

BOOK II
SECRET SERVICE DAYS

CHAPTER I

ON ACTIVE SERVICE

ON the 4th August, 1914, I joined my regiment at Glasgow—the 1st Scottish Rifles “Cameronians”—and by the 14th of the same month left Southampton aboard the s.s. *Caledonia*, en route for France.

At Valenciennes we brigaded with the 1st Middlesex, 2nd Royal Welsh Fusiliers and 2nd Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders, comprising what was eventually to become the famous 19th Infantry Brigade, which, although deputed for Lines of Communication, was, through urgent military reasons, destined to become the unit that did all actual rear-guard fighting from Mons almost to the gates of Paris.

The battles of Mons, Le Cateau, Landrecies, the Aisne, and First Battle of Ypres have passed into history, but I hope my readers will excuse me if I quite naturally digress a little to the war while I am entering into the second part of my book. My active service reminiscences must, of necessity, begin at the initial stage when I was a private soldier of the original First English Expeditionary Force—the glorious “Old Contemptibles,” to which I had the distinction to belong.

When war broke out my only brother and I both joined up. It seemed strange that I should go safely through some of the fiercest engagements, yet that my brother should be killed in his first attack. His name can be seen on the beautiful Cenotaph between St. Laurence and Ramsgate—Samuel Woodhall, age 41, killed in action.

The first shots between the Germans and English, when they came face to face as enemies for the first time in modern history, took place at twenty minutes to one on the afternoon of Sunday, August 24th, 1914, and from that period onward to the 6th September, my brigade was constantly in action.

An incident of 1914 days which will remain impressed upon my memory concerns the two late Field-Marsals of the British Army—the Earl of Ypres and Earl Haig, then Sir John French and Sir Douglas Haig.

It was on the fifth day of our retirement, in face of the German hordes, amidst terrific heat and dust, when, with a few men of my brigade, I went into a large yard of a deserted farm for the purpose of filling water-bottles.

To our astonishment, we saw the Union Jack, and in a large dust-covered car, the Commander-in-Chief. Standing close by, and in deep silence, was a group of officers, who, irrespective of the white dust covering them from head to foot, were obviously of high staff rank.

Their faces, like those of the troops staggering by outside, were grime-covered, unshaven, and haggard, with eyes sunken and hollow from want of sleep.

We instinctively turned to go back to the road outside, when one beckoned me towards him, and, as I came near, I at once recognised the handsome features of Sir Douglas Haig, 1st Army Commander.

"What do you boys want?" he asked in lowered tones.

Saluting, I replied: "Only water, sir, if there's any to be got."

"Yes," he answered. "There's a pump round there. Take what you want, but, for the love of Heaven, get it quietly. Make no noise—your Commander-in-Chief has been asleep for five minutes—the first he has had for nearly four days."

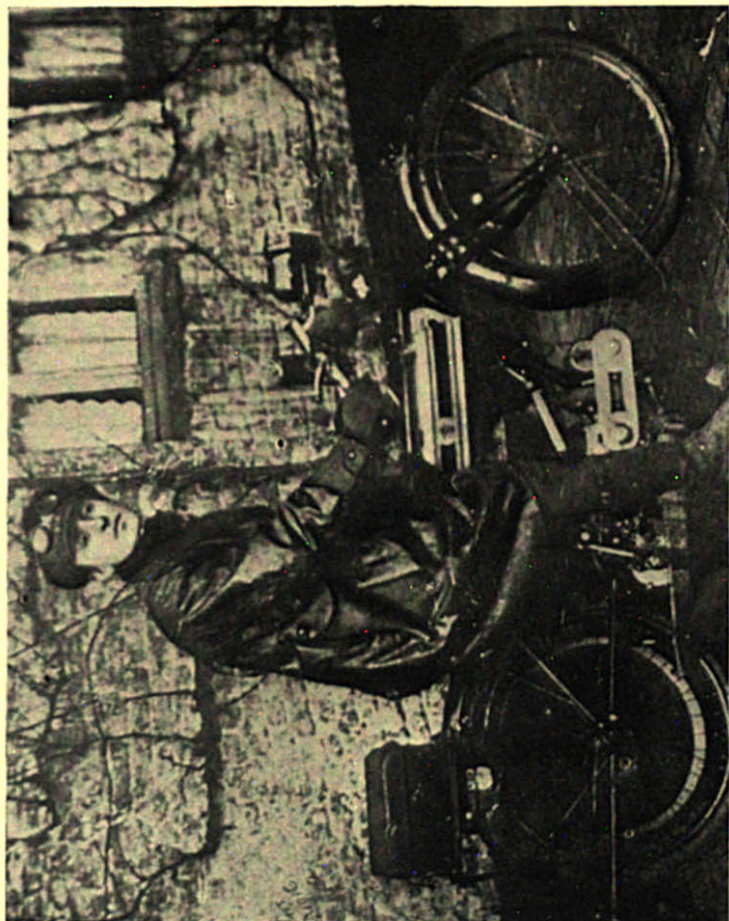
As I passed by on my way to the pump I saw Sir John French lying back in the corner of his car—asleep.

To others, as well as myself, the incident conveyed all that our leaders had to endure. The strain on the men was terrible, but who can fully realise the ordeal which these great soldiers passed in the darkest hours of our Nation's history?

I served with my regiment from Mons to the Marne, from the Aisne to Flanders, and in 1915, by the instructions of my commanding officer, Sir Phillip Robinson, D.S.O., K.C.B., M.V.O., was transferred to the counter-espionage department of the Intelligence Department, Secret Service. This meant a position of responsibility and opportunity for adventure, which was all to my liking.

It does not need much imagination on the part of anyone who was present in France in those days to picture how arduous was our work in the Intelligence Department.

The country was teeming with German hirelings and spies of all kinds. We had to keep constant vigilance for mysterious lights, pigeon-flying, suspects in British and French uniform, and scrutinise and inquire into the credentials of all civilian labourers working behind the lines. The tricks, resources, and ramifications of the German Secret Service were legion.



THE AUTHOR IN FRANCE IN 1915

For instance, on one occasion a French soldier in uniform on leave came into the town of Estaires with his aged father. Questioned as to what they were doing behind the British Lines, in the zone of the armies, they produced their *laisser-passer* and said that they wished to visit their former home to see if they could discover a small hoard of money hidden during the first on-rush of the German armies.

The Town Major, or British Assistant Provost-Marshal, accepted their version and gave them the necessary authority to proceed to their native village, a shell-blasted derelict place inhabited only by British Artillery observation officers, and within incessant gun-fire of the German Lines, also in the immediate rear of the British and Canadian section of trenches. I happened to call upon the Town Mayor that day, having just come through on a commission from 3rd Corps Army Headquarters. In fact, as I alighted from my Triumph motor-cycle, our friend and his aged parent came out of his office.

I knocked at his door, saluted and entered. He knew me. "Good morning, Sergeant," he said.

"Good morning, sir," I answered. "Anything my way to-day?"

"No!" he replied, "one or two lights at night; but the Town Guard saw to that."

We continued to talk, and I asked him quite casually who were the old man and his son. When he told me, I was suspicious at once. In fact, right throughout my Secret Service days I fostered a dual nature, for I suspected, in the exigencies of my work, everything and everybody until satisfied.

"You'll excuse me, sir," I said, "but I think you have exceeded your duty. I shall report this incident to Army Headquarters."

I did not wait for his reply—but dashed off out and on to my "bike."

It did not take me long to overtake them, and dismounting, I saluted the French soldier and said:

"Pardon, I am a sergeant of the English Military Police. Show me your military bock!"

He explained that he had come on leave; in fact, repeated exactly what the Major had previously told me, and everything appeared to be in order, but, just to be on the safe side, they were closely watched—so much so that though they

were afterwards found to be "suspect" by the French Authorities, they did not, on that occasion, attempt to carry out their scheme, whatever it was, and had to stick to their assumed rôle. The result of my report to headquarters was a transfer of the Town Major and an immediate tightening up all round, the Army Brigade and Divisional Provost-Marshal being the only authorities to visa and issue permits of any description.

With regard to the Allied Secret Service, I state emphatically it was far superior to that of the German.

In real military Secret Service work there is only one set of people who can be relied on, and they are the real military spies who act out of purely patriotic motives, and whom I would term, for the want of a better definition, "national spies."

