken advantage of. Yes, that must have been their way of arranging things."

"Those Germans are specially gifted with cleverness when it comes to spying, and doing things on the sly," remarked Sid, from near the rear.

"Perhaps it would be as well," observed Bob, drily, "for us to keep down our voices as we make our way along. While I rather expect we'll be some time getting to our destination, still you never can tell; and it'd be a pity to ruin our chances for success by a few incautious words."

"Excuse me, Sergeant," said the repentant Sid; "I'll try and remember that mum's the word."

It was perhaps ten minutes after this that they found the walking better for a spell. They seemed to have struck one of those higher levels that abounded in certain parts of Shattuck Marsh, where the ground was firm, and bushes as well as grass grew in abundance.

Sid saw a rabbit scurry away; next he discovered a series of muskrat houses in the shallow water, looking like matted masses of broken reeds interwoven, and piled up above the surface of the bayou.

Doubtless it was in such places as this that Jasper plied his trade of pelt collector during the Winter times. He suddenly stooped now and picked some object up that seemed to have lain half buried in the earth.

Sid stared at it in perplexity and wonder, for he saw it was a machinist's pipe-wrench.



## CHAPTER XV. ON THE RIGHT TRACK.

"SAY, that's a mighty queer object to run across in this old marsh, isn't it, Bob?" Sid asked, in a stage whisper, still staring at what the guide was holding in his hand.

"A pipe wrench couldn't come here unless some one dropped it," mused Bob.

"And plumbers, as well as gas-fitters, wouldn't be apt to make much of a living with such surroundings, I take it," jeered Sid. "Now, why dye suppose the man who owned that tool could have been passing along this trail we've been following?"

"He didn't," Bob told him, quickly; "you see, he was passing *over* it. That wrench came down with a heavy thud, and partly buried itself in the soil. It was accidentally dropped from an aeroplane!"

"By George! that's as simple as two and two make four, for a fact!" ejaculated Sid; "and it hadn't lain here long, either, because we had a little shower last night, and the marks prove it fell *after* that came. Oh! I'm not quite so dumb along the line of woodcraft as I look, boys. Once in a long while I have a flash of sense come over me. Am I right, Bob?"

"You certainly are this time, Sid," the other assured him. "And while the wrench isn't likely to be of any value to us, as we are not in the pipe-fitting line just now, still it tells us something we wanted to know."

"Which is," pursued Sid, "that those chaps pass along this way when coming and going. So the finding of their tool is as good a clue as we'd want, to tell us we're on the right track."

"Even so," Bob added. "Once again we can take stock of our bearings. We've come here on an easterly slant, and our general course is to keep moving in that direction."

He and Jasper conferred, and mapped out the line of travel they meant to take, once they started off again. A certain tree was marked as a guide post, and after the word to start was given they headed straight that way.

Fosdick and Randolph were whispering, Sid noticed. His curiosity finally caused him to drop back a pace and join them.

"What's wrong, fellows?" he asked, with the familiarity that school companionship engenders.

"Why, don't you know, Sid," replied Chauncey, keeping his voice low, so that he might not bring down a reprimand from the sergeant, "it's clouding up considerable latterly."

"Now that you mention it, I see you're right, Chauncey," admitted Sid, casting his weather-eye aloft; he always shut one eye when doing this, and gave a wise squint, after the manner of an old sea-captain coming on deck, and glancing up at the sails to ascertain if the man at the wheel had been holding the vessel true to her course.

"And it's grown considerably warmer in the bargain," continued Chauncey, significantly.

Sid, at that, drew out his big bandana, and mopped his moist brow.

"I was just going to do that anyhow," he apologized; "but what you say is absolutely true, my friend. Well, what's the answer? I suppose you are both thinking it may take a notion to rain later on."

"Any old time," affirmed Leonard Randolph, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"And we haven't so much as a tent along with us," said Chauncey.

"Certainly a rubber poncho can be used in an emergency, two of the same to make a dog-tent for a couple, that will keep their uppers fairly dry; but it's a tough proposition at best," grumbled Leonard.

Sid hissed his disapproval.

"Hold on, fellows," he said, cautiously, so that Bob might not hear, "please don't forget that by now we're well seasoned campaigners. We've passed long weary months in camp down on the border. We've hiked over stretches of desert sand and been blistered by a torrid sun, almost frost bitten by the swoop of a Norther, punctured by mosquitoes, nipped by gnats, threatened with bites from scorpion, death from the poisonous Gila monster, and a dozen like perils. By now we ought to be hardened to almost anything that can come along the pike. And say, shall Virginia boys show the white feather just because there's a slight chance of getting their jackets wet in a miserable little shower? Shame on you, fellows; I didn't expect you'd act as if you were made of sugar or salt."

"Let up on that, Sid, don't rub it in, please. Of course we were only joking. Let her rain cats and dogs, we'll stand it and still smile, as well as draw rations three times a day," and as he said this boldly Chauncey winked at

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his comrade in a knowing fashion.

Realizing that both of them were heartily ashamed of having uttered the first word of complaint, Sid did not press matters. He understood just how they felt, for it would be an unpleasant experience to be caught in a storm while far in the depths of that wide expanse of open marsh, with no decent cover to shield them from the downpour.

They were still on firm ground, for which all of them felt duly grateful. It was so very uncomfortable moving along in single file, and often wading ankle-deep in the treacherous ooze, that even such a small favor was appreciated.

Jasper and Bob frequently passed a sentence or two. Undoubtedly they were conferring when thus engaged, exchanging notes and opinions. Jasper, of course, had all the knowledge concerning localities, but then Bob's free masonry of the woods made him a factor to be taken into consideration before any definite plan was arranged; besides that he was at the head of the little expedition, and must be consulted.

It was not long afterwards when they received a sudden shock.

