

Shanghaied at Seventeen

By
Sergeant Arthur Guy Empey

Author of "Over the Top,"
"First Call," Etc.

Mr. Empey's Experiences During His Seventeen Months in the First Line Trenches of the British Army in France

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In New York Public School No. 78 I had three chums, "Bill" Meek, "Jim" Fleming, and "Charlie" Unger.

Bill was full of wild ideas and schemes. He had the "get-rich-quick" mania. About every two weeks he would call us aside and in a mysterious and important manner carefully unfold some daring scheme to get rich quick, giving his personal guarantee that it could not fail. At first we were very enthusiastic over his scheme and wanted to go in "with both feet," and would carefully work out the details of how to proceed, when, bang! Bill would introduce another project absolutely different from the preceding one. When we asked him what became of his wonderful proposition of two weeks ago, he unhesitatingly told us that unforeseen circumstances which no one could predict had interfered. Then he would enroll another wild dream of fortune. And so it went on; one scheme after another vanishing in smoke, until we became very skeptical. Personally, I had no faith in any of Bill's day dreams, but I admired, and perhaps envied, his spirit of adventure; so at last I decided that I would take a chance, success or no success.

One night Bill came around to the house with four tickets for a blood and thunder war play entitled "Cuba's Vow." His brother was playing the villain. This play greatly impressed me; in fact, from the first act to the last the footlights were gushing blood, love and adventure—and rotten acting. Bill's brother was awful.

Bill was a pretty good judge of human nature. He had taken us to this play to get us worked up to a pitch of enthusiasm, and thus getting us in the proper frame of mind, he could enroll his latest scheme.

That night, after the show, he proposed a trip to South America, which took our breaths away. We were to run away and ship on a tramp steamer, for a passage of about nine months. With the money thus earned we were to equip ourselves and start out for Port Limon, Costa Rica, and go into the coffee plantation business. We all fell for this and took a solemn vow to stick. The scheme especially appealed to me because there was my chance to follow Dana in his "Two Years Before the Mast." The next day, after sleeping it over, Charlie and Jim decided that there was more money in New York, and refused to go. I admit I had a sinking sensation in the pit of my stomach when I viewed the proposition in the sunlight, but I stuck. Then Bill and I made a tour of the docks in New York, trying to find the ship we wanted. We fell in with several "boarding masters." These men in lank water fronts of large cities and are nothing but bloodsuckers preying on sailors. One of these parasites took us on board an old tramp steamer, lying in Erie basin, called the Cushman. Here we met the steward, a "lime juicer," John Royal-Minns, with the emphasis on the hyphen. The wonderful tale of sense, luxury and "getting paid for seeing the world" stuff that the steward and the boarding master unrolled before our eager eyes carried us into the seventh heaven of expectation. This was five o'clock in the afternoon. The ship was to sail at three-thirty the following morning, but they did not tell us this. The steward said that we were just the two that he wanted, there being vacancies on the ship for second steward and second cook. He suggested that we sleep on the ship that night, and then in the morning, after seeing what it was like, we could go home and decide whether we wanted to ship or not. I demurred at this, because I had to go home first, so he gave Bill and me permission to go, but said we had to get back at midnight. We hurried home and on the way I packed my grip with my belongings.

That night I exploded a bombshell in the family. After dessert had been served, puffed up with importance, I declared: "Well, I'm going to South America." A barrage of laughter rippled around the table. This got me sore, and I shut up like a clam. It was February, and very cold. About seven o'clock that night a great storm came up and the streets were soon covered with sleety ice. I turned into bed with my clothes on. Bill was notified me at ten o'clock by throwing pebbles against the window pane in my room. Every time I looked out into the street and saw that howling blizzard, a picture of a ship walking in a trough of the sea constantly came before my mind and I shivered, and my enthusiasm dropped to zero. I could not take my eyes away from the clock. It was an agony of intense waiting, similar to that when, later in the trenches, I

kept looking at my wrist watch waiting for four o'clock in the morning when we were to go "over the top" in a charge. Oh, how I wished that Bill would change his mind!