The French displayed much daring, resource and intrepid bravery in work of this description, and to quote Colonel W. Nicolai (Chief of the German Secret Service) will, I think, be the best example of what I am trying to convey :

"In 1915 nine 'air spies'—four in uniform—and five aeroplanes fell into our hands. Attempts to pick up the spies again were watched. The French aeroplanes would fly at the arranged time over the landing place, kept under observation by German counter-espionage agents. But the airmen in such cases flew at a considerable height, because the sign agreed upon that the coast was clear was not given. In no case was it definitely ascertained that an 'air spy' was really taken off again.

"Some were caught far behind the front in Eastern Belgium. They were instructed that if they reached Holland they were to report to the French Consul, who would see to their return to France.

"Some of them had instructions to destroy railway lines and bridges in the rear of the German army, especially in those parts of the front in which a German attack was expected or an Allied offensive was to take place.

"*Regarding successful enterprises of this nature nothing can be ascertained.*

"The usefulness of air spies lay mainly in the information they sent by their carrier pigeons.

"This method of obtaining information could not be resorted to by the German military authorities. *No enemy*



GERMAN INTELLIGENCE MEN TRANSPORTING WIRELESS AND PIGEONS

prisoners of war were found who would undertake work of this nature against their own country."

In respect to bravery displayed by the enemy, they were our equal, but they suffered from being in enemy territory, with inhabitants favourable to the Allies. They tried our methods, but I do not think from a military point of view, they had the success of the Allies.

I recall seeing the shattered body of a spy near Albert in 1916. He had been dropped from an enemy aeroplane during the night, but his parachute had failed to act. He had given his life for the Fatherland with fortitude as did our own brave men for their cause.

We certainly had much trouble in those days with some French and Belgian civilians working in the pay of the enemy.

Lieut. E. H. King, Intelligence Officer of my brigade, arrested a man named Debacker-Polydore, of Croix de Bac, in the act of cutting our telegraph wires with a pair of insulated pliers.

He was tried by the French Civil and Military Authorities, found guilty, and shot as a spy on the 11th November, 1914.

These, it is perhaps needless to say, being inhabitants of the parts in which they operated, were far more difficult to deal with than were German members of the Huns' Secret Service who had crossed the lines for the purpose of espionage. I do not think many got back. In fact, towards 1917, our Intelligence Department had become so efficient that it was almost an impossibility for any civilian in the zone of the armies to move without his every movement being accounted for and recorded.

Pigeons upon both sides played quite an important part during the war. The Germans often using them to send into various secret homing lofts in the Allied territories, or, on the other hand, back to different parts of the occupied territories in Germany.

I have dealt with cases of enemy pigeons in many parts of the British line, some having alighted by reason of mating instinct, exhaustion, or wounds.

Dogs, also, were used by both sides, and in cases of attack could be trained to advantage. Some of these dumb animals showed remarkable intelligence, and conveyed, backwards and forwards repeatedly in the face of death, very valuable information.

Paddy, the dear little mongrel dog whose life-story at some future time I intend to write, is only one of the many dumb Secret Service Agents that worked for the belligerents upon both sides during the war.

In the first months of hostilities it was much easier, and often, too, innocent civilians became entangled in the machinations of spies without knowing it, as witness the case of the old lady of Fleurbaix.

In the early days of the war I had occasion to be in the neighbourhood of this village, and, owing to my duty, had been keeping watch at certain cross-roads for something entirely different from that which I am about to relate.

On two evenings I saw an old peasant woman pass me at about the same time, so, on the third evening, I considered it strange.

On the fourth evening I kept out of sight, but observed that the old lady passed just as before and in the same direction. Having decided to keep watch and satisfy myself about her, I discovered that she invariably entered a partly-ruined church at about seven in the evening, always carrying a little basket.

Evening after evening I discovered this performance to be a regular thing, so I decided to act. She entered the church, went straight to a door in the tower, and began to mount the shell-smashed stairs. Up she went, muttering and mumbling in Flemish, and at last reached the top story.

She had no idea that I was close behind her, and when I confronted her, she was in the act of handing provisions from her basket to an officer in British uniform.

For a moment I was nonplussed, but, realising that I must go on, I demanded to know who he was, and what he was doing there under such peculiar circumstances.

With great indignation, he replied.

"What do you 'vont' to know for."

That was enough. I whipped out my revolver and covered him. He asked if I had gone crazy, and threatened all sorts of punishments; and I must admit he nearly bluffed me—but that little word "vont" for "want" was, I instinctively knew, the mark of the Teuton.

His statement was that he was attached to the "X" Battery and was then on duty as observation officer.

Determined to see it through, I made him precede me down-



PADDY

stairs and asked him to accompany me to his commanding officer.

It was then that the truth came out.

He was a German officer, though speaking English almost perfectly. He had been for ten days in the tower and had communicated the movements of our troops by means of a field-telephone, purposely left by the Germans when driven out of the village. When it appeared that he could bluff no longer, he became quite candid.

"You were lucky," he said. "In another six hours I should have been back across the lines."

He smiled as he added :

"The fortune of war !"

The poor old woman was quite an innocent factor. She had been asked by this officer during one of his night expeditions to bring him a daily supply of food, and, thinking him British, and entirely ignorant of military law, she had complied.

The spy, it transpired, had been the manager of a well-known London hotel and had been recalled to the German flag in July, 1914.

I never know how he ended, but I do not think we shot him. He was taken away by car for interrogation, and, I believe, interned.

My last impression of him was seated in a large Rolls-Royce car between two armed officers *en route* for an unknown destination. As the car moved off, his fine blue eyes met mine.

I smiled and saluted. Yes ! a brave man. But he was a spy against my country.

On November 22nd, 1916, in full view of thousands of mud-grimed soldiers, who watched the combat from their trenches, took place one of the most deadly aerial combats of the War.

It was between Manfred von Richthofen, Germany's crack ace and Captain Hawker, at that time the most daring and intrepid English airman in the Royal Flying Corps.

Both men, respectively, had a long list of enemy deaths upon their escutcheons of fame and both, as great belligerent champions, were destined one day to meet.

It was a duel between two highly-experienced enemy leaders for the recognised supremacy. Like two fighting eagles, they circled and manœuvred around each other to gain the vital advantage, and the memory of this sight will remain with me for all time.

132 DETECTIVE AND SECRET SERVICE DAYS

With a strong pair of glasses I watched from a forward artillery officer's observation post near Albert, the last encircling aerial evolution of the English plane.

By this time Hawker had driven Richthofen well over the German lines towards Bapaume, and from what I could gather, they were going around and around each other in swift and ever-narrowing circles, both playing for the position of target with their machine-guns.

To this day, I can never account for it. Perhaps it was some curious optical illusion—but it seemed to happen in a second—suddenly the German red Fokker was behind the English plane spitting machine-gun fire—fifty yards from behind the tail of Hawker's machine.

With a roaring glide I saw the English machine race earthward toward the German lines—and that was the last seen of one of the greatest English airmen.

Let me add in passing, that Baron Manfred von Richthofen, whom I saw upon many occasions in aerial combat with the Allies—has been admitted to be the greatest aerial "Ace" of the world.

Up to the day of his death, April 21st, 1918, near the lines of the Thirty-third Australian Field Battery, 5th Division, between Sailley-le-Sec, not far from Corbie, on the Somme, he had brought down no less than eighty of the Allied aeroplanes.

He took toll upon English, French and Americans, among whose names are to be found Hawker, Ball, McCudden, Immelmaan, Guynemer, Lugberry, and Quintin Roosevelt.

A well-known American journalist, Mr. Floyd Gibbon, attributes the death of Richthofen to the machine-gun fire of Captain Roy Brown, who came up behind while the German was pursuing another English airman named Lieut. May.

May, with Richthofen roaring behind him was racing from death with no ammunition. He was planing down in a race towards the British trenches. Near the Australian lines the machines could not have been more than a hundred yards apart—and some of the "Diggers" were firing on the Red Fokker of the German.

Suddenly Captain Brown, from out of the blue, as it were, and behind Richthofen, swooped down—and up—releasing as he did so a deadly volley into the cockpit of the Fokker beneath.

Officially, the R.F.C. claim the Red Knight of Germany's death—but to this day the surviving witnesses of the 5th



LAST PHOTO EVER TAKEN OF "THE RED KNIGHT OF GERMANY"

Australian Division claim that a shot from one of their men had already killed the Baron before Captain Brown swooped down upon him from behind.

In a large marquee tent the body of Richthofen lay in state behind the British Lines for two or three days prior to its interment.

Thousands of officers from all parts of the Allied front came to see the remains of this daring German airman.

