

# WAR

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## Stories

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### "THE RED STRONGHOLD"

Thrilling Novelette

by

VICTOR ROUSSEAU

EVERY OTHER THURSDAY

# WAR STORIES

Vol. 22

OCTOBER 10th, 1929

Whole No. 67

WAR STORIES, WAR NOVELS, and WAR BIRDS are published by the Dell Publishing Co. Like all good things, a good magazine brings forth a host of imitators. WAR STORIES is the original, pioneer magazine of this type. The brand of fiction that made it famous overnight will continue to be found exclusively in the BIG THREE.

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Published bi-weekly and copyrighted, 1929, by the Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 100 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y. George T. Delacorte, Jr., President and Treasurer. Eugene A. Clancy, Editor. A. A. Wyn, Associate Editor. Chicago Advertising Office: 140 So. Dearborn Street, Chicago, Illinois. Entered as second-class matter at the post office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3rd, 1879. Published in the U. S. A. Also copyrighted in Great Britain. Yearly subscription \$4.00. Single copies, 20 cents. In Canada, 25 cents. Canadian subscription, \$5.00

**NEXT NUMBER ON SALE OCTOBER 10th**

**JOIN THE BIG THREE GANG! Read:**

**WAR NOVELS**

**WAR BIRDS**

# Call Off the War!

By

**WILL R. BIRD**

Author of "Bandages," etc.

**Maybe you think it takes an Armistice to call off a war? Then meet that prize-fightin' Yankee private, "Jeff" Jackson, and Otto, champion boxer of the German army—and change your mind.**

**S**ERGEANT MANNERS swore dispiritedly as his steel helmet tipped and scorched his neck. His sweat-streaked face was boiled red, and he was almost dizzy with the heat. He was cooped in a shadeless cellar wherein not a breath of air stirred, and the sun was unusually powerful even for a French September. It was only noon, and that meant that he must endure the cellar for hours before it would be cooler. He swore again and shook his head. "What a life!" he muttered. "Blisterin' in this cussed hole—and a river of nice cool water only a couple hundred yards away!"

He sighed and turned to the runner who squatted beside him, dragging at a cigarette butt. "Have a look through the weeds, Jimmy," he ordered. "See if those bums in the bushes have a man on guard. This is sure one hell of a war."

Jimmy obligingly wormed up a bank. The cellar wall had been blown in, leaving a slope of loose soil bordered by rank weeds. He looked to his right and then to his left.

"Keep low," grunted the sergeant. "The Krauts have hawk eyes. Can you see anybody?"

"I can make out Hicks and Dan, back of that brick heap at the river bend. They're awake, because I see Dan point-

ing up the hollow. Gee! There must be something doing! The boys in the bushes are all bunched up by the stumps and they're watching the river."

The cellar Manners occupied was on the outskirts of Nollens. It was an exposed site and the now swiftly ebbing tide of war had left it deserted, as though smitten by a plague. The grass grew in the streets, the people had gone; every living thing had disappeared except a few stray cats that stole about the deserted ruins as wild-eyed as evil spirits, and were hated by the dough-boys as harbingers of bad luck. Just beyond the village the ground dipped to a sluggish river, and that pondlike stream was the limit of the American push that had hustled the Boche miles back from their original holdings.

"I'll bet that big guy is up to something," muttered Jimmy. "He'd never stay in them bushes and be eaten by the flies if there was any other place he could go."

"He'd better, if he's got any sense at all," growled the sergeant, crawling up alongside Jimmy. "You heard what the captain said, and when 'Red Davy' says a thing, he means it."

"But, hell, sarge, we been here two days now. What's the hold-up? Everybody's rarin' to go."

"Yeh—to their graves? The Krauts

have got their guns massed back of them hills the other side of the river and they can wipe us off the map as fast as we come. There's nothing but a clear sweep on this side, then the river, then up hill against his Maxims. I tell you once more, we're hung up."

"Why not sneak across the river in the dark and get through that gully? Then we wouldn't have to go over the hills and we'd get behind his batteries and clean them out."

"What a brain wave!" The sergeant spat at a big blue fly and tried to stare through the heat waves. "Jimmy, use your bean. Don't you know them Krauts shoot sideways, crossways, and every-which-way around that gully all night? Don't you think them Dutchmen know a thing or two? We got more chance of going straight up that hill and over than we have of ever getting in that ravine. They've got at least ten machine guns planted right at the entrance."

