

## More Adventures In Kilt and Khaki.

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### THE EVENING "STAND-TO."

"Rations are up!"

The words were passed along the line.

In one of the bays of the trench the Orderly Corporal had spread a waterproof ground-sheet upon the firing-step, and upon this was dividing and arranging the day's rations into separate portions—one for each mess of four.

"Wha's been playin' at fitba' wi' the breid?" asked Erchie. "Or is thae the loaf's that wis left ower frae the Boer War? They've got gran' beards on them, onyway."

The loaves were much broken and dirtied from the rough usage they had received ere reaching the firing-line, and on their surfaces was a quantity of fine hair gathered from the sandbags in which they had been carried. The cheese had a similar downy appearance.

“One tin of butter between two messes to-night,” said the Corporal, “and Ticklers for everybody.”

Erchie groaned as he surveyed a jam tin. “Turnip jam again, labelled and libelled ‘plum an’ aipple!’ Whenny we to get strawberry jam again, Corporal? It’s nearly a fortnicht since we had it last, an’, man, ah can fecht faur better on strawberry jam than on this dagont glue. A wee tate o’ strawberry jam, an’ ah’m a raig’ler deevil.”

An orderly broke in, “Here, Archie, you’ll have to get a transport section of your own. My back’s nearly broken humping two big parcels of yours up the trench. Judging by their weight there must be bullion in them.”

“Na, na, that’ll juist be some scones o’ ma sister’s bakin’. They’re aye terrible wechty proposeetions.”

The mail was distributed, and thereafter I helped Erchie to carry our mess’s share of it and of the rations to a dugout.

Pudd’n and Gussie lay outstretched on the sandbags that covered the floor of our circumscribed abode, and Erchie tumbled in through the narrow doorway so precipitously that he accidentally trod on Gussie’s hand.

Gussie sat up. “Oh, I say, old chep,” he Kelvinsighed, “I don’t mind you treading on

my hand—I don't really—but you might, please, not loiter on it!"

"Pardonnay-mwaw!" said Erchie, "an' here's bokoo letters fur ye—a percel fur Pudd'n—three letters fur Leo—d'ye pey folk to write to ye?—an' twa percels fur me. Wur awfy popular sweds the nicht."

In his exuberance of spirits he began to execute a step-dance, thereby gravely disarranging the sandbags spread over the floor, while he sang—

"Ashes to ashes and dust to dust,  
 If it werena for the Glasgows  
 The Empire 'ud be bust;  
 Allemands may come, Allemands may go,  
 But where the deuce they go to  
 I dunno . . .  
 Tum-ta-tum-tum—Pom-pom!"

He essayed a final fling at the last note, where-upon his head struck the interlaced branches and twigs that formed the ceiling, and brought down a shower of earth upon us.

Pudd'n expressed his rage with much art, and then he and I, taking up our mess-tins, passed along the trench to draw tea for the mess. An orderly presided over the dixy, and when one had been served with tea he had to crush his way past the other men lined up in the trench

waiting their turn—taking care not to spill any of the priceless fluid in the process.

Erchie was examining the contents of his parcels when we returned to the dugout.

“Scones, pancakes, gingerbreids, an’ lice-killer,” he announced. “We’ll juist have some o’ them a’ toot sweet; an’ the sausages we’ll lea’ to the morn’s mornin’ when we hae time to fry them. Noo for a bong mongzhay!”

We were in the middle of our meal when the Platoon Sergeant’s voice was heard in the trench.

“Comin’, Sergeant,” shouted Pudd’n, scrambling to his feet.

The Sergeant thrust his head through the doorway.

“All right!” he said. “Finish your grub! You—and you—and you”—he indicated Gussie, Pudd’n, and myself—“are detailed for a listening post to-night. You’ll go over immediately after stand-to.”

The Sergeant disappeared.

“Serves ye richt fur jinin’,” said Erchie cheerily. “Tak’ ane o’ thae scones in yer pouch for self-defence in case ony o’ thae German blighters see ye. A hame-made scone that’s been on the road for a week is mair deidly than a bomb ony day.”

. . . . .

