

A complete, true-to-life story of fighting in the air during the Great War, and how an affair of honour was settled by an aerial duel.

THE FIRST CHAPTER The Dawn Patrol I

" Jour o'clock, sir!"

Captain Eric Milvain, of One Hundred and Ten Squadron, operating from Duville, was awake in an instant.

"Oh, hallo, Bates!" he grunted. "What

kind of morning is it?"

"Clear and fine, sir," replied the batman.
"Right-ho!" exclaimed Eric. "Stand by
outside with the canvas bucket, Bates, and
1'll have a cold sluice!"

Five minutes later, dressed in his oilstained khaki uniform, with its pilot's wings and row of medal ribbons on the left breast of the tunic, Eric crossed to the mess, his flying kit over his arm.

Dew sparkled on the grass, and there was in the air the fresh, clean smell of early morning. But from eastwards came the rumble of heavy gunfire, grim token that the dawn "strafe" had commenced in earnest.

Eric gulped down a cup of steaming black coffee, then made his way towards the hangars, where mechanics were wheeling his fast little Camel fighting scout out on to the tarmac. A sergeant mechanic swung himself up to the snug cockpit, and, as he switched on, another mechanic swung the

propeller.

The engine picked up with a shattering roar, and, after running it up to full revolutions, the sergeant throttled down. Leaving the propeller ticking over, he clambered out of the cockpit and dropped to the ground.

"O.K., sergeant?" asked Eric.

"Yes, sir," replied the sergeant, saluting. "Giving her revs?"

"Yes, sir. She's fine!" replied the ser-

Eric nodded.

"I'm off towards Metz on offensive patrol," he remarked, buttoning his leather flying coat at the neck, then added regretfully: "I suppose it's a bit too early in the day for our friend, the Count, to be

The sergeant grinned. Every flying man on that part of the line knew the Count. They called him the Count, but his full name was Count Gerhard von Platz. One of the most brilliant war aces that had ever taken the air, he had over seventy Allied

machines to his credit.

The machine he flew was a black Fokker scout, with a grinning skull painted in white on the stream-lined fuselage. As his record showed, he was a brilliant fighting pilot, fearless and merciless.

Eric himself had thirty-four German machines to his credit, but he had never vet had the satisfaction of meeting Gerhard

von Platz in the air.

"I suppose I'm lucky, sergeant," he said, turning towards his cockpit, "in that I've never met him yet."

"Lucky, sir?" questioned the sergeant.

"Yes," replied the boy, "because when I do only one of us will return home, and I don't think that one will be me!"

"You're as good as he is, sir," replied the argeant emphatically. "And you only sergeant emphatically. want to meet him in the air to prove it!"

"Ah, but I don't seem fated to meet him," laughed Eric, and swung himself up to the

cockpit.

He ran his engine up once to satisfy himself that it was giving full revolutions, then, drawing on his flying gloves, he opened the throttle again. The roar of the engine rose to a high, pulsating, thunderous rhythm, setting the little fighting scout quivering against the chocks.

Eric's gloved hand shot up, and, in response to the signal, the waiting mechanics whipped away the chocks from in front of the tyred wheels of the under-The scout shot forward like a carriage. greyhound from the slips. The tail came up, and, as Eric eased back the controlstick, the machine took the air in a steep upward climb.

Circling once over the hangars, Eric shoved forward the control-stick and dived on the banked-up range at the far side of the aerodrome. Above the roar of his engine there sounded the staccato rattle of his synchronised gun as he fired a test burst.

Then back came the stick, and the scout went up into the blue in a zoom, to flatten out and swing eastwards towards the

trenches, climbing as it went.

And at the aerodrome behind the ser-

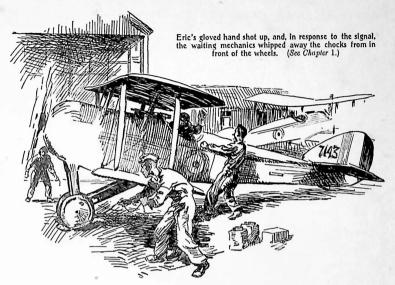
geant turned to the watching mechanics. "I'll bet a month's pay," he said, with slow deliberation, "that if ever he meets Von Count there'll be one Boche pilot less on this part of the line!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER "Fokkers!"

