

# The Hero

by Hugh McCracken

He was a mousy man with dirty-brown hair that constantly fell over his slightly yellow face and his small, restless eyes. You could rely on him to fade quietly into the background when volunteers were asked for.

When we were called out to look at an unexploded bomb. I gave no thought to Private Bain—except perhaps to think how appropriate his name was—the bane of my existence. A man guaranteed to louse up any parade or inspection.

The sergeant and I approached the bomb. Our squad stayed behind their sandbag wall. As usual, I had to dry my hands several times and wipe the sweat from my eyes before I could even touch the thing.

Everything looked quite simple until sand in which the bomb was partially buried, shifted. It rolled onto my legs pinning me. In seconds, Bain was beside me kneeling, carefully pushing handfuls of sand away, drenched in perspiration although it was December. His eyes were closed and he worked entirely by touch.

He cleared enough for me to pull my legs clear.

I told Bain to get back. The sudden move might have started a timer.

He grinned his sly, shifty grin. "Wot go now and miss all the fun?"

His voice shook as much as my hands, but he stayed close till the fuse was out.

Next day Bain went AWOL and with him my wallet.

(233 words)