About five minutes to ten, crack! crack! came a couple of pebbles against the window pane, sounding like the crack of bullets on the western front. With my shoes in one hand and my grip in the other, I softly tiptoed downstairs, put on my shoes and heavy overcoat, and opened the front door. I was greeted by a rush of wind, snow and sleet. Bill looked like a snowman.

We plowed through the blizzard, got on a trolley car, and reached Erie basin at a quarter to 12, went up the gangplank and reported to the steward.

The ship looked like an ice palace. You could hear the creaking of winches and the straining of cables, and could see dark forms sliding and cursing on the slippery decks under the glow of the cargo lights.

The steward greeted us very cordially and I thought him the finest man I had ever met. Bill was shipped as second steward, and I got the billet of second cook.

My "glory hole" was aft on the main deck, while Bill slept amidships. I piled into the little two-by-four bunk and was soon fast asleep. I had a horrible dream; a giant had me by the heels and was swinging me around his head, trying to dash my brains out against the side of the ship. I awoke in terror. The "glory hole" seemed to be looping the loop, and I could hear heavy thuds as immense waves broke against the side of the ship, the water hissing and rushing around the port hole. Reaching for the electric button I turned on the switch. An awful mess met my eyes. The deck of my room was awash. The grip and all my belongings, which I had unpacked before turning in, were swishing and swashing on the deck, now in this corner, now in that.



Arthur Guy Empey.

The ship was rolling like a log in the trough of the sea. I held on to the sides of my bunk in terror. A wave would swash against my door and water would pour in through the cracks. I felt deathly sick and I thought I was going to die. I was experiencing my first touch of seasickness.

About six bells in the morning (three o'clock) the door opened, and three standing in the opening was a huge Swede, encased in oilskins. The icy blast sent a cold shiver through me. I wondered what he wanted, but did not wonder long.

"You bane get tea and toast on bridge for mate, damn quick," I was bewildered. The door slammed and once again I was alone. Fifteen minutes must have passed when the door opened again and in rushed the toughest-looking seaman I have ever seen. He had only one eye. Later on I found that he was out first mate, "One-eyed Gibson," a "Blue-Noser" from Nova Scotia, and a man whom it was not safe to trifle with. Without a word he stepped into the glory hole, grabbed my shoulder in a grip of steel, and yanked me out of my bunk into the icy water which was awash on the deck. This was my first introduction to him.

"Get out o' that, you landlubber. There's no fire in the galley, and I want my tea on the bridge, and I want it now, or I'll put out your dead lights."

I meekly answered, "Yes, sir," and started to put on my wet socks. Seeing this action, he shouted, "Never mind that damned rigging. Get into the galley and get that fire alight."

My feet were blue with the cold and my teeth were chattering. I timidly asked, "Where are we, sir?" With a look of contempt he answered, "We're outside o' Sandy Hook, bound south for the Horn, and she's blowing big guns." Then he left.

I stepped out of my glory hole onto the deck. We were dipping our scuppers, and huge seas were breaking over the weather side. One minute the after deck would appear like a steep hill in front of me, and a horrible churning sound would come from the racing propeller. Then the deck would slant away from me and a loud chug! and a shiver through the ship as the propeller sank again into the water.

Bentumbed and wet from the icy spray, I managed to steer a course to the companionway, and dragged myself to the upper deck. A sailor was in the galley and had started a fire. The ship was rolling, pitching and lurching. In that galley it sounded like a bombardment. Pots and pans were rattling in their racks; a few of them had fallen out, and were clanging each other around the deck.

Cold and miserable, I crouched in the corner, keeping myself from falling by holding on to the rail in front of the stove.

The sailor took compassion on me, and made the toast and tea. How he did it was a marvel to me, but later on I became very expert myself.