Jimmy subsided. "Gee, it does look bad," he admitted. "I knew it, there's a dozen black cats hiding around these cellars. But why don't they—what's that? Look, sarge, look! At the river, by the other side of the bushes!"

Sergeant Manners looked, forgot himself and half-raised to see better; then he remembered the danger of snipers, and dropped and groaned. "I knew it," he said mournfully. "Another R. I. P. Hell, I don't want to see him get it." The sergeant backed into the position he had vacated, pushing a shower of gravel into the cavity.

"But the Krauts ain't shooting! Come and see, sarge!" Jimmy was excited. "Gee, they musta seen him. Lookit!"

Once more the sergeant mounted to the weeds and peered through them; then his lank form tensed. His mouth opened and shut, like a fish out of water, but no sound came. Sergeant Manners was completely, absolutely dumfounded. He hardly believed what he saw.

From the cellar he looked down hard barren ground to a growth of low bushes surrounding a few shell-battered tree stubs. At the beginning of the

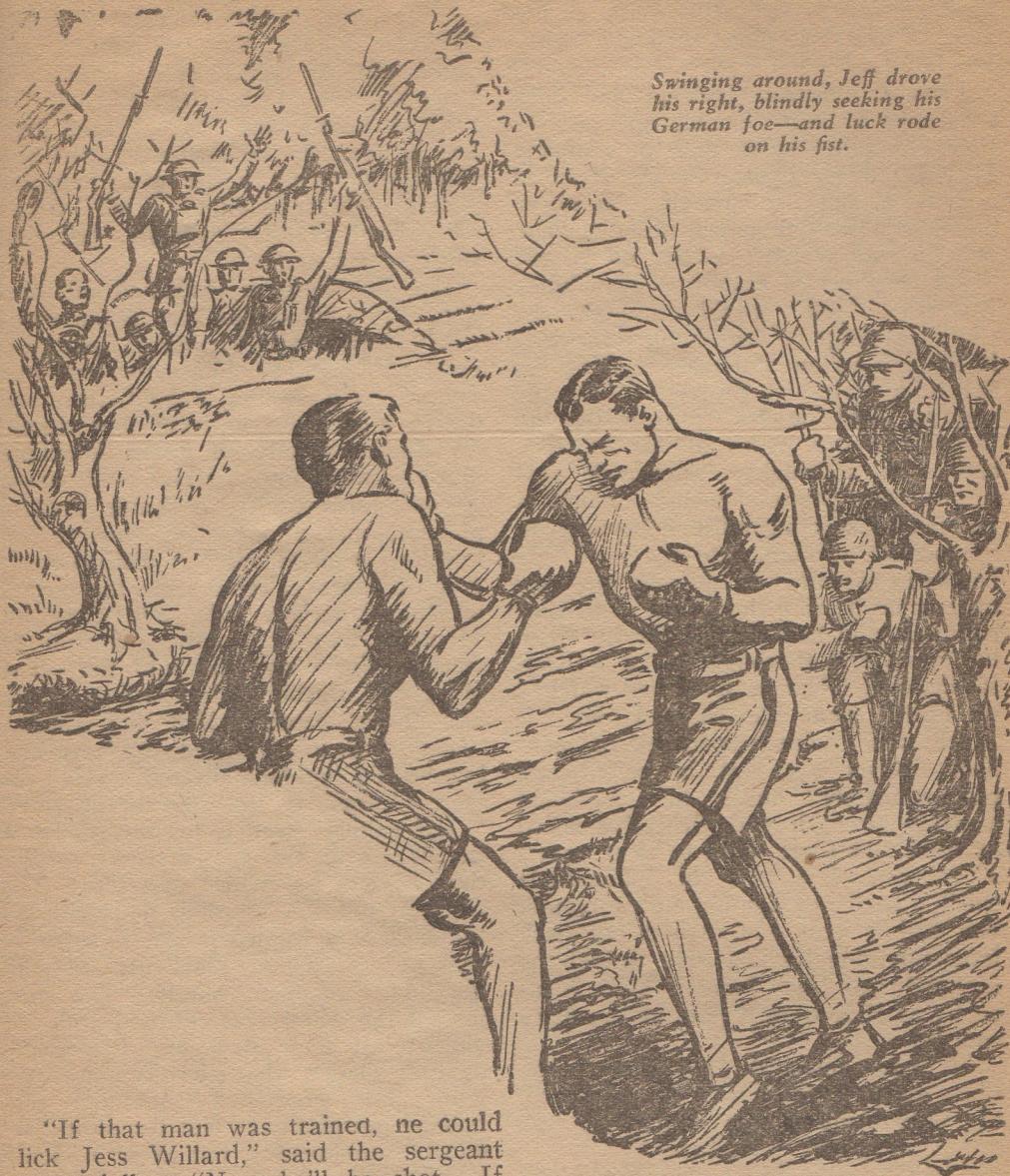
war a pretty group of shade trees had stood beside the approach to a stone bridge. Constant shell fire had blasted every tree from its stump, had rooted almost every vestige of the bridge from view, and the fallen masonry had dammed the waters so as to form a considerable pool.

