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Stories

December 6th

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“Two Aces—In Dutch”

Splendid Flying Novelette

By Ralph Oppenheim

EVERY OTHER THURSDAY

WAR STORIES

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NEXT NUMBER ON SALE DECEMBER 6th

SEE WAR NOVELS NOW ON SALE
WAR BIRDS Join up with the **BIG THREE**

"The Ghost Hole"

By

WILL R. BIRD

Author of "White Collars," etc.

It was Kent's first time in the trenches, and the war didn't look so good to him. And when they detailed him for that "Ghost Hole" mission, he was plain scared. But Kent had red hair, which was why he was chosen.

A GRAY mist covered everything. It clung to abandoned trenches, tree stubs, battered brick ruins and broken sandbags, a drab touch that made the marching men shiver.

The platoon was in file, and "Red" Kent was the last man but one. Behind him plodded Corporal Dan Murphy. At first glance many took them for brothers. They were identical in build; broad-shouldered, lean, hard, and red-haired. Both had the blue eyes and the square jaw usually bestowed as a legacy of fighting ancestors. Yet in many things they were as opposite as the poles: Corporal Dan Murphy was as hard-boiled as sixteen years in the regulars could make an Irishman, and Kent was a banker's only son.

Their regiment was relieving a French force in a war-worn area. Word was passed back to put out cigarettes and step smartly. Craters yawned in the mist; they skirted mudholes, stepped over broken wire. To one side, remnants of a rain-washed parapet exposed rotted uniforms, booted feet, mummified hands. Kent could not repress a shudder. The steady booming of the guns grew louder and they passed a camouflaged battery position. Suddenly the platoon entered a communication trench, once a front line, littered with evidence of hasty evacuation.

The shifting leaden pall hastened the

dusk and the going became difficult, as portions of the trench had been blown in. In front some one tumbled in a cavity. The line halted and a low murmur of surly remarks drifted back.

"What th' hell is wrong?" demanded Murphy sibilantly.

"A guy has fell in a hole and can't get out," came the explanation.

"Push him in further and step on him," hissed the corporal. "Move on!" The platoon moved. Kent shuddered again. Murphy sounded inhuman.

A hundred yards farther and they halted again. The platoon sergeant came back to Murphy. "We have to cross open ground," he said tersely, "and Heinie has been shelling it. I'll go over first, with half the platoon. You follow in about five minutes, and come quick when you do."

In the vague gloom the trench was a smother of blackness and the last half of the platoon could not discern their comrades as they went forward. They waited, listening. Stray shells whined and groaned overhead like devils of darkness, but the usual evening hate had not begun. It came as they waited. In the fog ahead, there were sudden stabs of orange-red flame, a series of sharp reports, then frenzied shoutings and agonizing calls of, "First aid! First aid!" There was a rush and a party of fugitives mingled with Murphy's section.

"Who are yez?" demanded the corporal.

"We're a ration party," gasped a fellow, panting for breath. "Them shells got us fair—half our crowd."

The man pressed close to Kent, so close that he could see the stark terror on his features. Then he heard Murphy's voice. "Come with me, Kent. Th' rest av yez stay in yer tracks."

They squeezed by the men and found an abrupt end to the trench. Dark forms blurred on the high ground and groans mingled with soothing voices. Murphy scrambled up and Kent followed. The first man they reached was twisted in a grotesque fashion. He moaned feebly as they attempted to raise him.

"It's th' sergeant," muttered Murphy. "Kin yez beat it?"

"Don't touch me," pleaded the non-com. "I'm—" His voice trailed off. There was no need to move him.

Stretcher-bearers were busy with other wounded. Everyone worked feverishly, knowing that the strafing would be resumed without notice. Kent assisted with a stretcher and found his way to a first-aid station. It was crowded with victims of the surprise salvos, and in the candle-light a doctor and his assistants bandaged furiously. A wave of nausea swept over Kent and he turned away.

Near the dressing station Murphy found the continuance of the communication trench. "Wait here till I bring th' lads," he ordered, and the new man was glad to obey.