Following the "life lines" on the upper deck, I at last managed to reach the bridge with my pot of tea and two slices of toasted bread. There were two men at the wheel. In the darkness I went up to them and asked for the mate. They did not answer. Just then I received a resounding smack on the back which made my teeth rattle, and that dreaded, gruff voice of the mate reached my ears through the wind: "Damn you, you hell's spawn, keep away from the men at the wheel or I'll throw you over the side."

I mumbled my apologies, and followed the mate into the chart house. He greedily drank the tea, and in about four bites disposed of the pieces of toast. The toast was soaked in salt water and I inwardly wished that it would poison him; in fact I prayed that the ship would sink with all on board. Such is seasickness.

I managed, somehow or other, to make my way back to the galley, and I met my "superior officer" for the trip, the "cook." He was about five feet nothing in height; a shriveled-up Welshman about forty-five years old. He reminded me of a mummy in the Museum of Natural History in Central park. If he had ever smiled I am sure that his face would have cracked. It seemed frozen into one perpetual scowl. He gave one look at me and let out a howl.

"Blawst my deadlights, an' this 'ere (pointing to me) is what I'm to work with on this bloomin' passage. I'm lucky, I am, not 'arf, I ain't." He looked like some gorilla. The rolling of the ship affected him not in the least. He seemed to sway and bend with every movement of the ship.

The next two or three days were a horrible nightmare to me. How I lived through them I do not know. I had a deadly fear of the cook. As soon as he found out that I could not even boil water without burning it he started in to make my life a misery. He had a habit of carrying a huge butcher knife in his belt. Between meals he would sit down on a bench and constantly feel the edge, at the same time telling me what an expert he was at carving. Later on I found that there was a reason for his carrying this knife. He and the crew were at dagger points, he never daring to go forward except in case of necessity, and then he was careful always to carry his butcher knife. Down in my heart I realized that if the occasion should arise he would not be backward in demonstrating his art of carving on his opponent. That Welshman was no better cook than I was, and the crew soon became aware of this fact; hence their hostility.

The Cushman was a "lime juicer," sailing under the English flag. The skipper was a "lime juicer," the first mate a "blue noser," the first engineer a Scotsman, while the crew was composed of Spaniards, Italians, Squeakers, Finns, Swedes and Russians. The bos'n was Irish, and a firm believer in Home Rule. A worse gang of cutthroats could hardly be conceived; a nice, polite bunch they were. Believe me, Bill and I had our troubles.

Bill and I were the only two Americans on board. The engineer's messman was a Prussian, Karl Tatzner by name. I nicknamed him "Fritz." He was only twenty years old, but was clumsy, strong as an ox and about six feet tall.

After weathering the gale we at last came into the Gulf stream, and off the coast of Florida it was warm and pleasant.

I found that my duties were to peel spuds, wash pots and pans and be a regular "fetch and carry" for the cook. My office hours were from six bells in the morning (three o'clock) until four bells at night (ten o'clock). I was greasy and filthy at all times, having nothing but salt water to wash in, and this would not cut the grease. Bill had it much easier than I. I had murder in my heart and vowed to "jump ship" at the first port we put into.

After nine or ten days we came alongside at Castries, St. Lucia, British West Indies, to coal ship. At this port the men believed in woman suffrage. Long lines of half-naked black women, with huge baskets of coal on their heads, passed up the forward gang plank, dumped their load of coal into the open bunkers, and left the ship by the after gangway. Before leaving the ship the fourth engineer gave each one a little brass check, which later on she would turn in to the coaling company for an English penny. While the women were working the men would sit around the dock smoking cigarettes.

The natives at St. Lucia had a great appetite for salt pork. I soon got wise to this fact and traded about a half a barrel of pork for limes, guava jelly, bay rum and alligator pears. If the steward or cook had caught me I would never be writing this story. The women threw the pork into their dirty coal baskets, and upon reaching the dock gave it to their husbands or sweethearts, who would immediately, without washing it, devour it. They

spoke in a jibbering patois which I could not understand. Some of them could speak pretty good English. The kids, averaging from seven to fifteen years, were running around naked, or diving off the dock for pennies which we threw overboard.