Red Davy, the red-thatched captain in command of company K, had sent a few men to dig themselves in back of the stubs and constitute an advanced post for his company. On the other side of the small river, the Germans had established themselves in a similar position, behind the stumps of the ornamental trees that had stood at the other end of the bridge. One hundred yards back from their post was the entrance to the narrow cutting that parted the hills, the cutting that was the key to the defense of the German artillery.

Due to the extreme heat, neither side had evinced much hostility during the daytime, and though the river posts were only sixty yards apart, they had not exchanged shots. But now an American soldier had deliberately left his cover and walked to the edge of the pondlike stream. Any fighting man would state that such an act was suicidal, but the Germans did not shoot. The doughboy was not armed, and he could not possibly be carrying concealed weapons—for he was stark naked!

AS nonchalantly as if he were by some isolated water hole far from all scenes of war, the naked man waded into the sparkling water and splashed full length in an ecstasy of enjoyment. He swam a few strokes upstream till he came to shallow parts, then turned back and disported himself like a playful porpoise. Again and again he dived in the deepest part, blowing like a young whale as he emerged, licking and threshing with his legs, floating like a great peeled log. The sergeant looked at his runner and said, "Damn!" in an awed voice.

The runner looked at the sergeant. "You bet!" he gasped.



*Swinging around, Jeff drove his right, blindly seeking his German foe—and luck rode on his fist.*

"If that man was trained, he could lick Jess Willard," said the sergeant mournfully. "Now he'll be shot. If only he wasn't such a— Look! What in hell?"

The man in the water was standing in the shallow part, immersed to his waist, and looking toward the German post. A hoarse shout came clearly to the watchers in the cellar, a shout in German—and the big bather calmly thumbed his nose with all the insolence of a small boy. An instant later something erupted among the bushes that

screened the enemy, a great white body that glinted in the sun, a gorilla-shouldered giant with knotted muscles and the neck of a bull. He came running to the water edge and splashed in, heading straight for the American, and his charge was like that of a champion of the wilds that had been challenged.

Sergeant Manners swore hysterically, and never knew he spoke. He heaved up on one elbow and tore up a hand-

ful of weeds. Jimmy hunched on his knees, his body quivering with excitement. "Gee!" he piped shrilly. "Gee—hoss-a-phat!"

Private Jefferson Jackson had been the cause of more trouble and anxiety than any other three men in company K, and all his transgressions were as unusual as the man himself. He never got into difficulties with wine or women, and he was a smart soldier on parade—but no one in authority ever knew just what "Jeff" would do next. At the base camp he had hung a brawny M.P. high on an outhouse, hooking his belt on a drain-pipe projection. On the training field he had torn a dummy loose with one twist of his bayonet, and with a mighty pitch-fork toss heaved the stuffed enemy among a group of inspecting officers, bowling an aristocratic adjutant into the dust. He had been assaulted by mistake one evening while passing the billets of a labor battalion, and had cleaned the hut with the speed and thoroughness of a Kansas cyclone. Now he stood and watched the hostile giant who charged him.

Jeff was a superb specimen of manhood. Over six feet in height and proportionately built, he combined amazing strength with deceptive speed of hand and foot. Add to these assets a concrete jaw and an indomitable spirit, a legacy of fighting ancestors, and you had a man who would not back from anything human. He waited the onslaught of the German Goliath as coolly as if it were a part of the day's routine.

"If your mens do not shoot," the thick guttural voice was clearly heard, "I, Otto Lunser, the champion, will drown you, pig *Amerikaner*."

"Yeh?" Jeff's drawl was exquisitely tantalizing. "You and who else? No one will shoot, unless it is one of your sausage-grinders—when they see that you're under water."