"Listen!" hissed Leonard Randolph, who had always been noted for possessing a wonderfully keen pair of ears, so that in all kinds of tests where acute hearing was being tried he invariably came in ahead of the string.

Every one stopped short, and inclined their head a little on one side in an attitude of listening. Now that their attention was called to the fact they certainly did hear something worth while.

"It's the humming of a motor, all right!" affirmed Bob.

"And I can catch the rattle of a propeller working like fun!" added Sid, eagerly.

"It's growing louder right along, too," Leonard told them; "which means it's heading this way."

"What if the old bee is just treetop high," gasped Sid; "the fellows aboard are sure to see us down here. Hadn't we ought to duck out of sight somehow, Bob?"

"Yes, get under some of the bushes around here, and do it in a big hurry, too!" ordered the sergeant, grasping the situation, and realizing the necessity for immediate action.

There was a scurrying all around. If Sid had had time to think he must have likened that scattering to the actions of a flock of ducks on the water as an eagle poises on fluttering wings directly above, and coolly selects his intended dinner.

"Be sure and don't move hand or foot after you're located," Bob was heard saying earnestly, about the time they started to crawl under the sheltering bushes.

It was indeed fortunate that there chanced to be anything along this order in the immediate neighborhood. Most of the time they could not have found the slightest thing under which to conceal themselves. Sid, lying there, wondered what they could have done had the aeroplane passed overhead while they were strung out in the open. He hastily concluded that its only course would have been to crouch as low as they could, remain perfectly still, and trust to luck for the balance; it was always possible that unless those in the airship happened to be looking down with unusual care they might take the dingy objects, almost of the same general color as the surrounding soil, for excrescences, mounds thrown up by some of the marsh rats, or other burrowing rodents.

Sid was wise in one thing, for he slid under his bush on his back. There was an object in so doing, since this position allowed him the liberty of looking up as he lay there; and Sid wanted the worst kind to glimpse that wonderful aeroplane.

He fairly held his breath and waited.

The clanking and whirring noise grew in volume. This indicated that the object responsible for all this racket was rapidly approaching them, sweeping through the air with considerable speed.

How Sid's heart did thump against his ribs as he realized that in another few seconds it was likely the flying machine would pass directly over them, and at no great height, either.

He kept perfectly rigid. Apparently Sid was resolved that if their presence was discovered by the men in the seaplane it could not be laid at his door, for he meant to be as motionless as though frozen stiff. Still he had eyes, yes, ears also, and could make good use of both sight and hearing without having to as much as move a single muscle.

Then the crisis came. Some large object suddenly broke out from behind the trees that grew a hundred feet away, and which Bob seemed to have known they could not have reached for shelter, in time to avoid discovery.

It was the seaplane, sure enough. Sid took it all in. It was not the first time he had watched a sky skimmer at

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work soaring through space. Over there in Austria, where the Italians were battering at the doors of Trieste, there had been whole air fleet of fliers; and Sid with his chum had watched how they went aloft in dozens to harry the enemy lines while an attack was being pushed; while in Venice they had been present when the Austrians launched an air assault, dropping a myriad of destructive bombs from just such seaplanes as the one now passing over.

Then Sid heard voices, one high-pitched and querulous; the other a deep bass rumble like the mutter of thunder; but both gave the eager listener a thrill.

He quivered with expectancy, wondering just then whether all his comrades could be as well concealed from view as himself; or if some unlucky movement of a half-exposed leg might not catch the attention of those so close above them.

It was all over in three seconds, in fact, so fast was the aeroplane spinning along. The rattle of the propeller had risen to its greatest height when directly over the concealed scouts; after the seaplane passed them the sounds grew appreciably less in volume.

Sid drew a big breath, that was almost a sigh of relief. The worst was over, and he had reason to believe nothing had happened to spoil their plans. Either the two men had not been looking down at the time, or else the cover was dense enough to effectually conceal those who lay flattened underneath.

"They're gone, Bob; shall we stay here or crawl out?" asked Sid.

"Wait just a bit longer," he was told; "it's still in sight and we'd be noticed. I'll keep tabs on the thing, and let you know when it's safe to get up, Sid."

A minute afterwards Bob gave the word for which the uncomfortable Sid was waiting, and all of them crawled out into the open.

"Let's stay right here for a spell," Bob went on to say; "they're likely to come back again shortly. I reckon they're just out for a trial spin or two. Perhaps they passed along here before early this morning, and dropped the wrench then."

"I'd suggest that they might even be looking for the same," remarked Sid. "I couldn't notice that either of the men glanced down as they swung over us. But when you say a trial spin, Bob, what do you mean to imply?"

"Only this idea struck me," came the prompt explanation; "as like as not the machine may have received some injury the other night, when we cut loose with our gun. We saw it wobble badly, and once I thought it was going to turn turtle. Well, if some of the shrapnel did weaken a stay or two, and smash certain important parts of the 'plane, it would be easy to guess the men spent pretty much all of Sunday making the necessary repairs. That's what I meant by a trial spin."

"There was one thing I noticed," Sid continued, triumphantly; "though I reckon all the rest of you caught the same. Both of those men were talking in German!"

"Yes, I noticed that, all right," assented Bob, while each of the other two in khaki nodded their heads in the affirmative; but Jasper only raised his eyebrows, as if possibly he had not known whether the language used were Choctaw, Greek, or Latin, for evidently Jasper was no scholar.

"It only goes to confirm what we felt pretty certain of before," Sid added, modestly; "which is that these plotters, who would blow up the munition plant supplying both the Allies and Uncle Sam with war stuff, are subjects of the Kaiser, all right. I don't believe they've got a drop of American blood in them, either, because no man who has sworn allegiance to this glorious republic could be so much of a traitor as to scheme against his own country like that."

"Let's hope not, anyway," Bob remarked, drily, and all the time keeping his face turned toward the point at which the raiding seaplane had disappeared, while he also continued to listen with every sense on the alert, anticipating the return of the enemy.

