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# **OUR BOYS OVER THERE**

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**FREDERIC COLEMAN**





# OUR BOYS OVER THERE

TO THE YOUNG AMERICAN IN  
KHAKI—WHAT HE WILL FIND  
WHEN HE GETS TO FRANCE

BY

FREDERIC COLEMAN, F.R.G.S.

AUTHOR OF "FROM MONS TO YPRES WITH GENERAL FRENCH,"  
"WITH CAVALRY IN 1915," ETC.



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TO MY DAUGHTER  
RUTH





## PREFACE

**I** COMMENCED this series of notes shortly after leaving Liverpool and concluded it before reaching Sandy Hook. Many of the bits of counsel it contains are the fruit of the combined efforts of a number of good friends with whom I have seen active service in France. I prefer to be considered the compiler, rather than the actual source of some of the advice given. For all of it, however, I accept full responsibility. Every statement has been made and every opinion sifted with but one idea—that of being of real service to the soldiers of that New Army which The United States of America will soon send overseas to fight in a truly just cause, for God, Humanity and the Right. From the bottom of our hearts my old comrades and I wish them God-speed.

FREDERIC COLEMAN.







## INTRODUCTION

**F**IGHTING in France is a very different matter to-day than it was when I went there with General Sir John French's First British Expeditionary Force, in August, 1914. Compared with the Germans, we knew but little of the machinery and organisation of modern warfare.

In those days we fought against all sort of odds. Not only did the Huns have a preponderance of men and guns, aircraft and transport, and the usual impedimenta of campaigning, but they developed a habit of introducing new moves into the game with somewhat disconcerting rapidity. Trench bombs and trench mortars, hand and rifle grenades, fresh intricacies of barbed wire, fine night lights, which fortunately illuminated the darkness for us as well as for the enemy, sniping brought to an exact science, gas and gas shells, trench and dugout construction on a business-like basis, and innumerable other attributes of trench fighting were practised by the Boches first, to be taken up, well learned, then gradually improved upon by us in turn.

The French helped us in some ways. Their gunners were worth their weight in rubies to our gallant artillerymen. But most of our lessons came straight from Brother Boche. We paid for them. Like most lessons for which a high price is paid, they were well learned.

"The only way they will learn is by their own experience" is a hackneyed phrase long since grown fa-



miliar when one is discussing new arrivals at the front. But words of advice may be spoken to good effect, nevertheless. I can remember with heartfelt gratitude more than one straight tip that saved me from undue exposure to danger and unnecessary hardship. "The cross-roads in a village in this part of the world," said my General to me one day in October, 1914, when our division was holding the Messines line, "is a good place to avoid when possible. Crossed pave roadways send shell-splinters whirring in all directions. The enemy may chuck shells on such points at any time, at random, on the chance of causing us inconvenience." That seemed reasonable. I arranged my halts so that the cross-roads were at a respectful distance. A couple of days later a new division, fresh from England, came through Neuve Eglise, a Flemish town some miles back from the firing line. A halt was made. The men strolled curiously about the village cross-roads for half an hour. Smash! Bang! came a shell. Crash! came another. Just two. Two odd ones, apparently. No special reason could be assigned for their coming. Just two shells at random, striking the junction of two roads for general effect. But those two shells caught the new lot, halted at the cross-roads, and killed twenty-two of them and wounded as many more. Had the officer in charge of that company been given the warning my General had given me I doubt if he would have failed to have passed it on to his men, and thereby a handful of lives might have been saved. The little obvious things, however, sometimes escape the telling.

On the other hand, I ran across gratuitous advice, at times. More than once I have had it hurled at me in no uncertain tone. Once I walked upright



toward a machine gun emplacement in a depression in the ground. I did not know of its proximity. Neither did I know I was at that particular point in range of a Hun rifle. I was told to "get down" in a manner and with a sufficiency of trimmings which would have induced haste in any case. As I dropped, a half score of wicked little Mauser bullets sung over my head, and to the accompaniment of the peculiar "swish-swish" of an itinerant pellet I was given an opportunity of listening, for some minutes, to a low-voiced but marvellously complete symposium on the subject of foolish folk attached to headquarters staffs who put more valuable units of the command into needless danger of discovery. I remembered that tirade, however, for a long time. Out of it I sorted some of the most valuable advice ever proffered me.

I have had advice from all ranks, too. From generals and from colonels, from non-coms and from "Tommies." Probably the most valuable of all has come to me from time to time from the junior subs. These officers in the British Army correspond in rank with our American second lieutenants. They are mere kids, many of the junior subs at the Front, but their wisdom is frequently as that of Solomon. Few indeed are the better class homes in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales that have not contributed their quota to the army of junior subs in France and Flanders. Few homes have escaped the loss of one or more of the youngsters, the best of Britain's blood. One had but to know them to love them, these splendid, brave young sportsmen, to whom to "play the game" and fight and die like Englishmen came naturally, as a precious heritage of race.



At the commencement of the war the junior sub cut little figure, comparatively. The company commander or the squadron leader, and the incomparable, sometimes grizzled British non-commissioned officer, were the principal actors. But the war has changed all that. The subalterns have been given added responsibility. In a modern attack the junior sub is a veritable young brigadier, in real earnest. The non-commissioned officer, too, has much more importance in the general scheme of the actual attack than he once had. Units are smaller. The work is under more close and efficient organisation. Each little group has its own particular work cut out for it. Each man feels that his own individual conduct may mean much. The success or failure of a mere half dozen men in a line of thousands upon thousands may mean a big factor in the success or failure of the whole. The rate of individual responsibility has not only risen, but the possibility for individual prowess has increased, or at least the results of such prowess are easier to trace. Small groups are more than ever in the limelight. Their members feel the special responsibility and the rare opportunity that may be theirs, and are rendered more and more keen as they are given a part to play the connection of which with the whole big game is less and less hard to distinguish.

That is where the American soldier will shine. As I remember the sort of fellows I had for comrades in the Spanish-American War and the War in the Philippines that followed it, I long to see personally how our boys will cotton to the work when they get into the front trenches in France. Individual initiative, individual intelligence, adaptability to strange environments and circumstances,



physical capability of a high order, will help make the American soldier in the field one of the finest fighting units the world has ever seen. Since the earliest days in France I felt that the day would come when my own country would be compelled to take a hand. I ever thought that one day the Stars and Stripes would float over American soldiers on European soil. That day has come at last.

Much that the American soldier in France will have to learn no one can tell him effectively, but from out all the varied bouquets of advice that have been thrown my way I may be able to select a few blooms that may stay some time unwithered, and some that, even though their freshness may be one day gone, may yet remain in a corner of some soldier's mind, run across sometimes, perhaps, as one stumbles unthinkingly upon an old pressed posy in the leaves of an old book.

High privates in the rear rank, as we proudly used to call ourselves in the days when I was carrying an American army rifle, can thank their stars that they are going to play a part in a war wherein the man in the ranks is something more than mere cannon-fodder; that they are a part of the scheme of things to which advice is just as necessary and the acting upon it just as important, as in the case of their superiors in rank.

The lessons I have learned, and which I hope in some measure to be able to pass on, apply as much to the man in the ranks as to the officer, and vice versa.







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# OUR BOYS OVER THERE

## CHAPTER I

### WEATHER AND WOMEN IN FRANCE

**T**HE strange sights and the unfamiliar scenes that will greet the American soldier when he comes to France will make his initial days on the continent an enviable experience.

The general geography of France is easy to learn, and the amount of time required to become reasonably familiar with the course of the most prominent waterways and the location of the most important cities of France will be indeed well spent. The French roadways which have escaped the ravages of war are efficiently marked with sign-boards giving the distance in kilometres between small hamlets as well as important towns. To remember that every eight kilometres means five miles is useful on occasions, though many a kilometre that the soldier covers in France he would swear to have been well over a mile in length. A cheerful chap who had made a considerable study of foot-work over French roads told me once, quite seriously, that he had made the discovery that every billet was placed at the farthest possible point between two railway stations.

Weather in France is like weather everywhere



else,—it varies. Augusts are hot. I fear no contradiction on that head. Septembers are hot, too, if you have hot work to do and the sun is shining. But September nights begin to be cool, and if you are wet and getting wetter, a September night may be uncomfortably chilly. Autumn rains, that might be enjoyable under some circumstances, are not greatly appreciated in the trenches. When October likes, it can be glorious in France. I vote it the best month of the year. Still, mid-October nights in 1914, enveloped in Flemish fogs, made many a joint stiff among the elder officers. Those who grumbled at the weather in October, if such there were, loved November less. Nights grow really cold then, and mud underfoot seems come to stay for the winter. Fogs are frequent in Northern France and Flanders in November. Most November days, even given a sun, make one bless an overcoat. About mid-month comes the snow. Blizzards alternate with days of thawing until the fields are almost impassable with mud. Movements of troops across the open country become impossible.

Mud in Flanders is awful stuff, but it has its uses. Who that has tramped the three miles or so from the walls of ruined Ypres to the line that stretches from Hooge, in front of Zillebeke, to Hill 60 and beyond, has not blessed the mud? All across the muddy fields, slipping, sliding and ploughing along, we were used to follow no pathway, avoiding where possible fields where enemy shells were falling. Then came, sooner or later, the inevitable droning, rushing sound, to grow into a shriek as a big Boche shell came over.

One was thankful for the mud, then. For the advice I will give to a man under such circum-



stances, unless his job is such that delay must be avoided, is to go down flop! quick! into the mud. The quicker and the more flop and the more mud the better. That is my way of looking at it. Once you are down all your worries are over. Let her come! If the shell lands on you there will not be enough of you left to do any worrying with. If it does not land on you, the odds are overwhelmingly in favour of your escape from all injury. Many a lad has lain flat in the mud when a big "Black Maria" landed near and dug a hole into which you could put a couple of taxi-cabs, and never been a bit the worse for it. Yes, the mud has its uses. That same shell, one of the big H.E.s, as the high explosive shells are called, might land in a town you happened to be passing through, and be a very different matter. Those big 'uns chuck the towns about so—any one is likely to get a good bit of the town on him. And the way they dig around for you, those shells, make cellars themselves useless as protection, sometimes.

Even shrapnel is not so uncomfortable as H.E. shell. Shrapnel has hundreds of bullets to the projectile, but all of us who have been at the front have seen, more than once, Hun shrapnel burst in what looked like a fatal spot for a group of men, and see very few drop. You will become impressed with the great fundamental fact about shell-fire. That is that you occupy a comparatively small space out there in France. There is a lot more space all round you. It is marvellous how many bullets can go into that space. The percentage, too, of shells of all kinds that come over from Brother Boche and hit no-one, go no-where, except plump into the mud, would cheer up the most pessimistic mathematician that ever sat in a trench.



By December winter has the Western Front in his grip. The damp cold of the lower levels and the dry cold of the higher parts of the country is real cold. January is cold and wet too. Further south, below Soissons, it is less wet than to the north. February brings snow, which seldom stays long, but is soon absorbed by the coverlet of black mud. March, too, is trying. On most March days I have seen in France it rained and blustered, while at night snow fell, and the wind howled unceasingly. This alternated with hard frosts. Toward the end of the month, bright sunshine and spring zephyrs one day, and snow the next, and more than once snow and sunshine alternating throughout the span of a day, mark its passing. In April the days grow warmer, though rain falls with sufficient frequency to keep the fields deep with mud. Trenches are still cold and damp at night, though morning suns are divinely warm. May is fascinating with her bright sunshine and blue, cloudless sky, though both May and June can produce plentiful showers. June warms things sufficiently to prepare one for July heat, which is much the same as July heat in temperate zones the world over.

Taken by and large, a healthy specimen of American youth need fear no particular hardship from the weather in France.

The countryside delights the eye, well back of the line. The horrors of war are very real. Those who see smashed France will not quickly forget the sight. But such of France as has not seen the Hun is a fair land, save for its black country, and even that is not ugly. Some of Flanders is not beautiful. Roadways near the sea coast run between sluggish, morbid-looking canals and flat, dispirited fields—a



sad, soggy, flabby land, in very truth. But that is Belgium, not France.

The people of France, that the American soldier will see and quickly grow to like immensely, are simple folk for the most part. Like simple folk the world over they are mostly God-fearing. Those who have not seen France since pre-war days would not know her now. France has undergone a change indeed as regards her attitude toward religious matters. France, fire-tried, knows God to-day as she never knew Him before her day of tribulation. France has passed through the Valley of the Shadow, and it has made her faith sure.

Save for those in the Army, the American soldier will meet few French men, except very old ones. The women, he will find, have taken the places of the men to an astonishing extent. The women of France become mother, sister or sweetheart to the Allied soldier as though he was French born and bred. It will not take the American soldier long to learn the worth of French womenkind. What he will see of women in France will make him more proud than ever that he was born of woman.

To some folk France, home of fashion and smart dress in ante-bellum days, might give promise of femininity attractive to the eye, gowned fetchingly, smiling bewitchingly, truly entrancing. Such French women there are still, perhaps, in the large cities, but the sombre colours and severe simplicity of their frocks is their chief characteristic to-day. Years may still press lightly on many pretty French lasses, but though the Hun cannot altogether blight the high spirit of healthy youth in France, the war has made a difference that none may miss.