"So!" The German's voice was a snarl. He turned to the post he had vacated and shouted harsh orders. "My men will not shoot," he declared, "and they are but Saxons."

"Saxons!" said Jimmy, as if to him-

self. "Now what does that mean?"

"Shut up!" said the sergeant irritably. "They're a tame sort of Krauts who don't want to fight. This big one's a Prussian, one of them fire-eaters."

"You heard that, boys," said Jeff, looking towards the bushes. "Don't you pull a trigger, no matter what happens. This show's to be on the level." Sheer joy echoed in every syllable. Jeff was supremely confident.

The big German disdained all caution. He advanced as fast as the water would permit and lunged to seize his opponent. Biff! Splash! Jeff had fainted, as if seeking a hold, then had driven a straight uppercut that caught his attacker totally off guard, knocking him backward into the river. It was a splendid opportunity to decide matters at once, but Jeff made no effort to follow up his advantage. A distinct murmur of approval came from the bushes on the American side, and Sergeant Manners tore up another handful of weeds. Some one slid into the cellar from the farther side, rushed across and thrust between him and Jimmy. "Don't crowd," growled the sergeant, but he did not look around. His eyes were focused on the men in the river.

Jeff calmly awaited his adversary, a derisive grin on his features. This time he had no chance to strike. The German did the feinting, and with all the skill of a trained boxer, so adroitly that he was able to reach his foe with his huge outspread hands. The next instant the water was churned with the violence of their struggle. It seemed, at first glance, that the Teuton must win. His enormous shoulders and bulging muscles gave him the more formidable appearance, but after a closer inspection, it was seen that Jeff was just as deep of chest and had just as impressive a display of sinew. His muscles were more supple, like ropes of steel under his skin, and his speed was baffling.

The two giants were locked like grizzlies, rocking and reeling with the strain of their efforts. The German crushed Jeff backward in a mighty grip, but the American writhed in his arms and

used an elbow so effectively that the hold was broken. They both slipped and went to their knees, and their play for advantage was too swift to follow; yet the German rose first—to go down heavily as Jeff made a terrific surge. In a heartbeat they were lashing the water to a foam. First one was under, then the other. They lost holds, dodged grips, warded blows, strove with arm and leg, with elbows, knees, fists and feet, and the water saved each in turn from blows that would have finished the combat.

ON the American side of the river, steel hats and sunburned necks had gradually thrust higher and higher into view until ten doughboys lined the stubs, tense ring-side spectators. Over on the German bank coal-scuttle headgear appeared. Eight men in field gray peered through the openings, breathlessly viewing the strange duel.

In ten minutes each man had been down twice, and then it was that the German got the advantage. His superior wrestling tactics had been apparent from the outset, but his lack of speed made matters almost even. Jeff stepped on a rolling stone that made him lose his balance, and in a moment he was crashed down by a mountain of flesh that had secured a needed hold. In falling, the American tried to twist free, and instead was only pinioned the more solidly. The German was on top at last, and slowly but surely he forced Jeff's head under.

The American's only hope was to pull his opponent down with him. He partly succeeded. Otto's face was barely clear of the water. Then, as the trio at the cellar groaned in unison, Jeff raised himself enough to try a last trick. He spurted a great mouthful of water. It shot upward directly into the German's eyes. Otto bellowed with rage and lost his hold. He had released his grip to relieve his vision, and Jeff's desperate surge overturned them into deeper water. More threshing and struggling, and then the German was down. He was still blinded, and the American, exerting every tissue, lifted his vast

enemy completely off his feet and heaved him over and underneath. It was a magnificent display of strength. Bubbles rose from the man under water, and it was the men in gray who groaned. Then Jeff rose, releasing and then assisting his strangling, blinded victim.

Otto gasped and gulped for air, pawing at his eyes. For a moment he spewed river water. Both men were bleeding from a dozen hurts, evidence of the desperate nature of their struggle. Jeff blew his nose violently and shook the water from his blond hair. "How about it, 'Hindenburg'?" he queried. "Shall we call it a day or do you feel like another try?"

Before Otto could answer, another man appeared in the sunlight, coming from the mouth of the ravine. He was a stiff-backed, supercilious officer, with the ribbon of the Iron Cross in his tunic, and any soldier could tell that he was one of the famous Prussian Guards. "This is the play of fools," he shouted harshly. "Let the American meet our champion like a man. We have the gloves for boxing, or make it a wrestle. Sergeant Lunser would find either easy—in a fair meeting." There was a rasping sneer in his words.

