

**ARMY BOYS IN THE
FRENCH TRENCHES: OR,
HAND TO HAND FIGHTING
WITH THE ENEMY**

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Army Boys in the French Trenches: Or, Hand to Hand Fighting with the Enemy by Homer
Randall & Robert Gaston Herbert

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HOMER RANDALL & ROBERT GASTON HERBERT

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HAND TO HAND FIGHTING WITH
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BY

HOMER RANDALL

AUTHOR OF

"ARMY BOYS IN FRANCE" AND "ARMY BOYS ON THE
FIRING LINE"

ILLUSTRATED BY

ROBERT GASTON HERBERT

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ARMY BOYS IN THE FRENCH
TRENCHES
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ARMY BOYS IN THE FRENCH TRENCHES

CHAPTER I

A SLASHING ATTACK

"STAND ready, boys. We attack at dawn!"

The word passed in a whisper down the long line of the trench, where the American army boys crouched like so many khaki-clad ghosts, awaiting the command to go "over the top."

"That will be in about fifteen minutes from now, I figure," murmured Frank Sheldon to his friend and comrade, Bart Raymond, as he glanced at the hands of his radio watch and then put it up to his ear to make sure that it had not stopped.

"It'll seem more like fifteen hours," muttered Tom Bradford, who was on the other side of Sheldon.

"Tom's in a hurry to get at the Huns," chuckled Billy Waldon. "He wants to show them where they get off."

"I saw him putting a razor edge on his bayonet last night," added Bart. "Now he's anxious to see how it works."

"He'll have plenty of chances to find out," said Frank. "This is going to be a hot scrap, or I miss my guess. I heard the captain tell the lieutenant that the Germans had their heaviest force right in front of our part of the line."

"So much the better," asserted Billy stoutly. "They can't come too thick or too fast. They've been sneering at what the Yankees were going to do in this war, and it's about time they got punctures in their tires."

At this moment the mess helpers passed along the line with buckets of steaming hot coffee, and the men welcomed it eagerly, for it was late in the autumn and the night air was chill and penetrating.

"Come, little cup, to one who loves thee well," murmured Tom, as he swallowed his portion in one gulp.

The others were not slow in following his example, and the buckets were emptied in a twinkling.

Then the stern vigil was renewed.

From the opposing lines a star shell rose and exploded, casting a greenish radiance over the barren stretch of No Man's Land that separated the hostile forces.

"Fritz isn't asleep," muttered Frank.

"He's right on the job with his fireworks," agreed Bart.

"Maybe he has his suspicions that we're going to give him a little surprise party," remarked Billy, "and that's his way of telling us that he's ready to welcome us with open arms."

"Fix bayonets!" came the command from the officer in charge, and there was a faint clink as the order was obeyed.

"It won't be long now," murmured Tom. "But why don't the guns open up?"

"They always do before it's time to charge," commented Billy, as he shifted his position a little. "I suppose they will now almost any minute."

"I don't think there'll be any gun fire this time before we go over the top," ventured Frank.

"What do you mean?" asked Bart in surprise, as he turned his head toward his chum.

"Do you know anything?" queried Tom.

"Not exactly know, but I've heard enough to make a guess," replied Frank. "I think we're going to play the game a little differently this time. Unless I'm mistaken, the Huns are going to get the surprise of their lives."

"Put on gas masks!" came another order, and in the six seconds allowed for this operation the masks were donned, making the men in the long line look like so many goblins.

It was light enough for them to see each other now, for the gray fingers of the dawn were al-

ready drawing the curtain of darkness aside from the eastern sky.

One minute more passed—a minute of tense, fierce expectation, while the boys gripped their rifles until it seemed that their fingers would bury themselves in the stocks.

Crash!

With a roar louder than a thousand guns the earth under the German first-line trenches split asunder, and tons of rock and mud and guns and men were hurled toward the sky.

The din was terrific, the sight appalling, and the shock for an instant was almost as great to the Americans as to their opponents, though far less tragic.

"Now, men," shouted their lieutenant, "over with you!" and with a wild yell of exultation the boys clambered over the edge of the trench and started toward the German lines.

"We're off!" panted Frank, as, with eyes blazing and bayonet ready for instant use, he rushed forward in the front rank.

"To a flying start!" gasped Bart, and then because breath was precious they said no more, but raced on like greyhounds freed from the leash.

On, on they went, with the wind whipping their faces! On, still on, to the red ruin wrought by the explosion of the mine.