It is the bent, seamed, weather and storm beaten



women of France that the American will remember long. No man can go through France to-day and not marvel at the spirit of the women and their untiring energy. They are keeping France together while the blue wings of her armies are protecting her from the further ravages of the Hun invader. No work is too hard for these magnificent mothers and daughters of France. Many who never knew what labour meant have become toilers. Just as the hospitals see blessed nurses who lived lives of gaiety and frivolity one day in the past that seems so far back of us, so village belles and the girls of the prosperous French of the Provinces have taken up what burden they can carry, gladly, cheerfully, but with sober faces, nevertheless.

I was billeted in the home of a charming Frenchwoman, a fine musician, who would not open her piano. "My husband, thank God, is yet alive," she said, "but many a neighbour within hearing has lost some one from the home. The battalion from this town has been completely wiped out three times and filled again, until the homes that have not lost dear ones can be numbered on your fingers. No, it will be long, I fear, before we will play and sing again."

Then, too, I saw in June, 1915, the "seventeen class," as they were called, leave their homes in Northern France. They were the lads of 17, who would be 19 years old in 1917. They were called to the training camps two years ago. That wrung the hearts of French women, while the bravery with which they met the call was the admiration of every man who saw them.

The American soldier, when he comes to France, will see all this, and learn to be patient with some-



what amateur girls in little shops, with something a bit less well done than they might think it could be done. Their hearts are big, French hearts, and they will always be thinking that the American boys have come from mothers and dear ones left at home—come to fight for France. Treat them well, boys. Be kind and patient with them. Your coming means more than all the world to them. They will do for you what they can. Sometimes it is pitifully little, but the will to do is great. You are going across the water to save France her flag and her freedom. Do not forget to always have a cheery word and a bright smile for the splendid women of France. They need it, for they have suffered as we may well and earnestly pray that our own mothers and sisters may never be called upon to suffer.

The division to which I was attached was the first to occupy an unhealthy locality called Ploegsteert. It deserves its name. Our trench line runs through the edge of it to-day. I called there many months after our original occupation of the town. At luncheon the mess-president of the brigade holding that part of the line was cursed for the poor quality of the bread. I volunteered the information that the bread of Ploegsteert in my day was excellent. I purchased bread for my mess, and knew. That brought still more curses, loud and deep, on the poor captain who catered for the brigade mess, who swore in reply that he would change his baker, if possible.

After lunch he and I walked through the town, which was partly in ruins. I questioned an old French lady who was standing in a doorway. "We have been here through it all," she said. "We go into the cellars when the bombardments begin, and



when they end we come out and go about our work. What else could we do?" Some townsfolk had been hit, but few killed, she continued. The merry baker, whose brown bread I remembered so well, had been hit by a shrapnel bullet but a few weeks before and killed. "His wife is running the bakery still, though in but a small way," and the old lady shook her head sadly. I looked at the mess-president. "Glad I heard that," he said. "Wait till I tell those grumbling beggars. That will be the last kick that will be heard about *that* bread." His baker was the poor little widow. If that brigade is still in Ploegsteert, she does not lack for custom.



## CHAPTER II

### “POILUS” AND BRITISH “TOMMIES”

**T**HE French soldier will at first amaze his American comrade. Seen in their trenches or in billets not far “back” they are frequently a tough-looking lot of customers. A bit nondescript as to uniform, and universally campaign worn, unshaven and perhaps mud-plastered, they always look stout and fit for anything.

It must be remembered that all the manhood of France is in her armies, men drawn from every class of the community. A more friendly lot of men one would never wish to meet. They are universally respectful to officers, either of their own army or of the Allied forces, a fact that speaks not only of good discipline, but of fine French traditions of politeness.

French soldiers as a class do not pay the same attention to cleanliness of uniform and kit that is given to such details in the British and American Armies. An English battalion, relieved from muddy trenches, at once smartens its external appearance to a degree that must be seen to be believed.

Another thing that will surprise the American soldier is the amount of equipment, and its variety, that the average French foot-soldier straps upon his back. I saw a black-bearded “poilu,” with a typical load, start off with his company for a long, long march, with literally as much as he could pack about



him, fastened securely by ingenious means. Over either shoulder was a strap supporting two good-sized canvas haversacks, one on each hip, both bulging with food. To his belt were attached two ample cartridge-pouches, one in front and one behind. A water-bottle dangled against a haversack. His principal pack, hung at the shoulder, was, he told me, full of spare clothing. A blanket, rolled in a sheep-skin jacket, surmounted this and towered above his cap. A cooking-pot adorned the back of his pack, while to one side of it was strapped a tin cup of ample dimensions, and to the other a loaf of bread. A bundle of firewood at his side, and a roll of clothing, holding an extra shirt or two, at the other, flanked him.

My examination of his equipment concluded, he said he must be off, and picked up his rifle with a cheery smile. A comrade rushed up and handed him a sort of leather portmanteau. He grabbed it without a word, threw the strap over his head, settled his various pieces of baggage into place with a strenuous shake, and stamped away sturdily, with a firm step and head held high.

With all that, boys, the French infantry soldier can make marching time of which any army in the world would be proud.

For the most part the French soldier is just a hard fighter and a good fellow, unusually hospitable and generous. I found an evening spent among them when off duty was sometimes great fun. They sung songs from *Chansons d'amour* to grand opera, from popular ditties from the Paris halls to swinging marching airs of older wars. Many of the French troopers possess a suspicion of the grand air when drinking a toast, carolling a love-ditty, or roaring



out a rousing chorus. Once in a while you may meet a veteran that might have stepped from a volume of Dumas. I remember three—an elder one who was a bachelor of arts and science, a man of studious and thoughtful mien, another a true Gascon, and the third a fellow blessed with powers of mimicry that made us laugh long and loud before the night was over.

Some of the French soldiers are very keen to learn to speak English. “Conversation books” were often hard to get in the early part of the war, though now they abound in France, and the United States will no doubt be soon flooded with them. Good ones are “helpful.” An improvised one made by an English Tommy for a French “poilu” caused a brain-storm. The poor Frenchman had a fair start until he was presented with that booklet. Then he began to progress backward. Examination of a sentence that seemed wrong, somehow, showed that the voluntary teacher, in a spirit of devilment, had produced the following:

“Q. Where is the cat of my mother’s aunt?”

“A. No, but the kittens are drowned.”

Other sentences were in the same vein.

Never forget that every French soldier is to-day a veteran, and that he has forgotten more about actual war than any one coming fresh to France will know for the first few months, at least. He will appreciate the respect that such knowledge will engender, and the American boys will ever find him quick to help them in any way that lies in his power. He is without vain-glory, and is not puffed up, though he knows himself to be a sound fighting machine.

He could, though he never will, take lessons from



his Anglo-Saxon comrades as to outward appearance. His uniform and kit, however, do not encourage him in that regard. He is brave as a lion, and takes fighting somewhat seriously. That is, perhaps, the greatest point of difference between the "poilu" and the British Tommy.

Tommy Atkins needs no praise of mine to tell the American soldier how good he is. Most people who speak English have heard of his prowess. The men in the First Expeditionary Force, that went to France in August, 1914, under Sir John French, were among the very finest soldiers that the world has ever seen. In numbers that small contingent might well be referred to by the Kaiser as "French's contemptible little army," but it held on against five Germans and more, sometimes, to one Briton. Further, the Germans were the pick of the Hun horde.

What the American will notice first and like best about the English soldier is his ever-present, saving sense of humour. When things are so bad that the ordinary mortal might be thinking of desertion or suicide, Tommy Atkins comes into his own. Given nothing to worry him, he is a chronic kicker. Real worries dissolve his complaints into thin air. He can see something funny in everything with which he comes in contact.

On May 13, 1915, dawn was the signal for a Boche howitzer bombardment of the Ypres salient which surpassed in intensity and duration any previous gun-fire during the war. From four o'clock in the morning until five o'clock in the afternoon it drifted from one section to another, without respite. I was one thousand yards behind the trench line, which all forenoon was covered continuously with a heavy pall of smoke, as if a well-fed conflagration



was raging beneath. The flashing of bursting shells in that smoke-cloud were so numerous that no human eye could follow or count them, even in a most restricted range of vision. The sound was one grand, incessant roar. All the thunderstorms of time, crashing in splendid unison, would not have made a more magnificent din. The ear could not intelligently record so tempestuous a maelstrom of sound-waves, and the brains of those in the midst of its wildest fury became numb and indifferent to the saturnalia of explosion. For our part, at headquarters in the support dug-outs, we could not distinguish the separate detonations of the shells for the greater part of the morning. One regiment, the Queen's Bays, held a bit of shattered front line trench magnificently. Its right and left were in the air, once, but it held on like grim death. It suffered heavily. German attacks swept up to that little band on several occasions, only to be hurled back with heavy losses.

I talked that night to one of the troopers who had been through that Hell. His only impression was the recollection of a fat German observation officer who obtained a place of vantage in a shattered farmhouse near the Bay's line. No amount of sniping could dislodge him. Up came an armoured car. The Hun officer in the farm noted its approach and fled up the road as fast as he could run. "I had to laugh so much at the funny figure the little fat chap cut, with the tails of his long grey coat flapping straight out behind him as he ran," said the trooper, "I swear it did in any chance I had of hitting him. He got to his own lot safe, I think, but he did make a holy show of himself doing it." That



was the one thing that trooper remembered of that awful day.

That was the same sort of man that had come out with the First Infantry Division under Sir Douglas Haig, now Commander-in-Chief. In August, 1914, the First Division was 14,000 odd strong. In six months its casualties—total lists of killed, wounded and missing of all ranks—had reached 34,000. Filled up more than twice with reserves. After twenty-eight days of continuous fighting such of its regiments as the Queen's (West Surreys) came out of the firing line with but fifteen men and no officers left out of the battalion. The Black Watch only mustered 60 men and one officer, and the Loyal North Lancashires but 150 men and two officers. Such battalions as the First Coldstreams, the First Cameronians, the Second Wiltshires and the Second Royal Scots were wiped out to a man—no one left to make a report. Those are only samples of the sort of casualties the British soldiers have gone through, and won through, in this war. I tell you, it takes real pluck to keep good spirits throughout, when suffering punishment, but that is just what Tommy Atkins has done.

The more amateur soldiers of England were good, too. Once I gave a lift to an Essex Yeomanry trooper. His regiment had been in a hot charge the day before and had been almost wiped out. During the charge he had badly sprained his knee. By morning it had become so swollen and painful that he could only hobble along toward the rear. No thought of coming back the day before, after the charge, to have it attended to, had entered his mind. "We were told to hang on till dark," he explained to me, "and it took all of us that were



left to hang on. I couldn't have come back very well, could I?"

Coming through Ypres during hot fighting I passed a friend. "You have a fine bruise on your forehead," said I, pointing to a nasty, raw bump the size of a goose-egg. "How did you get it?" "I haven't an idea," he answered; "unless a shell bounced off it. Some of 'em have come close enough, so one *might* have done so."

That young sportsman, I learned later, had been insensible from gas, then delirious, that morning, yet he could pass a joke on his way back to the dressing station, sick as he was.

Hundreds of incidents might be told to illustrate the splendid discipline of the British Tommy. In March, 1915, the Huns took the town of St. Eloi from us. We won it back, all save one point. During that fighting, the 4th Battalion Rifle Brigade was sent up to take a trench. Another battalion had tried the job, but failed. The Rifle Brigade set its teeth and started for the hottest corner of the fray. "You must cross that road," its commander was told, "though Heaven only knows how any one can get across it alive." Sixteen Hun machine-guns were playing on the open space over which the battalion must pass. It looked impossible, but over it they went. In less than 60 seconds 11 officers and 250 men were down, but the rest pushed on. They reached the trench, some of them, cleared out the Huns with the cold steel, and consolidated the position—a fair sample of British Army discipline and valour.

The American soldier must bear in mind that the British Tommy will know as little, or less, of America than the American knows of England and Great



Britain. It is wise to remember that Welshmen love Wales and are proud of it; that a Scot comes from a land of which he is fiercely fond; that Irishmen, whether they be from Ulster or the South Counties, will fight as to the merits of their own home; that a Lancashire lad or a Yorkshireman differs from an East Anglian as much as a Devonian or Somerset man from he of Northumberland; and that the London cockney is of radically different mould from them all.

Almost every man in this world loves his home. Few men know that theirs is not the best home of all, and that few are seldom wise men, for all their knowledge. As the American expects to be allowed to love his own fair land, so let him tolerate in his comrade overseas such comrade's love of *his* home in turn. Of all the Allies, Australians are the most provincial as yet. They are less tolerant of any place on earth except Australia. New Zealanders are much more broad-minded in this particular, and Canadians are so much like our own good selves that we will hardly know them from our own blood.

As to the Canadians in France, they have indeed done nobly. One night, at the time of the first Hun gas attack, 200 Canadians were surrounded by Germans in the town of St. Julian. All night they fought on. Some of our men had gotten up sufficiently close to hear Huns call out to the gallant Canadians in a lull in the firing: "Surrender, Canadians! We are around you! You have no chance!"

"See you damned first! Come and get us," was the answer sent back in the night by a clear young Canadian voice, and Bedlam was again let loose. All our attacks of the next day failed to get to St.



Julian. One came close, but all sounds of firing from the town had ceased. The last of the heroic 200 had fallen. Weeks and months afterwards anxious ones waited for word from German hospital or prison camp, but none came. The Canadians had fought on to the last man, to the bitter end!