Every fibre of his frame revolted, cried out in protest. Was this war—men killed in the dark, before they reached the Front, by an unseen enemy? Crash! Bang! Crash! Overhead shrapnel pounded the open again. Kent crouched in the trench end. The world seemed full of noise, a chaos of crashing salvos, soul-sickening detonations. The acrid reek of explosives filled his nostrils, caught his breath. Then colored rockets shot up into the sky from farther along the sector, and he heard the hurtling roar of retaliation passing overhead.

At the first lull Murphy and his men came rushing overland. Then came a period of blundering in the gloom as they gathered the rest of the platoon, and lurid vituperation when they found a cutting by which they could have avoided the over-the-top crossing. Eventually they reached the Front and relieved the garrison. Kent stood sentry at a post with one of the veterans of the platoon and listened to vivid explanations of trench warfare, shuddering at such sickening details as the use of the head-crushing whiffer and the freeing of a rib-held bayonet.

Corporal Murphy loomed behind him. "Ye'll come with me, Kent," he ordered. "We're off duty for th' night as we'll be spendin' th' day in a crater."

"In a crater!" echoed Kent. "What for?"

"To kape watch av a dugout in No-Man's-Land that is only occupied by ghosts. The 'Ghost Hole,' they calls it. Ye can ask questions at th' crater. Try playin' shut-eye while ye have th' chance."

His words held an ominous sound. Kent found a dugout and slipped into a corner bunk. Other men, detailed for day duty, snored lustily. His tense nerves relaxed to limp exhaustion. He wanted to sleep but when he dozed he saw again the fright on the faces of the ration party, the agony of the stricken sergeant, the horror of that first-aid dugout. He was fighting desperately a panic fear that dulled his senses, and the ordeal baffled him. From enlistment he had not known any special dread of what might await, had rather welcomed the chance of adventure. Yet the Front had shaken his poise. Only by sheer will power had he concealed his feelings. Was he a coward?

KENT lay in a huge crater wherein the sun was pleasantly warm and no wind penetrated. Beside him a timbered nook, large enough to admit a man upright, contained a shelf of bombs and held an overhead screen, representing a weed patch, in which were planted three periscopes, focused right, left, and front. Corporal Murphy was

using them in turn, studying keenly the wilderness between the wires.

"We're at present neither here nor there," he remarked in guarded tones. "We're jist halfway over, and it's our duty, me lad, to mark th' unusual in our left front yard. In a matter av six days, or nights, to spake correctly, three av our patrols have vamoosed, vanished, me lad, disappeared intirely, when investigatin' this Ghost Hole. 'Tis time th' mystery was solved—and we have th' assignment."

"You mean that we are to find where they went?" Kent had not ventured to move since their arrival just before dawn. They had had an exciting time reaching the crater. A Boche gunner had sprayed hot lead above them as they crawled, and Kent had felt that every bullet had a horrible personal sound.

"I do," retorted Murphy. "Them's our orders, and we can work in any way we see fit. 'Let yer conscience be yer guide,' says th' captain. An' if ye are feelin' rested, ye can slip in here and have a bit of geography."

Kent rose slowly and squeezed in beside Murphy. He peered in the center periscope and saw a level, pock-marked waste ending in a perfect hedge of barbed wire. Behind it he could distinguish colored sandbags. Nothing moved in his line of vision. The periscope to the right gave him a view of a ruined village in the distance, where the sunlight caught a glass here and there that had not been broken. Nearer at hand stretched the same desolation of shallow craters.

At first glance the left seemed equally barren of feature, then he made out a small brick pile under the German wire, saw a crumpled form, a dead German, outstretched near a shell hole, and then made out a short pole supporting a small notice board. Adjusting Murphy's glasses, he spelled the lettering: "*Fernsprecher und Befehls Unterstand.*"

"And what does it mane?" asked Murphy sarcastically. "Ye can have three guesses."

"It reads 'Telephone and Command Dugout,'" Kent whispered. "I don't have to guess."

7—W. S.—45

Murphy gave a low whistle. "And ye are one av these birds that com-pray th' Dutch, are ye," he muttered. "Ye will be useful, my lad."

"I believe there is a dugout entrance beside that pole," said Kent, looking carefully.

