

Jam for the Enemy

Smithy

by Edgar Wallace, 1875-1932

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Nobby's bright ideas are sometimes fraught with awkward results. How a trap laid for the Germans came within an ace of annihilating some of his fellow soldiers is graphically told in the following amusing story.

“THERE’S ten ways of finishin’ the war,” said Smithy, “an’ very likely there’s more, only I have only talked it over with ten people. There’s the celebrated way of

bringin' Russians through England, there's the idea of takin' Berlin an' destroyin' von Hindenberg's time table, an' last but not least—skippin' all the other suggestions—there's the plan which is in favour in almost every club in London of destroyin' the German Fleet an' landin' an army at Hamburg. Nobby Clark, whom I might describe as one of the grandest geniuses that ever came into the army, had a plan which hasn't been heard outside of a select circle.

"What we ought to do," he sez, "is to go up into the Alps to the place where the Rhine rises, stick a cork in the spring, an' stop the Rhine from runnin'. If there wasn't no Rhine there'd be no watch on the Rhine, an' if there wasn't a watch we'd be able to nip across before anybody saw us."

"Another idea of Nobby's was one which I daresay you've heard about. It wasn't exactly to stop the war, but, so to speak, to stop the bit of war which was operatin' on our front.

"We held a line of trenches near Y---- or Z----, an' our main difficulty was to persuade the enemy that the trench line was held by about 90,000 men. In a sense we was in the air, an' even our supports was well in advance of where the line should have run.

"Owin' to the fact that we had a little river on our right, an' a swamp on our left, we could take liberties, but the unfortunate fellows of 'D' company, who were in the support trenches an' had to bring up supplies an' ammunition, got it properly in the neck.

"Sometimes the enemy was satisfied with snipin', but now an' then, especially after nightfall, the parties that came up to the firin' trench would be raided from the marsh, an' have all their stores pinched. If they got away without bein' pinched themselves or shot a bit, they was very lucky.

"We could never find all the paths across the marsh—there must have been half-a-dozen—an' no sooner had we laid a trap for the Germans in one place than they come up in another.

"It got a bit annoyin', especially after 'C' company, who had been holdin' the firin' trenches, lost a day's rations.

"We wouldn't have minded," says one of the fellows from 'C' bitterly, "only the pinchers pinched the box with the jam in it."

"Jam's bad for you," sez Nobby, "besides which it's pretty bad for the enemy," he sez. "You've probably done the army a good turn by losin' it."

"A couple of days later, when it was our turn to be in the firin' trenches, the same thing happened. The supports comin' up with provisions was attacked an' routed, an' the stores taken.

"This ain't war," sez Nobby indignant; "this is barbarity—it ain't civilised to rob the wounded of their comforts. When I say wounded," sez Nobby carefully, "I mean heroes who are likely to be wounded at any minute."

"It was about this time that Nobby got his grand idea for finishin' the war. He had a long talk with our company officers when we came back to billets, and the captain, who was a bit of a sport, went over to see the R.E.C.O. It was Nobby's plan, and Nobby's grand idea all through.

"They emptied a new packin'-case, and filled it full of all kinds of things that the Germans did not want. There were little packets of cordite, a box of nitro-glycerine, or somethin' that made the same noise, pieces of old iron, and samples of

explosives collected far and near by the R.E. officer, and the whole was arranged so that when you prised the lid off, somethin' would happen which gave you a better idea of an earthquake than anythin' which had ever been invented. It was a nice new packin'-case, an' when they had nailed it down very carefully they stencilled on it 'Comforts for the troops ' and 'Jam for the soldiers,' and Nobby added, what I might term an artistic touch, by stickin' on a card, 'From little Minnie Brown, with love for all the dear heroes at the Front.'

Illustration:

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that the Germans did not want

"That ought to get em, sir,' sez Nobby enthusiastic, and the R.E. officer and our company officers were highly delighted.

"The general idea was that the case should be taken up to the edge of the marsh, an' left carelessly near the end of one of the paths which we had spotted.

"All might have gone well if it had not been for the Wigshires. We never got on with the Wigshires owin' to a slight disagreement about football some years ago.

"Although since Mons we had met all the horrors of war, we never had the bad luck to find ourselves quartered alongside the Wigs. We'd been shelled, aeroplanes had dropped bombs on us, we'd had our trenches blown in, we had had the roads blown up, we'd had poisoned water, typhoid fever, an' had gone without warm food for days together, but we'd never had the crownin' misfortune of findin' ourselves side by side with the first battalion of the 150th (Peakey Blinders) Royal Wigshire Regiment. It is not for me to run down chaps in the army, but we know that whenever it has been possible for the Wigshires to lose theirselves they've done it. If any convoy takes the wrong road an' finds itself in High Street, Germany, you can bet your life it's the Wigshires. The only wise thing they ever did was to keep away from the marsh road. At least they tried to.

"What happened exactly on the fatal 7th of January I've never been able to find out. We were at a post halfway between the trench and the billets when we saw a lot of the Wigshires comin' back in a hurry.