American soldiers will be very close and good friends with the Anglo-Saxon troops in France, from whatever part of the British Empire they may come. They will find so many common interests and so many points of general agreement that they will be surprised. Then, the fact that the Hun is the common enemy, and no enemy to be despised, at that, will be a bond between every Allied soldier.

The closer the bond the harder it will be for the Boche.



## CHAPTER III

### TRENCH FEET

ONE of the most brilliant British commanders in the field, a man who had been through such early experiences as the terrible first battle of Ypres, where he earned considerable official commendation, was chatting to me recently about the prospective American Army.

“The success of the new American Army that is now in the making,” said the General, “will depend primarily upon its spirit and discipline. To be quick to follow the lessons learned by actual experience is, we have found, a characteristic of the splendid Canadian troops we have seen here, and there should be equal keenness along this line among the American contingents. That quickness is one of the most valuable assets a fighting unit can possess. Without it a heavy price may be paid for that which, given real quickness of perception and accurate grasp, may be had at little or no cost.

“Too great emphasis cannot be laid on the necessity of taking every minute precaution for sanitation and health. Continual vigilance must be employed in insisting that precautions against ‘trench feet’ are carefully and systematically carried out.” Trench feet! One who has seen a regiment suffering from trench feet is not likely to soon forget it.

I remember the first time such an experience came my way. We had found it necessary to pay a call



to the headquarters of a division that had newly come into the firing line, but very few days after its arrival in France. They do such things differently now, of course. In those days we were very short of troops in Flanders, and there was no time to place them back of the front a bit for some final touches of training, as is the custom to-day. The division was composed of troops of the British Regular Army, many of whom had seen no little campaigning in other parts of the world. They were fit enough, but had had no time to become acclimated to the weather of an early spring in damp, sodden Flanders. I was standing in the village street in front of Division Headquarters. The actual firing line was quite three to four miles distant, at its nearest point. Up the roadway from the direction of the trenches came a slowly moving procession through the cold dusk of the approaching night. As they drew near they looked like casualties, and so they proved to be, almost to a man, though they had escaped projectile, bullet, and all other common dangers of that unhealthy locality from which they had just come. They were casualties, more surely so than any of us at that time realised. Limping haltingly, dragging throbbing, aching feet step by step, they were a sad lot. Some had wrapped their feet in sacking after discarding boots acute swelling had rendered useless.

When they reached me I questioned them closely. They had been in apparently very good shape the day before. They had been marched unusually hard in order to reach the position in such time as to render a night relief possible. They were tired, but the taking over of the front line from the French troops that they had found holding it proceeded without a



hitch and with very few untoward incidents. The trenches were wet, but gossip as to trenches in France and Belgium had led them to expect that. The night was cold, bitterly cold toward morning. They had suffered somewhat from the cold and the wet, but standing in almost icy water all night could hardly produce comfort. They had been cold all day following that night of cold. As the day wore on specific complaints as to swollen feet, become so tender the men could hardly bear weight upon them, became frequent. A sullen drizzle, half rain, half mist, set in. The commander of the company to which the score or more I met were attached wisely sorted out the worst cases and sent them back to billets. But the way to billets was long and over an unfamiliar road. They lost their way once, they said. They were uncomplaining, but each man was obviously suffering acutely.

That division was not in the trenches many days before its casualties from "trench feet" reached several thousands. Later, at one of the base hospitals, I encountered some of them. Few that had so suffered would be fit for soldiering again for many long weeks. The majority would require months of rest, care and recuperation. All too many would never again be of use as infantrymen. It was really appalling. I studied the matter all the more closely for the reason that my own division was due in the trenches not long after. When we did go in we had learned our lesson, however, as to "trench feet." Our divisional chief medical officer was a genuine hustler. He arranged points for foot-baths and foot inspection, relays of dry socks, and a supply of a solution we knew as "anti-frost bite." We had a bad ten days in a part of the line that was plenti-



fully blessed with water, but our foot-casualties from frost bite and exposure were less than half a score, and some of those were chaps who had gone out at dead of night, over the top into "no man's land," on reconnaissance. Now and again these brave boys would be all but discovered in the glare of a trench light or Verey pistol, and thereafter have to lie doggo for hours before they dared attempt to wriggle back home. One night the ground froze solid and with it the feet of one of our best stalkers. He returned safely so far as perforation was concerned, but for one long, tense hour he had laid motionless close to the Boche wire, hoping to be mistaken for a German corpse. His poor, wet feet could not withstand that icy vigil. He lost most of one of them, and though the surgeons saved the other, the gallant lad came through pitifully crippled for life. But what was most important to him, he gathered some very useful information on that stalk, and splendidly got back to his own lines with it after the odds had become a thousand to one that he would never do so.

To return to my friend the General, he was most interested to hear how well the American soldier handled his rifle. "No one who has not been through it out here can realise the importance," he said, "of training the men to use their rifles,—to shoot and to be handy with their bayonets." Many observers go astray on this point. The overwhelming position in the picture occupied by the big guns, the machine guns and the Lewis guns, the importance of trench mortars, hand grenades, bombs, rifle grenades, and other accessories of trench warfare, make some men think that the day of the rifle as an important adjunct to success in battle is well-nigh past.



Such is not the case. Those of us who can remember the brave advances of the Prussian Guard at Ypres, when they marched in battalion formation right up the Menin Road, straight at our trenches, on one occasion, if not more, marching to almost sure death at the goose-step, know the value of accurate, rapid rifle-fire. So do those Prussian Guardsmen, if any of them are still alive. Not many of them were left when the broken waves of grey were swept back as leaves by an autumn wind. The rifles did most of it. Machine-guns we had, to be sure, but wofully few of them. Those that we had were over-worked to a point that made us wonder, not when they jammed, but when they worked long without jamming. The rifle, in the hands of a man who can shoot straight and shoot with great rapidity, is a wicked weapon still, and the value of the cold steel, while it is not a subject on which men who have seen it used love to dwell, has not, so far as I can see, changed greatly, if at all, in the three and a half years of grim war in Europe.

One bit of advice that my friend the General tendered, indirectly, to the new American armies was easier to give than to act upon. "Get rid of incompetent leaders," he said, "before they come over to France and make mistakes."

We can all say amen to that. We can all be sure, too, that our High Command will, so far as in them lies, see to it that nothing but competency counts. Care in that direction means the saving of more lives than a few.



## CHAPTER IV

### "ON THE ROAD"

LARRY is a cheery bird. In years he is a babe, in war-wisdom a patriarch. He has seen enough of horror and sudden death to have made the average man quiet and sober, if not misanthropic. But Larry is never quiet, and the glint of fun ever in his blue eyes gives piquant turns to his conversation.

Larry is now a junior subaltern. He came to France as a private in a special battalion which was composed of splendid young officer material, of which he is a good type.

We were cuddling in a front line dugout. All was quiet except Larry. We had been talking of "trench feet." From that subject the conversation had drifted to route marching, its value and its effects. Then Larry obtained possession of the floor, if one may use so imaginative a term concerning a pow-wow in a dug-out, and held forth at length. I wish, for the benefit of the American soldier-to-be, I could reproduce his argument verbatim, quaint phraseology and all. I will do my best to do so, for through the spontaneous fun that always is part and parcel of Larry's doings, shone many a gem of sound common sense, born of actual experience as a man in the ranks.

"Civilians walk—soldiers march," he began. "That is why trains were invented. For a soldier



can do without them, and he is not a soldier until he can. What then is the difference between walking and marching which makes of trains, trams and traction engines almost a superfluity? It is simply this, *mes amis*. A platoon, a company, a battalion on the road is not merely a collection of men. It is more to be compared with an eight-oared boat with each man swinging in time and rhythm. When you have this feeling of combined action about a unit on the march, you have something which will make a cemetery of milestones and will not find its own cemetery in the doing of it.

“Learning to march is less important than learning how to get ready to march. The back of all marching can be broken in the platoon hut before one sees the road. It is a question of socks and boots. No boot is fit to join in a march which is not a familiar comrade. The soldier’s foot must know it as if it had been born in it. New brooms sweep clean. So do new boots. They will sweep the road clean of your platoon in under five miles. Good boots, sound boots, well-fitting boots, that is the first secret of marching, but be sure and get to know them well before you make a test of them over ten or fifteen miles of road. Socks are hardly less important. A hole in a sock means a hole in your company. Only ‘thick’ men wear thin socks on the march. Wise men soap their socks at heel and the tops of the toes. Wise men, too, first soap and water their feet before they start their journey. A wash in hand is worth a score that you may never get once you have started.

“In the early stages of this bally war the British soldier on the line of march looked like a parcels-post man. Later he developed into a sort of pro-



totype of Father Christmas. It was only when the authorities tried to hang around his neck the unexpired portion of the next five years' rations in addition, that it was found that he could no longer move without either horse or motor traction. And so he now marches as a soldier should march, with his equipment, his rifle and his fifty rounds of ammunition. And in his haversack he carries such toilet accessories as will last him over a night or two. Rolled overcoats do not add to his comfort on the march, but they are mighty useful at night or if the weather is bad. In summer, overcoats may safely accompany his pack by motor transport. In winter, it is foolish not to carry them."

I might mention in passing that it is never safe for the foot-soldier to depend on having his pack carried for him by motor transport. It is frequently impossible. At such times the weight and character of his equipment means much to him, but of that more anon.

"On the road itself," Larry continued, as he warmed to his subject, "there are three golden rules which make of a body of men a picture instead of a rabble. These are, first, march in step. Second, hold to the right of the road. Third, keep covered off from the front. A battalion on the march is a fine sight, but it is not the only pebble on the beach, nor is it likely to be the only unit on the pavé road. Other departments of the service have their rights either in passing or overtaking. It is well to remember this. A good battalion does not need to side-step to allow a mounted orderly, a car, or even a lorry to go by. Further, it is easier to march in step than to march out of it, just as it is easier to ride a horse than merely to sit on one.



“Pavé roads were not invented by the French for the discomfort of the infantry. Without them the transport problems of the British Army in France would have been multiplied by ten. They are a blessing in disguise, even if that disguise cannot be penetrated by the all-suffering foot-slogger. The paved roads do slow up the infantry, however. Two and one-half miles an hour is the only safe rate to reckon upon. Files should be changed at halts so that the same men do not always ‘strike it unlucky’ on the cobbles. Trained men, not overloaded, will do their fifteen miles a day without discomfort, providing their feet are watched at the end of each day, that boots and puttees are removed at the earliest possible moment, incipient blisters nipped in the bud, and the soothing charm of soap and water applied with regularity. A good officer always has his eye on the men’s feet, while he trains them to keep their eyes off the ground.

“It is customary in France for all units to halt at ten minutes to every hour, when they are on the road, and to remain halted till the hour. Resting troops should remove all their equipment and lie down with their feet raised, if possible. They should also keep the road absolutely clear. Only officers should rest on the left side of the road. Even they should remember that the road was not made for them alone. Horses should be kept in the column, their heads turned toward the traffic and their business ends in a direction where they can do no one harm.

“A band is the greatest aid to good marching, but its position in the column should be frequently changed so that all companies may have the advantage of it. Failing a band, mouth organs and penny



whistles help the journey on. Singing troops will always march further and better than silent ones. Smoking on the line of march adds greatly to men's comfort and happiness. I question if it decreases their efficiency and it undoubtedly increases their morale.

"After a halt, troops should fall in, standing properly at ease. They should slope arms by order of the company commander and march off at attention, the command to "march at ease" being given by platoons soon after starting, after a sign from the battalion commander. Each platoon should comply with this order as it passes the spot where the leading platoon came to attention. Good troops come quickly to attention in like manner from the march-at-ease. They should tighten their rifle slings before they come to the slope, press on the butts, look straight to the front, throw their chests out, and swing their disengaged arms. In a word, they should remember they are soldiers, a fact which they will soon forget on long marches if allowed to do so.

"A really long march loses most of its terrors if it is split in two by a meal in the middle of the day and a rest of an hour or two. Constant and unauthorised eating and drinking on the road leads to inevitable inefficiency. 'Water, water everywhere and not a drop to drink' should be the motto of a good battalion on the march. Bottles should all be full, but they should not be touched to the lips until an officer gives the word, which he should do very sparingly. Water is much more easily carried externally than internally. Even temperance reformers would stand aghast if they could see the effect



of cold water on a man's inside when he is on the road.

“Though marching appears to be the simplest thing a man can do and his natural method of progress, it is a department of military training which gives opportunity for much thought, much care, much instruction and much foresight. A battalion which cannot march cannot fight. Even a civilian can tell a good, sound unit on the road from an indifferent one.”

How much longer Larry would have continued no man may know. The trench relief from another battalion arrived at this point in his discourse, which effectually “broke up the party,” so far as that night was concerned.



## CHAPTER V

### KIT, REST CAMPS AND TACTICAL TRAINS

**W**HEN Mr. Punch gave his famous advice to those about to be married I suppose he never expected that his "Don't" would be taken seriously. But I once heard a very well-known general, who has been continually fighting on one front or another for three and a half years, and who has commanded many, many thousands of men, say that he was very firmly of the opinion that young soldiers should avoid getting married on the eve of their departure for the fields of Mars.