"Ye are mistaken," returned Murphy. "Th' pole is beside th' dugout. There's been patrols to look at it since th' Frogs left, but it's jist another av these Jerry pill-boxes, av no use at present to either party. And three patrols, me lad, went monkeyin' around there and never come back. Take yer time, and see if ye notice anything else."

Kent took his time; he was forgetting it was his first look over the top. Yet he saw nothing outstanding.

"Ye are new to th' game," said Murphy. "Can't ye see that every shell hole near that dugout has been made by our own shells? There's not a Jerry crater within yards av it. Ye might think they were using that place for some av their diviltry, if ye didn't look at their wire. I searched it carefully and divil av an openin' is there on th' left. That's why they've left that stiff for th' rats. Have a look at yer right."

Kent looked. "I can see two lanes through their wire," he said slowly. "I suppose they use them for patrols."

"Ye talk like a perfessor," snorted Murphy, "but ye are supposin' right. Now if they wuz usin' that dugout, accordin' to me own way av thinkin', they'd have a short cut there. However," he continued drily, "we'll be seein' for ourselves when it's dark."

"You mean—we will go out there—to-night?" Kent wondered if Murphy could hear his heart pounding.

"Ye are a mind reader," returned the corporal. "And in case ye should not be enthusiastic, there's a reward av one hundred francs if we can discover Heinie's trick av disappearin' patrols, which same would help me financial statistics."

"I don't like to go out there," said Kent.

"Make it anonymous," retorted Murphy. "'Tis jist me cravin' for excitement that takes me."

"But I should have more experience," persisted Kent. "A new man is liable to make mistakes."

"They never make more than one," said Murphy grimly, "and ye'll soon get yer experience. This time to-morrow, me lad, ye'll be wearin' a medal or a buryin' party'll be throwin' mud in yer face."

"I might be wounded," said Kent, forcing a smile. He was warming to this hard-bitten Irishman in spite of his qualms.

"There's three kinds av wounded," said Murphy. "Th' walkin' cases, th' stretcher ones, and th' sandbag kind. If ye are hit to-night ye are likely to be all av them." He pushed by Kent and stretched in the sun. "Kape them comfortin' thoughts with ye till noon," he instructed, "and kape yer eye to th' glasses. Old Jerry has never learned th' rules av this war."

IT was evening. Gun flashes lit the horizon like heat lightning. The vicious hammering of a machine gun dominated the area surrounding Murphy's crater, and Kent ducked low as a swarm of waspy bullets passed overhead.

"We'll head for that dugout when he stops," the corporal hissed in his ear. "If ye drag yer feet or rattle yer tin derby, it's blooey for both av us."

Kent made no response, but when Murphy left the crater he followed at his heels. They found the dugout entrance without difficulty, a blanketed doorway facing the German lines. The corporal pushed through and flashed his electric torch. A neat wooden stairway led down to a strong underground chamber. The roof was supported by steel rails, and one end was tiered with bunks. Ammunition boxes served as seats around a rough table. On the table were some discolored trench maps and a telephone. Gas masks hung from a post. Overcoats, long boots, and bandoliers were scattered about. There were picks and shovels near the door and the usual string of stick bombs.

"For rent, on uneasy terms," mut-

tered Murphy. "Kin ye smell ghosts?"

He lighted a candle and made a deliberate inspection of the walls of the chamber, then sat down at the table. "Not even a rat hole," he said thoughtfully.

He unhooked the receiver and examined the telephone. Its wire entered a conduit beside the stairway. For a moment he listened intently, then he hung up. "I'm askin' ye," he said calmly. "Why would this phone and a *Gott-Mit-Uns* buckle be here after one av our patrols had looked in?"

"I've heard that our boys salvage everything loose," said Kent, "but I can't answer your question."

"Well, kin ye spake Jerry?" Murphy shot the question suddenly.

"I think I could get by with it," said Kent. "Why?"

"Then sputter in this phone," snapped the corporal. "Make out ye are excited. Say ye are chased by th' enemy and are needin' help, and talk as if ye were sure they were listenin'."