In burying him with full military honours, the British paid the highest tribute possible to the memory of a gallant foe.

Another recollection of the War—and one of the most treasured—goes back to the period when the Heir-Apparent, our beloved Prince of Wales, was attached to the General Staff in France.

His known contempt for danger and his habit of "looking for trouble" were a constant source of anxiety to the high officers responsible for his safety.

The method of guarding the Prince was for his "shadower" to assume various rôles which would render him inconspicuous. Mine usually was that of a dispatch rider.

Often it was quite impossible to keep him in sight, and there were many times when Headquarters received a nasty shock because the Prince was missing.

On one occasion it was suddenly realized that the Prince had not been seen for some time, and, although enquiries were immediately instituted, nobody seemed to know where he had gone.

The first knowledge that I had of the trouble was when I was approached by several Staff Officers in a long communication trench. They were breathless with hurrying, and were obviously in a state of great anxiety.

One of them recognised me, and a look of relief came over his face as he said: "*Oh, here's the Intelligence Police chap; perhaps he can tell us something.*"

I could, and I did. I had been trailing the Prince for hours, and at the time during which Headquarters were in a mortal funk lest something should have happened to him, the Prince was in the corner of a machine-gun emplacement, talking to a young lieutenant, some sergeants and a big bunch of interested Tommies.

Can it be wondered that he is so beloved by us all?

He said : " I found my manhood in France," and never was a truer and more sincere speech uttered. First and foremost he is a man and a Prince afterwards.

It was not long after this that there occurred an incident which might have robbed the throne of its heir.

I was waiting for him to set out on one of his daily pilgrimages when suddenly I saw a high-powered car drive up to the headquarters at Merville. It was clear that he was going up the line, and it was equally clear that he would be going at a pace with which it would be impossible for me to keep up on my bike, good engine though it had.

I hung on as long as I possibly could, but at length lost sight of the car altogether.

However, I carried on until I got well into the danger zone, and the German artillery were putting over some very heavy stuff. I pulled up and made some enquiries of a few Tommies, and through this medium I managed to pick up the trace of the Prince and set off in the direction where he had been last seen. It was in the artillery area and in the very heart of a shell-blasted region.

At that moment a terrible roar and crash indicated the explosion of a shell on a derelict farm about four hundred yards to my front, and I hurried on.

Suddenly, I came upon the Prince standing near to a wall, looking shaky and distinctly pale. And small wonder. It appears that he had left his car in what he considered to be a place of comparative shelter—that is to say, he had left it protected by a thick wall that had been left standing.

He had gone out a little way, and, on his return, was horrified to find that both the wall and the car had been blown to atoms.

A few seconds earlier, and he would have been killed.

More than once (he got to know me and spoke to me often) I have detected a gleam of amusement in his eyes when he caught sight of me. I have seen him glance round at me with a little smile as much as to say :

" So you still insist on shadowing me. Right, old chap ! I'll give you a run for your money. By the time I've finished with you and my walk across country, you'll be glad to get back on that old motor-bike of yours ! "



WIRE REPAIRING—AFTER THE BATTLE

CHAPTER II

THE "MYSTERIOUS" LIGHT

LATER on in the war I was transferred to Boulogne, Paris, and Le Havre, and at the last named place, not only met with adventures, but came into contact with a number of interesting persons and became acquainted with numerous secrets of espionage. Of the latter I could tell many stories which I am not at liberty to set down at the moment.

I have only one recollection of the subject of the Intelligence Police Department having been touched upon before, and that was by Sir Basil Thomson, late Assistant Commissioner, New Scotland Yard, in his book entitled, *Queer People*.

He refers to the department only very briefly, inasmuch as he states how the nucleus of the Intelligence Police was formed in the initial stages of war, how it was made up, and the type of personnel.

I will go farther and state that I consider the brunt of the main work of prevention and detection of espionage in France at this time was conducted by Lieut.-Col. J. S. Knox Lamb, O.B.E., and many other officers, including Captain Priestly, D.S.O., who was in command, at my time, of Le Havre Base.

The former distinguished officer was fortunate in having at his utilization such clever and brilliant police detectives loaned from Headquarters London Metropolitan Police, as M. Clancy, A. Canning, W. Selby, A. Lander, P. Worth, P. Smith, J. Brown, W. Tireback, C. Kite, Trevet Reid, T. Hunson, C. Frost, Inspector Burt, and the late Inspectors E. Hill and Leo Gough.

Attached to these experienced men was another section of capable auxiliaries who augmented the Intelligence Police on the Lines of Communication and Army Areas, and were drawn from the best class of educated British manhood procurable.

All of them were efficient linguists and comprised of such types as stockbrokers, partners of big business houses, civil, mechanical, and electrical engineers, artists, journalists, surveyors, accountants, men of travel—men of good family, men of the world. In fact, the finest types and the best

136 DETECTIVE AND SECRET SERVICE DAYS

brains obtainable, judiciously selected and trained to play their part to combat the machinations of the enemy's espionage system.

My main duties at Le Havre were at the "Gare des Voyageurs," the main arrival and departure station for Rouen and Paris. I was attached to the French Commissaire Special, and my primary duties consisted of examination of all persons travelling with British passports, while the French detectives were responsible for all passports of other nationalities.

By certain pre-arranged visas or markings, I knew who were suspect and who were otherwise. The code was known to all members of the Intelligence Police, and although specific instructions were issued in regard to such, each Intelligence Police member acted on his own initiative and responsibility in determining his line of action in any unforeseen contingency.

The French Detective Chief, or Commissaire Special, was, during my tenure of office, one Monsieur Càserne, under whom were about a dozen or so detectives of various ranks and grades.

Working with them all—these French officials—with their respective personalities, temperaments and mannerisms, remains one of my great experiences, and the memory of certain individuals lingers tenderly in my mind. In the presence of any known superior or anyone they deemed of importance—I was *Le Serjent Woodhall*. I fraternised with superiors and subordinates and was secretly designated "Monsieur Ted," my Christian name. This, coming from a body of Frenchmen, who, at the least, are sticklers for etiquette, showed their friendly appraisal of their foreign comrade.

All travellers to and from Paris, or crossing either way, the French, Spanish, Swiss, or Italian frontiers, via Southampton and Le Havre, came through my hands, and many and numerous were the strange duties, incidents, and irregularities which cropped up.

Ambassadors, diplomatic couriers, King's messengers, special messengers, naval and military attaches and officers of high rank, big commercial magnates—in fact, all, from the highest to the lowest, passed through my hands.

I handled, through my control barrier, the passports and special papers of many distinguished people. On one occasion



BRITISH AVIATOR RELEASING CARRIER PIGEON

the late Field-Marshal Lord Kitchener, in mufti, came through, as also did Mr. Winston Churchill. Of course, no control was necessary in the case of such persons of national importance. Facility of progress was the order in that case.

The late Master of Elibank, Lord Murray, came through, and our recognition was mutual. I saw him to his compartment and we had a long chat to each other. He spoke of the old election days when I was attached to Mr. David Lloyd George, and recounted many instances which caused us both amusement. His death a few years ago removed a distinguished man from public affairs.

Joe Childs, the present jockey of His Majesty the King, came through my control on his way from France to England, prior to joining up in the fighting forces. I recall him quite vividly, a charming, quiet, and gentlemanly little fellow.

We had many laughs together during his sojourn in Le Havre—and if his eyes meet these lines he will smile at a certain incident known only to him and me!

One day there was handed into my custody at the Gare des Voyageurs a man whom I will call "A."

He had been arrested by the French when crossing from Spain into France but, being an Englishman, had been sent to us to deal with.

At the time of his arrest his passports were in a muddle. I believe he had foolishly been trying to alter them himself. It was also learnt that he had been trying to get into communication with his wife, who was then in Brussels. His own actions had brought suspicion upon him and the case looked very grave.

When handed over to me he was in a dishevelled state, looked absolutely worn out and emaciated; his clothes were dirty and torn, he had no collar or hat, and was, in fact, a pitiable object. I could see that under normal conditions he was a superior type of man.

As he was handed into my custody by the detective of the French Sûreté Générale, his relief was great. His first words were:

"Thank God, I am in English hands at last!"

It was my duty to bring him over to England and hand him to the authorities at Southampton. This I did, being locked in a cabin with him on the steamer, and, during the trip, he told me much of what he had been through.

Brutally treated, he had been convinced that the French intended to shoot him. In England he had a square deal, eventually joined the forces and served with distinction.