AT fifteen thousand feet, Eric passed over the trenches and headed eastwards into Germany. He was tensed in his seat, and continually his watchful eyes swept the sky ahead. More than once, also, he turned to scan the sky behind, for he knew the danger of enemy aircraft coming hurtling down on his tail from out of the

Far below, on the ground, grey-clad columns of the enemy were moving up to the line. Anti-aircraft guns, occupied with the shelling of British artillery observation machines, had little time for the lone scout so high in the morning sky. The Fokkers or the guns farther eastwards would attend to him. He would not return, that Engländer.

On and on thundered the scout, climbing



to eighteen thousand feet. Visibility was good, the sky cloudless. Away to starboard something like a ball of cotton-wool came suddenly into being, and dissolved into white, wraith-like smoke. Another and another appeared, closer now. It was shrappel.

Eric saw it and smiled grimly. The German gunners had not got his range, and he would be past before they could do so. They'd wait for him coming back, of course, but a lot might happen before then.

Suddenly the boy stiffened in his seat. Instinctively his hand moved towards the trigger of his synchronised gun. Far ahead, high in the sky, were ten machines. Moments passed as, climbing to another thousand feet, Eric watched them closely. Then came certainty as to the identity of the machines which were now heading towards him.

They were Fokker scouts!

It was obvious that they had sighted Eric. But advantage of height lay with the boy, and he continued to climb. Remorselessly, in fighting formation, the Fokker scouts came thundering on towards him. And if the Englander had the momentary advantage of height, what did that matter? Were they not ten to one? The chances were he would turn and run, rather than face certain death by showing fight.

Eric held his fire, keeping the nose of his machine up, until the Fokkers were within a quarter of a mile of him and two thousand

feet below him.

Then forward went his control-stick, and his gloved fingers curled round the trigger of his synchronised gun. With engine thundering at full revolutions, he tore down at the Fokker formation. Wind shrieked madly through his flying wires and struts, and above the roar of his engine there sounded the death-snarl of his flaming gun.

Right through the formation he went, and as he pulled back his control-stick to go up, up in a wild, soaring zoom, one Fokker went spinning earthwards in flames. But the others had broken formation, and were diving in at him from every angle,

with guns ablaze.

Bullets ripped and whined through the fabric of his fuselage and planes, and white wood showed vivid beneath the varpish of riven struts. Kicking on the rudder, Eric whipped the control-stick across, and tore to meet the nearest Fokker.

He had a vision of the white-faced German pilot, crouched over his controls, with leather face-mask whipping back in the whirling slipstream of the propeller. Then, when it seemed as though the two machines must crash propeller boss to propeller boss, the German leapt to his feet, hands clutching at his throat.

The control-stick jerked forward of its own volition, and as the Fokker fell away into the death-spin, the pilot crumpled up over the controls, shot through the throat.

But there were eight of his companions left to avenge him. Twisting, diving, looping, rolling, Eric fought desperately against the overwhelming odds. His left arm was hanging uselessly, the shoulder of his flying coat wet with blood. He knew, hemmed in as he was by lurid, flaming guns, that the end was inevitable. Already his machine was lurching drunkenly, and his rudder control wire was hanging by a strand.

But two more Fokkers went spinning earthwards, their pilots limp across the controls, before the end came for the boy. The squadron leader had pulled out of the fight, manœuvring for position. And now he came thundering down on Eric's tail, cartridge-belt whirling madly through the

chamber of his Krupp gun.

Eric wheeled to meet this new artack, but as he kicked on the rudder, the control wire snapped, and the bar swung loosely beneath the boy's booted foot. At the same instant he felt a searing pain on his scalp. His world went black about him, and, as he slid forward in his seat, his scout tore earthwards, out of control. Once, the rush of cold air seemed to revive him, and weakly he tried to haul himself off the controls, his gloved fingers groping for the switch on his

shattered dashboard. And, high in the sky above him, the Fokker leader wheeled the triumphant remnants of his squadron, and headed back eastwards towards his aerodrome. In future, there would be one roving Englander the less.

THE THIRD CHAPTER Henri D'Auvignac!

CAPTAIN ERIC MILVAIN slowly opened his eyes and looked about him in dawning wonderment. Swathed in bandages, he was lying in bed in a small, sparsely-furnished room. And by the side of the bed, watching him, was seated an elderly man in shabby civilian dress.

Seeing the boy awake, the man rose and shuffled from the room. He closed the door behind him and a key clicked in the lock. Minutes passed—long minutes, in which jumbled recollection of the fight came to Eric, and in which he made the discovery that his head was throbbing agonisedly,

and that he was strangely weak.