Kent seated himself and concentrated on his task. He picked up the receiver and simulated hurried breathing. "*Hilf, hilf, liebe Gott,*" he called, and in broken, jerky sentences repeated Murphy's fake story. There was not the slightest response as moments passed. Only the distant mutter of the heavies came down to them. He replaced the receiver. "That phone's absolutely dead," he said softly. "Don't you think we should be watching—upstairs?"

"Yes," agreed Murphy. "I'm goin' right now, but ye mind this phone. Remember this is th' Ghost Hole."

Kent listened again without result. The candle burned low. The faint sounds of night strafing grew and waned in turn, the foul air of the place oppressed him. Suddenly a slight, grating noise froze him to rigidity. Something had moved, somewhere, near and yet far off. Cold tremors ran down his spine, then the grating sounds came again, louder, galvanizing him to action. He sprang up, faced the entrance—too late. The neat wooden stairs had risen, as if by magic, and confronting him, with leveled rifles, was a quartette of

German soldiers! He threw up his hands—it was suicide not to do so—and a stiff-necked, arrogant officer came forward, his upper lip curled in a hateful sneer.

"Pig *Amerikaner*," he snarled. "Think you to fool us? Where is your party?"

"I am alone," stammered Kent, bewildered by the suddenness of his capture. "I—I lost my way."

"Pig! Fool! Liar!" The German's voice was vitriolic. "You wass with the telephone. Your party you will tell to come when I give the order."

A soldier removed Kent's revolver and bombs, searching him thoroughly, and with a grating sound the raised portion of the stairs dropped back into place, eliminating every trace of the tunnel behind it. Then the prisoner was made to stand facing the entrance, the candle was extinguished and the hard barrel of a Luger was thrust in his back. "One thing wrong and you wass die," came a snarling threat.

He was hustled up to the gas curtain. "Call to your party," whispered his captor.

Sick with apprehension, Kent gave a low call. "Come in, corporal. I want you." There was no answer. In response to an insistent prod, he called again and again, louder. The blanket was thrust aside. Flares rose and fell like soap bubbles, shedding eerie light. As far as they see, No-Man's-Land was deserted. Only the dead German lay sprawled by a shell hole. Murphy has vanished.

A growling command, and Kent was hurried downstairs. His captors made a brief survey of the cellar and the officer rasped questions like pistol shots. "Who the belt buckle from the bunk took?"

Kent shook his head. "I didn't," he said coolly, "and I don't know anything about it."

"So," the German bared his teeth like an animal. "You are clever, so. But we have ways, and you will talk."

THE stairway was raised and Kent was prodded into the passage beneath it, a tunnel, strongly timbered,

with mud walls oozing greasy slime. One of the Germans used an electric torch to show the way and the party proceeded in weird silence.

It seemed to Kent that they had gone several hundred yards, but when they emerged into the clamorous night they were at a German front-line post, and stolid sentries stared at him as he was hurried by. At the tunnel end a man sat with a telephone attachment to his ears, and Kent understood the disappearance of the patrols.

A long communication trench led to the rear, and then they traveled a cobbled road until they passed heavy batteries and the air shook with the heavy hammer strokes of the guns. Beyond them they descended into a deep dug-out with accommodation for a company of men. An inner chamber was furnished with chairs and tables from French houses, mirrors and water jugs, even to an ornamental clock. On the wall was a large-scale map, flanked by pictures of the kaiser and Hindenburg. In the background stood signalers and messengers, lackeys of an officer who sat at a table, a major, decorated with looping gold cord and a brushed-up mustache. He spoke in curt, jerky sentences as Kent's escort clicked heels in a precise salute. Then he turned to Kent.

"What is your name?" he snapped.

"Private—er—Murphy," answered Kent, not having time to manufacture a name.

"How long have you been at the Front?"

"One day," said Kent. "I came in last night."

The Officer glanced at the French clock. It was striking eleven. "I shall give you one hour," his words were clipped, frozen. "If then the truth you do not speak——"

"But I'm telling you the truth," said Kent, chilled by the German's merciless manner. "I've only been in the trenches one day."

The officer gave him a piercing glance before he turned to his map. "Even the Americans are not fools enough to use new men as scouts," he snarled.