To-day he occupies a high position in the journalistic and photographic world.

In the heights round about Le Havre were many encampments of German prisoners, guarded and maintained in some cases by the French. But the majority of detachments were under English control.

Nearly all the prisoners worked on the quays, loading and unloading the many ocean-going vessels arriving and departing with cargoes. The particular detachment of prisoners to which I refer was comprised of the Prussian Cavalry Guard, from which complement several successful escapes took place in spite of the strongest guard and the utmost vigilance exercised.

Collusion was suspected, and the French Military to whom this detachment belonged, applied for secret assistance. I was deputed for the commission, and my instructions were "Trace the source from which the prisoners get their instructions and assistance."

In conjunction with the French Mobile Sûreté Général I took on my new task; in fact I lost my identity. From a Sergeant of Intelligence my new rôle was as follows: A "réforme Anglais" (English discharged soldier) living in Paris and married to a French woman, according to story, but working as a civilian labourer under the French people.

My first job was to get into the detachment under observation. This I did by applying for a position as crane driver, realising that in this capacity I should have a better opportunity of watching without being suspected. Along the quayside there were many Belgian, French, and civilian labourers who, under the instructions of French officers, assisted the German prisoners in their tasks: of course, all under military guard.

My luck was in. I was taken as a crane driver by the French civilian foreman on the strength of my "Permis de Sejour" (Authority of local residence) and duly installed.

Naturally, I was instructed by a French crane-driver in the arts of an electrically driven crane, which, on the first day,

caused great amusement to the Germans and very nearly terminated my tenure on this earth.

My driving cabin was entered eight feet from the ground, by an iron ladder.

The crane itself, being electrically controlled, had a huge arm shooting out from its centre with a large chain running up and down into the holds of any vessels or barges.

It also went round from left to right on an immense circular base. Also it could be moved on metal lines in the same direction if and when the case necessitated.

I remember there was a switch to make the crane swing round. Left to left, right to right, and a lever which you plugged in to hoist and drop the chain, and another lever to send the whole crane along.

I soon picked up the principle and bid fair to become an excellent crane driver. The only thing that needed dexterity of touch was the crane when it went round. Too much current would swing it instantly round and if—as it was that day—unloading heavy stuff, in this particular instance it was iron plates, the crane could be easily thrown off the cog wheels of its circular base on which it revolved by the swinging momentum of its load.

The afternoon was wearing on as I hoisted and dropped my tons of iron from shore to hold. I had just got the signal from the German officer to hoist from the ground to the ship, which was done, and as the iron load stood out on the end of the suspending chain slowly revolving in mid-air over the heads of the prisoners beneath, my eyes caught a slight movement on the part of a civilian and a German officer prisoner.

At the same time as I saw the movement—a swift passage of something which looked like paper—the civilian's eyes looked up and met mine! For the moment I thought he had detected me, and, in order to cover up any suspicion on his part I accidentally "yanked" round the switch instead of the lever to lower the load into the hold.

Instantly the crane swung round, and just as quickly I switched back into neutral. The cabin rocked, men flew in all directions and I had a momentary glimpse of about ten tons of iron swinging madly backwards and forwards at the end of my chain hoist.

I shut my eyes, for, had it swung off its base, a fifty-ton

crane, including its driver, would have been precipitated into about 30 feet of water of the dock.

The crane stopped. I had switched off all current, more by luck than judgment. From below I could see the German prisoners, some laughing, others looking in amazement, and, above all, the voice of the French civilian foreman shouting out. "Nom de Dieu!" "Nom de Dieu!" "Quelle affaire." "Quelle affaire."

The foreman yelled on me to come out, which I did—and he promptly cursed me in his best French, and, to use an Americanism, "I was fired!"

Ignominiously as I was treated, my purpose was served. I knew my man and in due course proceeded to track him. As he left work I shadowed him home, and left the rest to my French detective colleague.

As a result of my efforts I was informed that through the instrumentality of this particular Belgian labourer—a pure "hireling"—a huge scheme organised from Berlin through Geneva and Paris was discovered by the French Sûreté Général.

At any rate during the whole period afterwards not another German escaped. The French saw to that! What became of the man I discovered handing over his message, I never knew. The French moved silently, but sometimes with deadly effect.

Upon another occasion I was loaned to the Admiralty. The trouble this time was a mysterious light seen by some of our Naval Patrol Boats outside the port of Le Havre.

It was alleged to be a clear flash to sea in the form of a Morse code, and it was conjectured that some enemy agent was signalling to a hidden submarine. Therefore, one afternoon, off I went by the ferry from Le Havre to Honfleur, that beautiful old world town situated in the Commune of Calvados on the mouth of the Seine and opposite to Le Havre.

My orders were to report to the Senior Naval Commander, who at that time had a shore billet on the heights overlooking the Seine and the English Channel. He was a splendid type of typical Naval officer.

We discussed the question of the light, and he admitted that it seemed too strange to be believed, in view of all the precautions taken by the French and English authorities. I decided to stay for a few nights and investigate. Near



CAPTURE OF A GERMAN WAR DOG

to his bungalow, and on the top of the hill looking out to sea, was a small farm occupied by an old woman whose two sons were serving in the French Army. Her sole means of support were several cows which she turned out for grazing in the fields around her homestead. Assisting the old lady was an individual of apparently feeble intellect.

As the lights, which appeared every evening just after sundown, seemed, according to the information, to come from this direction, I was at a loss to understand.

On the third day I asked the commander if the light had still been seen, and he assured me that it had. So I decided to watch the farm. It was getting near night-fall when I observed the half-witted man come out of the cottage. The cows were outside lowing to enter their shed for the night.

Judge my astonishment when I beheld the old lady leave the farm door and enter the cowshed. Swinging in her hand was a lighted hurricane lamp. I watched her enter the shed and busy herself with the cattle, all the time passing and re-passing with the lamp. *Suddenly the mystery of the light was solved!*

Turning round I could perceive that from the little farm the view out to sea was absolutely uninterrupted.

I reported accordingly, and the experiment was tried. Next evening at night-fall from out at sea keen eyes were watching—but the light was never seen again, because the Commander had informed the local gendarme, with the result that when the old lady required a light she took good care to see that it was not exposed to view.

There was absolutely no ulterior motive, the old lady in rural simplicity never realizing her actions. When informed that an exposed light on a high eminence looking out to sea might give cause for much official perturbation, she quite innocently replied that it had been her custom for many years and this was the first time any complaint had ever been made against her!

We left the local gendarme to reprimand her, and there ended an episode which, like many more of a similar nature, turned out to be quite harmless in its foundation.

In 1917 I was transferred from the Intelligence Police to the Military Police at Etaples to assist in the rounding up of deserters. I arrived at a period when this tremendous base depot, the largest reinforcement camp in France, situated

about twenty miles or so from Boulogne, was settling down to comparative quietness. Some time previously a first detachment of W.A.C.C.'S had arrived.

The Military Police at that time was comprised of a peculiarly assorted body of men, tact and experience apparently being the least sought-for qualification.

It would appear that a quarrel took place one night between a "Tommy" and a Lance-Corporal of the Military Police. The subject was one of the W.A.A.C.'s. The row occurred through jealousy and terminated fatally, the "Tommy" being shot—I believe accidentally—in the struggle.

Immediately the news flew round the huge camp, and the troops rose *en masse*.

"The Military Police! The 'Red-Caps'. Down with 'em!"

And nothing would have prevented a terrible riot had it not been for the presence of mind and wonderful tact displayed by several members of the Headquarters General Staff.

For days the trouble seethed, but in the end it simmered down to the normal.

From this time onwards the Military Police was improved by an introduction into its ranks of non-commissioned officers made up mostly of policemen from all parts of the United Kingdom.

Two very popular, and certainly the most efficient Military Police officers this difficult area ever had in command, were Major Pym and Captain Cross. The former being Provost, and the latter Assistant Provost, they commanded wisely, diplomatically, and firmly. At any rate, that was the unanimous opinion, so I think I am at liberty to quote what was considered to be the case.

In passing, I think it fair to refer to two other men of the rank and file who rendered signal service at all times and under very difficult conditions. They were Detective Jack Williams of the Bristol Constabulary and Detective Skelton of the Windsor Borough Police. There were, of course, many others, but as space does not permit of detail I hope, if this book is ever read by them, they will appreciate my opinion of all their splendid individual efforts in the area of Etaples.