Dusk was falling when the order "Stand-to!" was passed along the trench. From every dugout men tumbled forth, and, having buckled on their equipment and fixed bayonets, took their places upon the firing-step, rifle in hand.

Peering over the edge of the parapet one looked directly upon that amazingly complex structure of wooden posts and thin tangled steel that was our barbed wire fortification. Beyond, and terminating in a ridge that serrated the sky-line perhaps three hundred yards away, stretched a plain covered with lank, sickly-yellow grass. Here and there were dark showings of earth, indicative of shell holes: a little to our left a row of bushes, planted at distant and irregular intervals, extended in a straight line from our trenches, being all that survived of what had lately been a compact hedge: at one point a slight, jagged projection of red brick above the earth's surface and an adjacent mound of building stuffs served as monument of a former home. About two hundred yards away, at the foot of the ridge, there was faintly discernible a whitish streak which stretched to right and left for a great distance ere it faded into the grey mirk of evening, and this we knew for the parapet of the enemy's lines.

*Ping-g-g!*—*S-s-s-s!*—An occasional bullet sang over our heads, and there was the intermittent *crack! crack!* of rifles along our lines as our men responded. All evening the ordinary sounds of the trench had been punctuated by a series of dull roars emanating from a point about half a mile to our right, and now each such outburst was heralded by a sudden fierce lightening of the darkness in the south.

“Gled they’re no chuckin’ ony trench mortar bombs ower here,” said Pudd’n, as he stood on tiptoe and craned to see where the bombs were landing; “they’re no stricken bon!”

Even as he spoke the faint crackle of distant “rapid firing” was heard; it gained in intensity until it was as one sustained note of sound, fluctuating but slightly: it grew louder—nearer—louder still: we levelled our rifles on top of the parapet in readiness: the machine gun in the next bay sputtered for a few seconds—was silent—sputtered again.

A dark figure appeared below and behind us—leapt up on to the firing-step between Erchie and Gussie. “Let’s give ’em fits,” said he, and opened fire.

“Righto, Corporal!” said Gussie, and his rifle spat flame and death.

For five minutes or so we pumped a rapid succession of bullets into the darkness ahead, taking rough aim at the spot where we judged the German front line to be; our arms ached with the effort of jerking the bolt to and fro, and an inexplicable, wild excitement was upon us. The battalion stationed on our left had also caught the fever and had joined in the rapid fire—and battalions beyond that too; perhaps the fever and the crackling sound reached to the sea. A few bullets whistled over us, but the enemy was not responding to our overtures in any great measure. Now the darkness was suddenly dispelled as a number of flares soared upward from the German lines, making the night a ghastly whiteness. Then——

“Cease fire, you fellows! Who the devil told you to open a ‘rapid’?”

An officer was speaking from the trench behind us, and at his word we desisted and passed the command “Cease fire!” along to the next bay. The crackle faded gradually into the Northern distance.

Said Pudd’n, “The Allemands have got the wind up now, sure. Dekko (look at) a’ thae flares!”

The Lance-Corporal drew back the bolt of his rifle, inserted a fresh clip of cartridges, jammed them home, and closed the cut-off.



“Wouldn’t be surprised,” said he, “if the blighters retaliate. We’ll be having ‘bokoo’ shells over here before long. Funny that they haven’t——”

His rifle slipped from his fingers and clattered to the ground: his body suddenly crumpled up, and, falling backwards, struck the parados and thence slid down and into the trench.

Gussie leapt down from the firing-step.

“Stretcher-bearers to the right!” he roared. Then, “Here, give’s a hand to lift him up, somebody!”

But what he saw by the light of a flare sickened him.

We laid the body on the firing-step and covered the upper part with a waterproof sheet.

. . . . .

The air was hideous with the scream of bullets. They skimmed over the parapet—just above our heads—and—*sput, sput, sput!*—plugged into the sandbags. The Germans were returning past favours, and had opened a “rapid fire” on us. Our machine guns raked the enemy’s parapet, and Pudd’n and a few other daring spirits occasionally tried a hasty shot at the flame-spitting line of the opposing trenches, but most of us were content to let the shower of



lead pass over ere we exposed the smallest part of ourselves in the upper air.