Kent's guards thrust him out of the room, jostled him along the outer quarters and halted where coffee bubbled on a French stove. The cook in charge gave both soldiers a mug of the beverage, then spat contemptuously at Kent. "Schweinhund!" he grunted.

The American studied every detail of his surroundings. The threat of the officer had steeled him to desperate resolve, and he was surprised to find himself cool and tingling for action. By the door of the dugout he made out a store of bombs and rifle grenades. If he could reach them—

There came a tread of hurried feet on the stairway, and into the dugout came another prisoner in grimy O.D. uniform, a prisoner whose hair was red, and who was lean and broad-shouldered. Kent's words formed the word, "corporal," but it died in a whisper. Where, when, and how had Murphy been captured? Had he learned the secret of the Ghost Hole?

The Irishman had not chosen to recognize him, and had been escorted to the inner room. A moment later and a harsh voice was raised in vindictive, and Murphy was fairly thrown into the passage. His guards brought him to the coffee dispenser, and all five Germans conversed in guttural undertones. Kent, listening, understood the major's rage. The corporal had given his correct name, but had asserted that he had only served one day at the Front.

Kent turned so that his eyes met the corporal's, and he was stirred by the fire in their depths. A flicker of eyelash, the merest hunch of his shoulder, and Kent realized that the Irishman wished immediate action, and would tackle the nearest guard. But—they were standing against the wall, watched closely by the coffee drinkers. Suddenly there was the sound of a motor near the door of the dugout. The guards stiffened to military precision and glared at their prisoners. Down the steps came two tall men in long black slickers that glistened in the candlelight. Evidently it was raining outside, a summer shower. The guards saluted like machines. Kent caught ex-

tremely hostile glances and noticed that the newcomers wore shrapnel helmets. They were either going to, or coming from the Front.

AFTER they had entered the inner room the cook stepped forward and searched Kent's pockets. Finding them empty, he insolently tweaked the American's nose. Kent's blood boiled. He drove his fist into the fellow's ribs with a force that knocked him into one of the guards, and the soldier lost his rifle in avoiding a fall on the stove. In a darting, snakelike movement Kent snatched it up, catching the weapon so that it pointed at a second guard.

It all happened in a split second. The remaining guards leaped to the rescue, not daring to shoot for fear of hitting their comrade, and Murphy sprang like a panther, avoiding a bayonet by a hair's breadth as he landed a beautiful right-hander. Kent's man tautened—and lost his life. The American simply pulled trigger, then lunged, as his man fell, to meet the fourth German. A bullet seared his ribs and he was almost blinded by a flash of fire, then his muscles set as he felt his bayonet enter a yielding bulk.

Weapons clashed, a rifle butt rose and fell, then a Luger spoke sharply and the gold-braided officer came charging into the passage. Kent shot him without taking aim, Murphy's rifle butt thudded the groaning cook into silence. The tall men in the slicker and the dead major's assistant stood, undecided, at the door of the inner room, unable to see clearly in the poorly-lighted passage.

The Irishman spoke for the first time. "Tell them guys to send out their slickers, and tin hats, and Lugers, by one chap, and kape reachin' for th' roof."

Kent was exuberant, joyous, flushed with battle. He shouted the drastic orders, and sent a high shot through the open door to emphasize them, then added threats of stick bombs, in case trickery should be planned. Removal of the slickers revealed officers in Bavarian blue, each wearing an Iron Cross. A trembling private brought the required goods, then hurried back to his comrades.

"Now dress up in these things and play Jerry," ordered Murphy. "Upstairs with ye."

Kent donned a slicker and helmet and hurried upstairs, wondering how far they would get. He peered out. The car they had heard was some distance away, in the shelter of a wall. He looked back. The next instant the stairway rocked with the force of an explosion and yellow flame gushed into the dugout. The deafening roar and shock of concussion dazed him, and he feared for Murphy, but the Irishman crashed into him.

"Av course ye would be lookin' back," the corporal wheezed. "Are yez hurt?"

"Not a bit," said Kent, forgetting the pain in his side. "What happened?"