"I can hear the old thing still," announced Randolph, "though it seems to have swung around a bit, and comes more from that quarter on the right."

"Yes, just as I expected," Bob agreed, "they are making a turn, and about to come back again. It was a trial spin to see if everything works perfectly; which means another raid on the plant soon."

"Well," chuckled Sid, "they had fair warning the other night, and their blood will be on their own heads if they run smack into a cloud of that bursting shrapnel. It must have been a fierce jolt to those chaps when the light was turned on, and they found themselves in a dazzling glare, with that gun commencing to bark like fun!"

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"The sound's growing louder, sir!" announced Randolph, just then.

"So it is," said Bob, "and perhaps we'd all better take to the brush again."

With that five pair of legs could be seen scraping over the earth, as their owners started to crawl under the shelter that had proved so effective on that previous occasion.

## CHAPTER XVI. THE NEST OF THE RAIDING SEAPLANE.

THIS time the danger was not so great, because the seaplane did not pass directly above the concealed pilgrims of the big marsh. It presently disappeared once more from view, and Bob gave the word that again brought all of them out.

"Is the ugly old hawk gone, mother dear?" whimpered Sid, just as if he might be an innocent little chick; "and what an *awful* harsh voice he had, too. It nearly gave me palpitation of the heart. And now, Bob, I reckon we're due to go on again?"

But Bob had said something to the guide along those lines, for Jasper was already moving off. So the others fell in behind again. The general direction followed the lines of the course already laid out. The coming and going of the seaplane had only strengthened the conviction which Jasper entertained, to the effect that he knew where the lair of the marsh prowlers must be situated.

"They's a heap big pond over yander, suh," he was telling Bob, nodding his head to indicate the direction; "yuh mout eenmost call the same a lake, 'case she's that wide acrost. An' if as yuh tells me, thet same queer contraption sets on the water like a duck, why, they'd be a heap plenty o' room fo' runnin' 'round crazy-like in sech a puddle."

This sounded so very reasonable that Bob found no cause to disagree with Jasper. All he wanted was that the guide should lead them within sight of the aforementioned "lake," when further plans could be arranged.

Soon they were again passing along through a soft portion of the marsh. Sid found plenty of reason for anxiety. He dreaded lest they should once more hear that warning buzz so significant of approaching trouble. What if the enemy again sailed over, and discovered their presence below; what chance would any of them have to avoid being injured or killed, should the spies attack them?

Sid had all he could do to follow in the wake of the leaders and not lose his balance, so narrow at times was the unseen ridge which served them as a pathway. And if the seaplane swooped down close enough for the occupants to bombard them with a shower of lead how could they escape? If they tried to run the chances were ten to one they must lose their insecure footing, and be plunged waist deep in the slimy depths of the soft marsh.

"Besides," Sid told himself, with growing uneasiness, "I expect those fellows are as ugly as sin on account of what we did to them the other night; and so they'd like nothing better than to get one on us. I certainly do wish we were across this nasty stretch of open work. How I envy the lucky chaps who can sit comfortably in their seats, and sail over all this ruck without so much as getting a sole of their shoes wet; and gee whiz! just look at us, will you?"

He lifted one of his shoes, heavy with mud, and surveyed it ruefully. It seemed to weigh half a ton, according to Sid's way of thinking, and would need a deal of diligent scraping later on in order to allow him to walk properly.

But then as a rule Sid could keep a smile on his face, and meet trouble about as well as the next one. He quickly grew ashamed of allowing his feelings to get the better of his common-sense, and hoped that neither of the pair trudging along in his wake had noticed his little transgression.

Joy took possession of Sid's heart again when Bob announced that once more they were approaching solid ground, and how Jasper had told him they would really have no more of this precarious sort of work.

Presently they were out of the muck and standing on dry land. Here they spent a short time cleaning their shoes, after which the guide once more led off. It was getting more and more thrilling now, as they realized how close they must be drawing to the lair of the seaplane pirates. Jasper held up a warning finger every time one of them chanced to make the slightest sound, even to breaking a twig under foot. This alone told Sid the guide expected to speedily come upon the open water.

"I reckon now," Sid told himself, "the old chap has done more or less trapping along the edge of that same lake he spoke of; though come to think of it the fur he'd get down here in Virginia wouldn't be near as heavy or as valuable in market as that taken away up in Canada. Animals don't need such heavy coats where the cold never stays long, and pleasant days break in through the winters. But I happen to know that there are heaps of pelts taken even further south than this. Hello! there she comes again, Bob!"

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He raised his voice just a trifle to give the concluding sentence in a husky whisper. Of course at the same time Sid was looking around him for a chance to do the "grand scuttling act" again, under the belief that the seaplane was likely to soar over their heads as before.

The sound of an engine buzzing away at a merry clip reached their ears.; but Bob did not seem to be overly anxious to make a dive for cover.

"It's stationary, and not coming this way," he hastened to announce, just in time to prevent several of his followers from plunging into friendly bunches of bushes.

"Then they must be only trying the engine, to see if certain repairs have filled the bill?" suggested Leonard Randolph.

"If that's so," quickly added Chauncey Fosdick, "it would mean we are right now close in on their headquarters."

"Jasper tells me the pond lies beyond that line of trees over there," explained the leader.

"We're in great luck then, I take it," chuckled Sid, "to have such excellent cover, behind which we can do our crawling. A different proposition from trying to surprise a camping enemy down on the border, eh, boys; where the sandy desert ran as far as the eye could reach all around, with not a scrap of shelter in sight either."

Bob gave a low whistle which indicated silence in the ranks. So the others closed their mouths, and took it out in thinking after that.