The man who was wedged between the sergeant and Jimmy, as tense as they, scrambled to his feet and hurried down the open ground, and the sergeant swore again in his mechanical fashion. "That was the captain all the time," he gasped.

Red Davy was a fiery, red-topped leader, famed for his drastic action. He went down to the river as near as the Prussian had come. "The American will meet your so-called champion at any time," he called sharply. "He had him beaten this time."

Otto had recovered from the effects of his prolonged dip. He shook himself like a great dog, then saw his enemy awaiting him. "To the ground come," he roared, like a throaty lion, "and it will finish quick." His big fists clenched and his muscles flexed. Rage shook him like a convulsion.

"*Nein—nein!*" The Prussian's com-

mand was sharp as a pistol shot. He barked orders at Otto, and the giant slowly waded ashore.

The Prussian turned toward Red Davy and bowed. "Let them meet tonight, an hour before sunset, on this ground." He indicated a smooth grassy sward that led to the river bank.

"He'll be there," called Red Davy. "Come in, Jackson, and get dressed."

The officers stared at each other a second, then stiffly saluted, wheeled about and returned the way they had come. Jeff splashed to the riverside and disappeared in the bushes.

"Tell the men not to fire a shot, unless it is necessary," said Red Davy as he passed the sergeant's cellar, "and don't let word of this get back to the rest of the company."

It was an easy task to keep the news from spreading. Each doughboy was wildly anxious to see the meeting, and each knew that any addition to the audience might imperil the entertainment.

THERE were only three advanced posts fronting the river, but Red Davy himself visited them to make sure that their garrisons would remain on duty. The Boche were not to be trusted at any time. Jeff lazed in his shelter and fought flies, and it was with difficulty that the sergeant prevented him from making a hearty meal of bully and biscuits. Sergeant Manners was at the post in the bushes, at the captain's suggestion, and was armed with a sniping rifle. If Jeff did not get a square deal, he was to be promptly avenged.

As the appointed time approached, the Americans became apprehensive. They feared it had all sounded too good to be true. Then, very punctually, Otto appeared, followed by his arrogant superior. They came to the river bank and gazed at the American side. Jeff, clad only in his improvised trunks, strode to the water edge and waded in. "I'll be right with you, Hindy," he called. "Get your horseshoes in your mitts."

Some one plumped into the bush post beside the sergeant. It was Red Davy

and he was breathing with the quick intakes of a man highly aroused. One swift scrutiny of the pair on the opposite bank, and he had torn off his equipment. He scrambled out of the shelter. A moment more and he was fording the shallow end of the pool. He was going across to act as a second for Jeff. Sergeant Manners gazed open-mouthed, then swore softly, and his jaw set grim. "If anything happens," he said, looking around, "we'll go over too, with our bayonets." He read his answer in the eyes that met his, and each soldier gripped his weapon.

Red Davy laced the gloves. They were not ten feet behind Jeff. The Prussian glared at him but made no objection to his presence. Eight ardent disciples of the goosestep, rifles in hand, were peering from the post by the stubs. He threw a set of boxing gloves at Jeff's feet. "Make ready!" The Prussian's voice rasped like a file. "You will be carried back before it is dark."

Red Davy laced the gloves. They were a standard set of good quality. Then, as coolly as if he were officiating in a regular bout, the American captain stepped across to the scowling Otto and examined the giant's gloves. "All correct," he said briskly. "What are the rules of this scrap?"

"The usual ones," grated the Prussian. "Lunser is a champion boxer and knows the rules. I will be the referee." There was a direct challenge in his statement.

Red Davy looked at Jeff. "Suits me," grinned the big fellow. "Let's get going."

Otto attacked as fiercely as he had done in the water, but used more judgment. The sergeant saw at once that the German was a professional, and began to perspire. He knew that Jeff had never donned gloves until after he had enlisted. But the American was gifted with natural hitting ability and an instinctive defense. Furthermore, he had the most valuable of assets, a cool head. Otto had not. Hate burned in his small eyes, and was repulsive in his bulldog features.



The German opened with an attack to the body, and before Jeff had learned his first lesson, he had absorbed some heavy blows just above the waist line. Then Otto began to miss his swings, and Jeff, through his quickness of foot, caught him with a lefthander that sent him spinning. Curt comment from the Prussian major made the big German more cautious until Jeff, with a sudden vicious dart, rapped a one-two on Otto's nose and caused it to bleed profusely.