Murphy adjusted his helmet. "I jist dropped a potato-masher among them bombs down there," he chortled, "and th' entrance is blocked intirely. 'Tis likely their telephone is out av order as well. Drop yer rifle, man, officers don't carry them."

"But," protested Murphy. "That chap in the car must have heard the racket."

The roar of a battery nearly deafened them. "Hear nothin'," rasped Murphy. "Never! We're goin' to have a ride in that car. Come along, me lucky lad."

Kent followed. There was no time to argue. The driver started his car before they reached him, backed it so they could get in easily, then, without a question, shot up the road leading to the Front. Murphy relaxed his pistol arm. There was no need of hostilities—yet.

Rain fell in one of those torrential downpours for which France is famous, and the *unteroffizier* who met them at the reserve line accepted their identity without question. Apparently the two tall officers were expected. Soon they were slopping up a communication trench, and the carrying parties they met or overtook crowded sodden embankments to let them go by. At the second line their guide halted at the entrance to a dugout, and Kent grunted at the impact of Murphy's elbow in his sore ribs.

Kent spoke harshly, in his best German. "We will first go to the front line."

The *feldwebel* saluted, turned, and squelched on through the mud. Murphy's hand squeezed his in the dark. He had not made a mistake.

Their next stop was at the front trench, and they were halted by a blockade of men who toiled with some contrivance in the depths of the bays. Kent, nerved and perspiring freely, simulated impatience.

"What is the trouble?" he rasped.

"The gas-throwers are being placed," said their guide. "It will be but a moment, *Herr Hauptmann*."

Gas-throwers! Kent tingled anew. It was doubly important that they get through to their comrades. Murphy, close behind, pushed him on, the path had been cleared. A glimmer of light came from a blanketed doorway. Their guide halted inquiringly, and Kent went down the stairs. He had seen, at first glance, that it was but a small cellar, and he dismissed the *feldwebel* with a harsh growl. If he and Murphy could cow the occupants of this cellar it would be an excellent place in which to make plans. It was too risky to speak English in the trench.

THE cellar was lighted by a single candle. Two officers, sole occupants of the place, sat at a table studying some roughly-penciled sketches. They sprang to attention and saluted. Kent returned their greeting and stood without speaking, taut with expectation yet not knowing what move to make.

"The wind is wrong, *Herr Hauptmann*," said one of the officers apologetically. "We will have to wait, but the wire has been cut and all is in readiness." Then he brightened. "Our brave patrols have captured two prisoners, these *verdampfter Amerikaners*," he said proudly.

Murphy, who had been shifting uneasily in the background, stepped forward and glanced at the sketches on the table.

One of the officers leaned over and pointed to a cross on the lines. "That is

where we cut the wire," he explained. "It is at the small brick pile, just left of this position we are in, and—" The Irishman's fist caught him flush on the jaw and he collapsed like a poled ox.

It was just in time. The second German had glanced at Kent's boots and puttees, but the American caught him by the throat before he could make an outcry. The Boche was sturdy and agile, however, and before Murphy had quieted him with the butt of his Luger the table had been crashed to the floor and much paraphernalia torn from the walls.

"What'll we do now?" panted Kent as he rose from his man. "They are fixing gas-throwers in the trenches, those working parties, but they say the wind is wrong. And on the sketch that fellow had he pointed out a cutting in the wire at the brick pile. If we could find it——"

"We'll skin out av here, toot sweet," jerked Murphy, watching the stairs, "and I'm takin' that pick with me. The wind is up-trench and I'll smash a few av their containers to kape up th' excitement. Kape yer ears open and use that Jerry tongue av yours. Accordin' to me fancy we should go left to find that cut wire."

"By the bricks, that chap said," said Kent.

"I knew that mesilf," answered Murphy. "I came in that way. Now up with ye, me lad. Ye are doin' fine."

His praise warmed Kent like hot wine; the assurance of this veteran with his ice-cold, tigerish courage nerved the new man for anything. As they left, the corporal groped for and found the pick he had seen by the stairs, and Kent wondered how long it would be before sentries noticed that no candle-light came from the doorway. The upsetting of the table had vanished the light.