He himself had been deeply interested in observing the build of the seaplane, as it passed overhead, and so near them that every line of its construction was plainly visible to the naked eye. Bob in fact was reading up every scrap of news in the daily papers he could hit upon, connected with just this type of flier, known also as a hydro-aeroplane, because it rose from and settled on the water, having a miniature boat under its body.

Bob had talked on the subject with many persons who were well up in such matters. He believed that if Uncle Sam did plunge into the great war, the most important part of his business would be not so much to aid the Allied armies at the front with a vast force of men, but to tame the growing submarine menace.

The Germans having unleashed their big submersible fleet, seemed determined to sink every vessel on the seas, no matter whether belonging to an enemy or a neutral; bottoms for carrying munitions and food supplies across the Atlantic would be getting so scarce before long as to seriously handicap the Allies.

It had already been amply proven that there was no better means for hunting the submarine down and sinking the same with cleverly directed bombs than through means of a hydro-aeroplane. Such a craft could rest on the water when waiting for one of the divers to come to the surface and hover overhead, swooping down close enough to make deadly use of the rapidfire gun with which each aircraft would be armed.

So thus early in the development of the war fever in the States Bob, in conjunction with other keen-sighted persons, who looked ahead, believed that Uncle Sam ought to proceed to build fifty thousand such fleet airships, and swamp the German submarine menace beneath the weight of their combined attack. With such a vigilant force patrolling the submarine zones one of the divers would hardly dare show itself above the surface. Besides, such craft could be speedily as well as cheaply built.

Bob believed in making way with the *cause*, not trying to build enough ships to make up for increased losses. Even though that were accomplished the loss of all those priceless cargoes of grain and munitions must be taken into consideration.

Meanwhile they advanced carefully. The trees beyond formed a fairly dense screen, though several times Bob believed he could just manage to catch a fleeting glimpse of water beyond. Had the sun been shining brightly no doubt they must have seen its rays reflected on the little wavelets; but the gathering gloom prevented all that.

Now they had arrived, and the trees were at hand. Sid heaved a sigh of relief as he felt they would have shelter at any rate.

So they crawled forward. All of them realized the need of the utmost care, for they knew nothing about the conditions beyond, nor just how close the enemy might be located. The whirr of the engine broke out occasionally, proving that some one was pottering with it, perhaps endeavoring to adjust certain parts so they would act harmoniously with the rest, and that not a "miss" might be made in the explosions.

Then it came about that the creepers reached a line where they could look out and see, without taking any chances of betraying their own presence.

It was a thrilling scene, considering the fact that those upon whom they thus spied were hostiles, men whose

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hand was raised against the Government, and who were desperate enough to do almost anything rather than allow themselves to be taken prisoner.

First they saw the sheet of salt water, which Jasper persisted in calling a lake, although it was really a bayou, all of them understood. It was of generous size, possibly half a mile across, and certainly offering an abundance of room for a seaplane to make a start over the surface until sufficient momentum had been attained to insure a successful launch into the air.

On the near shore a rude shelter had been built, though Bob found himself wondering just how the spies had managed to carry all those boards into the bayou by water without exciting suspicion on the part of some prowling Secret Service agent, or possibly a game warden on the lookout for offenders, of the law protecting wild ducks and other aquatic birds along the coast from Spring shooting.

This shanty was erected on a float, it seemed. There was a runway leading down into the water, Bob noticed, which of course was used when the hydro-aeroplane was starting forth from its "nest," or being dragged back again to be hidden out of sight inside the sheltering shack.

The seaplane just then rested on this platform, with its propellers extending over the edge, so that when the engine was working the latter might whirl around at will.

A man was bending over and evidently hard at work. He was the smaller chap of the pair, and Bob instantly guessed that he must be the owner of the raspy shrill complaining voice; as well as the machinist and pilot.

The other fellow, possibly the secret agent of the foreign government backing the enterprise, if such proved to be the true state of affairs, was sitting further along, with his back against the wall of the shanty, taking things easy, a long black cigar held between his teeth. Bob surmised that he might be the brains of the company, the one who did the planning, while the smaller man simply obeyed orders, and managed the machine.

But where was Tommy Radcliffe?

There was certainly not the slightest sign of a third party in sight. Indeed, so far as Bob could see just then the only place where the boy prisoner might be hidden would be the shed where the seaplane was kept when not in use, in order that it might not be seen in case of any coast oysterman coming into the bayou.

Hence this flimsy structure occupied a full share of Bob's attention. How he wished he had eyes capable of seeing through those planks so flimsily put together, as though only meant for temporary use, and discover what was hidden from view within the interior. He mentally pictured poor Tommy lying there bound and helpless, as though any one unacquainted with the intricacies of the marsh could ever manage to find his way out of the maze of ooze, and green floating stuff, and moss-covered mud.

There were no signs of fire arms about the two men, but for all that Bob felt certain they must be prepared to defend themselves. The enterprise in which they had engaged was of too desperate a character to believe otherwise.

Rome one was tugging at his sleeve, and turning his head Bob saw that it was, even as he had suspected, Sid. The other was making motions with his lips, and acting as though desirous of communicating something, which he dared not do without the assent of the leader. So Bob dropped his head, and moved over a bit, thus allowing Sid to place his lips very close to his ear and whisper.

"Tell me, isn't that a rapidfire gun they've got mounted on the seaplane, Bob?" was what the other wanted to know.

That caused Bob to look more closely, again turning his batteries on the machine that lay there in plain sight on the landing stage. Yes, there could be no doubt about it, Sid was right; there was such a weapon secured in place on the seaplane, and ready to be manipulated with all speed by the larger man, while the pilot busied himself in managing the motor, and steering the air skimmer.

Bob wondered whether that gun had been aboard the seaplane on the night it ran the gantlet of their fire? If so why had not these men started it going, so as to possibly smash the searchlight, and put the anti-aircraft gun out of business by lucky shots? That was a mystery which he imagined would not likely be solved. But there could be no doubt about the presence of the dangerous gun aboard the raiding plane.