CHAPTER III

MILITARY "ISHMAELS"

AT the time of my transfer to the Etaples Base the Court Martial Prison and Detention Camp of Etaples was formed just outside the town on the road to Camiers. It was situated on the sandy soil overlooking the railway, while on the other side, it faced an estuary of a river that runs inland from the English Channel.

It was a sort of stockade erected from huge wooden stakes about ten feet in height, inside which again was a double compound of heavily woven barbed-wire entanglements.

Sentries guarded the place at night and armed military warders by day. To this place were fetched delinquents, absentees and deserters from all parts of the British Lines.

The organization was crude, but the methods applied to prisoners were sound and certainly fair. It was simply a detention compound for men awaiting armed escorts, and in consequence prisoners were arriving and departing constantly for their units in the battle areas of the British Front.

The work of rounding up deserters and absentees necessitated great patience, tact and discretion—always accompanied by rigid firmness.

Some of these men would stick at nothing, especially if the death sentence was against them.

Our method used to be that of silently getting our information, then, having made sure they were deserters, shadow them to their hiding places.

Many and many a time I have gone out to some particular area which we had decided to raid and brought back sometimes as many as a dozen "Ishmaels." On one occasion, I had a man who had been missing from his regiment for nearly three years, and another almost two.

We used to carry out our raids unostentatiously but very effectively. With a large covered lorry, about an hour before dawn, eight or nine picked, armed Military Police, accompanied by the Assistant Provost Marshal and myself, would proceed silently and swiftly to a prearranged rendezvous.

Perhaps, if the places to be raided were chalk dugouts, with three or more exits, men would be stationed at each entrance to prevent escape in the dark.

Then at the point of the revolver the A.P.M. or myself and

another N.C.O., with electric flash-lamps, would penetrate the caves and arrest anyone we found. By this method we were bound to entrap someone, and in time we made it so hot for all and sundry, that, in a very short time, we made practically the whole of this area untenable for desperadoes of any description.

I do not wish to say that there was a great number of absentees and deserters from our ranks, but at that time many undesirables and men with bad characters at the best of times, were, by virtue of the Military Service Act, being drawn into the fighting forces.

These types of men, having managed to get away from their units in the general confusion of battle, would make their way towards the coast, anxious to get as far as possible from the fighting, and probably having the idea of somehow crossing to England.

They would travel by night, sometimes individually, occasionally in twos or threes, lying hidden during the day and living by robbery, where, when, and how they could.

Sometimes they were armed with revolvers, but the weapons mostly favoured and carried were sand-bags or "thuds" as they were termed. These simple but effective weapons were improvised from the white linen ration bags—their creation being simplicity itself. Just sufficient sand was placed in the bag, which was then screwed and tied up tightly.

Rifle barrels, quartered and filed down conveniently for the pocket, knives, daggers, pieces of solid rubber tyres, ash entrenching-tool handles with the iron end, short sticks, knuckle-dusters, pieces of chain—in fact many and varied were the crude weapons found on these men.

The "headquarters" of many wandering characters of this description were in Etaples, Camiers, the Forest and Woods of Le Touquet and the sand dunes of Paris Plage and Berck.

The desolate, wild, and undulating nature of this particular tract of country between the coast-line and woods sheltered all sorts of characters. Particularly was this so in and around Etaples and Camiers. The countryside far and wide abounds with pits, caves, and long chalk tunnels, where we very often found dugouts, many of which were more or less comfortably furnished.

Not only did these men rob civilians, but mixing with the huge general mass of troops in this tremendous Base Head-

quarters, would take an opportunity of running "Crown and Anchor" boards, shooting dice, three-card manipulation, and any other manœuvre whereby they could acquire money. If not in these ways, then they would rob army hostels, canteens and officers' messes; in fact, they would stop at nothing to obtain what they required.

A method often resorted to was the waylaying of inebriated soldiers. "Chumming up," they would get the selected victim to the right spot, pick a quarrel, knock him senseless, and strip him of everything of value.

Our work, as may be guessed, was far from easy. It was impossible to stop and question every man upon the roads around and in Etaples. There were Colonials masquerading as English, also English dressed as Colonials, and a large proportion of men dressed as officers in stolen uniforms.

Many of them had already been tried by courts-martial, but, having broken away from their escorts, were living in this fashion, hoping, like Mr. Micawber, "for something to turn up."

While on the subject I may add that some absentees, and even deserters, were not all bad men. Mentality and temperament had a lot to do with their class of military crime, and many a man possibly left his unit on the impulse, with an idea of returning. In fact a great number of men, after a few weeks' absence, often returned on their own account and made the best of active service conditions beside their comrades.

One particular set of officers' quarters was the scene of so many robberies that the A.P.M. ordered me to "do something."

"For heaven's sake, Woodhall, do something; things are getting awful." So I concentrated on the affair, and I became for the time an officer's servant.

I was not long in finding out what I wanted, for one day, shortly after I had started my unaccustomed work, I was rewarded by seeing "a dear old familiar face." Although in khaki I knew him and recognised him for an "old lag." The fact of him being in the Army was not, however, a surprise to me. I met many such during the war, and good fellows some of them turned out to be.

On this occasion I did not let any man see me, but ascertained through another soldier that he often came over from another unit to see his "china" or, in other words, the man with whom he was working in collusion. When he left, the man

was followed by a pre-arranged signal and tracked to Paris Plage.

That same evening the Provost Marshal and I, with a large posse of men, raided his "headquarters," an outlying tool-house in a spare plot of ground near Paris Plage Lighthouse.

We discovered a veritable Aladdin's Cave of stolen stuff.

My old "lag" and his pals, all absentees, had stolen goods to the value of thousands of pounds, taken from various camps in the neighbourhood.

Gambling in those times was nothing. The Military Police were powerless. In fact the Military Authorities applied Nelson's tactics of the blind eye to the telescope. It was regarded as a safety valve and so long as there was no trouble or rioting the troops could do as they liked.

I have seen many a time the "top of the hill," as it was termed, reminiscent of Epsom Downs on Derby Day, only with no conglomeration of male and female fashion, but simply of khaki and hospital blue. "Tommies," with Cockney, Midland, Northern, Scottish, Irish, and Colonial accent all shouting the odds like bookmakers on the race-course. In a day thousands of pounds would change hands in English, Colonial, and French money, just as it does on the race-course.

The humour of the whole thing was vividly brought home to any average healthy-minded man. You might hear such invitations as "What about a flutter at the old mud-hook!" meaning the Anchor in the game of Crown and Anchor. If you didn't like the status of this military bookmaker there would be another on his left shouting out such encouragement as: "Come on, me lucky lads! Come on, me lucky lads! You win 'em and I'll pay! Whack it down—thick and heavy," while "The old firm, the old firm," could be heard on all sides and the language—oh! It would make any ordinary navy blush.

Some enterprising Tommies went so far as to get boards painted, advertising their stands. To see a Tommy with an old black or grey silk top hat, or bowler, or even with a bookmaker's satchel, was quite a common sight. I have seen crude notices painted on gutta-percha ground sheets and made in a banner with two long sticks, displaying such advertisements in picturesque American-like language, as "No limit! 5 francs to 5,000,000. Jock of Pontius Pilate's Body-

guard," whilst another would read "Gentlemen of His Majesty's Forces! Old Darkie of the Diehards! The Sky's my Limit!" or "Old Digger of the Aussies, the Sporting Colonial," and many more humorous phrases of which the above are fair samples.

It was in and among such an atmosphere that the absentee would move, safe in the assurance of the old saying "There's safety in numbers." With hundreds of thousands of soldiers all odds were against their detection, provided they used caution.

My sojourn at Etaples was destined to bring me in touch with a military deserter of singularly ferocious character. His name was Percy Topliss, and by a stroke of fate this desperate young thief and murderer slipped through my fingers.

The circumstances of the case are as follows :

I was on the look out for a deserter who, by many violent means had robbed civilians and army hostels. Further, I wanted him for a particularly brutal assault on an old French peasant whom he had robbed and beaten senseless.

After an exhaustive hunt for days I ran him to earth at a little village named Rang-de-Fleur, and, with the assistance of a local regimental policeman, went into a café to effect his arrest.

As I stepped into the estaminet, which was completely empty, coming from the sunshine to comparative gloom, my eyes were not quickly accustomed to the change. In any case, before I could realise it, the man I was after, Topliss, stepped from behind a curtain and covered me with a Colt army revolver.

I heard his remark, "Got you—you——!" and the hammer of his revolver clicked. It did not go off.