Within ten yards they stumbled on workers fitting containers in position. The Irishman, in the lead, stooped, feeling as he went, and Kent heard the clank of metal. Suddenly, from behind them, they heard low calls, then strangled coughing, unmistakable sounds

of confusion. Murphy put on speed and Kent kept pace. They fell over another group of workers, who were crouched, listening.

"Here, stupid," snapped Kent. "Get along the trench and give help. They have bungled with the throwers." His order was obeyed with alacrity. Murphy smashed another container and they hustled on.

The confusion grew louder. There were muffled shouts, given from under gas masks, some one started to sound a gas alarm, and was stopped as suddenly. Some one shot a flare but it fizzled. A bomb exploded. They had just reached a third garrisoned bay, when there came a rush of heavy feet after them. Some cooler head was leading a pursuit of the trouble makers.

"Quick," urged Kent, springing to a gunner who stood post beside a Maxim. "The enemy have reached our trench. Hold them until I get reinforcements."

The fellow snapped into activity. His comrades seized stick bombs and hurled them with a will. Then the machine gun yapped its defiance. Startled shouts, a fusillade of shots, bullets zipping in all directions. Murphy and Kent ducked and ran, but the Irishman halted to break another gas shell. There was a torrent of passionate gutturals in the darkness, to one side, and a bulky figure loomed so close that Kent instinctively attacked with knee and fist. The figure groaned, then struck, but Murphy thrust his pistol close and shot the man through the middle. Kent disentangled himself from the falling body as the Irishman chuckled aloud. "I thought so, me lad. This way to th' gap. We're away."

His voice was high-pitched. A needle of flame stabbed the dark and he staggered against Kent.

"*Donnerwetter—was ist los?*" a muffled voice called from behind them.

They were trapped between two parties, one, in gas masks, coming along the trench, the other a sentry or sentries at the cut wire. Kent supported Murphy, and pushed straight out from the trench, veering left as he judged he was near the wire. The unseen Ger-

man shot again, the flash of his pistol dazzling them.

"*Nein! Nein!*" yelled the men in the trench, and voices berated each other.

KENT bumped into someone and was seized in a bear hug. He pressed the Luger against the man's tunic and pulled trigger. As he was freed, Murphy's pistol barked sharply, and Kent surged to one side, dragging the Irishman with him, trying desperately to avoid a rush of bodies. A tug at his puttees made him feel for wire, and he discovered that they were on the far side of the German barricade—they had reached No-Man's-Land.

Phutt! A flare sizzled up in the soft rain, giving a sickly glow, but revealing the glisten of their wet slickers. Kent saw four Germans at the gap. He shot twice before the light vanished, then dived to one side, yanking Murphy after him. Two shots rang out, two bullets whined past them.

"Off with yer slicker," grunted the corporal, "and bunch them."

They wasted a precious moment discarding the garments and leaving them like prone figures.

"I'm hit in the leg," Murphy groaned, as flares began to pop up all along the front. Machine guns rattled on either flank, and there was excited rifle firing. "Go straight ahead and ye'll find our lines. Tell them about th' gas and th' Ghost Hole. I'll be crawlin' in after ye."

"Shut up," said Kent roughly. He had to speak roughly to hide his feelings. Him leave Murphy? "I'm going to carry you in," he snapped.

But the Boche had no idea of letting the enemy escape with such valuable information as they possessed. Kent had not gone twenty yards with the corporal on his back before he heard men, stumbling and falling as they ran, coming from two directions. He let the Irishman down. Two men, hazy forms in the dark, came hurrying toward them, their pot helmets bobbing queerly.

"*Ist es du, Otto?*" asked Kent, thankful for his deceptive helmet.

The pair bent over the Irishman and

asked a sharp question. Kent's Luger crashed one from behind, and he drove the other man face downward by a desperate plunge, shutting off an outcry. Murphy, on his knees, struck like a rattler, with his Luger, and the fellow lay still.

Kent hurried on with his burden, guided by whispered instructions, and was sure he had escaped all pursuers when a trio of Germans rose, like wraiths, in their path. Murphy shot as he slid from Kent's back and the nearest man pitched forward. Three Lugers barked in unison. Kent felt hot lead graze his neck, received a sharp blow on the shoulder, then saw a second wraith had dissolved.