Murmured voices on the other side of the door drew his attention. Then suddenly the door opened, and a young man stepped into the room. He also was in civilian dress, but his not unpleasant features were drawn and haggard, as though with long suffering, and his right arm hung withered and misshapen. As he slowly crossed the floor towards the bed where Eric lay, the boy could not help but notice his halting, pitiful limp.

"You are awake, then, m'sieur," he said, speaking in French, and the smile which accompanied the words wiped something of

the pain from his face.

"Yes," replied Eric weakly, staring up at him. "But I do not understand. You are French, are you not?"

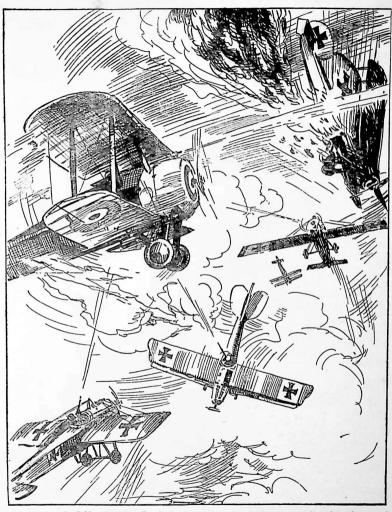
The other inclined his head in assent.

"Yes, I am French, m'sieur," he said softly. "My name is Henri D'Auvignac."

"But," persisted Eric, in a weak and puzzled voice, "I crashed in Germany."

"Pardon, m'sieur," corrected D'Auvignac quietly, "you crashed in Alsace!"

"Which is German territory!" replied Eric.



Right through the Fokker formation Eric hurled his machine, his flaming gun sounding above the roar of their engines. The enemy broke order and one 'plane went spinning earthwards in flames. (See Chapter 2.)

"Yes, German territory agreed D'Auvignac, and there was a quiver of emotion in his voice. "A little longer they may hold it, those cursed Junkers. But already their vaunted field-grey heroes fall back, and the shadow of defeat hangs heavy over Germany. Soon we will see the armies of France and England push forward to the Rhine, and once more the Tricolour of France will wave above this province of Alsace!"

Eric was silent. He knew what Henri D'Auvignac meant. He knew that many in Alsace, whilst owing allegiance to the House of Hohenzollern, looked forward in their hearts to the day when their beloved France should once more take possession of Alsace, which had been wrested from her by the mailed fist of Prussia long, weary years

ago.

"Will you please tell me how I come to be here?" asked Eric quietly, breaking the

sudden silence.

"You crashed near this house of mine, m'sieur, which stands isolated and alone, some twenty kilometres to the south-east of Metz," replied D'Auvignac. "You would undoubtedly have been killed had you notor so it appeared to Jacques and I-switched off your engine and pulled your machine out of its dive when you were about five hundred feet from the ground. You hit the ground in what I think you call a sideslip, and you were thrown clear of the wreckage Your machine took fire, but Jacques-he is my servant, m'sieur-and I pulled you out of danger, and carried you to the house. I am afraid," he added, with a twisted smile, "that I could not help much. You see, m'sieur, I am paralysed in my arm!"

"What can I say to thank you for what

you have done?" murmured Eric.

"Nothing, m'sieur! We require no thanks. For two days we have kept you here and nursed you, and——"

"How long?" exclaimed Eric.

"It is two days since you crashed, m'sieur," explained D'Auvignac. "And during those two days death has hovered very close to you. But you will get better now, and Jacques and I will keep you

hidden here till you are strong and well enough to attempt an escape from this country. M'sieur, you must not be taken prisoner. Ah, you do not know the horror of a German prison camp!"

Eric stared up at D'Auvignac in blank

amazement.

"Do you mean to say," he demanded, trying to raise himself on his elbow, "that

the Boche don't know I'm here?"

"No, m'sieur, they do not!" replied D'Auvignac. "They came, of course, to inspect the wreckage of your machine, but none had seen Jacques and me carry you here, and they think you crawled away to die somewhere. They were very sure you had been badly wounded."

"It is a wonder they didn't search this

house," remarked Eric slowly.

"They did, m'sieur, but Jacques and I had hidden you below some sacking in the cellar behind the wine-cellar. They did not search much beyond the wine-cellar, and you, unconscious, never stirred!"

"But, great Scott! Don't you realise you'll be shot for harbouring me if they

find me here?" cried Eric.

