

THE DIGGER

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W'd gained' our first objective hours
before
While dawn broke like a face with
blinking eyes,
Pallid, unshaved, and thirsty, blind
with smoke.
Things seemed all right at first. We
held their line,
With bombers posted, Lewis guns well
placed,
And clink of shovels deepening the shal-
low trench.

The place was rotten with dead; green
clumpy legs
High-booted, sprawled and grovelled
along the saps;
And trunks, face downwards, in the
sucking mud,
Wallowed like trodden sandbags loosely
filled;
And naked sodden buttocks, mats of
hair,
Bulged, clotted heads slept in the plas-
tering slime
And then the rain began—the jolly old
rain!

A yawning soldier knelt against the
bank,
Staring across the morning bleak with
fog;
He wondered when the Allemands would
get busy;
And then, of course, they started with
five-nines
Traversing, sure as fate, and never a
dud.
Mute in the clamour of shells he watch-
ed them burst,
Spouting dark earth and wire with gusts
from hell,
While quick-firing giants dissolved in
drifts of smoke.
He crouched and flinched, dizzy with
galloping fear,
Sick for escape, loathing the strangled
horror
And butchered, frantic gestures of the
dead.

An officer came blundering down the
trench:
"Stand to and man the fire-step!" On he
went.
Gasping and bawling, "Fire-step, coun-
ter-attack!"
Then the haze lifted. Bombing on the
right
Down the old sap; machine-guns on the
left;
And stumbling figures looming out in
front.
"O Christ, they're coming at us!" Bul-
lets spat,
And he remembered his rifle... rapid
fire...
And started blazing wildly... then a
bang
Crumpled and spun him sideways,
knocked him out
To grunt and wriggle; none heeded
him, he choked
And fought the flapping veils of smother-
ing gloom,
Lost in a blurred confusion of yells and
groans...
Down, and down, and down, he sank
and drowned,
Bleeding to death. The counter-attack
had failed.

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