Crack! Crack! Two shots from Murphy's gat, a moment's quiet, then, like roused dogs, a dozen Maxims barked their hate. Bullets sang above them, around them. Kent felt a warm, sticky flow on his wrist, blood from his shoulder.

"I can't play pick-a-back any longer, corporal," he said shakily. "They got me that time."

"Where?" Despite his hurt, Murphy tried to rise. Then he stilled. "Whisst! Listen!"

Men were coming in the dark, coming without much caution. Murphy gave an eager call. The answer was a rush of feet and a low sputter of American profanity. It was a rescue party from their own company.

KENT turned so that he could see the stretcher beside him. "I hope we're headed for the same hospital, corp," he smiled.

"You damn redhead," snorted Murphy, easing his bandaged leg. "You tried your best to get me killed—but we're buddies, me lad."

"Tried to get you killed?" echoed Kent. "Why, you took such chances—I tried to help, that's all."

"Ye fire-eating' redtop, ye have had too much brandy," jeered Murphy. "Ye were thirstin' for blood."

"For th' luvva Mike, what a pair of babies!" Both stretchers creaked as their occupants looked up to see a griz-

zled top-kick grinning over them. "Th' captain sent me down with a bunch of francs for you birds. He'd come himself, but he's havin' th' artillery shoot up Jerry's gas rigout, and he's ravin' yet about how you guys went over and turned Jerry upside down. 'Redheads for guts,' he says. Here's the frog money. Buy some silk hankies for yer nearest of kin."

"G'wan, stow yer chin," retorted Murphy. "We're away for a vacation from these forget-me-nots th' kaiser kapes heavin' over—and me nearest av kin is th' Haig brothers and Vin sisters."

Kent winked an adieu to the soldier-wise top-kick, then turned to Murphy again. There was a matter he had to get straight. "You'll keep all the money, corporal," he said determinedly. "I don't deserve any of it. Honest, I was scared cold in that ghost dugout, just sat there and let them raise the stairs, when I—I—" He paused for words.

"Kin yez beat it?" Murphy's voice without its rasp. "Listen, soldier, ivery man that has good sense is scared some, then he's fightin' mad about it. I'll spill me secret. The' captain makes me sergeant when we got in, and he wants another corporal. 'Try out that twin brother av yours,' he yaps. 'Take him out in front,' and when ye were callin' from th' Ghost Hole I was hidin' back av that Heinie stiff, with th' help av a small crater, never thinkin' that ye were entertainin' Jerries.

"When I found me mistake I cut over to Heinie's wire, intendin' to watch for yer arrival, but in me haste I tumbled into a nest av them dog-eaters at that gap we come through. Ye know th' rest, and," his chronic gruffness returned, "if ye try any more sich talk I'll have ye reduced to th' ranks. Scared! Me lad, th' only thing that kapes ye from bein' a perfect fightin' man, is yer nationality, a mere matter av geography."

GETTING THE DOUGHS OVER

Of the 2,000,000 American soldiers who were landed in France, 500,000 were sent over in the first thirteen months, and the other million and a half during the last six months of the war, according to official government statistics. The highest troop-carrying months were those of June, 1918, when a total of 306,000 soldiers were transported to Europe.

Most of the troops who sailed for France left from New York. Approximately half of them landed in England and the other half in France. British ships carried 49 per cent of the Americans who went over; American ships 45 per cent; Italian ships 3 per cent; French ships 2 per cent, and the remaining 1 per cent went in Russian ships under British control.

Our troop ships averaged one complete trip in every 35 days, while our cargo ships took an average of 70 days. The cargo fleet was almost exclusively American. By the end of the war it reached a size of 2,700,000 deadweight tons, and carried to Europe about 7,200,000 tons of cargo.

The greatest troop-carrier among all the ships was the *Leviathan*, which landed 12,000 men, or the equivalent of a German division, to France every month. The fastest transports were the *Great Northern* and the *Northern Pacific*, which made complete turnarounds, taking on new troops and starting back in 19 days.