"That is a risk which I must take, m'sieur," replied D'Auvignac quietly, "and one which I take most willingly. m'sieur," he went on, his face working strangely, "you do not know how I, a cripple, have thanked the good God from the bottom of my heart that he has given me this opportunity to aid our cause-the cause of France and gallant England. I have not been interned because the Boche does not know that my sympathies are heart and soul with the armies of France. Nor does he, in his arrogance, suspect hurt from a poor cripple such as I. On the eve of war I tried to reach France, but I was too The frontiers were closed, and I had to remain here."

"But, D'Auvignac, I cannot allow you to risk your life-" began Eric, in distress.

"Is life, then, so sweet for such as me," cut in D'Auvignac bitterly, "that I should fear to face a German firing squad? And what better death could I die than in the service of my country?"

He turned away his head, and when he

spoke again his voice was almost a whisper.

"One thing only do I ask of life before I die," he said, "and that is to see justice done to the man who murdered my brother!"

He turned again to face Eric.

"You are an airman," he said quietly, "and maybe you have heard of him-that Prussian Junker who killed my brother. He is a German war ace!"

"His name, D'Auvignac?"

"Is Count Gerhard von Platz, m'sieur!"

met his death at the hands of Count Gerhard von Platz.

"M'sieur," D'Auvignac had said, "always the Junker blood flowed in the veins of Gerhard von Platz. He spent his boyhood on a near-by estate, which was owned by his father. Louis and I were boys at the same time as was Von Platz. Often we quarrelled, and often Louis thrashed him, m'sieur, for some cruelty to some poor dumb and defenceless animal. We grew up, and



"You mean that I am a liar?" said Von Platz, pushing back his chair and rising. "Yes I" replied Eric coldly. "And also a swaggering braggart, who is lucky indeed not to have been shot down by a British 'plane before to-day !" (See Chapler 5.)

THE FOURTH CHAPTER The Way of Von Platz I

Mars drifted on, and, hidden in the attic of D'Auvignac's house, Eric progressed slowly through convalescence to health. D'Auvignac spent long hours with him, and a strange affection for the poor cripple grew in the boy's heart.

Often when he was alone Eric would think of how D'Auvignac's brother. Louis, had there came the war. Louis was conscripted to the colours and drafted to the flying corps. He became a pilot in the squadron of Gerhard von Platz. But Von Platz had not forgotten the boyhood days, m'sieur. and he hated Louis.

"One night in the mess he taunted Louis about the Alsatian blood which flows in D'Auvignac veins. They quarrelled, and Louis struck him. He did not have Louis court-martialled, m'sieur. No, for he

himself had been indiscreet. He challenged Louis to a duel, for with the war duelling has come again into its own. M'sieur, Von Platz is deadly with the rapier, and Louis had never handled one. Yet this affair of honour demanded clean steel—and Louis died. Ah, m'sieur, the whole thing was but a cunning trap set by Von Platz, who hated Louis, and who, when a boy, had sworn that some day he would repay in full the thrashings Louis had given to him."

"And have you ever seen Von Platz since

this happened?" Eric had asked.

"Yes," had been the reply. "I have seen him often. He sometimes operates from the aerodrome on the outskirts of Metz, and he comes here to dine. Yes, you may stare, m'sieur, but it is so. Nothing would give him greater pleasure than for me to refuse him admittance, or to quarrel with him myself. I tell you, m'sieur, he hates the D'Auvignacs, and he knows his presence here is a deadly insult. Yet, if I offend him, he will denounce me as either a traitor or as a pro-Ally, and if I am not shot, then I will be sent to the internment camps. That is what he wants, but I will not give him the satisfaction of putting me away. I wait, m'sieur, for I know in my heart that if I am patient some day I will see Louis avenged. I know my attitude puzzles Von Platz, but he will not trap me as he trapped Louis."

The more Eric pondered on the matter, the more he was convinced that Henri D'Auvignac was acting wisely. After all, as far as the world was aware, Louis D'Auvignac had struck the first blow, and had been killed in clean fight for his presumption. Hostility on the part of Henri could only result in misery, and maybe death, for the poor cripple. No, Henri was

wise to bide his time.

There came a day when he brought a

German uniform to Eric.

"It was my brother's, m'sieur," he said.
"You are almost well now, and in this uniform you will have a better chance of reaching the frontier. Make for Switzerland, but beware of the Swiss frontier guards, many of whom are in German pay! I want you to leave here to-night!"

Eric took the grey, high-necked German uniform and looked steadily at Henri.

"Why do you suggest that I leave to

night?" he asked quietly.

"Because, m'sieur, I do not think you

will be safe here much longer!"