Simultaneously, I made a rush at him and smashed my fist into his face, closing with him as I did so and fixing the wrist of his revolver hand. At that moment assistance arrived and he was easily overpowered.

¹ By the term "Pontius Pilate's Bodyguard" is meant 1st Royal Scots, a pseudonym applied to their ancient military lineage. "The Diehards," the Middlesex Regiment—who, according to their regimental history, acquired this name by one of their Colonels at Tel-el-kebir, when surrounded on all sides, shouting out to his handful of men "Die hard, men! Die hard!" "Old Digger" is an expression among the Colonials, conveying the same signification as our word "Tommy"!

He was brought back to the prison compound for enquiry and identification. Unfortunately, during the night, he with another notorious character, who had the death sentence against him, tunnelled down under the sand of the barbed-wire compound and in the early morning broke out.

The escape was daring to a degree, for the compound was situated on the banks of a river, but, nothing daunted, they dashed down the slope of the foreshore, though it was high tide, with a swiftly-running current, plunged in the river and swam across to the other side and made good their escape into the woods in and around Le Touquet.

Before the day was out, with a strong posse of armed men, I found one of the prisoners in an exhausted state near Berck Plage. He could get no farther, as his ankle had given out.

But my real man got away, and although I scoured and combed the place for miles, he successfully eluded all the attempts at capture.

The sequel to this story is as follows. He made his way to Paris and there in the "underworld," with the collusion of some women, he "lay low" until the Armistice, when, in the course of time, as military precautions became relaxed, he got back to England, and in 1920 commenced a series of armed depredations in the West of England. On the 25th April he shot in cold-blood a defenceless man—and then Nemesis overtook him. Here are the facts.

On April 25th, Sidney Spicer, who drove a 12 h.p. 5-seater Darracq, left Salisbury at 9 o'clock in the morning with the intention of driving two ladies as far as Bulford, a town of military importance several miles away.

From this journey he did not return, and of his subsequent movements nothing more was ever known.

It was, however, known by Mr. Rodgers, the employer of Spicer, that at the time of leaving Salisbury his employee was carrying a considerable sum of money, an amount somewhere in the neighbourhood of £75.

Besides the two lady occupants of the car that left Salisbury, there arrived just prior to departure another passenger, wearing the khaki uniform of a soldier.

He sat on the seat beside Spicer and, in appearance was observed to be a man from thirty to thirty-five years of age and about five to five feet eight inches in height. In general appearance he was smart, fresh complexioned, had fair hair

and moustache, the latter of which was inclined to be ginger. Witnesses also described this man as having several gold teeth which were displayed when he spoke, but beyond this description no other was available. After they left Salisbury, Spicer and his companion seemed to be on the best of terms, as was subsequently testified by the evidence of the two ladies who were in the back part of the car. After setting down the two ladies Spicer was never seen alive again.

On the evening of the same day, in a lonely and deserted part called Thruxton Downs near Andover, a solitary workman on his way home perceived the body of a man lying behind some bushes near the roadway.

Horrified, he approached the body, and one look was enough to indicate foul play and that the man was dead.

Without loss of time the local police, accompanied by a doctor, were soon upon the scene, and at once the body was identified as that of Sidney Edward Spicer, a licensed Salisbury taxi-cab driver.

The murdered man was lying upon his side, the arms underneath the body and the legs drawn out and wide apart. Blood was oozing from the mouth and nostrils, while the back of his head had been practically blown away.

From the position and nature of the wounds it was obvious that Spicer had been shot from behind, and at close quarters, possibly no more than an arm's length. The state of the victim's apparel, every pocket having been turned out, pointed to the motive of robbery.

There were marks which indicated that the crime had apparently been perpetrated upon the high road, as there were tracks which showed that the murdered man had been dragged from the roadway, across a small space of greensward, to the spot where his body was discovered behind the hedge. In due course the inquest upon Sidney Spicer was held, and a verdict returned of "Wilful Murder against some Person or Persons Unknown."

Every available description of the missing taxi-cab and its possible military driver was immediately circulated by telegraph and telephone throughout the country by the responsible police authorities in charge of the case, whilst an exhaustive and wide-spread enquiry was made in every direction. Very soon the police got on the track of a certain notorious military deserter. This soldier was identical with the man in military

uniform, who, on the fatal morning of April 25th, left Salisbury in Spicer's taxi-cab.

Further, by certain information in their possession, this man was undoubtedly the same individual as he who had been suspected of previously attacking the owner of another Bristol taxi-cab, having stupefied him with chloroform, beaten him unconscious and stolen all his possessions, including his taxi-cab.

The circumstances took place under similar conditions, the passenger in this instance being a soldier, fair-haired, fresh complexioned, ginger coloured moustache, about five feet eight inches in height, who displayed several gold teeth when in the act of talking or laughing. The next day the Swansea police telegraphed through to notify that the deserted taxi-cab had been found in a lonely lane off the Mumbles, also that a soldier answering to the description circulated had taken a ticket from Swansea Bay Town to another place some thirty or thirty-five miles distant.

The Authorities were now confident that the cold-blooded murderer of Sidney Edward Spicer was one Percy Herbert Topliss, a cowardly, thieving and armed desperado of the worst possible type.

In the meantime a hue and cry had been instituted throughout the whole country-side, and every police force of the United Kingdom was on the look out. The importance of this step will be better appreciated by my readers before this dramatic story is brought to its conclusion.

It would appear that, when Spicer's murderer evaded the police who were hard on his heels at Swansea, he must have doubled on his tracks by alighting at some small intermediate station. This fact was borne out by local enquiry from residents who had seen a man answering to the description of the wanted military deserter. In any case, he managed to work his way into the comparatively large city of Cardiff, and from there, disguised in civilian clothes, travelled to London, ostensibly with the purpose of lying low, so that when the hue and cry died down, he could make good his final escape.

With relentless tenacity of purpose the police were still on his track, but by some perverse irony of fate always arriving at the eleventh hour to find the "bird flown." One time it was Stepney, the next it would be West Kensington, then again the East End and finally the neighbourhood of Waterloo

Road. In fact at this place, within ten minutes of Topliss taking alarm, two detectives arrived to arrest him. By some curious, indefinable working of human nature, it was known that a woman of good social standing was in love with and was helping this cowardly and despicable criminal. Also that certain persons had been, and were still, rendering surreptitious help to the wanted man.

However, simultaneously with the authorities deciding to arrest certain persons for "aiding and abetting," fate played one of its unexpected moves.

Becoming scared at the relentless activity displayed by his pursuers, Topliss, no doubt at the instigation of certain persons associated with the criminal underworld, decided to make one determined and conclusive bid for freedom. The circumstances of this last desperate bid can be likened to the scenes in the final act of a modern crook story. The "get-away" as the Americans term it was as follows: a faked passport, a sum of money, and the night boat via Newhaven and Dieppe for the Continent. He, no doubt, figured that, once safe in Paris, there was no telling what stroke of luck might favour him. Besides he had friends in the criminal haunts of Montmartre and other low-down parts of the French capital. At about a quarter-past seven on an early July evening, Topliss made his way to Victoria Station, secure in the idea that at last he had surmounted all the difficulties in the way of his escape. Immaculately attired in a well-cut grey lounge suit he calmly strolled into the buffet, and, being early for his train, ordered a drink.

From the buffet, adjusting the gold-rimmed monocle he was affecting, he leisurely proceeded upstairs and purchased his combined railway and boat ticket, asking several questions as to the arrival and departure of the trains and boat service upon this, and the other side of the Channel. Satisfied with the rôle he was adopting, he strolled on to the station, preparatory to passing through the barrier, that initial gateway to freedom, when, as I have previously stated—fate took a hand, deciding the ultimate issue.

Standing near the ticket barrier were two men in conversation, and as one turned his head, Topliss, with an icy clutch at the heart, recognised the features of a well-known police detective.

Without waiting to take stock of the situation, the fugitive

beat a hurried retreat, and by his precipitate action, no doubt, frustrated all efforts he had made for his escape, and irrevocably sealed his doom. Had Topliss kept his nerve, and waited, he would have seen the object of his momentary alarm (the police officer) walk away about five minutes prior to the boat train's departure !

This particular detective whom the murderer recognised had come to Victoria with the purpose of seeing a personal friend off to Paris. Such is the irony of fate !

There is no reason to disbelieve that at this particular juncture the hunted man was absolutely terror-stricken, and dashed off regardless of any efforts to safeguard his movements. From this time onwards he seems to have resided off the neighbourhood of Euston Road, remaining indoors by day, and only coming out at night.