About two hours before sailing from St. Lucia, a little fellow about fifteen years of age came to the entrance of the galley and in fair English told Bill and me a pathetic story of inhuman treatment which would have melted hearts of stone. He wanted us to stow him away on the ship. I was agreeable, but Bill warned me that this was a very grave offense against the English board of trade laws, the maximum penalty being fourteen years' imprisonment. I did not wish to incur this risk, therefore would not listen to the entreaties of the young negro, explaining to him the penalty of the board of trade laws. Upon hearing this, a cunning look, which at the time did not appear significant to me, came into his eyes, and he told me that if I would stow him away, "see how easy it will be for you." He would do all of my work, and all I would have to do would be to sit on the superstructure and let my feet hang. I thought this was worth risking fourteen years for, so fell in with the plan, Bill objecting.

The ventilators had been unshipped while the coaling was going on, and were lying aft on the poop deck. Watching our chance, we sneaked aft and hid the little fellow in one of the ventilators, warning him, upon pain of death, not to make a sound until the ship was well under way. To say that I was nervous is putting it mildly.

We cleared St. Lucia and were soon at sea. The islands of Martinique, St. Lucia and Barbados were tony gray dots on the horizon when an Italian sailor, Louis Maranto, went aft to ship the ventilators. In a few minutes he came rushing forward with terror in his eyes. As he passed the galley I stopped him and asked what was the matter. All he could gasp out was "Mary of God, a devil es on da ship." "One-eyed Gibson," seeing his terror, went aft with him and soon we could see him coming forward, leading our little stowaway by the ear. The little negro was howling blue murder, and the curses of the mate snapped like a wireline message. Luckily for me the mate stopped at the galley and said, "Keep your eye on this black skunk until I can take him before the 'old man.'" For five minutes I put all my power of entreaty into my voice and prayed the stowaway to stick by me; to swear that he came aboard of his own volition. He promised to do so. Then the mate came after him and took him before the captain. During this fifteen minutes of torment and suspense. The little fellow came back with a smile on his face and I knew things were all right. He told me that the captain had shipped him at a shilling a month for the passage. For two days he was detailed to help me in the galley, and I lived the life of a prince. We nicknamed him "Monday," the day that he came on board. His real name was Charles Tasima Benn.

On the fourth day, Monday, after peeling a bucket of spuds, while I was reading and smoking, threw down his knife and, with a sunning leer, in a commanding tone told me to get busy and complete the task; that he wished to rest. I started in to "bulldoze" him, but he simply held his hand in my direction, fingers extended, and in a majestic voice informed me:

"From now on, work for the American I will not. I tell Meester Captain American Monday stowed away. Meester American to preeson go fourteen years British government." I nearly fainted. From that time Bill and I were Monday's abject slaves. We even waited on him personally. Any article in my possession that Monday desired was his for the asking. The steward wormed the secret out of Monday, and I was also his slave. Bill and I spent a life of hell on board.

After getting into the tropics lime juice was issued daily to the crew to keep away scurvy. The food was hor-



"Get Out o' That, You Landlubber."

rible. The pork was rotten; in fact, on the head of one of the salt pork cans was stamped "Inspected 1883." The crew were on the verge of mutiny.

Then we reached the eastern entrance of the Straits and it was blustery and cold. The captain attempted to negotiate the Straits one bright moonlight night. After about three hours the moon disappeared and we went on the rocks, knocking a big hole in the side of the ship, and only quick and efficient work by the carpenter and crew saved us from sinking. They

dropped a huge sail over the side, covering the hole. The boats were put over the side and we expected the ship every minute to founder. Next day we were towed into Punta Arenas, and after two weeks the ship was again made seaworthy.