"Why do you think that?" persisted Eric.
Henri was silent a moment, and when
he answered his voice was low.

"Because, m'sieur," he said, "to-night Von Platz comes here again, and brings with him his friends. It will not be safe for

you to be in the house!"

"Safe?" echoed Eric, and laughed aloud. "Henri," he went on earnestly, taking D'Auvignac's arm in his firm, strong hand, "ever since you told me your story I've been waiting for this opportunity of meeting Von Platz! Listen! Fortunately, I can speak German like a native. I have a plan, and if all goes well, by to-morrow night you will be back in your beloved France, and Von Platz will be dead! Now, listen carefully!"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER The Challenge !

THAT evening, clad in the uniform of the German Air Service, Eric Milvain sat at dinner with Henri D'Auvignac and Count Gerhard von Platz. There were four other officers there, who had flown over from Metz with Von Platz.

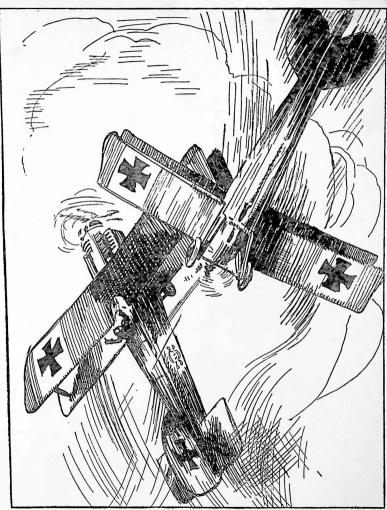
Henri had introduced Eric as the Herr Hauptmann Alberich von Federkiel, on leave from the School of Flying Instruction at Dusseldorf. Von Platz and his companions accepted Eric as such, without suspicion. Why should they suspect any-

thing?

Time and again the boy's blood boiled as Von Platz shot some thinly-veiled taunt at Henri D'Auvignac. There was a devilish ingenuity in this subtle form of torture, for torture it was to D'Auvignac to be forced to entertain the man who had killed his brother. Yet refusal to entertain would have resulted in disaster.

It was perfectly obvious that Von Platz was endeavouring to goad Henri into some indiscreet gesture or word, but Henri sat in brooding silence throughout the meal.

More than once Eric could scarcely realise



In the instant that Eric's strategic move brought him above the 'plane of Von Platz, his gun belched flame and lead. As a bullet hit the enemy ace, he flung up his arms and then slumped limply over the controls. (See Chapter 5.)

that he was sitting at table with the great German ace who had wrought such havoc amongst Allied machines. He watched the man—tall, fair, arrogant—weighing him carefully up for what was about to come.

It was when coffee was circulating that Von Platz made a remark which gave Eric

his cue.

"Prince Rupprecht. in his latest despatch to his father the King of Bavaria," murmured Von Platz. idly watching the blue, drifting smoke of his cigarette, "has, I understand, referred to me as being even greater than the Baron Richtofen!"

"Then he lied!" said Eric quietly.

There was a moment of tense silence. Von Platz turned his cold blue eyes on the boy.

"I beg your pardon?" he said icily.

"I say Prince Rupprecht lied if he said that," replied Eric steadily. "But I do not think he said it. To my mind, the statement exists only in your imagination, in which it was originated!"

"You mean"—Von Platz's voice was under perfect control—"that I am a liar?"

Eric nodded assent.

"And also a swaggering braggart, who is lucky indeed not to have been shot down by some British or French machine before

to-day!" he said coldly.

Count Gerhard von Platz pushed back his chair and rose slowly to his feet. His face was pale with passion, and not for an instant did his blazing eyes leave the boy's face.

"You understand," he said thickly, "that there can be only one answer to what you

have said?"

"Yes." Eric shrugged his shoulders. "A court-martial for insolence to the Count Gerhard von Platz, who prefers to protect his honour thus!"

There was not one man in the room who did not understand what Eric meant. The words were tantamount to a challenge yet the challenge must come from Von Platz. And it did.

"My honour is in my own safe keeping," he said harshly. "I shall prove that to you

one hour after dawn!"

Eric nodded.

"Let us dispense with seconds for the moment," he drawled. "The choice of weapons lies with me!"

"That is so !"

"Then I choose the aeroplane and the synchronised gun!" replied Eric sternly. "And I, the Hauptmann Alberich von Federkiel, will prove my words that the luck in the air has so far lain with you!"

He turned to the others.