"I notice many young fellows," he said, "who get carried away by the exciting influence of war and incur responsibilities beyond their years. Having married before starting for the front, and no doubt having promised to run no unnecessary danger, they do not show any eagerness for enterprise and sometimes arouse the suspicion of cold feet in consequence." That sounds a bit hard, but there is a lot of truth in it, nevertheless. We all want to come back home safe and sound, but the soldier with whom that desire is the predominating thought is unlikely to be the most valuable unit in his command.

Advice as to kit is easy to give. It, too, consists chiefly of "don'ts." With the ingenuity that lies at the beck and call of the big American department stores well at work, femininity will, of course, purchase war equipment for its dear ones to its heart's



content. Some articles rendered thus available may prove of value to the officer, but few indeed to the soldier. In spite of the many presents the embryo fighting man will no doubt receive from friends and relatives, presents which range from cooking pots to bullet-proof chest protectors, the personal articles he takes with him to war should be limited by what he is prepared to carry on a fifteen-mile march. The arms and necessary equipment of the British foot-soldier total a weight of 60 pounds, and the American soldier's equipment when on the road in France will probably weigh about the same. Every ounce over that weight that a man attempts to carry will drag like so many pounds after the first hour's march. Many men think their extras will surely be carried for them, but I can assure them this will seldom be the case. Time after time it has been proven by new contingents that all extras to absolute necessities are invariably cast into the nearest ditch after the first lap. It is wise, therefore, to leave such extras at home in the first place.

I remember the advice of my own general on this head. He had worked his way from subaltern to colonel of a famous British infantry regiment before the South African War, had commanded Australians in that campaign, and cavalry in the present war. He is now commanding an infantry division that has gained an immortal name, not only for its work at the landing at Gallipoli, but its conduct on the Somme and at Arras as well.

"There are two articles and only two in the way of a soldier's extra equipment that I would recommend," he said to me one day. "First, a good watch, a wrist watch, with a luminous face that screws into the case. The works of a screw-faced watch are



protected from damp and dust and should last for years without requiring attention. Avoid cheap watches and insist on an hermetically sealed case. Secondly, a luminous compass. The best one I have ever seen is one in which the dial floats in oil. It is known in England as the Cavalry School Compass. Not only a commissioned officer, but a non-commissioned officer, however small the unit he commands, is responsible for his men. Loss of direction at night is an occurrence by no means uncommon and sometimes has fatal results. A compass prevents such incidents. Its weight is small compared with its value. I have carried mine in my breeches pocket for more than two years, and I would as soon leave my watch behind as this trusted companion, my compass."

Arrived in France, on leaving the transport the American soldier's natural eagerness to get to the front may suffer a rude shock, and he may be disappointed to find himself sent to some place well out of the sound of the guns for further preliminary training. Such places are often called Rest Camps. "Rest," once said a verdant army youth in my hearing, "is a comparative term in army circles. I have always found it to imply supreme discomfort and a much greater labour than that which one has just left. On disembarkation in France I found myself under orders to proceed to a Rest Camp. There is every appearance of an almost superhuman consideration for individual welfare in military orders. On carrying them out one is apt to be disappointed. My Rest Camp lay at the end of a march of five miles up a dusty pavé road, where we found a collection of boarded tents. We reached the camp in the late afternoon. We left it before dawn the next



morning for more marching on more pavé roads in search of a railway station which proved to be another five miles away."

"Rats," ejaculated another youth who held a very junior commission in the same battalion. "Rest Camps have their points when considered side by side with Tactical Trains. There is the limit for you, my son. A Tactical Train is a collection of cattle-trucks drawn by an alleged engine starting at an unknown time for an unknown destination. There is an air of secrecy about all movement in France which is penetrated only by the German."

That is a standing joke in France, which is not all a joke. It is astonishing how far the Hun secret service penetrates. Every man in the Allied armies, whatever his job, should never forget that German spies are everywhere. Much knowledge is undoubtedly collected by these worthies from gossip. These Boche agents are quite clever enough, and gain quite sufficient information of use to the enemy, without having placed at their disposal the assistance of those who are fighting the Boche. Moral, shun gossip of military matters wherever you are. Then you cannot be unwittingly helping the Hun.

"Tactical Trains have one very real danger," concluded the youngster. "The men love to sit with their legs dangling from the trucks. That's the danger. Passing trains and tunnels may remove more than one pedal extremity or at least render its owner unfit for further military service. The loss of a man who has survived even a short period in a Tactical Train is a serious matter."

Cheery lads. They never saw the dark side of things, really. Their air of mock pessimism was



always punctuated with jokes and laughter. Like all good soldiers, they were prone to "grouch" when there was little or nothing about which to complain, and merry as crickets when facing actual hardship. Mere boys, but splendid soldiers. Gone, both of them, now. One, the victim of a German sniper's bullet. The other went "over the top" at the head of his men, gallantly, gaily, with a jest and a quip, but when the ground was gained and the Hun trench won, they found him, lying still and white, a smile on his brave, handsome face, and his clean, young soul gone on beyond, to the reward waiting for heroes like him, who have "died to make men free," in very truth.

Those who do not understand the necessity of the final training camps in France too often resent the delay of the day when they can feel they are in the game, and some, in consequence, do not benefit from this period as much as they should do.

The preliminary training of the American soldier before he leaves the United States, excellent as it will no doubt be, will be different in some points from the training in France, though such training may bear a strong resemblance to what the new soldier has gone through at home. The points of difference will be very essential points. The soldier will be put through the whole course of training that has occupied six months in as many days. It will be hard physical work, but nothing to the next six days, which will be harder still. Unless the soldier is physically fit enough for all this he could not possibly stand the strain of fighting, which is more severe than anything he has ever been called upon to stand in all his life.

No doubt, before he goes to France, the new



American soldier will have learned some drill and discipline; to use his rifle on the range, and to march with or without a light pack. His course of training may be more complete. In France, before he is sent to the fighting line, however, he must learn to be a bomber, a rifle bomber, and a Lewis gunner; how to fight with the bayonet; to dig and to wire, both of these to time; and to march with a heavy pack containing all his worldly goods. All this means a very severe trial and if carried out with interest goes far toward turning the recruit into a trained soldier.



## CHAPTER VI

### LIFE IN BILLETS

**L**IFE in billets in France may briefly be described as one long struggle for cleanliness against insanitary conditions. Each company must make its own little military world.

No one who is not a trained soldier can possibly appreciate the value of discipline in the everyday life of an army, both when it is moving and when it is stationary. Even the entraining of a battalion is by no means an easy matter. Business-like planning must precede every movement.

For instance, the battalion transport requires a full three hours' start of the men. Loading parties from the men must be carefully detailed under the command of an officer. Imagine a long line of cattle-trucks standing empty. Up comes a battalion of soldiers. A well-disciplined battalion, exclusive of its transport, should entrain, 30 to 40 men to each truck as per the specific orders of the R.T.O., as the railway transport officer is called, in ten minutes' time. The men must be supplied with the day's rations, which are carried with them. Rations for succeeding days must be arranged to be served out at various stopping places. Opportunities must be planned at some stopping places for watering horses and men. Endless detail ever demands consideration. Non-commissioned officers who can understand and obey orders smooth the paths of their superiors



under such circumstances, and contribute immeasurably to the comfort of their fellows.

A billeting party, consisting of an officer from each battalion and a non-commissioned officer (preferably the quartermaster-sergeant) from each company, will have preceded the train. The billeting officer meets the train at the detraining station with a sketch to show companies whither to proceed and where to meet their own familiar N.C.O. as guide. This billeting work is another matter that is less simple than it would seem to the uninitiated. Accommodation must be found in a given area for four companies, for headquarters and its various details, for the transport and for a quartermaster's stores. Billeting officers expect to be and generally are subject to much calumny and abuse.

A billet in France differs from a château to a cellar. Hardened billeting officers declare that an ideal billet for a company is one which supplies a bed for every officer, the company sergeant major and company quartermaster sergeant, and a plentiful supply of nice, clean straw whereon the men, not too closely packed, can sleep. As some of the straw in France has been in use since August, 1914, it invariably requires inspection,—an inspection, I might add, to be made with discrimination, disinfectants and care. When in doubt it is better to burn the suspected straw and buy more from the farmer. Diplomacy dictates against taking straw without payment, especially if the company's stay might prove a long one.

In billets in France a little knowledge of the language of the country is of the utmost value. It is to-day always supplemented by a little knowledge of English on the part of one's hosts. The latter al-



most without exception are courteous and kind, providing the men extend a little friendliness to them. Providing, too, that they have not suffered from previous occupants who have committed depredations in the form of careless and thoughtless raids on chicken roosts or orchards. One Tommy informed me that he could always gauge the friendliness of the inhabitants of a billet by their dogs. "A good billet," he said, "has a contented dog that wags his tail at the sight of khaki."

The moment the company gets into billets work in real earnest begins. Latrines must be dug and screened with the utmost care of the sanitary men. The cookhouse must have its grease pit and be made a marvel of neatness and cleanliness. A company orderly room, even though it be no more than a farm-house kitchen, shared with the farmer's family, has undeniable advantages, while communication by runner with battalion headquarters is as necessary as it may at some times appear to some of the company officers to be wholly undesirable. Bounds for the men must be fixed; the custom of the British officers is to allot certain estaminets, or inns, to the men and make clearly known to the whole command at just what hours the men will be allowed to visit them. A guard for gas or possible shelling at night is essential, as is a fire picket in constant readiness by night and day. To avoid fire the most stringent orders against lights or smoking in barns are the most efficient antidotes. Finally, the company must have its alarm post and be prepared to stand to at any moment ready to fight, leaving behind it its blankets rolled in tens, its officer's valises packed, its latrines filled in, and its billets scrupulously clean. When an alarm is received,



the company marches at once to its alarm post, where it receives its ultimate orders.

A new unit naturally requires much practice in making quick preparation to move. I made that remark to a captain of my acquaintance recently, when discussing surprise alarms. "Yes," he agreed, "that is a fact which strikes most people. It is unfortunate for the new unit when it strikes several people at approximately the same time. I was a subaltern in a company once which was ordered by its company commander to practice a stand-to at 8 p. m. At 9.30 p. m. the battalion commander was seized with a like inspiration. At 11 p. m. the Brigadier wondered, over the telephone, how long it would take his brigade to get ready to march. Just as the men were tucking up for what was left of the night, the Divisional General ordered 'gas alert.' Otherwise, so far as I recollect, the night was calm."

Gas, Hun gas, is a thing against which one must be constantly on the watch in billets, just as in the line proper. No battalion may be sure that its billets, if "close up," will not be visited by the grey-green poison-clouds. No battalion is a good one which cannot be ready to march off, with its transport, in an hour, at the outside, from the time the gas alarm is given. Practice alone can insure this with partially trained organisations.

Further, no battalion is a good one which does not leave its billets scrupulously clean, however it may have to leave them, at leisure or in haste. No tins, no paper, no matches, no cigarette ends, no signs of previous occupation should remain. Latrines should not only be filled in, but their situation marked as



foul ground. Ponds should be clean, for no washing should be allowed in them. Washing should be done in tins filled from the ponds or water supply allocated for the purpose, and the tins carried several yards away to avoid all chance of pollution of such supply. As to drinking water in France, there are many farm wells, but the British troops are not allowed to touch the water in them until a medical officer has tested and decided what action should be taken against its ever-present contamination.

Life in billets is perhaps the easiest part of a soldier's life in war-time. Training should occupy all the morning and a short portion of the afternoon. During the remainder of the day the soldier is usually given his time to himself. A genial Major was once asked if he thought the men of the battalion would get into mischief if "turned loose" over the countryside. The Major drew up his rather stout figure in surprise, his eyes wide as he said explosively, "Certainly not! Let 'em roam. Let 'em wander. Let 'em drink in moderation of the beer of the country, if they like. Let 'em make love, in still greater moderation, to the lasses that happen to catch their eye, if the lasses like. I can trust my men. They have been billeted in this locality before, and they may be again. They have just as much pride in the good name of the regiment as I have. They have never been in a village in France that would not be glad to see them again."

Aye, a good battalion leaves its mark on billets, leaves it in the friendliness of the inhabitants and in the fact that it has left no other mark at all. A bad battalion can be traced in a moment by the filth



and litter it leaves behind it and by the sour expression on the faces of its former hosts which greets those unfortunate enough to follow in the bad battalion's wake.



## CHAPTER VII

### “KEEP SMILING.” YOUNG “NON-COMS”

**I**N due course of time a new command is moved toward the front and at last the day will arrive for it to go into the trenches. This is the critical time, on which the fighting value of a unit so much depends.

Experience has taught in France that if a new lot is ordered to take over a sector of the line without first being attached to an experienced unit the newly arrived troops have to buy their knowledge and the cost is paid in blood. So many factors continually intrude at unexpected moments in the war-game, that carefully laid plans sometimes must be abandoned. If matters do not materially change, however, it will probably be possible for the units of each new division that arrives at the firing line to be attached to some old division for ten days. The newcomers will thus have the advantage of the experiences of well-tried troops, first being disposed in platoons, then as companies, and last, taking over a battalion sector.

One who has been long at the front will know of more than one new formation, after an attachment such as I have suggested, which has quickly developed its best fighting qualities. Many of us have, unfortunately, seen the reverse, owing to the absolute necessity of using new troops to fill a gap before they had had any experience of trench warfare.



