

AMERICAN GIRL'S SMILE U-BOAT'S WORST ENEMY

Boys of Mosquito Fleet, Who Find French Ports Dreary and Full of "Homesickness Germs," Go Back to Their Ships Cheerful and Ready for Anything after Meeting the Women Workers Who have Gone "Over There" to Make France Look as Much Like Home as Possible.

BY REGINALD WRIGHT KAUFFMAN

ALTHOUGH he was a mere lad—he didn't look a day over seventeen—he wore the uniform of a sailor in the United States Navy. He had come into this little room, opening of the main street of the dreary French port, with just a bit of a swagger.

"Des cigarettes," he said, and flung upon the counter a fifty-franc bill. "What brand do you prefer?" asked the girl-behind-the-counter.

Instantly, that faint hint of bravado passed from the boyish face, leaving it clean and manly—glad, too, and yet wistful.

"Gee!" he cried. "You're an American, aren't you? Great guns, but it's good to hear American talked in this town."

He drew out, as long as he dared, the details of his purchase. He went away slowly, and presently returned and bought some more cigarettes. He hung about the room, and then bought still more. He ostentatiously pulled out a shining cigarette case from a pocket, and filled it.

The clerk couldn't help a smile. "You must smoke a great deal," she said.

The sailor blushed. "It's not that," he confessed, "but—well, just to hear you talk is like home!" He fumbled with the cigarette case.

"See that?" he said. "I got it today from my folks in Boston. That monogram—they're my initials. I guess maybe they'd send me cigarettes, but I didn't expect the case. As it was, the case came alone."

"It's very pretty," said the clerk. "It's the first word I've had from home for three months," said the boy.

"They don't write?"

He turned away. "I guess the mails are all balled-up."

"Still you did get the case."

LETTERS, THE DEMAND

"Sure; but I'd rather had a letter than a hundred cigarette cases. Of course I'm glad I enlisted; but, gee, if the people at home knew how bad us fellows wanted letters, they'd write every day, even if they didn't have nothin' to say except 'Yours truly.' If they only knew!"

That sailor was a fair example of our young seamen in France: unfaltering in his determination to do his duty, but unremittingly homesick. The room in which he revealed his heart was one of many such rooms where, daily, many of our enlisted men are moved to similar confessions: their one healthy substitute for home, the Y. M. C. A. headquarters at a French port.

These boys are the keepers-up of commerce, the food-bringers, the sleepless guides and guardians of our troops that cross the sea.

"The work of the Mosquito Fleet is nothing short of wonderful," a French admiral recently declared. "In the last report of two hundred and fifty ships convoyed, only three losses were reported; since the Mosquito Fleet came here, the S. O. S. calls due to mines and submarine attacks have decreased fifty per cent."

These results are achieved only by labor that is hard, dangerous, and without recorded praise. There are days when men have to stand on watch for fourteen hours without relief; whole voyages when the gun crews have never moved more than five feet from their guns, snatching sleep on the rain-washed decks; cruises when the men in the fire room and before the engines have never even been able to come up for a breath of fresh air.

WITHOUT A WHIMPER.

Yet all that is borne without a whimper. The sailors read, now and then, a stray home paper and see the accounts of cheering crowds bidding Godspeed to this or that departing regiment; they feel that all the public heart is going out to their army. They don't at all realize their own devotion, and their attitude is almost that of apology for not more spectacularly serving their country. They will tell you that they are glad they "jumped to the guns," but every mail brings news of friends that stayed behind and have won commissions at the Reserve Officers' Training Camps.

And then the ship comes back to port, and there are liberty parties going ashore.

The British sailor is given his drink ration; the British Y. M. C. A. serves light beer. It isn't thus with our men. At sea there obtains only the taut rule of flat virtue, and the man that goes ashore is his own master.

Do you begin to see now the problem that our Y. M. C. A. has to face?