"We've had a terrible fight,' sez one fellow to Nobby, and he was so agitated he could hardly get the words out; 'attacked, as it were, by overwhelmin' forces, like von Kluck attacked French, we made a noble resistance, an'—

"Tell us your sad story,' sez Nobby, 'without makin' a despatch of it, an' me and my gallant friends will be very much obliged.'

"The long and short of it was that the Wigshires had once more lost their supplies.

"The wonder to me,' sez Nobby, 'is that you don't lose your bloomin' heads!'

"The matter might have ended here, only the next day some of the Wigshires put it about that some of their comforts had been seen in the Ancaster supply trenches, an' a deputation of the Wigshires came along to investigate.

"It's a very funny thing,' sez one of the Wigshires, a chap named Wingsey, 'you chaps have got more fried bacon an' jam than you can eat, an' we've got nothin.'

"If it amuses you,' sez Nobby, 'me an' the other heroes of the Ancasters are very satisfied.'

“We don’t want to make no accusations,’ sez this chap, ‘an’ we don’t want to do nothing’ unpleasant—’

“There is two ways out of these trenches,’ sez Nobby very cold-like: ‘you can go over the parapet an’ have a talk with the Germans, or you can go back the way you came. Another way,’ Nobby sez thoughtfully, ‘is to wait for the ambulance to come an’ fetch you.’

“These little disturbances are always croppin’ up. Sometimes you hear talk about it in the trenches; sometimes you have to wait till you get back to billets before you get any news.

“We were in billets, the Wigshires havin’ relieved us, an’ were settlin’ down to a quiet country life, when a couple of Wigshire chaps drifted into our village. They had been sent back with a convoy of sick to the collectin’-station, an’ by their mysterious hints and their sarcastic manner, we knew that somethin’ was up.

“It is a very curious thing,’ sez one of these Wigshire chaps.

“You are,’ sez Nobby.

“It is a very curious thing,’ this chap went on, ‘that our regiment should find some of its comforts near your lines.’

“Speak plainly, Moses,’ sez Nobby. ‘You alarm me.’

“To rob the poor bloomin’ soldier,’ the Wigshire chap went on, ‘is one of the lowest crimes I have ever heard about.’

“Hear, hear!’ sez Nobby.

“We’ve found one of our boxes of supplies,’ sez the chap. ‘We found it very close to the marsh road, not one hundred yards from your supply trenches. There it was lyin’ *doggo* by the side of the road where nobody would have thought of lookin’ for it.’

“Nobby jumped to his feet.

“Here, he sez, agitated, ‘what is this you are talkin’ about?’

“A packin’-case,’ sez the Wigshire man very emphatic—‘a Wigshire packin’-case with comforts for the troops sent by a young lady in England with her best love. What the Ancasters pinched, and what we found.’

“Do you mean to tell me,’ sez Nobby, turnin’ pale, ‘that you found that packin’-case by the marsh?’

“I do,’ sez the other chap, ‘an’, what’s more, I was the fellow that found it. To-night, he sez, ‘when the fellows are eatin’ them comforts—’

“Nobby didn’t wait for any more, but dashed out of the barn an’ made his way to the little cottage which our officers were usin’ as a mess. In three minutes the bugles were soundin’ to assembly, and ‘B’ and ‘C’ companies had fallen in.

“We had better send as many as we can spare,’ I heard the Colonel say to the Adjutant. ‘We don’t know to what part of the trenches this confounded box has got!’

“Whose idea was it?’ sez the Colonel.

“Private Clark’s of B company,’ replies the Adjutant.

“What a brain that fellow has!’ sez the Colonel, but he sez it in a way which made Nobby squirm.

“It was growin’ dark, an’ the roads underfoot were thick with mud, but we marched quicker than we had ever marched before.

“It was Spud Murphy, Nobby, and me who struck the section of the trench where the box was. One of the Wigshires was just puttin’ the edge of his entrenchin’ tool between the lid an’ the box when Nobby fell on him.

Illustration:

One of the Wigshires was just puttin’ the edge of his entrenchin’ tool between the lid and the box when Nobby fell on him

“Here, what’s the game?’ said the chap, an’ one of the Wigshire officers came up.

“What is the meanin’ of this?’ he sez. But before we could answer, the sentry at one end of the trench loosed of a round of ammunition and shouted ‘Look out!’

“It was a bit of luck,” Smithy went on, “that we came up in time. A whole brigade of German infantry had been pushed forward against the Wigshires’ front. From 8 till 10.30 the Wigshires and the Ancasters fought side by side until the enemy blew up a bit of the trench and the order came to retire.

“In the support trenches we rallied, drivin’ back two fresh attacks, an’ gradually the firin’ died down on our front, an’ at 12 o’clock there was almost silence.

“This is a nice thing,’ sez Wingsey, of the Wigshires bitterly. ‘They have not only got our trenches, but they have got our bloomin’ jam!’

“He had hardly got the words out of his mouth before there came an explosion in the trench we had left louder than any other explosion I have ever heard.

“What is that?’ sez our company officer, who was standin’ close behind me an’ Nobby.

“That, sir,’ sez Nobby proudly, ‘is the jam!’”