At Talcahuana we shipped 28 Spaniards, or "hombres," as we called them, to work the cargo. This doubled my work, and I prayed that I would die. It was nothing but misery to me. I must have peeled eleven million barrels of spuds; in fact, I never turned in before six bells at night, and had to turn out at six bells in the morning.

After touching at 13 ports on the west coast, discharging our cargo, we left for a little island called Lobos, where we were to take on a cargo of guano. While working this cargo it was misery for everyone on board; the strong ammonia from the guano made our eyes red and watery, and we could only breathe by wrapping big handkerchiefs around our noses and mouths. The wind was constantly blowing, and guano was even in our food.

Then, coming back, we touched at Valparaiso, Chile. To me death seemed easier than the homeward-bound voyage, so one night Bill and I slid down the anchor chain and swam to a "bum-bum" lying near us. We gave the Chileno \$4 to row us ashore. He did so. Dripping wet we crawled up onto the stone quay and made tracks for the town. We found that the dock was enclosed by a tall iron fence. At the gate were two customs officers, who immediately put us under arrest. Bill and I had \$20 in gold between us, and, as is usual in South America, it was a simple matter to bribe the customs officials to let us through. This cost us half of our fortune, but we did not care. Freedom was worth all of it. We were well into the town and feeling secure when we were held up by a Chilean gendarme, who looked like a walking arsenal. This cost us \$2 more for our freedom. He left us in a hurry and went around the block. We had walked about five minutes when, bang! another gendarme. This cost us \$4. After leaving him we were more cautious, hiding our remaining money in my shoe. Again we were arrested. We said we had no money and were haled into the presence of the "commandante of police." He had one hundred and seventy-eight medals on his chest and four thousand yards of gold braid on his collar and cuffs. He had us searched, but did not find the money. Very much disappointed, in broken English he informed us that our ship was to sail at four o'clock the next morning, and that if he found us in Valparaiso we would be sent to the mines.

Shivering and trembling we wended our way back to the dock and hunted around for a boatman. Bribing him with our remaining money he at last brought us alongside, just before the gangplank was lifted. The black smoke was pouring from the single funnel of the Cushman. Then we went before the captain, and he "logged" us ten pounds (\$50) each.

On our homeward-bound passage we went around the Horn and ran into a gale. The bos'n mutinied. Old "One-eyed Gibson" came behind him and laid him low with a marlin spike. Then, carrying him amidships, he chained him to the iron steps leading to the bridge. He remained this way for a day and a half, exposed to cold and icy wind. Strict orders were passed through the ship that no one was to approach him. That night, under cover of darkness, Bill and I sneaked him a steaming pot of stew, and some hot coffee. If he had lived, we would, through this one action, have gained a true friend for life. From exposure he contracted pneumonia and died. He was buried at sea. The carpenter sewed him in a sack, and tying an old iron wheel to his feet, placed him on a plank, and while the captain read a rough burial service the plank was tilted, and the body of the bos'n went down to rest in Davy Jones' locker.

The first port we touched at, the consul's flag was hoisted at the foremast, and a bleary-eyed, half-drunken little old man came on board and was closeted with the captain for about an hour. When he came out he was staggering, and his eyes, if possible, were more bleary. The captain lined the crew up, and the consul, in a thick and stuttering voice, asked the crew if the bos'n had died from natural causes. Ninety per cent of the men could not understand what he said, and a silence prevailed. At sea silence means consent. I butted in and said "No." I was standing next to the mate. I felt that gorilla-like hand of his pinching the back of my neck, and I nearly fainted. Then the consul went over the side into his boat, and was soon pulling for the shore. We lifted anchor and the port was left behind.

Half way up the coast we ran out of fresh water, and had to drink condensed water from an old squeaky condensing engine. It was brackish and sickening. I would have sold my soul for one drink of clear, cold water.

Monday became tyrannical and unbearable, and it was up to Bill and me to devise some scheme to keep him in check.

Through listening to Monday's rible. The pork was rotten; in fact, on the head of one of the salt pork cans was stamped "Inspected 1883." The crew were on the verge of mutiny.