I remember one instance distinctly in which a battalion which to-day has a splendid reputation let us down badly and was responsible for the loss of a section of line which it cost hundreds of valuable lives to regain, all because the senior officers of the command had but a very hazy idea of the exact location of the twisting trench line into which the battalion had been rushed. But those were days when we were deplorably short of men. Our needs of those days are unlikely to recur, thank God.

I want to particularly impress the young American soldier with the fact that he will gain much information from the war veterans he will meet. Their accounts will vary with the sector and the period, for he must bear in mind that conditions in the mud flats of Belgium are very different from those on the chalk downs of Artois. Still more diverse will be the experience of those who "stuck it out" and kept smiling during the punishing times of the Great Retreat of 1914, and of those who took part in the successful Allied advances on the Somme, at Arras and at Messines.

Do not forget that the British soldiers, some of them, are men who did "stick it out" with a vengeance, under conditions more disheartening than will ever surround Allied soldiers again in this war. Do not forget that they kept smiling. They are smiling still, bless them. You may kill the British Tommy, but you cannot, unless you kill him, take away his stout heart and his effervescent cheerfulness. He has proven himself, the Tommy. He will make a firm friend and a fine comrade, and the boys from America will have his whole heart when they come in contact with him. He may see things from a different light. He may express himself



differently. But he is a fine fighting man, and, best of all, he has “kept smiling.”

Keep smiling, too, boys. It is worth so much to just keep smiling. And it may be harder, sometimes, than one might think.

Let the man who is not a professional soldier, who has come forward in this war to help make greater, newer armies to fight against the inhuman cruelty, oppression and lawlessness of the German, the Bulgar and the Turk, remember that without the nucleus of our trained army we would be helpless. The new soldier is prone to forget the value, if he ever fully realises it, of a sound military training that has been systematically spread over a number of years. When the officer or man who is not a professional soldier meets with the man, whatever his rank, who has given his life, long since, to the profession of arms, let the newcomer to the tents of Mars bear well in mind the fact that the professional soldier's military knowledge has been built on a ground-work that gives him considerable advantage over the soldier that has had a short and necessarily superficial training.

The new soldier can always learn some things about soldiering from the old soldier.

The great test of a new soldier sometimes comes with promotion to non-commissioned rank. Recently the son of a very great friend of mine, a colonel in the British Army, became of the necessary age and popped off into the army as a private soldier. This pleased his father in one way, and worried him somewhat in another. The Colonel was proud of the boy for taking his place in the ranks instead of waiting for the commission which he knew would be his for the waiting. At the same time, the Colonel



naturally wished that his son could be spared the hardships that must be the part of the lower ranks in a war like this. He resolved, however, for the boy's own good, to let matters run their course and let the lad work out his own salvation. The youngster took to soldiering like a duck takes to water. His father was a disciplinarian, in the army and out of it. To have known what discipline really means is of more use to the prospective soldier than much gold. The boy's natural bent was not to be denied, and he was chosen, eventually, for the rank of sergeant. Naturally, his father's joy was great.

The boy came to dinner at my home one Sunday not long after, and showed me a letter from the Colonel. I took a copy of that letter and obtained the Colonel's permission to publish it, and here it is:

“My dear Boy:—

“Your last letter gave me the greatest pleasure, the more so as you tell me that your company commander assured you that your promotion to sergeant, in spite of your youth, is in no way due to the fact that you are my son. I fully appreciate your views, and agree that it would be intolerable for you to be placed in command of better men except on your merits. Promotion for political or social reasons is very much to be deprecated, as it is the ruin of all discipline. In peace time there is always a suspicion of this in the ranks, and it is always much resented. In war time the feeling is much stronger, as men know they have to trust their lives to their platoon and section commanders, and unless these are carefully selected for manliness and ability the men naturally feel anxious in action.

“You tell me your men are fine fellows and des-



perately keen to do their duty, as well as to show that they have been well trained. This is satisfactory as far as it goes, and it is up to you to see that they keep this fine spirit when in the line; I must even add when going up to and returning from the line. Nothing reflects the spirit of the men than the maintenance of training and discipline under unusual circumstances. A platoon marching up to the line, for instance, is of necessity much overladen with all the various articles required; extra ammunition of all kinds; in cold weather, a blanket, waterproof sheet, trench boots, etc.; and the average weight carried is nearer 75 pounds than 60. The pace must be slow, about two miles an hour, but there is no reason for breaking ranks, straggling or dropping loads in convenient ditches. Inclination and discipline pull in opposite directions, and the picture of a platoon on arrival is no bad indication of its fighting value, and is certainly a true reflection of its commander. Never forget this. If you ever get a swelled head, cast your eye over your platoon in billets, on the march, and in the trenches. If they are insanitary, slovenly or slack, you will see a true picture of yourself. In fact, any want of discipline means you are slack yourself, or unable to maintain discipline. This test is unfailing, and all the best excuses in the world will not alter facts.”

When the young sergeant read that letter over to me, he said soberly, “The Governor does not intend I shall fail to recognise my responsibilities, does he? Just wait till I get out there. If we ever get near him I will show him a platoon that comes a mighty long way from being slovenly, insanitary or slack.”



And I will guarantee that he will, too. But his father's words and others to the same point, would have played their part. My experience is that the young non-commissioned officer cannot strive too hard for the perfection of his platoon. The results, too, will be worth all the effort.



## CHAPTER VIII

### TRENCH RELIEFS

**T**AKING over a trench," said the Sage Youth, "is, I find, very like moving one's residence in private life. There is the same house-hunting (for though the map reference may be found the trench itself may not), the same transference of personal property, the same discomfort in new quarters and the same ultimate settling down."

Thereupon, with a solemn wink, he tramped off trench-wards.

In the early days of the war, trench relief was much less of a business than it is now, and was, in consequence, much more dangerous. Much depended upon the character of the terrain immediately back of the firing line. I have seen trenches in such water-logged ground that the construction of approach trenches was impossible. When the water lies a few inches from the surface, digging communication trenches is futile. In such sectors, we had to send the men up over the open at night, let them lie down behind the trench parados, and stay there until the incumbent garrison was ready to move out. When the exchange took place under such circumstances it was done with celerity and despatch, usually to the accompaniment of sundry hits by enemy snipers. Five seconds was time enough for that sort of relief. Organised trench warfare and an



ever-watchful enemy have made such methods of trench relief costly and impracticable.

Nowadays the relief of a sector of the line begins with what is officially styled "reconnaissance." Unofficially the boys refer to it as "the Cook's tour." Everything is most businesslike. A party of officers and senior non-commissioned officers from the new unit is taken by motor 'bus to the vicinity of the trench system to be studied. Guides meet the 'bus. The party is taken forward to the adjutant of the battalion holding the line, who sends the company officers still further forward with their respective guides and himself pays attention to the needs of the officers who will later take over the battalion headquarters. When the "Cook's tour party" reaches the front trench line proper it is again subdivided and each little group of platoon representatives finds itself attached to a platoon in the line. Here they live for a couple of days or more gleaning all available information.

I can give no better advice to a non-commissioned officer who might be selected for a reconnaissance party than to tell him to endeavour to obtain on loan a general map of the position, and commit to memory the commanding features, ridges, valleys and any tactical points. On arrival in the trench zone, by means of his compass, he will then be able to locate various points as landmarks.

It is not often that reliefs can be carried out by day, for troops, if detected on the move, attract shell fire in a most unpleasant way. Consequently a general knowledge of the lie of the surrounding ground may prove of inestimable value.

Let me advise the man who may be selected for the important duty of visiting the front line, be his



stay there long or short, against trusting to his memory. He should jot down in his note book everything he can learn of the position, such as (1) The number of men holding the part of the line his company will take over; (2) The Lewis gun and bombing posts; (3) The state of the defences, wire obstacles, fire parapets, communications and dangerous spots; (4) The shelter accommodation in the support line; (5) Cooking, sleeping, washing and sanitary arrangements; (6) Information about the enemy, his habits, machine gun and trench mortar positions, his usual hours of activity, etc.

No trench near the line should ever be entered without the permission of the officer commanding it. Company headquarters in the line may or may not be a desirable residence. The signallers should have the best dug-out and the company commander the next best. If the two can be combined, so much the better, but it is imperative that the signallers should be in a good place because in time of trouble it is the company commander's duty to be on the end of the phone wire.

It may be useful to note how a first trench system is arranged. A well-organised system consists of a first or firing line, a support line, and a reserve line. The first line should be used entirely for defence and should be well wired, 40 to 50 yards in front. The garrison should act as if on outpost, ready at all times, properly dressed, with belts on and with rifles ready in hand. Cooking, washing and sleeping should not be permitted in the first line provided the support line is close up, say within 100 yards, and the communication back to it is practicable by day.

The reserve line is intended for the companies in



battalion reserve. In short, the system of trenches should not change the recognised outpost organisation of piquets, supports and reserves, but should simplify the defence of the position and decrease the casualties of a more primitive arrangement by quite 90 per cent.

It is usual in France in later days for battalions to be responsible for an area of this front system of trenches, including the three lines, on a certain front. Companies occupy a section of the firing line and that part of the support line immediately behind it. This enables the relief of the troops in the firing line to be carried out at regular intervals to prevent troops being worn out. An 8 hour tour of duty in the firing line is perhaps the best arrangement for a platoon. This allows 8 hours each day for rest and a large margin for the work necessary to maintain the trenches in good order.

In one of the best divisions in France, when the battalions are ordered to take over a section of line it is done in two stages. First the incoming troops occupy billets or camps close to the line, and second comes the actual trench relief. The occupation of billets close to the firing line is in nowise different in practice from the taking over of billets in any other place, except that usually more stringent regulations are issued regarding fires and lights. In that division, officers and senior non-commissioned officers are encouraged to go up again, subsequent to the first "Cook's tour," visit the trenches, learn the latest news, and see that any items of importance are disseminated to the men.

This division has another rule that might well be made universal. It would prevent many misunderstandings. During the day prior to the relief each



battalion adjutant and company commander pays a last preliminary visit to the trenches and carefully arranges, for each company, the exact time, method and route of relief. That is thoroughness carried to a fine point, but it pays.

My friend Larry, the Junior Sub par excellence, said he would write me a valuable essay on trench relief, if I would print it. Like most of Larry's cheerful effusions, it contained, when produced, some real information and sound common sense. It is unnecessary to translate it. Here it is in the original:

“On the occasion of a proper trench relief company commanders and company sergeant majors in our lot go up at least one hour in advance of the troops. The popular idea is that they do this in order to miss the strafe put on communication trenches by the Hun if he spots the relief taking place. This is untrue. Their object is to be allowed as much time as possible for taking over a varied collection of ironmongery known vaguely as trench stores, which includes practically everything in the trench, from rat-traps to latrine pails, by way of rockets and bafflers. I once had three tins of strawberry jam and fifteen Kirchner drawings solemnly listed and signed for with the rest of the stores. Handed over also are maps, aeroplane photographs, any important correspondence or instructions, plans for work, and a large book bound in dark red cloth called a log book. This last purports to be a complete record of the life and works of that particular section of trench. Were it kept up to date it might be useful, but one cannot help feeling ruffled when, in search of knowledge, one



turns to the section headed 'Enemy Trenches,' and finds that the only entry for two months is the laconic remark, 'Not visited.' Systematic pruning of trench store lists is helpful, but must not be attempted by the novice, because only experience can teach what may with advantage be deleted. Defective pumps, broken gas horns, wet rocks and the like should, however, be sent down to battalion headquarters at once and replacement requested.

"The men having been duly impressed with the necessity of keeping behind cover and quiet during relief, guides having been met and assurance been obtained that the N.C.O.s already know the route, relief of the trench should offer no great difficulty. Success comes to the officer who foresees where trouble will arise and takes steps to thwart it. A 'good' relief is one which goes off without a hitch in the minimum of time. The method of one platoon or company pushing its opposite number out at the opposite end of the trench is not recommended, for should Fritz open up while all the men in the trench are on the move, the resultant confusion is too awful to describe. The better way is for the old platoon to keep its position and sentries until the new platoon has actually occupied the trench and mounted its own sentries. Then the relieved platoon can file quickly and quietly out.

"Finally, when all is quiet again and the new occupants have asked all their questions and got everything square, the old company commander reports relief complete in prearranged code over the 'phone and departs down the trench, mopping his brow and exclaiming, 'Gee! What a relief!' The full meaning of the expression the reader will only fully understand when he has been there."



## CHAPTER IX

### LIFE IN THE TRENCHES

**I**T has become rather a habit with me to scribble notes on things when I have nothing else to do. I confess there were times at the front when I sat and wrote to keep my mind off possibilities not altogether unconnected with enemy shells. This habit became noticed sufficiently often to rouse the suspicion that I was engaged in writing a book.

“What is it about to-day?” asked Tommy Dodd one sullen morning.

“What could it be about, written here,” I parried, “except the doings of all of us? Life, my son. Life in the blessed trenches!”

“I could give an oration on trench life,” asserted Tommy Dodd. “Put this in your bally old book, you sorrowful blighter.”

He rose till the top of his head threatened to hit the roof of the dug-out, and declaimed sententiously: “A trench is a rectangular ditch for troops to live in, so that enemy bullets go over our heads instead of into them. Trenches are joined together at the end so that journalists can refer to them as ‘our far-flung battle line,’ and in order to allow newspapers to print pretty but usually incorrect maps with even prettier and more incorrect ‘front lines’ running diagonally across them. I believe we have to thank the American Civil War for the introduction of trenches, but the desire to preserve friend-



ship with our brothers across the pond prevents us from often mentioning the fact. Trench work is never, never done. Only Lewis Carroll could do justice to the condition of a trench blown in or collapsed.