After a few minutes the noise of firing subsided, and soon there was a stillness such that one could hear the upward rush of the Germans' star rockets.

The Platoon Sergeant appeared.

"Where are the men detailed for the listening-post? Oh, you're here! Stand by in readiness to go over—it won't be for a wec while yet—give the Allemands time to quieten down after the little 'hurroosh!' I'll give you the wire (I'll advise you) when you're to go."

A few minutes later—"Stand-to's off!"—the words passed from mouth to mouth along the trench. Those of the men not detailed for look-out duty jumped down from the firing-step and crawled into their dugouts—to be rooted out within quarter of an hour to fill sandbags and repair the parapet.

But Gussie, Pudd'n, and I, being under orders to go on a listening-post, spent the time of waiting in an endeavour to warm our chilled hands over the flame of the single candle that we possessed.

## THE LISTENING-POST.

We were six privates and a Corporal, and, having received our final instructions, the moment had come when we should "go over."

It had been arranged that three men should be at the listening-post, the other three to remain in reserve in the trench to receive communications. Midway during the seven hours that yet remained until dawn the parties would exchange places.

A method of signalling had been devised. A stout length of twine would extend from the listening-post to the trench, where it would be attached to an old jam tin containing a pebble. One tug at the cord would signify that one member or more of the listening-post was retreating towards the trench—possibly to give an alarm. Two tugs would indicate that a member of the party in the trench was wanted to visit the listening-post—it might be to receive a message. Three tugs would signify "All's well." The line would also serve to guide parties direct to and from the listening-post.

Pudd'n, Gussie, and I had elected to go first on duty, the Corporal to accompany us until we were securely settled. I was deputed to carry the twine and pay it out as we advanced; and attached to Pudd'n's waist was a bomb-carrier containing several Mills bombs to be used in case of emergency.

"Over ye go, an' the best o' luck!" said Erchie, who was on look-out duty in the trench bay in which we were gathered; "an' mind ye dinna juggle thae bombs ower much. Ah wadna like to see you an' Gussie gettin' too sudden a rise in the worl'."

A flare sank to the ground and died out, and there was intense darkness.

"Now's our time, boys!" said the Corporal. "Up with you!"

One after another we laid our rifles on top of the parapet and leapt and scrambled up.

"This way!" said the Corporal, "and keep down"—and was off into the darkness of "No Man's Land." Stooping low we followed in single file. Southward a flare brightened the sky, and in the feeble light it cast around us we paused irresolute and crouched lower.

"Come on, boys," sounded in low accents from the Corporal; "we can't stop for the like of that."

And from behind came a fierce whisper of encouragement from Erchie, "Gawn, chaps! that's naething—only an Allemand lightin' a spunk!"

Pudd'n snorted a suppressed laugh, and the Corporal emitted a peremptory "S-sh!"

We reached our barbed wire entanglement, and started on the slow and difficult task of crossing it noiselessly. Our kilts were bothersome, and one had no sooner freed them from the clinging wire at one place than they had formed a strong attachment at another; and, despite our utmost care, the wires jangled at moments in a manner that sounded alarming to our nervous ears.

"Ah'm scartit fae heid to fit," whispered Pudd'n once, as I strove to disentangle his buff apron from three separate strands of wire; "it's a stricken good job there's no a machine gun——"

"Down!" The word broke simultaneously from three pairs of lips.

A star rocket soared upward from the German lines and burst into light. In the fierce white glare all the world about us was made hideously distinct, and amid the wires we crouched low and motionless. When darkness had again plunged down on us we did not move

or speak for perhaps a half minute, then with one accord each rose and strove to fight his way through the remainder of the entanglement.

At last we stood on the side farther from our lines, and moved forward in close succession, the Corporal — who led the way — whispering warning of any irregularity in the earth's surface or other impediment likely to trip unwary feet. Suddenly I heard immediately behind me the appalling rattle of a tin can, followed by a muffled gasp from Pudd'n and a heavy thud.

“Halt, you two in front!” I whispered, and turning, “What's up, Pudd'n? Where are you?”