Bob figured that should the right sort of an opportunity only show itself that same gun might be turned on its owners with good effect. He determined to bear it in mind, and if half a chance came to profit by his forethought.

Meanwhile it was proper that they should make themselves familiar with the lay of the land. Perhaps nothing could be attempted while daylight lasted, but if in the end they had to work in the dark it would be useful to know

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their ground. Now if only the two men, having done a little more tinkering with the engine, took a notion to indulge in a third trial spin, Bob would gladly welcome the chance to investigate, and see if Tommy could be found in duress somewhere near by.



## CHAPTER XVII. WITH THE COMING OF NIGHT.

THE minutes dragged along. Finally the smaller man stopped his tinkering and lounged over to where his companion sat, to also throw himself down and take things easy. Bob felt disappointed. This did not look as though the conspirators intended to go forth for another test trial of the reconstructed motor. The mechanic of the firm seemed quite satisfied that he had made a thorough job of the repairs, and was content to let it go at that.

Supposing they meant to just hang around the whole of the balance of the day, and do nothing, of course Bob must fashion his plans accordingly. He might have conceived the idea of suddenly appearing with his squad before the men, and covering them with the guns, demand their immediate as well as unconditional surrender; but one thing interfered with such a programme, and made Bob hesitate.

What if after all they did not find Tommy in the shack which had been raised as a shelter to the seaplane; and the two men, becoming ugly and surly after their capture, utterly refused to give the slightest information concerning the whereabouts of their prisoner, laying all their trouble to the same Tommy, that was bound to make it go exceedingly hard with the lad. Why, if he were secreted somewhere else in the great marsh—for they might have another place where they sometimes dropped down, although the lake must be their headquarters—Tommy was apt to perish from hunger and neglect while they helplessly tried to scour the limitless extent of morass and treacherous bogs searching for Mrs. Radcliffe's boy.

And so Bob decided that before he dared make a move to show his hand he must learn in some way whether or not Tommy were inside the shed. Perhaps sooner or later he might hear one of the men say something that would decide this, calling out to the prisoner; or Tommy himself was apt to do something to betray the fact of his presence there, cough, sneeze, or sing out a demand, it might be.

They were not near enough to make out what the men talked about. Perhaps they might have had more or less trouble understanding the conversation even though they had been closer, for from fragments that floated to their ears they had reason to believe they spoke solely in German.

It was now close to noon. Bob found this out by consulting his little nickel watch that kept such good time. He also held it out so the others could see. Sid was glad to know so much time had been used up. He suspected something of the case, though he could see no sign of the sun now, and was thus unable to tell whether old Sol had climbed into the zenith or not; but Sid had just as good a way of finding out when the middle of the day arrived, which was an inward monitor admonishing him that according to his custom he ought to lay in a fresh store of munitions in the shape of food; for with Sid it was always a case of "Nature abhorring a vacuum."

When he actually saw that Bob was beginning to withdraw from the advanced line Sid rejoiced. He just knew that it was time they had a "snack" to eat. The smaller man was opening a haversack and taking out some sandwiches as though he meant to have a bite; but the larger fellow apparently did not care to join him. There was no sign given to indicate they meant to feed any prisoner; and Bob noticing this began to fear Tommy could not be present; although not yet ready to entirely abandon hope along that line.

Having conducted a masterly retreat, they remained seated on the ground amidst a patch of friendly bushes, and then opening their packs, took out such food as could be most easily consumed without the need of a fire.

Fortunately Sid and Bob considered this very point when laying out the details of the expedition, and had taken care to carry supplies along calculated to fill the bill. They had plenty of ham sandwiches with them, which could be used as "life-savers," Sid humorously whispered as he attacked his third one. Besides this there was plenty of cheese, and crackers, too. For hungry boys' appetites it is quantity rather than quality or variety that appeals, and fortunately this want was amply taken care of.

All the while Bob had tried to keep in touch with the situation over at the edge of the bayou. He could just manage to see by straining his neck, and knew that the situation had hardly changed during the time they were away from the "firing-line." The two plotters were still there in plain sight on the float. They looked innocent enough in all conscience; and perhaps should any native happen on the spot they had a specious story all hatched up in connection with their being in the employ of the Government, to try out a certain type of aeroplane; and that it would be rank treachery to the republic should any one even so much as whisper to a friend about their presence in the marsh.

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Having finished their lunch, the little party once more started to crawl back to their former position. Bob planned to keep up a constant espionage on the couple under surveillance. They could not do a thing while in that neighborhood but that he meant to be aware of it; and all without showing his hand either.

It was very tiresome. Sid yawned so often that he threatened to dislocate his jaws sooner or later, which would be more than a calamity, because such an accident was bound to upset all their plans. So Bob indicated finally that he would do well to hold his hand under his chin the next time he felt the desire to gape overcoming him, which Sid agreed to do, giving a nod of his head to show he understood the suggestion.

Still not a drop of rain had fallen, and for that at least all of them felt they had reason to rejoice. Things might seem doleful enough, but they could be a dozen times worse.

Bob could not say that anything had happened to positively tell whether Tommy were present or not. Several times one or the other of the men went into the shed, where the seaplane had been pushed long since. Just what took them inside it was impossible to even guess; but certainly by no sound or sign did they do a thing to settle the one question that was bothering Bob.

By the middle of the afternoon he had stared so hard at the bayou, the shack on the float, and its neighboring shore line that Sid believed he could see the whole picture with closed eyes. He had tried to count the number of steps it would be necessary to take from one object to another, and fancied he had even this down to a fine point. Really he hardly knew what else he could do, he told himself, when yawning for the thirteenth time.

Five minutes afterwards Bob smiled as he thought he heard deep regular breathing close beside him; and casting a quick glance that way found that poor tired Sid had gone to sleep while on duty.