Then we reached the eastern entrance of the Straits and it was blustery and cold. The captain attempted to negotiate the Straits one bright moonlight night. After about three hours the moon disappeared and we went on the rocks, knocking a big hole in the side of the ship, and only quick and efficient work by the carpenter and crew saved us from sinking. They

up and took it to my glory hole. It was in a dying condition. I said that that night, about ten o'clock, I would go aft on the poop deck with the pelican's skin down my back, and, with my face smeared with black, would do a mystic dance. He was to take Monday and hide behind the ventilator, and while I was doing my war dance, he would explain to Monday that I was in communication with my father, the great American medicine man. He did this and it made quite a hit. The next morning Monday came to me, and, bowing low, requested a token, as he called it; a message from my father. I promised to give him one, but we were sure up against it. Then I thought of the little black bird in my glory hole, and the solution was at hand. I very solemnly informed Monday that at eight o'clock that night my father would send a message to me in the form of a little land bird. All day Monday kept away from me, adoration and awe in his eyes. Bill and I immediately repaired to the glory hole, and certainly took tender care of that bird, praying that it would live until eight o'clock. About ten minutes to eight I put on my feathers and sneaked aft with the little bird, placed it on the steering gear, and commenced my mystic dance. I chanted a little song: "Oh, father, greatest of medicine men, a token is desired for the esteemed friend of

your son. Oh, father, send me this token." Then, with a few mystic grunts, I beseeched Bill and Monday to come and receive the token. Monday came trembling aft and I pointed to the little black bird which was weakly gasping its last, but it saved the day for us. How we honored and respected that little bunch of black feathers. Curious to see what Monday would do, we left him. He sat by the bird for over an hour, chanting in that weird, sing-song patois of the British West Indies. From that time on Monday was our slave.



There Was a Reason for His Carrying This Knife.

Two days before reaching St. Lucia, the captain sent for us, and said that he knew that Bill and I had stowed away Monday. We, like a couple of fish, fell for this and admitted it, whereupon the captain coolly informed us that we had forfeited all pay and allowances due us for the entire voyage. The joke of it was that under the board of trade laws, the Cushman had to go two hundred miles out of her way to get to St. Lucia and put Monday ashore.

We dressed him in a long pair of white pants; the carpenter gave him a red vest; Bill placed a derby hat on his head and he went ashore in a small boat. When the boat returned we lifted anchor, and as St. Lucia again faded into the distance we could see a solitary little figure on the dock waving his white pants around his head. He had removed them upon reaching port. We felt a pang of regret as he faded out of sight.

After an uneventful trip we went into quarantine in New York harbor. At the first sight of the statue of liberty a rush of independence and patriotism surged through me, and I sat down on the hatchway and absolutely refused to work. The captain threatened to put me in double irons. I told him to go to hell, and do it; that I was a free American in a free American port, and I claimed the protection of the Stars and Stripes, and in accordance with my rights as a sailor, I demanded the consul's flag to be hoisted at the foremast. The captain gave me a hard look but wilted.

The next afternoon at eight bells I landed in New York, free again. I was dressed in a pair of blue overalls barefooted, a Panama hat on my head, black as a negro from sunburn, a red handkerchief around my neck, and wearing a white negligee shirt. On my left shoulder I had a small monkey, and in my right hand a wooden cane with a parrot in it. In my pocket was \$8.40 in silver, but I did not care. I was again on terra firma with the Stars and Stripes floating above me.

I received a wonderful welcome at home, and was of the opinion that the hardships of my cruise were well worth enduring, in view of the reception I was receiving. But of course all wonders die out in nine days, and mine sizzled out like a wet firecracker on the Fourth of July, and it was up to me to get busy and find something to do.

Thus ended my first real adventure.

Not Genuine Generosity.
Said the near cynic, "Some fellows boast of being liberal in their views, but that is as far as their liberality extends."