

FIVE BRONZE BULLETSby L/Cpl. W. E. LUCAS

Sapper Ginger Smith walked slowly into his barrack room. He was alone, for it was 6.30 p.m. and his room-mates were making the most of their free period.

Ginger sat on his bed and ruminated. He had a grievance. This constant skirmishing with the platoon sergeant was becoming unbearable. It had started on his first day in Camp, when Ginger got two hours of fatigues for the crime of walking across the square with his hands in his pockets.

Then came a succession of fatigues - and for what? Dirty cap badge, filthy ammunition - the long scroll of infinitesimal daily crime unrolled itself.

What had the sergeant bawled? - "How the hell do you expect to fire accurately with dirty ammunition?"

Scowling ferociously, Ginger started cleaning his rifle, remembering how that very morning the sergeant had awarded him two days of fatigues for an alleged speck of dust underneath his rifle bolt.

Ginger laid down his rifle and took from his pouch the ammunition. Thoughtfully he rubbed a cartridge on his sleeve till it looked like a cylinder of burnished bronze. That seemed to make it look deadlier, so he polished up the other four and laid them all in a row on the blanket.

Five bronze bullets, five little cylinders of death; one of these, thought Ginger, could make a corpse of a man in less time than the sergeant could shout "Attention." And even the sergeant couldn't shout with one of these inside his brassy lungs. No, by cripes, he couldn't. . .

And at eight o'clock the sergeant would be in his room - alone. Supposing he went to visit the sergeant and took with him his rifle and five bronze bullets?

Supposing he went now? Cripes! he was going! He was already there and knocking on the door because he knew the crisis had come and he must do what must be done swiftly and silently.

The hateful Voice shouted "Enter!" Slowly opening the door, Ginger saw the sergeant lying on his bed and reading his newspaper.

"Well, Smith, what do you want?" said the Voice. Ginger grunted something unintelligible.

Deliberately and unhurriedly, he lifted his rifle breast high, pushed back the safety catch . . . opened the bolt . . . and then took out his five bronze bullets.

Suddenly the sergeant realised. Quickly he stepped across the room, examined rifle and ammunition with an expert eye.

"All right, Smith," he announced. "They've clean enough now."

And Ginger had passed the sergeant's inspection. . .

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