“ ‘If seven men with seven spades should work for half a year—

“ ‘Do you suppose,’ the Captain said, ‘that they could get it clear?’

“ ‘I doubt it,’ said the Subaltern, and shed a bitter tear.”

That proved too much for two other young irrepressibles close at hand, who charged the glowing orator, downed him and soon had choked all the eloquence out of him with a neatness and despatch that promised no good times for any Hun officer whom either of the merry stalwarts might meet hand to hand in a trench raid.

But Tommy Dodd was right. Trench life does mean work in plenty.

Life in the trenches divides itself automatically into two parts—the day and the night. Modern invention has endeavoured, with considerable success, to bridge the hours of darkness by means of such artificial illumination as Verey lights, parachute lights and searchlights. The use of the first two is practically universal. Searchlights possess one great drawback, lack of mobility. The Hun usually mounts his searchlights on a sort of tram track, thereby exhibiting a moving target which proves to be annoyingly difficult to knock out.

A day in the trenches opens with the “morning stand-to.” This extends from about half an hour before dawn to about half an hour after it. Every man in the trench is awake and ready for action and



is inspected in that condition by his platoon commander. Every man's rifle must be in perfect order; he must have his own special place on the firestep from whence he can fire, at the foot of the wire entanglements which have been placed in front of his own trenches; if there is any doubt about this he should be made to fire "five rounds rapid" so that he can see the error of his ways—and shots; his gas helmet must be in good condition and ready; he must know the position of bombs and extra ammunition, the immediate attitude of the enemy and the direction of the wind.

In parenthesis, the man must be trained so that he does not become jumpy. The practice that some young officers may have adopted, perhaps unconsciously, of creeping stealthily behind a sentry and unnecessarily surprising him, should be condemned. Such things always result in dividing the man's attention. I have been told of a case in which a man, on being told by his non-commissioned officer for the tenth time from which direction the enemy was expected to come, replied cannily, "Yus! but the 'or-ficer, 'e comes *that* way," pointing to the rear.

As the platoon commander inspects the men at "morning stand-to" he must note their physical condition, their spirits and cleanliness, the reserve stores, latrines, and cook-houses, and the thousand and one things that are to be found about and are integral parts of a trench system. The morning inspection and its results should not be a matter of decentralised, subordinate responsibility. The man on the spot must remedy defects at once, unasked, unaided, and Larry would have added, unhonoured and unsung. Once the man on the spot "lets the thing



slide" or "leaves it to the other fellow" chaos is come to the trench.

The "morning stand-to" frequently goes far toward taking away what little of the romance of war may have been left to the waking dreams of the platoon commander. Given new men, a cold, wet morning and a bad trench, a thoroughly-made inspection will involve no light task. The inspection concluded, "stand down" is ordered by the company commander, and the day's work goes on.

Then it is that the men learn the value of the phrase, "It's got to be done." This phrase, the Sage Youth says, together with "Carry on, sergeant," is believed by many men to be the real cause of Britain's greatness. Certain it is that a hundred times a day, in the trenches, one finds it fits the needs that continually arise.

Working parties are put at all sorts of jobs. Rations must be fetched from the cook-house, if the command has a cook-house in or near the front line. Above all, the question of the defence of the line must not be forgotten. Sentry-groups with periscopes must be posted at intervals and it is vitally necessary to impress the men at the periscope that the safety of the platoon is in their keeping and theirs alone.

The war in Europe, as well as former wars, has shown that the Anglo-Saxon has splendid fighting qualities, but he is naturally careless and over-confident. Nowhere is this characteristic more noticeable than in the matter of sentries. Some of the men of the best of regiments will require constant supervision. During the time a platoon is in the front line trenches its commander will have no rest if he does his full duty. I once overheard one of the most expe-



rienced generals of the British Army strongly recommend that the platoon leaders or senior non-commissioned officers post each of the sentries in each section of the line. "Too often this duty is relegated," he said, "to a junior non-commissioned officer, and general slackness often results. Personally I would never allow single sentries at night. In former wars double sentries have been found advisable and I see no reason to alter this excellent rule because the troops are sheltered in trenches. Too much importance cannot be laid on the continual cautioning which is required to encourage vigilance. It is the only price at which success in trench warfare can be secured."

Afternoons in the front line trenches are usually, when possible, devoted to rest. If special work entails the employment of men in shifts rest should be arranged for them in their time off. Generally, the best plan is for every available man to work for a definite period and rest for a definite period. Here lies ample opportunity for the good organiser. He can so order events that every man in his platoon is content and the maximum amount of work is accomplished, or his men may be disgruntled for the reason that they never know what time they can call their own. In such cases the work suffers.

As to mealtime in the trenches, a noon dinner is preferable. After an early supper, or tea, as the British call it, comes the "evening stand-to," which entails an identical inspection with that made at "morning stand-to." After "stand-down," night work is told off and once again the trench settles down to work, but with a difference, for the darkness lends confidence and permits of greater freedom of action. The thought of the commander of a sec-



tion is "What can I do now that cannot be done in daylight?" The answer fixes the tasks of the working parties.

"One thing looms conspicuously at night, particularly. That is wire. Is it still there, out in front, or has the Boche high explosive thinned or removed it? The only way in which an answer to such questions can be obtained is by going out and seeing for one's self. Personal reconnaissance is far the best road to knowledge along that line. If more wire is needed, it must be put out at once. As every coil of wire has to be carried up from the back areas, training in the best way to put out wire is absolutely essential. The untrained man can easily put out 50 coils of wire and wonder next morning when he looks through a periscope "what on earth he did with the stuff."

Patrols should go out at night to ensure that "no man's land" does not become German land, to cover working parties in front of their own trenches, to catch enemy working parties, and to scupper any enemy patrols with which they may come in contact. Patrolling is nerve-testing work at first, but many adventurous souls develop a real taste for it. The platoon commander must see that such men are not sent out each night, as that sort of men are of the highest possible value, and experience has shown only too plainly that men on patrol have, as it is put at the front, "only a certain number of chances." In other words, patrolling is work that asks a high sacrifice, the highest sacrifice that the soldier can make, if it is continued sufficiently long. A Lewis gun is frequently sent out with the patrol. If the patrol has no Lewis gun and discovers an exposed enemy working party, it is advisable to return to the home



trench and turn loose the machine guns in the trench. The Hun has developed a dislike for the Lewis gun akin to his aversion for the Mills bomb and the Stokes mortar.

The man who counts most in a trench from the administrative point of view is the platoon commander. He is, under normal circumstances, a junior officer—"junior subs" the British Army terms them. It is the platoon commander in France to-day who is winning this war, as much as any one class of officer or man can be said to be winning it. No amount of good staff work or generalship can succeed without him. His work ranges from accepting the confidences of Private Jones, whose wife has sold up the home, to the taking over of the whole scheme of operations in a tight corner, when the senior officers are out of action.

My friend Larry is a platoon commander. He once told me, in most serious mood, that "the men will follow a good officer anywhere. They fervently remark, at times, that they have no desire whatever to accompany a bad officer to the particular locality to which, soldier-like, they do not hesitate to verbally consign him."

Larry's men followed him, at Vimy Ridge, on an occasion when he deemed it necessary to work right through our barrage (curtain of shell-fire). They got through with marvellously few casualties, "did in the bloomin' Boche," who had a machine gun post that was proving very nasty, and then took such shelter as they could get while the terrible shell-curtain moved over them, on to the front. Again they seemed to bear charmed lives, for they had but one or two hit.

Larry's worshippers, for no other term would de-



scribe the relation in which they stand toward him, out-boast all-comers after that escapade.

It is such boys as Larry that are beating the Boche in France and Flanders. As America completes the training of the boys now in school in camp, and sends her swelling quota to the work in hand, an increasing number of young officers of our new army will be doing that sort of service. They are proud, in England, of their wonderful young Larrys. We are not a whit less proud of our boys, and I, for one, would stake my life that they will give us all and more than we could ask of them.

God bless them.



## CHAPTER X

### THE PREPARATION FOR THE ATTACK

**T**O write intelligently and intelligibly of the preparation for an attack, and not convey useful information to the enemy, requires care.

The actual scheme of operations so far as the attack proper is concerned has continually been undergoing change in this war. We have by no means reached finality in that matter yet. The instructions given the men who "went over the top" on the Somme were different to those given the men at Vimy Ridge and in front of Arras. Still other changes were introduced at Messines and later in front of Passchendaele, Becelaere and Ghelavelte. The Cambrai fight was different from them all. Before these words are in print still further alterations in detail may have been put into practice.

The Hun drive which seems so imminent this spring may teach us lessons in the detail of operations which will prove invaluable to our next "push."

But the general scheme is much the same, and has been since the "creeping barrage" was instituted. The first necessity in the inauguration of the "creeping barrage" was that the gunners should be able to register and shoot with almost superhuman perfection. On the Somme some of the newer British batteries fell short of General Sir Douglas Haig's ideals on this score. The marked improvement of the



marksmanship of the British guns at Arras and at Messines was easily discernible by every one in that sector. That was one of the greatest factors at Vimy Ridge, which was an almost perfect "push." Messines, too, was wonderfully successful. Every item in the British programme was carried out like clockwork. The same remark applies to many of the minor tactical operations last autumn that gave the British back the command of the high ground in front of the Ypres salient.

The explanation of the "creeping barrage" is hardly necessary. Simply, it is this. At zero time, known to all units, whose watches are carefully synchronised, the guns pour a heavy fire at a given line of front. The attacking troops approach so close to this barrage that they can almost reach out and touch the maelstrom in front of them. At, say, two minutes past the zero hour, the barrage moves exactly 25 yards ahead. The men follow. At three minutes past zero the inferno of shot and shell takes another 25 yard step forward. So the attack proceeds, the men in the attacking line following the barrage in always dangerous and sometimes unavoidably painful proximity to it. The lifting of the barrage from the actual enemy trench and dugout area meant in the old days, when the curtain of fire moved with less uncanny precision, and the infantry followed less closely on its heels, that the Hun machine gunners would come out of their underground shelters and open on the advancing troops. Drum-fire is growing increasingly more terrible. The days of strain which usually precede an attack leave their mark on the stoutest Boche. Even should a couple of Huns survive the tornado of high explosive and come into the air with their quick-firer as the barrage



passes toward their rear, the attacking platoons, under the new régime, are upon the Boches before they can take breath. Many of the Huns at Vimy, at Messines and at Becelaere peeked over the top of their ruined hiding places as the barrage lifted, only to find that Mills bombs were descending thereabouts like rain, that a fine big Canadian or British Tommy or kilted Scot or yelling Irishman was standing close at hand, with a Lewis gun slung to his hip, spraying bullets about as a gardener might spray a lawn with a garden hose. Bayonets are there, too, in plenty, and the Hun has shown an unusual amount of respect for the British cold steel since the beginning of the war. In this he is wise, for bayonet work seems to come naturally to the English soldier.

Of the work through which the new American soldier will have to go before he can take part in an actual charge, I can speak more freely, though I might say in passing that the following advice has been most carefully compiled at a divisional headquarters in France, and subjected to the scrutiny of the censor before it crossed the Channel. No censorship can be too strict.

To the uninitiated it would perhaps appear that no preparation is really necessary for an attack. That the men after living for months in trenches would be so glad to get out of them that one would only have to fire a pistol or say "Go!" That is where the uninitiated would be hopelessly wrong. Experience has proved that the more used a man gets to trenches the less inclination he has to leave them and go over the open. In addition, trench life makes men totally unfit for active operations. In a trench a man gets no exercise. His condition



after a fortnight's tour of duty is frequently appalling. Consequently he must be taken out and allowed to stretch himself, to play active games and to generally get the stiffness out of his joints, and all this quite apart from the actual martial training for operations of a kind he has forgotten all about.

With absolutely new troops this training is equally necessary, but new troops start with the great advantage that the "trench idea" has not become fixed in their minds.

The attack preparations start way back in the dim distance at the strategical fountain-head and filter through all the various headquarters down to the private soldier. They take cognisance of not only infantry, but artillery, engineers, medical corps, aircraft, and every branch of the army, including, in a big show, the cavalry. Of all these the infantry plays a not-to-be-despised part in the finished production. Guns and mortars may smash a position, machine guns splash lead all over it, planes circle above it and drop bombs, but it is the humble "foot-slogger" who actually takes the place by going over and sitting on it.

The composition of a platoon comprises every infantry weapon. There is one section each of Lewis gunners, bombers, rifle grenadiers and riflemen (whose proficiency with the bayonet may have opportunity of demonstration). The platoon, therefore, is a self-contained unit, and the training of a battalion, in the British formation, becomes simply the training of sixteen platoons.

At least a fortnight is the minimum time necessary for the training of a normal battalion for an attack. For the first three days little is done but



encourage the men to shake off trench stiffness. The work consists chiefly of physical training, bayonet fighting, active games and recreation, with now and then a brief, bright and brotherly lecture to impress the men with the fact that "war" is not necessarily the same thing as "trenches." This part of the training is most essential, for the attainment or non-attainment of good feeling and camaraderie may make or mar the whole of the subsequent work.

