

The last conscious thought in the mind of Private Jock Macalister as he reached the German trench was to get down into it; his next conscious thought to get out of it. Up there on the level there were uncomfortably many bullets, and even as he leaped on the low parapet one of these struck the top of his forehead, ran deflecting over the crown of his head, and away. He dropped limp as a pole-axed bullock, slid and rolled helplessly down into the trench.

When he came to his senses he found himself huddled in a corner against the traverse, his head smarting and a bruised elbow aching abominably. He lifted his head and groaned, and as the mists cleared from his dazed eyes he found himself looking into a fat and very dirty face and the ring of a rifle muzzle about a foot from his head. The German said something which Macalister could not understand, but which he rightly interpreted as a command not to move. But he could hear no sound of Scottish voices or of the uproar of hand-to-hand fighting in the trench. When he saw the Germans duck down hastily and squeeze close up against the wall of the trench, while overhead a string of shells crashed angrily and the shrapnel beat down in gusts across the trench, he diagnosed correctly that the assault had failed, and that the British gunners were again searching the German trench with shrapnel. His German guard said something to the other men, and while one of them remained at the loophole and fired an occasional shot, the others drew close to their prisoner. The first thing they did was to search him, to turn each pocket outside-in, and when they had emptied these, carefully feel all over his body for any concealed article. Macalister bore it all with great philosophy, mildly satisfied that he had no money to lose and no personal property of any value.