I found him sitting on the ground trying to extricate his legs from a contrivance formed of two or three hoops of barbed wire fastened together crosswise, and with a tin can attached. He had inadvertently strayed a little to the right of the path we were following, and had stumbled into the ball of wire designed to warn us of the approach of any Germans to our fortifications and to impede their advance. I helped to free him from the encumbrance, and we moved forward again.

When we were perhaps seventy yards in front of our own lines and about twice as many from the enemy's, the Corporal halted.

“There’s an old sap a little to the right—over there,” he whispered.

But Pudd’n broke in hoarsely, “Oh, Crickey! don’t go there. It’s fu’ o’ rats. I was on a listenin’-post there afore, an’ we wur nearly ett up.”

“That’s what I was going to say,” continued the Corporal. “I think we should stay here, or look for a good shell hole.”

“Me for the shell hole!” said Gussie.

We advanced again, choosing our steps with the utmost care, yet the swish of the grass as we moved our feet seemed as loud as the noise of mighty running waters; and to one at least—whose first experience this was of straying in No Man’s Land—the palpitation of his heart seemed as the tattoo of many drums. The nervous suspense was intense.

*Pop!* and a spluttering spark trailed into the sky—we threw ourselves forward full length on the grass—and again a fierce white light beat down upon us and upon all the earth around.

Crack! Crack! Crack! The distant sounds of desultory rifle fire were audible to our straining senses: there was a rustling in the grass near us, and a squeaking that was as a world-filling din. Gussie essayed to shift a part of his equipment on which he had been lying, and the Corporal said “S-sh!” sharply and irritably.

*Pop! pop!* Two more flares made night into ghastly day, and ere the grateful darkness had come again a machine gun rattled, and for a second or two the air hissed with the flight of bullets.

“Allemands!” gasped Pudd’n. “D’ye think they’ve seen us?”

But no one answered, and again the faint cracking of distant rifle fire was the only sound in the world.

After a minute or so of this tense, breathless silence Gussie spoke, his mouth close to my ear: “The Corporal thinks we’re safe to move now. There’s a shell hole about fifteen yards ahead, and we’ll move up to it on all fours—one after another. Corporal’s going first—then me—then you—then Pudd’n. Pass it on to him!”

I advised Pudd’n of the arrangement, and a minute later was crawling on hands and knees towards the shell hole, paying out the communication cord as I went. A rim of upturned earth surrounded the hole, and as I clambered over this someone caught me by the wrist and whispered, “Be careful what you’re doing. The sides are very steep, and there’s water at the foot of the hole.”

“Righto, Gussie!” I whispered back, and thereupon proceeded to slide down—down—



down the crumbling bank. When Pudd'n joined us a minute later I had only just succeeded in securing myself in a stable position at the inner edge of the pit.

The Corporal slunk off into the darkness, and a little later three distinct tugs at the communication cord apprised us that he had reached the shelter of the trench and that all was well. For some time after that we lay motionless and silent, our eyes peering over the edge of the shell hole and taking advantage of every flare that served to make the German trenches visible. The distant boom of cannon and of bursting bombs was audible, and the thin squealing of rats was all around us. Occasionally two red specks of light glowed balefully out of the darkness within a few inches of one's face, and if one did but blow or make a slight movement of the head the eyes vanished to the accompaniment of the rustling of grass and a further squeaking.

It was Pudd'n who first spoke. "O Goad!" he breathed, as he shifted his leg, "thae rats are makin' a feed aff me. There's yin o' them tryin' to snaffle ma puttee, wi' ma leg in't an' a'. Strafe them!"

"S-sh! Do you hear that!" said Gussie.

We listened intently for perhaps a minute, straining to catch the slightest unusual sound. My ears detected nothing, and I was on the point of asking my companion what he thought he had heard, when—the sound of a voice raised in laughter reached me. And then I could recognise the occasional note of a man's voice—a mere indistinguishable word dropping out of the silence.

“Allemands for a pinch,” muttered Gussie at last.

Our bodies cold and cramped, but with every sense alert, we waited while the minutes dree'd their weary length—and then a sudden, unaccustomed sound fell on our ears.