Given a feeling of well-being, health and fitness, training proper commences on the fourth day. This consists of the instruction of each specialist section in the use of its own arm. What is wanted, not only in the section but equally in the company and battalion, is plentiful instruction in tactical handling and little in mechanism. If a man can throw a bomb accurately for 35 yards, he need not know much about the size and shape of the striker. A Lewis gunner who can bring up and fire his gun without being seen is of infinitely more use in a "schemozzle" than one who can accurately repeat the famous details regarding the peculiar orbit of the boss on the feed-arm-actuating-stud. When trenches become untenable, Lewis gunners nowadays have an added responsibility. They are supposed to conserve their weapon and themselves, which sometimes means exercising considerable ingenuity in the discovery and selection of a sheltering shell-hole well to the front—in fact, further forward than most folk would imagine. Each platoon must be taken out into the country and shown that ground is not merely "country," but a marvellous combination of contours, the knowledge and use of



which means success or failure according to the use made of it.

If there is time each section should know something of the weapons of the other sections, but a specialist must always be most special with his own arm and not be converted into "a giddy harum-frodite." When the sections are able to manage their arms without their arms managing them, the platoon is reassembled and the sections shown how to combine their efforts. This is where the platoon commander really comes into his own, or he can feel that his platoon is truly his, ready to carry out his wishes, a complete unit able to tackle almost anything, and it rests with him whether the platoon is to prove valuable or useless. The men are the best judges. They seldom make mistakes in their estimate. In training, their supreme denunciation is expressed in the exasperated "He dunno what he wants, himself!" and their highest compliment is a satisfied and weary "He's all right!"

All training, but especially platoon training, has to be "swotted up." Disaster lies in front of the officer who goes out in the morning with the idea of "doing something with the men out there." He must know exactly what, where and when his training is going to be and not forget the fact that the men possess healthy appetites to be satisfied somewhere about midday. He must not coddle the men. He must not undeservedly damn them. Success lies between the two, and has to be discovered, not taught.

After about four days' platoon training the company is re-assembled and the platoon commander finds himself in receipt of orders, frequently brief and vague, and called upon to use his platoon to



carry them out. This is good for the platoon and excellent for the junior officer. In three or four days the company commander finds that he can issue orders with full knowledge of the manner in which each platoon will act upon them.

Battalion training follows that of the company and the attack begins to take visible shape. Strange creatures known as "moppers-up" appear, followed by "Vickers" (machine gun sections) and "Stokes" (trench mortar units). The battalion is introduced to a line of flags which represent the artillery barrage, which must be closely followed, but treated with the greatest respect. The man who was in danger of becoming bored with the whole thing finds a new interest in the proceedings and decides that "this is some show, sure enough," takes imaginary hostile trenches with a rush and a yell and returns to his barn at night, feeling as though he had, himself, unaided, won the war.

It is usual in France now to practice the attack of a whole brigade combined, if time permits. This undoubtedly helps to weld the attack together.

Finally the fed-up, tired individual who left the trenches a fortnight before, returns wearing his cap in a more jaunty manner, singing, full of beans and of offensive spirit, confident in himself and his leaders, ready to "go over the top" at any time and do with a will anything he may be called upon to do.



## CHAPTER XI

### ON INITIATIVE, COMMON SENSE AND GUNNERS

**W**HAT most Englishmen expected to find in the new American soldier, to judge from frequent conversations with British officers, is initiative and sound common sense. They will watch closely for evidences of good discipline. They have seen Canadian troops absorb discipline and become well-trained units in a comparatively short time, and know something of the sort of fighting man the American is likely to make.

The First Canadian Division won laurels one morning in April, 1915, by an action which showed clearly the great military value of individual initiative in the private soldier. That is the quality which was one of the predominant factors in making British generals think the Australian and New Zealand soldiers who were under their commands (and lost) at the Dardanelles the finest fighting men that had at that time been produced in the great world-war. Part of the Canadian Division was in dug-outs in front of Wieltje and west of St. Julian, in the Ypres salient. Some of the Canadians were unaware of the gas attack the Hun had launched against the French line and their own, the first gas attack of the war, until the Germans had driven the French well back and come on after them to such close quarters that the grey lines were clearly visible to the surprised Canadian eyes.



Grabbing rifles and ammunition pouches, with no time for company or battalion formation, officers and men of the reserve units rushed toward the advancing lines of Huns, and seeking such cover as could be found, opened a fierce fire at short range. The natural, inborn individual fighting spirit of men raised in the open—men to whose hands the rifle was no stranger—met the situation with such instinctive cohesion of action that the Huns were driven back and the line held until it could be reconstructed.

Many of the lessons of the war may be so clearly stated that a man of common sense can grasp them at once. For instance, before the war, a trench line was sought in a position that commanded a good "field of fire," i. e., that had in front of it as much open ground as possible.

This war soon taught that the most important item in the selection of a trench position was the extent to which the line could be hidden from the enemy gunners. The space commanded by the occupants of the trench and the nature of the terrain were secondary to the cardinal point of keeping the trenches well out of sight of enemy observers.

Thus engineers might, years ago, select a hill-top as a trench position, the line commanding the receding slope to the valley below. After the experience of the greatest of all wars, they would preferably place it fifty yards behind the summit. More than 50 yards of "field of fire" is desirable, but not absolutely necessary. A 50 yard space can be so covered with wire entanglements as sufficiently to delay an attacking enemy. Deep, narrow trenches with traverses to restrict the area of damage from shells bursting in the actual trench,



and to protect from enfilade fire, are demanded by the newer conditions, but great care has to be taken that they should not be constructed in ground of so soft a nature that howitzer fire can too easily demolish them. We found it possible, on occasions, to select a trench line that could be well concealed, which, if taken by the enemy, would be under perfect observation from our own gunners and by them easily rendered untenable for the Huns.

Discipline, the capacity to go forward in pursuance of an order, in spite of the fact that doing so seems utterly futile, is possessed by the British troops to a remarkable degree.

Mock pessimism at the front is always in evidence. A subaltern of an infantry battalion, which had long occupied the Ploegsteert trenches, paid a visit to a brother officer in another division, which had been marooned in the Kemmel trenches for what had seemed an interminable period.

"You will notice," said the Kemmel man, "my men are planting daffodils on the parapets to hide 'em. We hope to have the line quite invisible in the course of time."

"Humph," replied he of Ploegsteert, "you *are* a lot of blooming optimists. My men have planted acorns in front of *our* ditch."

The boys in the aircraft lot have the most spectacular jobs at the front. It is work for youngsters, but it requires great stamina. Few are fitted for it. What one brave young lad will do for months some equally brave comrade cannot stick for long. The heads that guide the flying men must be good judges of the human element, and I have known good flying men broken and their nerve lost



forever by being "kept at it" a shade too long at a stretch.

To my mind the hardest work at the front is done by the man who "goes up in a push" inside of a tank. The instability; the slipping, sliding voyage in which the men are thrown about in maddening fashion; the great heat and the intolerable choking sensation that accompanies work in a temperature above 120 degrees; the incessant din which renders some men deaf for days thereafter; and the nerve-exhausting excitement of such close proximity to the human prey of these leviathans of steel and iron is a huge strain on the man inside the tanks. Added to all this, of late, is the danger of the new Hun trench-field-gun planned to render the tank hors de combat.

An experienced officer of the British artillery sent me a few lines not long ago which may interest the American gunners-to-be.

"You have asked me to give you some notes from the gunner's point of view," he wrote, "which may be of use and interest to American gunners when entering on their first experience of trench warfare.

"I suspect that the first shock which awaits the American gunner is the discovery of how small a part shooting plays in his daily life. On an average day the personnel of a battery (199 in all), is employed roughly as follows:—40 men on the guns and telephones (four per gun detachment is fairly generous): 57 men in the horse lines: say another 30 to include officers and their servants, cooks, saddlers and other employed men: and the remaining 72 are in all probability digging. They may be digging gun pits or potato patches, but it is not long



before the gunner finds that the spade is mightier than the gun. At all events, it bulks larger in his daily life.

"I am under the impression that the troops from Overseas have not accepted this prosaic point of view, and still cling to the outworn creed that the soldier's duty is to kill his enemy, and to devote his periods of leisure from his legitimate occupation to such amusement as his fancy bids. He certainly excels in either rôle. But they are red letter days on which Huns are killed in bulk.

"Of course the gunner grumbles. But he learns the necessity for his labours. He digs not only for his safety, but for his comfort. The winter in Belgium is very wet. The battery which has taken life easily during the summer and finds itself in November with no horse standings, no drains, no huts, in a waggon line far from a road, is not to be envied. It is not always possible to hand over the camp to another unit before the day of reckoning comes. The battery which does so may court itself lucky—unless it meets its successor again.

"From some standpoints it is impossible to advise the newcomer to trench warfare. Along some lines he must buy his experience like everybody else. A volume of morals and maxims might be written. I suggest two. 'The reward for misplaced heroism is a court-martial.' That should be written up in every O.P. (observation post) and gun pit. It is misplaced heroism to show yourself in your O.P. or when approaching it. The loss of your own unworthy person matters little. The loss of your O.P. matters much. It is always misplaced heroism to expose yourself when you can do your work equally well under cover. The aspirant for hon-



ours will get his chances without making them.

“Again, ‘The Hun is not the fool you think him.’ Well-trodden tracks leading to six rectangles, with defined shadows, will suggest to a hostile airman an occupied battery position. Slope the walls of your gun pits and carry the tracks well past the position and you may live happily and undisturbed for months.

“Exercise of the imagination will save from the greater follies of trench warfare. A well-developed sense of humour will relieve its greater tedium. The American soldier will arrive in France well equipped with both, and may create a new school on the Western Front. If he will combine with all this the accumulated experience of those who have fought here for long months and the discipline of the old army, he will be a valued Ally and a welcome friend.”



## CHAPTER XII

### BELGIAN PEASANTS—RECOLLECTIONS—ON CHARACTER

**S**OME American soldiers who go to France may come in contact with the Belgian peasantry. They are markedly different folk from the French. Before the war they lacked the vivacity of the French, were slower of thought and of action, and their heart-breaking experiences during the last three and a half years seem to have deadened many of them to all feeling.

In most sections of the line nowadays the custom is to remove the countryfolk and villagers to places of safety, whether they will or no. Of all the attributes of the Belgian people, their persistence in making back to their homes in a shelled area, as soon as the shells cease falling, is the most prominent. Many of the peasants pursue their daily round of labour under shell-fire. Many others leave the bombarded fields or villages, albeit reluctantly, only to return as soon as the shell splinters have ceased to spatter about.

Hard-worked toilers, whose lives have been one continual round of labour, are, more often than not, fatalists. Such lives produce men and women who accept conditions blindly and uncomplainingly. A peculiar love of the soil which they have tilled, and from which they have sprung, seems to take the place in many Flemish peasants of the more defi-



nite and definable Anglo-Saxon or Gallic spirit of intense patriotism. Many poor Belgians seem possessed of a blind instinct that "home" is safest, and once "home" is lost, nothing worthy of preservation remains. Their attitude toward death borders on indifference.

I remember a group of Belgian children I saw at play at the roadside. A dozen boys were engaged in a mock bombardment. A bottle served as the hostile town. Stones made good shells. All waited for the order, "Fire!" and then rained shots at the target with a will. Now and then one of the children would say, "Rumph! Rumph!" mockingly, as a "Black Maria" fell near enough to jar them, but for the most part they paid scant attention to the fierce cannonade in progress all about. In a field by the road a man was ploughing stolidly. A woman was hanging her washing on the line, singing as she worked. A 13-pounder anti-aircraft shell buried itself a few yards away, but she evinced no interest in it, and did not even allow its coming to interrupt her song.

Yet, along that same road, not many days before, I had seen Belgian refugees pour back, forced off the road by the lorries, ambulances and guns. Slight mothers with numerous progeny, one, or sometimes two, of the lesser units in arms, toiled by. Each Belgian, young or old, capable of carrying a load bore heavy burdens. Bicycles with huge bundles balanced on the saddle, were pushed along haltingly, as road-space permitted. One lad passed on crutches, flanked by two grand-dames carrying blue buckets crammed tight with portions of the family wardrobe. The strong wind tossed their unwieldy bundles, and they stumbled awkwardly out



of the path of hurrying traffic, their feet bruised against the stones that edged the pavé. Tired, dirty, buffeted by the gale, with strained and aching muscles and broken feet, fleeing from death or worse, in their flight they were abandoning their worldly all.

In spite of all that they came back again, to go through it all one day again, for aught they knew. Peculiar people, the Belgians. The plight of the vast majority of them will excite great sympathy in the heart of the American soldier, if he comes their way.

An American soldier asked me recently what branch of the service was the most interesting to watch in action. That is a poser. The fliers make a wonderful show. The tanks are screamingly funny. Infantry in action is, perhaps, the most wonderful game of all, but if you are close enough to see it you are too busy to do much observing, particularly when a forward movement is on. Cavalry work is spectacular to a degree, but the same difficulty applies. The observation balloon chaps put up a show that cannot be beaten when something untoward happens. I know one balloon man who made two parachute descents, both enforced, in one day. Perhaps the most interesting part of the show that one can see comfortably and safely, comparatively, at times, is that played by the big guns.