I must now digress a little from my story, and in an imaginary way follow the aimless wanderings of the hunted wretch in his futile efforts to avoid the inevitable end.

The mills of God grind slow, but they grind exceeding small, and through the instrumentality of his fellow men, the days of Percy Herbert Topliss, deserter, murderer and desperado were slowly but inexorably drawing to a close.

From London, by stages, the fugitive made his way to the East Coast of England, and it was from the well-known seaside resort of Skegness that he again came under notice of the authorities.

It would appear that a large car had for some two or three days been driven about Skegness by four men.

At night it was garaged by a prominent motor-car proprietor, and it was owing to this tradesman's keen powers of perception that the police took action. He had reason to believe this car answered the description of one he knew to have been stolen, irrespective of several alterations made in its general appearance. Also, for some unaccountable reason this particular garage proprietor did not like the demeanour of these men. They seemed to be, as he termed it, "a bunch of wrong 'uns." Further, being an astute individual, he suspected one of them as answering to the description of Percy Topliss. This man, he observed, held himself aloof from all conversation, but nevertheless, his suspicions having become thoroughly aroused, he decided to inform the police.

The Lincolnshire Constabulary intended to take no risks,

and, as unostentatiously as possible, surrounded the premises one evening. About eleven o'clock at night the gang drew up at the garage, and with quickness of movement, were promptly arrested by the police.

The police were not wrong in their suspicions that the four of them were military deserters. Each man was armed, and each one was wanted. Unfortunately, in the scrimmage that took place, Topliss, after firing two or three shots, which providentially went wide of mark, escaped in the darkness, leaving his three associates in the hands of the authorities.

By various stages, the fugitive worked his way northward. One day in Doncaster, next day at York, then on to Durham. For several days he remained at Newcastle, but soon his relentless pursuers appeared upon the scene, and he once again took to the open road.

Arriving in Upper Banffshire, Topliss decided to lie low and for some time worked as a labourer near Tomintoul, a lonely little Highland village, fifteen miles from the rail-head of Ballindalloch, and approximately the same distance north-west of Balmoral.

Obviously, for reasons of avoiding too much notice, the "wanted man" took up a taciturn and uncommunicative attitude towards the villagers, and thus created the very atmosphere he wished to avoid—curiosity.

It was ascertained through the means of local gossip that he was living in an unoccupied shooting lodge near the lonely moor of Lecht, so, accompanied by a gamekeeper who had complained to him, Sergeant Griegg of the Aberdeenshire Constabulary decided to make enquiry.

Smoke was observed issuing from the shooting lodge chimney, and the police-sergeant decided to arrest the man for "breaking and entering," also "unlawful possession."

Evidently Topliss was on the alert and as soon as the dreaded police uniform appeared he decided to adopt desperate methods.

Upon the sergeant challenging his right to be upon these premises Topliss made no reply, but walked to an iron bedstead and from under a pillow drew a revolver. Firing at the gamekeeper, he sent him to the floor with a shot in the thigh, and, as the surprised, but plucky sergeant ran in to tackle him, Topliss fired point-black at the unfortunate man, shooting him through the neck.

Mounting a bicycle near by, Topliss made off and at Alford took train to Aberdeen.

The police by this time realised the murderous determination of the man in his efforts to resist arrest, and on June 3rd and 4th flashed the news ahead to such places as Aberdeen, Dundee, Glasgow, Edinburgh, etc., warning the police forces concerned that Topliss was abroad.

On Sunday, June 6th, at about half-past four in the afternoon a police constable by name of Fulton saw passing through High Heskit, Cumberland, a man who, he had reason to believe, was Topliss.

The suspect was wearing R.A.F. uniform and carrying a kit-bag upon his shoulder; discreetly following him, the officer eventually challenged Topliss outside the village.

To the constable's questions he said he was "on leave, but had overstayed his pass, and in any case it did not matter." Constable Fulton then purposely said: "You never know. In fact you resemble Topliss the deserter wanted for murder."

Immediately the expression on the interrogated man's face altered to an unutterably cruel stare, and, stepping back he dropped his kit-bag, simultaneously whipping a revolver from his pocket.

"Yes! I'm Topliss, put up your arms," he said ferociously. "I'm the man who killed the taxi-driver at Salisbury, and it was I who shot the policeman and gamekeeper, up in Scotland. Now walk on in front, and if you don't clear off I'll put daylight through you."

At the point of the revolver the unarmed constable had no chance, so walking away with his arms up, Topliss, standing on an elevated bank-side of the road, covering him all the time, the police officer made good his escape.

This particular officer, however, had been thinking pretty hard, and it is to his remarkable promptitude that the eventual rounding up of the murderer was achieved.

He hired a motor-bicycle and at Penrith reported what he had just experienced. Without loss of time the Chief Constable threw a cordon of police around the district, at the same time arming several of his officers with automatic revolvers.

In a high-powered car they overtook the murderer at Plumpton, five miles from Penrith. When about twenty-five yards away from him the car stopped, and Constable Fulton, this time on equal terms, commanded Topliss to stop.



PERCY TOPLISS

Wheeling round the hunted wretch faced his pursuers and walking slowly backwards, a revolver held at arm's length, commenced firing point-blank at his hated enemies. Immediately the police retaliated and—the end came.

Topliss sagged slowly forward, his arms and revolver dropping down before him as he did so. Then, for a second or so, with blood trickling from the corner of his mouth, he rocked upon his toes, turned round and crashed face downwards upon the road—dead.

Upon the 9th of June, 1920, Percy Herbert Topliss was interred at Christ Church, Penrith, the only persons present being the Relieving Officer of the Cumberland Board of Guardians and two or three police officers, his relatives having departed after the inquest.

By violence he had lived : by violence he died.

CHAPTER IV

A CHARMING SPY

FOR a time I was on duty in the neighbourhood of St. Omer. There I assisted the late Detective-Sergeant McLaughlin, who was in personal charge of Lord Kitchener.

I could not have served with a better colleague. Needless to record, the guarding of Lord Kitchener was an anxious and arduous task, especially as he himself was rather impatient at the necessity for it.

But the grim necessity for this may be judged when I relate that it was perfectly well known to the Secret Service that a number of German " patriots " had sworn to compass the death of the great War Minister, knowing full well how immovable he stood in the popular affection.

For this reason, a day-and-night watch had to be maintained over the British War Lord. I had many a talk with McLaughlin on the subject of shadowing Kitchener, and from him I learned many interesting facts. It was felt to be necessary to keep Kitchener's movements secret from everybody except his personal staff; often quite misleading items as to where he was were circulated.

If he went for a visit of inspection he was surrounded by a network of " shadows."

Many a night he slept in a small bed in the War Office, and even the position of this was frequently changed.

It certainly seemed the irony of Fate that, in spite of all these precautions, Lord Kitchener came to a tragic, if not violent, end.

I once said to McLaughlin that I rather envied him his job.

" Ah! " he responded without enthusiasm, " It isn't what you think it is." He paused and added: " I know they are after the Field-Marshal. I hardly dare sleep for thinking they will get him one of these days."

It was not, of course, that Dan McLaughlin was afraid. Fear did not enter into the mentality of this handsome, indefatigable Irishman's calculation.

No, but it was the ever-recurring idea of something beyond his control—something mysterious—and with his natural Irish temperament the sense of responsibility weighed him down.

I knew he had a premonition of coming tragedy.

At any rate, this I know, that as my ill-fated colleague shook my hand in farewell, prior to the departure of the Commander-in-Chief's special car from St. Omer Station in 1915, he said these ominous words :

"Good-bye, boy. God bless you—I SHALL NEVER SEE YOU AGAIN"—not, "*I may* never see you again." He was definite.

Before I could reply the train was on the move.

It was my last farewell to Detective-Inspector Daniel G. McLaughlin, Special Branch New Scotland Yard, personal attending detective attached to the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army.

Time passed, on, and there came that fatal farewell moment when Kitchener left King's Cross for Scapa with his personnel—attached to whom was McLaughlin. I now quote from the *Daily Mail*.

"The armoured cruiser *Hampshire*, in which Lord Kitchener left Scapa for Russia, struck a mine and sank off the Orkneys. No spy could have had any hand in that event. The mine in question was part of a minefield laid by the German submarine U 75 under Lieutenant-Com. Beitzen, under orders issued by Admiral Scheer before Jutland, a full week before Lord Kitchener's death and when no one knew anything of his intended journey to Russia. The minefield was one part of a scheme for causing loss to the British Fleet. It was laid to the west of the Orkneys, whereas our Fleet nearly always used a route east of the Orkneys, though the Germans were not aware of this.