Rigid, tense, our heads uplifted slightly as in expectation, we waited, but the sound was not repeated.

“That was a wire rattlin’,” said Pudd'n.

“A working party,” said I.

“It explains the voices in the trench,” said Gussie.

A flare started on its rainbow flight from the British trenches, and we raised ourselves a little and scanned the German lines.

“Ah see them,” whispered Pudd'n excitedly—“juist ower there.”

But Gussie and I confessed that we had distinguished no human forms. Pudd'n, however,

was positive, and we deemed it best to advise our comrades in the trench. Gussie tugged the communication cord and crept away. And soon, by the light of another flare, I saw—or thought I saw—a dark upstanding figure suddenly disappear—as a man would who assumed a crouching position, and I heard Pudd'n's voice, "Was ah no richt? Did ye see them that time? Allemands, fur a wager!"

The darkness now held something of terror. If some of the enemy—so near at hand—should sally forth unobserved and catch us unaware; if a German patrol should come upon us from the rear!

I felt Pudd'n move, and knew he was glancing backward—knew it because I was on the point of doing so myself.

Reassured, "Ah thoct ah heard something ahint," he whispered, "but it maun juist hae been a rat."

"Pudd'n," I replied, my lips touching his ear, "I can see more Allemands in the dark than the Kaiser ever saw at a review in the day-time."

Pudd'n emitted a ghost of a chuckle. "Aye, but bombs is nae guid fur makin' thae blighters 'ally.' Rum's the best thing fur gettin' yersel' rid o' them. Crickey! ah wish ah had a

wee tot the noo. Ah'm near foun'ert wi' the cauld."

Another long, tense silence, and again we heard the jangling of a wire; and there were further faint, unrecognisable sounds.

We were both suffering extreme discomfort now from cold and the stiffness that was the result of our strained physical position; we spoke infrequently.

But once Pudd'n whispered abruptly, "Whitty ye thinkin' about the noo?"

I laughed inwardly, and—"I was thinking I'd cheerfully sell my soul for a single pipeful of tobacco. . . . And you?"

Pudd'n hesitated; then—"Ah wis thinkin' about the tert," he affirmed more shyly than was his wont.

A pause: a sigh from Pudd'n, and a querulous whisper, more to himself than to me—"Crivens! ah wunner if her and me'll ever dauner again through Rouken Glen thegither!"

Another pause: then in a tone of infinite resignation, "It's a heluva war!"

The conversation expired, and was not resumed even when Gussie rejoined us.

It was shortly after this that a succession of flares went up from our trenches—possibly in an endeavour to intimidate or affright the German

working party. Then there was the rapid puff! puff! puff! of a machine gun and the song of flying bullets.

“Jumping Jehoshaphat!” muttered Gussie. “This isn’t bon. I hope the blighters ‘haven’t forgotten we’re here.”

We cowered down into our shell hole, and Pudd’n had the misfortune to slide into the water at the foot, which reached to his knees. But the machine gun fire did not last long, and soon we resumed our old positions at the lip of the hole and waited—waited in an agony of discomfort—for the reliefs to come. At last the Corporal and another man arrived, and Gussie crept off towards the trenches, and in succession, as our reliefs arrived, Pudd’n and I followed.

For three hours more we sat huddled together in a bay in the front line, silent for the most part, smoking innumerable cigarettes to keep us awake, and acknowledging always the three tugs at the communication cord which advised us from time to time that all was well with our pals “out yonder.” Then in due course they too appeared one after the other out of the darkness, and leapt down from the parapet on to the firing-step. Soon afterwards a faint pallor was discernible in the eastern sky, and a grey light crept over the world.

A sleepy-eyed young subaltern came shivering round a traverse.

“Stand-to, you men! Pass the word along.”

Gussie drew aside the waterproof sheet hung over the entrance to a dugout, and, putting his head inside the aperture, shouted, “Turn out, boys! ‘Stand-to’ is on!”

I warned the men in the next bay.

Then, with the weariness of a sleepless, anxious night upon us, we took our places on the firing-step, and, listless, saw the morning skies blazon forth their ancient message of hope.