"And as for you, gentlemen," he said, "whatever the result of this duel in the air may be, you give your word that the loser died in an accidental crash!"

"That is agreed. We give our word!"

was the response.

High in the morning sky, one hour after dawn the next day, wheeled two Fokker scouts. One was the machine of Count Gerhard von Platz, and the other had been provided for Eric by one of the pilots who had accompanied Von Platz from Metz.

At ten thousand feet they engaged in battle to the death, and for eight minutes they twisted, rolled, looped, and dived, each pilot striving grimly for the mastery. But Eric was fighting grimly, with a threefold motive. The shooting down of Von Platz would mean the avenging of Louis D'Auvignac, whose brother had so heroically aided the boy. It would mean that no longer would Von Platz ride the sky, taking grim toll of Allied machines, and it would mean life and liberty for Eric.

And there came a moment when the boy staked all on one last strategic move. He threw his machine into a spin and went plunging earthwards. Grinning viciously behind his leather face-mask, Von Platz followed, confident that a burst from his flam-

ing gun had got Eric.

He relaxed in his sent as he circled round the spinning Fokker. Then suddenly, with a roar of high-powered engine, the Fokker came out of its spin and tore straight in towards Von Platz, with snarling gun

Too late, the war ace saw his danger. The move had come with such terrible swiftness that he had but the fraction of a second ? in which to act. He kicked on the rudder, banking wildly away from the death thundering towards him. And in that instant of time, Eric's Krupp gun raked Von Platz's machine from tail plane to engine cowling.

C-c-c-crack !

The stream of death-dealing bullets blazed out with a belch of flame from Eric's synchronised gun. Too late Count Gerhard von Platz realised that he had been caught napping; that he had, indeed, fought his last fight.

He turned an agonised face towards the Nemesis that had overtaken him.

C-c-c-crack !

Once more Eric's Krupp gun spoke-for the last time in that memorable encounter.

A tongue of flame licked back from the riven petrol tank, and as Count Gerhard von Platz slumped limply forward over the controls, his machine tore earthwards, a blazing mass, surrounded by an eddying pall of thick black smoke.

Eric glanced down, then swung his Fokker westwards towards the line. had no difficulty in crossing the German lines, but he was doubtful as to the reception he would receive from the diligent

British anti-aircraft gunners.

With this thought in mind, Eric crossed the British lines at a high altitude. When he had left the trenches behind and was nearing an aerodrome, he plunged the Fokker earthwards, as if the engine had suddenly ceased to function. This deceived the anti-aircraft gunners, and, straightening out, Eric was able to land in a field adjoining the aerodrome. He was taken prisoner immediately, but his identity was established after inquiries had been made, and before noon was back with his own squadron.

And under cover of darkness that night, a Bristol fighter landed near the lonely house of Henri D'Auvignac, and, taking him and Jacques on board, took off and headed westwards towards France.

THE END

The Thin Red Line!

In these days of khaki-clad troops, the phrase "Thin Red Line" has almost ceased to hold a meaning-but only for those who have forgotten one of the most thrillingly glorious pages that the world's

history holds.

It was when a worn-out, battle-exhausted remnant of British troops stood up to massed attacks by overwhelming numbers of French infantry, cavalry, and artillery, and not only beat them off but put them to flight, and in so doing gave a thrashing to the Bully of Europe, that the great Wellington showered warm praise on his red-coated warriors for the bravery and prowess which, as a "thin red line," they showed on that memorable June 18th, 1815, on the field of Waterloo.

British regiments of the Line, garbed in red tunics, blue trousers, and the queer shakes and helmets of the time, were strung out, literally in a thin red line, to meet the

full force of the French cavalry.

All day Wellington had held at bay the immense army of Napoleon Buonaparte. Napoleon saw that the time had come for his forces to make the supreme effort to break this obstinate British force. and again his cavalry charged the British, but always our sorely-tried troops beat the enemy back.

It was the old 28th Regiment of Footnow the Gloucestershire Regiment-that bore the brunt of that fierce attack of frantic horsemen. The small squares into which the men had formed were surrounded again and again by the enemy. But they stood adamant.

Then came a lull. There was a waver of steel, a ragged cheer, and the 28th Foot and others of the British were charging. The French were in retreat! It was a perfect rout, and Napoleon's power was

broken utterly!

The Thin Red Line of heroes had whipped 5 him, had achieved the "impossible," and Napoleon was captured and sent, a prisoner and an exile, to the lonely rock of St.

Helena, there to end his days.



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