There was a rumbling roar, like that of a fighting bull, and the big fellow bored in with both hands going like tremendous pistons. Smashing, tearing, ripping, slashing, driving Jeff before him, Otto fought with berserk fury—but never landed a blow that did real damage. Then, winded, he slowed up, and Jeff was in on him like a tiger. A lead for Otto's midriff, a right straight for his belt—Otto's guard came down, and, with a half-pivoting swing, Jeff knocked him full length on the sod.

There was a loud hurrah from across the river, and guttural exclamations in the bush post on the German side. The major said nothing. His lips were tight-set, and he seemed to be watching his wrist watch. Otto rolled over and got to his feet. He was groggy, but crouched in readiness to continue. Jeff went after him in careless assurance—and made a big mistake. The German had not been seriously hurt; even the sergeant could see that from his post, and was now as dangerous as a cornered bear. His major spoke to him in rapid gutturals, and cunning mingled with the hate in Otto's eyes. The sergeant sensed some impending peril and wanted to call a warning. He was too late.

The Prussian major seemingly had had reason for the hour he named. At the spot he had chosen, the setting sun sent its rays directly up the pondlike expanse of the river toward the grassy bank, and before Jeff realized it, he had been tricked and maneuvered into its blinding glare. He sprang to escape, and met Otto's hamlike right. He did not go down, but appeared dazed

by the blow, and had no defense for the merciless jabs that rained through his guard. Then an uppercut felled him heavily, and the sergeant had to stifle a groan. It looked as if the fight was over.

Jeff came up with a daze in his eyes, seemingly punch-drunk and foggy, but rushed straight at his man. Otto laughed softly, a disagreeable sardonic chuckle, and set himself to deliver the haymaker that would be the grand finale. But he was careless in his movements; he had not reckoned on the vitality of the American he faced. Jeff drove his right, swinging in his pivoting way, blindly seeking his foe. Luck rode on his fist. The blow crashed home with two hundred pounds behind it. Otto, big as he was, was lifted off his feet by the impact. He came down like a stricken ox and lay unconscious, his limbs quivering.

IT seemed a full minute before any one spoke. Then there was a murmur of voices from each river post. The Prussian major was pale with rage. He could barely control his voice. "It was luck," he hissed. "Lunser was not watching."

Jeff's battered and bloodied features expanded in one of his grins. He was finding himself again. "Better tell him to watch, then, next time," he taunted. "There might not be any sun." He turned away, then looked over his shoulder. "Is there any other game he knows?" he asked.

The Prussian started eagerly. "*Ja*, one that luck will not always help. It is the wrestle."

"It will be on the other side of the river then," said Red Davy sharply, "and it will have to be soon. We have other business at hand," he bowed ironically towards the major, "and may see these gentlemen again."

"Yes," snarled the major. "Crossing the river will not be a sport, and before you are over, there will be time for a wrestle." His voice was vitriolic with baffled hate.

Jeff gave one of his carefree chuckles and looked the major over from head

to foot. Then he glanced at the unconscious fighter. "Any time the gorilla wakes up and wants to play, just let me know," he drawled. "I like wrestling."

Hope glistened in the Prussian's eyes. He seemed to try to smooth the harshness in his voice. "If you are not afraid," he said quickly, "be at the bank—on the other side—to-morrow at this hour."

It was another sizzling noon. The sergeant was in the cellar again. Three soldiers were with him, and they were an advanced post for the day. Overnight the Boche had changed. He had launched a barrage of trench mortars that had caused several casualties and had forced the Americans to evacuate their river shelters. Then he had plastered Nollens with high explosive, burying a machine-gun crew in one cellar. Not satisfied with this hostility, he had wasted countless belts of ammunition as his Maxims sprayed the entire area fronting the hills. It had made the doughboys dubious of their chances of continuing the drive.

To make matters worse, their only hope of detecting a weak link in the defense of the hills was gone. Their sole means of observation was a total loss. The sun was not an hour high when they had watched a hawk of the Black Cross swoop down from the clouds and spray tracers at the huge sausage balloon that was aloft in the rear of Nollens. There had been forked flames, billowing smoke, a meteor of fiery fabric, and two swaying figures attached to parachutes—a little side-show to enliven the morning, and their observation gone blooey!