Bob did not make any attempt to arouse his chum; what was the use, when they were only killing time? Of course it would be a different matter in case Sid got to snoring, as he sometimes did when lying on his back; but just then he was stretched out on his stomach, with his chubby face exposed over his folded arms; and really he looked so innocent and contented that Bob could not find the heart to disturb him.

Once Bob half thought the men were getting ready to go away, and his heart beat at double speed with hope and expectancy. They had come forth, and were standing alongside the shack as though deliberating as to whether it would be good policy to take another flight just then or not. Once let an aeroplane rise above a certain altitude and it becomes the cynosure of every eye within a radius of fifty miles that chances to be turned that way. Only during a fog can an air pilot hope to hide his movements; at other times he must depend wholly on the swiftness of his flight, or his mastery of aeroplane evolutions, in order to save him.

But they must have decided against taking any further risk, for they did not go to the length of hauling the machine out on the platform of the float.

Plainly then the attempt to learn whether Tommy were secreted in the board shelter must be postponed until night came with its friendly darkness that would act as a shield to their actions.

Still Sid slumbered sweetly. Chauncey and Leonard had also commenced to gape at frequent intervals, and Bob wondered whether he would not soon have his whole detail sound asleep on his hands. But they proved better able to withstand the attack than it seemed Sid could, for as evening began to draw on apace they showed signs of brightening up more or less.

A plain snort gave Bob something of a start. That was often Sid's way of waking up. He glanced hastily toward the float to see whether either of the men had apparently heard the sound, and thought it suspicious.

There was no movement to declare such a thing, and Bob concluded that if by chance they had heard the snort it was taken for granted some marsh creature, a muskrat perhaps, had made it. Possibly they often caught similar noises there in that lonely nook on the secluded bayou.

One of the other fellows had hurriedly spoken warningly in a hushed whisper to Sid, so as to keep him from saying something aloud before he quite got his bearings. He knew now where he was, but sat there digging his knuckles into his heavy eyes, as though trying to chase away the last remaining figment of sleep. Afterwards he would once more stare toward the float, and the shack, and the water, as if re-locating them in his mind.

He presently nudged his chum, and Bob obligingly lowered his head so as to let Sid whisper again.

"I think I must have dozed," suggested Sid, clumsily.

"Yes, you did drop off a bit ago," affirmed Bob, in turn placing his lips close to the other's ear.

"But what ails things, Bob?" continued the lately aroused one. "Why, as sure as anything, it's beginning to get dimmer around here. Is that storm going to hit us, or can it be possible I've slept three whole hours, and night's

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come along?"

"Well, you slept like a babe in the woods, and it's now getting dark, so there you are; but mum's the word, Sid," Bob assured him, whereat Sid shook his head with an air of perplexity, as though that may have been the shortest three hours span in all his varied experience.

All of them seemed relieved to know that the time for action was now close at hand. Every hour spent in waiting had seemed like an eternity to those impatient souls, that wanted to be up and doing.

It was a mystery to Leonard and Chauncey why Bob did not play the game along different lines; since they were five to two it surely would be easy to capture the conspirators; or if they attempted to run away against orders, pepper them good and hard. They could not understand it at all; but both had become pretty good soldiers by this time, and knew that orders from a superior must be obeyed—"theirs not to make reply; theirs not to reason why; theirs but to do, and die," as the old heroic poem on the "Charge of the Light Brigade" has it; and so they managed to keep their tongues still, though inwardly fretting.

The twilight quickly deepened into dusk, and presently this would in turn give place to darkness. On account of the fact of clouds covering the heavens the night might be expected to be even one of greater gloom than ordinary. Bob would not be sorry for this. He had work to do that necessitated a blanket impenetrable to the human eye, and the darker the better it would be for his purpose.

The men did not make any attempt to light a fire. Perhaps they feared lest even the small illumination attract attention, and cause them trouble. They seemed perfectly willing to go on eating primitive meals, and washing the same down with something they had in a tin bucket, and which Bob rather fancied might be beer; for since these two daring aviators were genuine Germans, and that was their national beverage, it would have been reasonable to believe that when they brought all that lumber, and the various parts of the seaplane to this rendezvous, they had also carried a keg along to help pass away their idle hours.

"I wish they might over-indulge, and sleep as sound as rocks," was the thought uppermost in Bob's mind just then; though at the same time he did not intend to count on any such happening.

Sid anticipating that it was about up to them to make some sort of move, wriggled uneasily from time to time. Had he dared speak he would undoubtedly have asked the leader of the expedition why they should linger any longer, when the shades of night had fallen, and the friendly darkness bade fair to conceal any forward movement they might undertake.

When he finally did feel Bob begin to stir, Sid having purposely rubbed up against the other so as to get the first warning, his heart beat high with suddenly revived hope.

The breeze was sighing softly through the almost bare trees, on which only the first sign of new leaves had sprouted. It crooned in such a fashion that the sound would serve admirably to hide any whispering that might be deemed necessary. Bob knew this when he bent and said in his softest voice:

"Sid, stay here while I'm gone, and the rest of you, too. If I give a call make a beeline for the shack, and come prepared to fight! But I expect to get back here without being discovered. I want to find out if Tommy's in there; then we'll know what to do. Get that, everybody?"

Sid grunted an affirmative, and from one after the other of the balance there also came a favorable reply. Perhaps those two fire-eaters, Geoffrey and Leonard, hardly thought it fair of Bob taking so much on his own shoulders when they were willing to help carry the load; but then they had served in the army a good many moons now, and by degrees learned that an enlisted man has no other course than to obey, when a superior speaks.

So they just lay there knowing that Bob had crawled away, going into danger of his own accord in order to learn what was necessary to the successful carrying out of his plans.

And once again did the seconds drag by as though shod with lead, while Sid continued to grip his gun and wait, every little sound from water or land causing his heart to leap with a fear that Bob had been discovered, and set upon by that desperate pair of plotters.