"The *Hampshire* followed the west route on the fatal day for a reason which no spy could have anticipated—that a great storm was raging from the east. Lord Kitchener would not hear of any delay, though had he waited till the storm had fallen, the voyage might have been made in perfect safety. Even as it was, but for the storm, Lord Kitchener and the greater part of the crew might have been saved. The *Hampshire* sank slowly, and it was the terrific seas that prevented any attempt to rescue and all but a mere handful of survivors from reaching the shore."

I have it from another living witness, a present serving member of New Scotland Yard who was present when,

158 DETECTIVE AND SECRET SERVICE DAYS

McLaughlin left for his last tour of duty on this earth, that he turned to him and said :

" I feel it somehow. Good-bye, I shall never see you again."

Now why should McLaughlin have said to this man eighteen months afterwards nearly the same words as he said to me ?

Did he have psychic intuition ? Who knows !

Personally, I think he had. I cannot understand ; it's beyond me. I would not have written this—but I know that there may be a good many readers interested in a remarkable happening of this description.

* * * * *

I now come to the case of the celebrated and beautiful woman spy, Mata Hari. So much has already been written about her, both true and false, that I do not propose to go at any length into her story ; but there are one or two things I should like to touch on, owing to my knowledge of the affair.

That she was the world's greatest spy I have no doubt, and also a very fascinating psychological study of womanhood.

It may interest those who remember her to know how she was warned by that brilliant Chief of Police and Director of Intelligence, Sir Basil Thomson ; how she was arrested by the French ; how she met her end at the hands of a firing party ; and to know that some of the British Authorities pitied rather than condemned her. But then, of course, the latter knew all the facts.

Her name, " Mata Hari," could suggest Japanese nationality, and she often affected Japanese clothing for her dances. The name means " Eyes of the Morning," but of course she was not Japanese at all. She was Dutch-Creole.

To her friends she made no secret of this and, indeed, her apparent ingenuousness was probably the case of the undoing of more than one important personage who ought to have known better, and who involuntarily told the little dancer more than was discreet.

When talking confidentially with diplomats, generals, admirals, and other distinguished people she would say, with her charming smile and disarming manner :

" Ah, no ! " I am not of Nippon, but just a little Dutch girl, with perhaps a dash of the wild blood of the South in my veins—you don't mind, do you ? "



LORD KITCHENER (IN GREY COAT ON RIGHT) ON BOARD THE "IRON DUKE"
JUST PRIOR TO EMBARKING ON THE "HAMPSHIRE"

Of course this was a terrible confession to make, and the simplicity of the girl who made it was so apparent that she appealed to all that was chivalrous in her admirers—who were often her lovers. Men would talk in clubs and regimental messes of the great dancer, never for a moment thinking that when they had been basking in her smiles they had been indiscreetly letting out a good deal more than they realised.

After the war broke out she was quite well known in England for a time and haunted some of the best-known rendezvous in the West End where officers of both services foregathered. The significant thing about Mata Hari now was that she had thrown off entirely the Japanese pose. She became Marguerite Zelle of Holland, the Dutch dancer.

Another significant thing which was marked up to her for a suspicious circumstance was that she pretended she did not know a word of German, though it was perfectly well known that she did.

When staying in France she affected very broken French, hesitatingly and daintily. In England she did the same with English, and, indeed, wherever she went she always knew another language better than that of the country.

In March, 1915, she left England and went to France. Prior to this she had spent some months in Switzerland, only returning to London for a fleeting visit. In the meantime she had been under continual observation of the French Secret Service in Switzerland and under the Intelligence Department as soon as she crossed the frontier.

Mata Hari was definitely suspected of espionage. There was no mistaking that, but the concrete evidence up to date was ~~too~~ flimsy to act upon so she was allowed perfect freedom of movement, the only point being that wherever she went a shadower was in constant attendance.

Towards the end of the year she came back to London where our Secret Service took her under their "shadowing" wing, so to speak. She entertained many of the young officers in the West End, but none in a position to give her much information. Indeed, it is safe to say that so far as this country is concerned her achievements were to be discounted. Then, in 1916, she went over to Paris again. The French Authorities were frankly baffled by her. They laid numerous cunning traps, but she eluded the lot and eluded them in such a

160 DETECTIVE AND SECRET SERVICE DAYS

manner as to imply that she had noticed them. In a word, she laughed discreetly in their faces.

Late in the year she asked permission to visit a remote place in the South of France, a village in the proximity of which was one of France's greatest aerodromes and building sheds. Here were being completed the great French super-bombers with their wonderful devices of night-bombing. This was again significant. What good purpose could Mata Hari seek to achieve here?

The French Authorities now thought that the time had come to act. They arrested the beautiful dancer and subjected her to an interrogation which would have put an American "Third Degree" to shame. The dancer must have suffered agonies of mental torture. It was all unavailing; she was too clever for them. She denied ever having been in the service of Germany and a rigid search revealed nothing at all. The long and weary examination was almost over, even her interrogators were becoming weary, when Mata Hari provided the biggest surprise of all.

SHE CHARMINGLY OFFERED HER SERVICES TO FRANCE! This was anti-climax! Whatever the French Authorities had expected they were not prepared for that. They very carefully thought over her proposal; the chiefs all conferred, and ultimately it was decided to offer a large sum to Mata Hari to undertake a certain mission. She was to be carefully watched all the while, of course, and most amazingly acute arrangements were made to safeguard against possible treachery.

She had told the colonel commanding the Intelligence Department that a German officer of the Great Headquarters Staff was in love with her and that it was her proposal to get to Germany, link up with the officer, who was on the personal staff of a German Army Group Commander, get into the General's house, get information—and send it to France. *Voilà!*

She actually embarked upon a boat intending to make Antwerp (then, of course, in German hands), and it was none other than Admiral Sir Reginald Hall who intervened and thus became the instrument of Fate. He intercepted the boat off the French coast and ordered it to a Spanish port, to disembark her. This was done. Mata Hari was now in a very serious plight. She dare not return to France without her mission completed and she was warned that she would not

be allowed to land in England, so nothing remained for her but to return to her German lover and her German friends.

Here, in her extremity, was manifested the deep vein of treachery, nearly always associated with the half-caste mentality.

She went straight to General von Morganstern, then acting Military Attaché in Madrid, and, instead of obtaining from him sufficient assistance to tide her over until she could carry out her pledged mission, she gave him enormous assistance. All the data which she had collected in France went into the hands of the gratified General, who immediately put himself into touch with the Wilhelmstrasse. Mata Hari desired to be sent back to Germany and the General agreed, subject to confirming permission from Berlin.

A message, explaining all the circumstances, was sent in code from Madrid to Berlin and this message was intercepted by the French Intelligence Service who were in possession of every German code within a few hours of its inception!

Of course, this message was as good as Mata Hari's death warrant, for it established beyond a peradventure that she was a spy. Nothing else had done that. She arrived in France eventually, via the Franco-Spanish frontier, and arrived at the Gare de Lyons where her arrival was noted by me and several French officers of the Intelligence.

In Paris a sum of money was placed at her disposal by an agent of the German Secret Service, and here again another interesting fact comes to light—one which had not, I think, been mentioned before and proves how entangled are the various machinations of "hirelings." This German agent was also in the pay of the *French*, and having obeyed his German masters in placing the money ready for Mata Hari—he immediately gave word to the French that he had done so.

Again, to complete the chain of evidence, she was allowed perfect freedom, and for some time she went about her work so cleverly that she defied detection of any overt act of espionage. Then at last she made a fatal mistake. She called at the bank for her thousands of francs, thus completing the chain of evidence. She left the bank in company with two detectives and was taken again before the French High Command.

She denied her interview with General von Morganstern, denied her visit to Madrid—denied everything until she was

162 DETECTIVE AND SECRET SERVICE DAYS

confronted by the messages between Madrid and Berlin, decoded and translated. Then, and then only, did Mata Hari break down.

Tried by court-martial she was found guilty and sentenced to be shot. Before the end she made a full confession, but never by a syllable did she implicate anyone else.

She was taken one cold October dawn to Vincennes and shot.

And so ended the career of a remarkable but misguided creature. Her death at the hands of the French was, in a sense, a tragedy—but she served too many masters.