More than once, when the second battle of Ypres was on, I walked from our headquarters to a "Mother" gun, concealed under a screen of dry branches in a near-by farmyard. The big 9.2 howitzer was throwing its 290-pound projectiles, filled with lyddite, into the Hun trenches nearly



9000 yards distant. The five-mile journey was accomplished by each shell in 35 seconds, a rate of more than 500 miles per hour. Standing directly behind the breech, I could distinctly see the 9.2 shell as it left the muzzle and started on its sinister errand.

For so huge an engine of war its paraphernalia was simple. The howitzer stood on a platform built into the farmyard. Rows of shells, each a load for four men, lay in a ditch behind it. On a log, under a tall tree, sat the captain gunner, by his side a non-com busy figuring out mathematical equations, and another pouring over a large-scale map. With his back to the tree crouched a Royal Flying Corps man, his receiver to his ear, and an elaborate box of wireless telegraphic tricks beside him. Across the road a slender pole, a score of feet in height, completed his wireless installation.

"Fire!" said the captain, sharply.

Flash! bang! "Mother" recoiled with a shock and returned leisurely. Not a big noise or a very trying one on the ears of those near by, unless in front of the "business end." The crew stood close at hand as each round was fired. Before the unsophisticated onlooker would imagine the great shell had reached its destination, the wireless man, listening attentively to the message from an aeroplane observer high over the Huns, and out of our sight, sang out "150 yards over."

A cabalistic sequence of numbers was shouted in staccato tones by one of the non-coms, repeated by a man at the breech, and flash! bang! went "Mother" again.

"Well placed. Right into them," said the wire-



less operator, as the approving message was ticked from his fellow in the 'plane.

Flash! bang! the work went on, harrying the Huns.

"Had nine direct hits on the Boche trenches yesterday," said the captain gunner, "and have got the range pretty well to-day. Managed to get a couple into one of the German batteries this morning, too." And he grinned.

Very interesting to watch, indirect fire. It brings home the value of the aeroplanes—those wonderful eyes without which the army would indeed be blind.

The effect of the big shells is a terrible thing to see. An ammunition limber went up the Menin Road toward our front line, just then very hard pressed. The horses were at full gallop. At a railway crossing the limber jumped up into the air as it struck the rails. The horses seemed to be skimming the ground, they were going at such a pace. Just as the limber bumped up, a flash came, right over it, and when the smoke rolled away the road led clean on beyond, absolutely empty. Not a sign of horse, man or limber remained. A big Hun howitzer shell must have lit squarely on the outfit, and swept it into the ditch like the wind would sweep away a leaf—just a shapeless mass, everything jumbled together.

For few things at the front is one more thankful than for the inoculation against epidemic. It has saved thousands upon thousands of lives. The conditions which surround one in the trenches are septic to a degree, in spite of all precautions. It could not be otherwise in country where so many dead are buried, some near the surface. Smells are truly



fierce in their intensity and persistence at the front. We used them, sometimes. At one point orders for dark night journeys across a certain field were as follows: "Go down the hedge till you reach the ditch, turn right, and go toward the big pile of dead horses until you come to the gap in the next hedge." Those instructions could be easily followed on the blackest night, if one's olfactory nerves were in working order.

All sorts of pictures come to my mind as those which will be most typical of what the American soldier in France will see and longest remember. A town on fire, the conflagration raging all night, a red splash on the inky black of the horizon. Bursting shells and the flash of your own guns never ceasing. Bright stars dotting the dark canopy overhead, and brilliant trench-flares rising and falling in graceful arcs. The wonderful, ever-changing sight and the continual accompanying diapason of the high explosives is awe-inspiring.

A cellar, low roofed and filled with foul air, under a house badly scarred and knocked about. A close-up headquarters. In the underground sanctuary the flickering light of a dozen candles falling on crowded tables for signallers, round which the men not busy with 'phone and ticker are asleep, heads resting on their crossed arms. Officers pouring over maps spread on other tables, or engaged in close attention to the receipt or despatch of innumerable orders. Against one wall are three or four bedsteads, covered with mattresses that have borne the wearied forms of a long succession of fighting men, from general officers to privates, and bear ample evidences of having done so. A battery of our own guns firing from a position near by, and Boche



shells bursting close enough to cause interruptions to conversation by their constant crashes. All this the very brain and heart of a whole section of front line on the possession of which rests the fate of an army, perhaps of a nation, possibly, even, of all Christendom.

A yellow-green haze that drifts slowly on the light breezes that herald the coming of the dawn. The Hun gas that is actually upon you before you can distinguish the poison-clouds from the early morning mist that frequently hangs low over the ground in front. The peculiar chlorine taste, the smarting of the eyes and nostrils, the strange catch in the throat that makes you want to tear away the gas-mask and get more air, though your better sense tells you that would be the sure road to torture and death. All that accompanies the coming of the gas to those who have yet to go through that phase of modern warfare for the first time. After the initial experience it is less terrible.

But longest remembered of all, perhaps, are those strange, inexplicable incidents where stern war gives way for one brief moment to such an episode as occurred in our line in 1915. The men of the opposing armies were in trenches not many yards apart. Calling across the intervening ground, each side boasted of its food supply. Huns who speak English are legion. A British Tommy held an empty sardine tin on the point of a bayonet in proof of extra rations.

"That's a sardine *tin*," yelled a Hun. "No *sardines* in it."

Not long after, a tin of sardines, unopened, was thrown from the English trench. It landed just short of the Hun parapet. Over vaulted a big



Saxon and dashed at the tin with outstretched hand. As his fingers closed over it, it jumped from his grasp. Tommy had tied a thin, stout line to it, and drew it quickly home, while the Boche jumped back into his trench amid the shouts and laughter of friends and foes.

Needless to remark, such antics meet with prompt discouragement.

Every one who comes home from France will bring his own recollections. God grant that the best-remembered may prove to be the least sinister.

The degree to which the present-day soldier becomes acclimatised to shell- and rifle-fire is remarkable. Those who have come into constant touch with the wounded or have seen much of the British soldier on leave in England, have all noticed an attitude on the part of Tommy when he speaks of front line dangers that would lead the average hearer to think Tommy was assuming a nonchalance at home that he would hardly feel when in the trenches. That is not so. The careless attitude toward the menace of shells, bombs, Mauser pellets or what not is not assumed for the benefit of the folks at home. It is real. It is acclimatisation to fire.

It does not come to all. It comes to some quicker than to others. Personally, I was cursed with an utter inability to attain it, so, perhaps, I can the better appreciate it. "Pip-squeaks," "Marias," "Johnsons," "Whizz-bangs," or just a simple little "Blighty" one,—all were the same to me. I was born nervous of all projectiles. I might explain in passing that Tommy has adopted the term "Blighty" as meaning England, home and beauty. Therefore, a "Blighty" one, is one that means the



victim will be sent across the Channel in consequence thereof.

I could not tell you how much scorn a soldier put into a remark concerning a pal whose wound had been slight, but who had been "sent back" on account of it. "'E stopped one. But not proper—only with his 'and."

The "game" is so big, so terribly fraught with consequences if an imaginative man lets his mind dwell on the possibilities, that it is nothing short of a blessing that the average human being is so constructed that he ponders little over what may happen, but rather engrosses himself in more useful occupation. Just what it is that makes Tommy so really thoughtless about the dangers of the firing line it is difficult to say. Doubtless his lack of worry comes from his good common sense, for of all the futile things a man can do when in the firing line or near it, nothing can be more utterly without comfort or other blessed effect than to continually anticipate the worst.

True it is that humanity becomes used to any environments, any peculiar conditions which are imposed upon it. Acclimatisation to Hun efforts at his individual and collective destruction does undoubtedly come to the man who experiences much of that sort of thing, whatever form the devilment may take.

That very "getting used to things" is a very real danger to every man in the line. No generalisation as to the sort of individual action that may be brave, or foolhardy, as the case may be, can be made. Circumstances may change the viewpoint from which such incidents should be judged. But every man should bear continually in mind that long



immunity from accident is more than likely to induce carelessness.

I knew a lad, an officer in a very famous regiment of Hussars, who seemed to bear a charmed life. From Mons on he had held a staff position that was no sinecure. Time and again he came through a fight in a way that seemed little short of miraculous. He was a very gallant officer. He did not seem to me to be in the least foolhardy. He did not go out of his way to look for trouble. Time passed, and he went to the Dardanelles. He was given a very dangerous billet. He distinguished himself. Many of his companions fell, day after day, but he still seemed unusually fortunate. He came back to France in due course, and went through the Battle of the Somme. His command lost heavily. He was in the forefront of the fighting, but his luck held, and he came out unscathed. On May 23, 1917, that boy was killed. In a little further time he would have been through three years' fighting, bravely, unshirkingly, continuously. I sought news of the manner of his death. I found that he had taken a sniping shot at a Hun sharpshooter from the front-line parapet. His shot seemed to have reached its mark. Grabbing a pair of field glasses, the boy raised his head over the trench top for an instant to see if his bullet had done the work required. At that moment a Mauser bullet from a Hun rifle tore its way straight through the lad's forehead, and he fell back dead.

"He was looking for it, and he got it," said an old hand at the game who knew the details. No, he was wrong. That boy was no dare-devil in that sense. He had merely been at the game so long, and for so many months had seemed immune from



hurt, that a moment came when his watchfulness took precedence no longer over his curiosity—and he paid the extreme penalty for that momentary lapse.

America wants live, virile soldiers. Some must pay the great price. All of us know that. But I always felt that there was one epitaph no one would write over my grave. That was, "He looked for it." That never means "He chose a task which led to sure death." No, that peculiar "He looked for it" is never used at the Front in that connection. It implies carelessness, and is always accompanied with just a little note of criticism, along with the regret.

Carelessness is a bad trait in any walk in life. In warfare, it may be one of the least forgivable errors—regardless of its consequences to him who allows himself to be accused of it. Risks may be quite justifiable. Be sure they are before you take them. Do not let it be said of you, when you "stop one," that you "looked for it." Remember that bravery and foolhardiness, courage and recklessness, have a very different meaning when applied to a unit in an army.

Courage, that animal instinct of collected humanity, humanity in groups, is more of a universal human attribute than most people think.

The courage of the rush forward, the courage of a moment full of high purpose, high resolve, born of sudden unaccountable impulse, an exact introspection of which no man who has experienced it would care to attempt, that is one sort of courage. Another sort is "stick to it" courage. Of great value, that. Still another is the pure, simple resolution to do the obviously right and undeniably best



thing at the moment, unhesitatingly, without demur or timid delay for cogitation. That is the most important of all.

Life is made up of one long facing of decisions—of deciding promptly or letting the opportunity pass. Doing or failing to do may equally affect us for good or ill. Character is built up, according to our present-day psychologists, by the influence on us of the endless chain of decisions we are called upon to make, so long as life is in us. The character of the individual may to a great extent influence his decision, but, thank God, the decisions he makes have an even greater power toward moulding, or perhaps remoulding his character. Were it otherwise human progress would be in hopeless case.

As with a man in ordinary spheres of existence, so with the soldier: with the soldier in ever increasing ratio as his duty calls for decisions of greater moment to the cause for which he is fighting. Some soldiers go through much fighting with but little opportunity for the exercise of important individual initiative. Nevertheless, any day it may come. Any day or any night the least important fighting unit of any command, the humblest soldier in the ranks, may find himself confronted with a choice of paths, one leading straight to the hard, perhaps hopeless task, one to an easier way out. If that soldier's character be founded on a series of bold, brave, flint-like decisions, if his habit has been to decide not only with firmness but with rapidity when a clear way opened ahead—no matter how hard the road—his character will show like a beacon of light in his big hour.

The men who have counted all down the ages are



the men who have not only willingly accepted but have eagerly sought the big task, the hard struggle.

An army of soldiers fighting for God and the Right who are to a man seeking keenly after the hardest work which can be given them is more than invincible.

One of the greatest puzzles I encountered on the Western Front was the tendency of certain units to lose sections of front with which they might be entrusted, and the even more clearly marked tendency of other units to hold on to practically untenable positions, regardless of results, until definitely ordered to retire by the Higher Command. Many times such orders, seemingly inevitable, never came. Many times the bulldog grip on a trench could not be shaken loose by all the deluges of Hun shells and all the waves upon waves of Hun battalions in stubborn charge after charge.

Long study, probing deep beneath the surface, was needed to show why one battalion always seemed to hold on while another more than once gave ground—though the severity of the storm of projectile and the density and persistency of the attacking forces in each case gave no choice as to which conflict might have been the fiercer. The fact that few units in our line had not been forced back or ordered to retire from some position at one time or another complicated the matter.

In the end, however, after careful study, I came to the unshakable conclusion that the individual character of the men in some groups was of higher calibre than in others. The most valuable formations of all were those in which there was the greatest percentage of men of sterling personal character; clean, strong, high-minded Christian soldiers.



That men of real character count most in stress of battle there is no shadow of doubt.

Every American soldier has in his heart a love of his flag, his homeland, and all that his country stands for. That love will go far toward replacing the esprit-de-corps of the members of some regiment whose history has been handed down as a glorious memory for generation after generation. Inherent American good temper will immeasurably aid the boys from the U. S. A. to become not only good soldiers, but good regiments of soldiers.

Chief of all, boys, remember that character counts most.

Seek the hard task.

Build steadily for the day the big strain will come.

Constant effort will bear sure fruit.

Then, when the great moment of your life comes, that character you have so painstakingly builded will indeed be your crown—a crown of certain victory.

THE END



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