## CHAPTER XVIII. TIME FOR ACTION.

SEVERAL times Sid believed he heard a movement in the direction of the "dock," as though the men might be moving around doing something. A wild hope sprang up in the heart of the young fellow that they might take a notion after all to go forth on one of their scouting trips, thus leaving the coast clear; when an examination of the shed would be easy, and the rescue of Tommy follow as a matter of course.

The darkness was intense enough to prevent them from distinguishing even the outlines of the frame shack built alongside the landing stage. Still, Sid had marked its position so thoroughly in his mind that he could have pointed to it without the least trouble.

Once he saw a light flash up, but it proved to be only a match being applied to one of those long black cigars which the stouter man smoked with such evident relish.

Finally Bob came back.

So cleverly did he creep along that his comrades really knew nothing concerning his presence until he was among them again. And taking advantage of the murmuring night wind, he went on to tell them something of what he had done, always in those low whispers, as their heads were brought close together.

"They have fetched it out on the float again," was his first communication, and of course all of them understood that he referred to the seaplane; which fact accounted for the movements Sid had heard.

"Do you think they mean to start off on a raid?" asked Sid.

"There was some sort of talk about it," came the cautious reply. "I'm not much on the German, you know, and all I could make out was that they meant to wait and see what the weather turned out to be. They may take a notion to start, and again decide to hold off for another night."

Sid had his own ideas about that. Really he fancied that the men could not be so very keen about wanting to run the gantlet of those shrapnel shells again in a hurry. It was all very fine to tell each other all those things about threatening weather, but according to his mind the anti-aircraft gun that could shoot straight upwards had more to do with their hesitation. Sid did not blame them much, either, for he could imagine how it must feel to be a thousand feet from solid earth and suddenly realize that you were shooting downward at a frightful rate, and about to be flattened out on collision with the ground, just as if you were a pancake.

"How about Tommy, Bob?" he asked.

"Speak even lower than that, please," urged the other. "That breeze does make a splendid deadener to sound, but one of them might have extra sharp hearing. And they're a pretty suspicious pair, believe me. But I've some reason to think Tommy is tied up in that same shack."

"Fine work, Bob!" breathed Sid, admiringly.

"I heard one of the men saying something when he went inside," explained the returned scout. "The other was still sitting there smoking at the time, so I don't believe the words were fired at him. Although I strained my ears like everything I failed to catch any reply, for the wind took a notion to rise just then, and besides the little wavelets are washing up along the shore with a splashing sound. But one thing settled it with me—the man inside was talking in English—I am dead certain of that."

"Oh! that ought to settle it!" whispered Chauncey Fosdick, who with his fellow in khaki, as well as old Jasper, the marsh guide, crouched there listening eagerly to all that passed.

Bob went on to say more. It was perhaps a bit strange that he should venture to do so much talking when enemies were so near by; but he gauged the carrying capacity of sound when the breeze was coming from the shack toward them, and did not have much fear that their low voices could be overheard.

"So, on the whole I've made up my mind we ought to tackle them without any great delay. If it commences to rain we'll find it harder to get around; and I reckon if you come right down to brass tacks they don't mean to take up the bomb business again tonight. That's all a big bluff, each wanting the other to believe he isn't afraid."

"Yes, I can understand that, Bob," agreed Sid; "and now about your plan."

"We've got to creep up on the place, and try to overpower them while they are off their guard," continued the other.

"That's the only way," Sid ventured, "because if they suspected anything they'd either meet us with a burst

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from that rattler gun; or else jump aboard the 'plane, run down the slant into the water, start the engine, and be off. Not to capture those two ducks would be losing half the fun."

Bob was heard to chuckle softly to himself, from which his chum instantly guessed he felt amused over something.

"They might do the sliding down into the water all right," he told them; "but the rest of the job wouldn't be so easy."

"What did you do, Bob?"

"Oh! fumbled around the motor of the seaplane, and managed to fix it so there'd be no response when the pilot tried to start the engine up!" came the answer.

Sid was thrilled.

"Just like you!" he breathed admiringly, as he patted the sleeve of Bob's coat affectionately.

Doubtless both the other fellows felt just the same as Sid did; and as for old Jasper, his breath was almost taken away by the rapidity with which events seemed to move, when such a live wire as Bob Hamilton took hold. He had certainly never in all his varied experience run across such a wideawake pair as those two chums.

By degrees, then, things were being brought down to a certain level. As the foundation was gradually removed the situation became clarified. The two plotters whose special function in the employ of the secret forces of the German Government it had apparently been to injure or destroy the big munition plant, would not be able to make a hasty flight from the place if an alarm sounded. They must stand and fight it out.

There was a grimness about Bob's action that caused the others to set their teeth together and determine to meet the intensified conditions. He had fixed it so that there could be no dodging the issue. And no doubt Sid, as well as Chauncey and Leonard, with the blood of soldier forbears in their veins would prove themselves worthy successors of their several lines when the crisis arrived.

Perhaps it might have been a wise thing for them to have waited until later in the night before making a start. The possibility of the men being asleep would add considerable to their chances of success, of course; but for several reasons Bob did not care to delay.

In the first place he knew his companions were wild to be in action, since they had been kept in idleness so long that their impatience had reached fever heat. Then again, too, there was a likelihood of the storm breaking upon them, possibly rendering their task much more difficult. Finally, Bob began to fear that the pilot, possessed of an investigating mind, might go prowling around his engine, as pilots have a habit of doing, because it is that little combination of machinery that means life and death for them when a mile above the earth; and while so doing he was apt to learn that some party had actually been tampering with the motor.

Such a discovery would create a wild commotion, and put the two men on their guard. Bob was almost sorry now he had gone as far as he did; but since the thing had been done there was no remedy save in immediate action. Besides, when Bob had any tough job on hand he always fretted until it was accomplished, and off his mind.