There was a scurry of feet in the next cellar, now connected by a short trench, and Jimmy appeared. "Hear the latest?" he piped. "The push is to go on to-morrow. We got to get across them hills somehow. It's orders, and there's a whole division come in back of us last night. Gee! There'll be some casualties."

Sergeant Manners looked at him closely. "Is that the straight dope?" he asked.

"It is," answered Jimmy. "Red Davy nearly had fits when I took him the orders. You ought to have heard him rave. 'It'll be damn murder,' he yelled. Gee, I guess he was right."

All the long afternoon the men in the cellar forgot to grouse at the heat and their minor discomforts. They talked, spasmodically, of the foolhardiness of attempting an assault of the hills, and cursed bitterly the brainless buzzards who gave such orders. At sundown Sergeant Manners was called to company headquarters and when he returned, he confirmed the grim news. "We're going to attack to-morrow morning," he announced, "and it'll be a wash-out for company K."

No one had the heart to answer him. There was more shelling by the Boche. Then a patrol of a dozen men, headed by Red Davy himself, passed the cellar. "No wrestling match to-night, is there?" whispered one of the soldiers. "Ain't war hell?"

Sergeant Manners started. "Don't that beat the devil?" he exclaimed. "I'd forgotten all about the wrestling. Where is Jeff?"

"Back at company headquarters," whispered the informer. "They're taking no chances on him cutting any monkeyshines."

The men in the cellar did not see or hear the patrol return. Throughout the night the German gunners kept their Maxims warm, and the artillery wasted many shells around Nollens. It was very evident that the Boche high command was determined not to take any chances with the *verdammte Amerikaner*.

An hour before dawn Red Davy appeared and called Sergeant Manners. "Sergeant," he said quietly, and every man knew that when the captain's voice was silky, he meant business, "I've a hell of a job for you."

"I expected one," said the sergeant. He hoped that Red Davy would not hear his heart thumping.

"I have picked twenty men for you. They are getting ready, each man armed with bombs, mostly rifle grenades. You'll remember that there's been a

mist along the river the last three mornings. You are to take your party and work down to the river bank just below the pond. Hide there until just after daybreak. At that time a fake attempt will be made to cross at the bend above the pond. There'll be just three men there, and they're going to push out a sort of raft to make the thing look real, and they'll throw over a bunch of smoke bombs. The smoke'll drift down with the mist, past your party, and that is when you do your stuff.

"You know that knobby rise just at the corner of the cutting? Keep in line with that, after you cross the river, and when you are up behind it, have every man shoot a rifle grenade. The Boche machine guns are planted in a small radius, and one volley should put at least half of them out of action. Don't wait to reload, but charge, and heave your bombs as you go. The surprise will count. I'll have the rest of the company here, ready to rush down as soon as you are in the mix-up. It's our one and only hope of getting over."

"Yes, sir," said the sergeant, "but if their sentries see us crossing, it'll be wholesale suicide."

"In this war," said Red Davy, "you've got to take chances. The Boche have their breakfast at that time and they'll likely have only one man on sentry. And listen, keep your eye on Jeff. I detailed him for your party; he's such a good bomb-thrower." Then the captain was gone.

"And that's the damn limit." One of the soldiers in the cellar was the first to find his voice. "Red Davy talks like he had been over and interviewed the Krauts and made a map of the layout. Hell's back door! How does he know when they eat or how many sentries they got? Smoke screen! Blah—blah! There'll be a nice crop of wooden crosses over on that bank——"

"Shut up!" said the sergeant roughly. His nerves were on edge. "You weren't included."

He made his way back through the cellars and found his party. Jeff was with them, packing a carrier full of bombs. "All set for the picnic," grinned

the big fellow. One eye was partially closed and his cheeks were rather lopsided. "I hear we're to have breakfast with the major."

The sergeant smothered a curse. He forgot his own inward fears in regretting that this splendid giant should be so wantonly sacrificed.

**I**N some uncanny manner Red Davy seemed to have guessed correctly every detail of the morning. The dough-boys at the bend stirred up the Boche post at the stubs as they tried to launch their craft. One man was wounded, and the Germans at the river post were so alarmed that they congregated in a watchful position at the end of their cover and never suspected the presence of the sergeant's party. The smoke from the bombs mingled with the river mist, and a slight breeze eddied the cloud down the current. Under its cover, Manners and his men rose like wraiths in the murk, and slipped into the water. In five minutes they were across. The mist and smoke clung to the higher bank and they were at the protecting knob before they knew it. Not a shot had been fired at them. They had never been spotted.

In breath-taking suspense they arranged their grenades. The sergeant gave the signal. Twenty missiles of death looped high, and fell into the mouth of the cutting. In the ravine there were sudden stabs of orange-red flame, spurts of lurid color and a series of sharp metallic reports. Twenty bronzed and lean fighting men raced over the lip of the rise and plunged into the German holding. At their head was Jeff Jackson, and he was hurling Mills grenades with amazing accuracy and length of throw. Only one Maxim got into action, one out of all those in the Boche nest. It riddled two dough-boys at close range, and then Sergeant Manners broke the gunner's neck with a blow from his clubbed rifle.

Foremost in the fray, scattering the Boche like frightened sheep, was Jeff, wielding a rifle and bayonet he had snatched from one of the enemy. The Germans had been at breakfast, as Red Davy had predicted, and were taken

completely unawares and routed before they could comprehend the situation. An officer rushed from the last dugout. He was bareheaded and his tunic was unbuttoned. He waved a Luger and snarled like a maniac. But his commands were unheeded, and he was so buffeted by his own men as they fled that the pistol was knocked from him.

A moment later Jeff's big hands had the major by the neck. He shook him as a terrier shakes a rat. "You wart-faced snob!" he shouted. "Have you got time enough for that wrestling match? Where's the gorilla's cage? I'm gonna send both of you to the zoo."

Jeff flung the Prussian from him, hurling him towards a group who were collecting prisoners, and his mistake was almost fatal. Like a cat, the major leaped to where his pistol had been thrown and he had fired a shot which went wild before a doughboy stopped his hostilities forever.

The acrid reek of explosives hung in the gully. Colored rockets shot up into the sky from other points along the river. On the hills the distant Maxims raved like wild things. Finally the Boche batteries opened in a mad chorus. They were too late. Their music was stopped almost as quickly as it began. Red Davy and company K were through the cutting, and under cover of rough ground, managed to reach the rear of the massed artillery.

Those headlong Americans ran wild among the German batteries. They used butts and bayonets, bombs and machine guns. It was hand to hand and steel to steel. The Boche gunners were a different breed from those who had guarded the gully, and no quarter was asked or given. And ever through the priceless ravine poured eager men in O.D. uniforms, the fresh division from Nollens.

Sergeant Manners had hacked and slashed and shot his way to the very rear of the Boche batteries. Twice he had lost blood in clashes of steel, but he had no serious hurts and he was happy. No opposition remained in their immediate vicinity, and everything now held the appearance of a walk-over. A party of prisoners was hustled past.

Behind them strode one man, but he was a giant. His helmet was pushed belligerently back on his blond head; his rather bruised face cracked in a wide grin. Jeff was as merry as a boy with a prize. He waved to the sergeant. "I'm going to find where that big gorilla is hiding," he called, "if I have to turn the hill over."

Then Red Davy appeared. His arm was in a sling, and there was a bloody bandage around his red head. "Pretty good show," he shouted. "You and your gang certainly opened the gate."

"We did," the sergeant admitted. "Everything went slick, so slick that I'm dizzy. I don't know how we did it."

"Why those Boche in the ravine were all Saxons," said Red Davy. "They didn't really want to fight. That's why the higher-ups sent the major and his big sergeant there to put fear into them, to make them fight. It would have been a different story if the major hadn't been down in his deep dugout having his breakfast."

"But how in the devil did you know?"

"Otto, the big fellow told me," grinned Red Davy. "He put me wise to the major's eating time. And he hated the Saxons so much that he didn't mind us putting the run to them."

"But—where," the sergeant was still perplexed, "did you see Otto?"

"At the river last night. He came over and surrendered, and agreed to give us this information—on conditions."

"Conditions?" said the sergeant.

"Yes, conditions. We had to agree to let him have another chance at Jeff. How's that for real hate? He felt that his dignity, as a champion, had been lowered."

"For the love of Pete!" said Sergeant Manners. "When does he get the chance?"

"In a couple of weeks or so," said Red Davy. "I don't know just when. I'll hold Jeff off as long as I can."

"Why hold him off?" asked the sergeant. "Is the big cheese afraid now?"

"No, he's not," said the red-haired captain of company K. "But don't you think that a man who had helped us so much deserves a little kindness?"