So that settled it. They must lose as little time as possible in getting started. Five against two seemed like big enough odds to carry things with a rush, certainly if they could only take the enemy by surprise.

"Bob!"

It was Sid whispering again. He evidently had something else on his mind, which he wished to communicate; a question or two he wanted to ask, it might be; for Sid was as full of a desire to soak up information as "an egg is of meat," to use a common expression.

"What now, Sid?" Bob questioned.

"Why, I just thought of something, you see."

"Go on!" ordered the other.

"It was about that gun," continued Sid.

"The one we saw attached to the seaplane?"

"Yes. What if they found a chance to work that on us, Bob?"

"Forget it, Sid; such a thing can't happen," Bob told him, soothingly.

"But you remember we examined how they fixed the same in aeroplanes across the water," argued Sid, showing signs of excitement; and then as Bob pinched his arm to remind him he was raising his voice dangerously he let it fall again, continuing: "Excuse me, I'll remember, Bob, and speak in a lower tone. But the

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gun is on a pivot, and can be swung around like lightning. It has to be that way, because when the 'plane is rushing along at the rate of a mile a minute the change of base has to be made like fun. One of 'em might be able to cover us, and start spraying the air with a hail of bullets."

"I tell you there's no danger of that," repeated Bob. "I've looked after it."

"Oh!" gasped Sid, electrified immediately; "then you blocked the gun so it couldn't be turned, or perhaps fired at all, did you, Bob?"

"It's stalled for the time being, that's enough, Sid, make your mind easy about it," came the reassuring answer; and Sid felt a wave of satisfaction sweep over him, as well as additional pride in having such a splendid chum.

They crouched there and listened carefully. Bob wanted to make sure that things were moving along in the same rut before giving the word to advance; because once they started out there must be no holding up.

He could detect nothing of a suspicious nature to tell him their game had taken the alarm. The breeze brought the faint odor of strong tobacco to his nostrils, and once in a while he could hear a certain low cough, one of the men appearing to have a chronic cold that caused him to give an involuntary sound every now and then.

So Bob went on to tell those under him just what he wanted each one to do in carrying out the general round-up. If his plan worked successfully all would be well; but should anything occur to upset his calculations they must alter their methods to suit the new conditions.

There was no need of such haste as to endanger the scheme by an incautious stumble, he warned them; doubtless this being for the special instruction of Sid, always inclined to be a bit awkward when trying to do his best. If they took ten or fifteen minutes in crossing over the ground that lay between the fringe of trees and the shore of the bayou, it mattered little, so long as their task was carried out with the utmost secrecy.

With all this line of instruction to draw upon there would seem to be no excuse for a blunder. And when they had managed to creep up very close, so that they could see the glow of the stout man's cigar, a word from Bob was to precipitate the attack.

Even the minutest detail had been arranged, so it was known that Bob and Sid would tackle the smaller man, while the three others looked after the stout chap. Their eyes, accustomed to the darkness, would be able to make out the dim figures plainly enough at such a short range, he believed, from having been personally on the ground himself.

After that they began to move. Foot by foot they crept along, although not down on hands and knees, just stooping half over. It was arranged that they keep in close formation during the forward progress. This would prevent any straying, a thing likely to prove fatal to all Bob's carefully arranged plans. Besides, the touch of a comrade's elbow can give a wonderful amount of assurance; which fact has always been the main cause for the Germans advancing in massed attack, each serving as an inspiration to those on either side, and falling back being next to impossible until the ranks have been thinned, and great gaps occur.

They made good headway, and presently had crossed one-third of the ground that lay before them at the start. All was working well, though Bob did hear some one moving, and suspected that the smaller man, the air pilot, might be again in touch with his engine, from which he could not keep away any great length of time.

Bob more than half expected to hear him give vent to a cry of surprise and alarm at making a thrilling discovery. He had this in mind when forming his plans, and knew just what must be done. He and Sid would jump for the landing-stage and proceed to cut the pilot off from his mate; after which it would be their pleasing duty to either make him a prisoner, or pump some lead into his system if he showed fight; while Jasper and the other two tackled the second spy.

All these nicely arranged plans, however, were upset by something that happened, and which it seemed even sagacious Bob had not counted on.

They had continued to advance and were now half-way across the open stretch. All of a sudden the bass voice of the heavy-set man boomed out. He called something in German, and evidently spoke to his comrade who was out there alongside the seaplane, on the landing-stage of the dock.

Sid felt his heart give a jump. He guessed that in some way or other suspicion must have been aroused in the mind of the man who thus shouted aloud. He wondered if he were not calling to his mate to turn the machine-gun loose, and spray a certain section of territory so as to catch any living thing occupying the same. But then Bob had fixed all, that, so there need not be any worry for them. Sid began to regain his usual nerve, when without warning something occurred to give them all still another shock.

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A dazzling glow shone in their eyes, blinding them almost. Sid knew what it meant, and that the pilot had switched on the search-light connected with the seaplane, there being enough energy in the storage batteries to work the same even when the engine lay idle.

There is an unaccountable break here in the text, three quarters of the way down the original page 249 in the book. The text above lies at a slightly different angle than the text below, indicating to us that a section of the book was cut out and the ending tacked clumsily into place. Perhaps an editor decided the book had to stay under 250 pages and dictated the cut. The world may never know. In any case, such a mindless cut at the very climax of the plot seems to us a fitting way for such an abominably written book to end.

—*Etext Publisher*

Under such circumstances it was probable that the two chums would see service on some field where their Allies of Great Britain and France and Belgium would be standing shoulder to shoulder with them in a righteous cause; and it will then be the pleasing duty of the author to again narrate some of the thrilling happenings that must necessarily come their way. So it is with the hope of soon meeting the reader in the pages of another volume that the last word is written.

THE END

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