Any American sailor man will get homesick after a week here, and it's just homesickness that's the matter with most of these kids: if they can't be cured of it, they'll DO something to forget it."

To be homesick—and, if you remember your first boarding school day, after your mother's kiss you



"Gee It's Great To Hear 'American' Talked in France!"

bringing are formed, under maternal chaperonage, to meet sailors of their own sort that have some knowledge of the French language. It is at these gatherings that the sailor talks most freely, and most lightly, of his work.

"Looking for subs?" I heard one say to his newly met companion. "I am going blind doing it! There is the sub that makes up to look like a sailing vessel, and the one that hides its periscope behind an imitation shark-fin, and now they've got one that spouts water like a whale. The porpoises drive us crazy: something comes dashing at our boat the other day; its track was exactly like a torpedo's. Humphrey saw it first. He pointed it out to me. 'We're gone this time!' he yelled. Then it jumped, and we saw it was a porpoise. We call porpoises 'Humphrey' torpedoes now."

The French girl wanted to know about sailors at sea.

PICK UP SURVIVORS

"Last trip," she was informed, "we picked up three small boats with fifty-nine men in them. About half of those men were from a ship that had been torpedoed the day before. They got away and were taken on a passing steamer, and they hadn't been aboard her for twelve hours before she was torpedoed, too. We got those fellows into the drum-room and laid them over the boilers. Whenever we sight a life boat the commissary steward starts supplies of soup and coffee, so we had plenty of the warm stuff ready for them, and we lent them our clothes while their own were drying."

His companion laughed. "Why don't you tell the rest?" he asked.

"Oh, what's the use!" grumbled the first sailor.

"Then I'll tell it," persisted the second. "Our crew's clothes were so much better than the ships the rescued men had come aboard in that some of the rescued forgot to change back to their own duds before they went ashore. If you see any stray uniforms walking around this town, they're ours."

However, if good company is a moral force not to be neglected, so is good food and in that particular the Y. M. C. A. has thus far been fortunate. There is a story told in one port, where Vincent Astor has been staying when on shore leave, to the effect that he was complaining of the restaurant in his hotel.

"You can't get a really good meal there," said Astor.

WHERE TO GET GOOD MEAL

His auditor happened to be satisfactorily fresh from another sort of restaurant. "I just now had a good dinner at the Y. M. C. A." he ventured.

"Oh, there!" said Astor. "Of course you did. The Y. M. C. A. is the best eating place in town."

Mr. Astor ought to know, because that eating place is of his wife's making. She bought and turned over to the association the one really good restaurant that could be found, and she has ever since been personally active in its arrangements.

"You get real food there," a sailor recently told me. "Real food. You know what I mean—ham-and-eggs an' steak-an'-fried-onions."

It is said that Mrs. Astor used to help out on table when the service was shorthanded, and that one of the first persons upon whom she waited was a newly enlisted man in the United States Navy who, until a month previous, had been the dining room steward on Mrs. Astor's own yacht.

"Gee," the steward is reported to have commented, "when I used to wait on her, I had to wear evening clothes."

The sort of men, then, with which,

at our navy's ports in France, the quartermaster leaned against the Y. M. C. A. has to deal, is all sorts, starboard rail.

"That boy," he said, as he nodded to a blackened, barefoot lad emerging from a hatchway, "got honors in French at Harvard last spring."

"And he's here as a common seaman?" I wondered.

"As a coal heaver," the quartermaster corrected me. "We've got a lot of college men aboard. They're volunteers. Of course, they've all

had yachting experience, but the red-to-the-service fellows laughed at them till a certain little thing happened on the voyage over."

"A fire started in our port coal-bunkers when we were three days out of the port we were bound for. A hatch 'd been left open and there'd

been a shower—water causes such fires, you know—and now, away at the bottom of the pile, that coal was white hot. All we could do at first was to play the steam-hose on it and hold it from gaining for twenty-four hours.

"I was on the bridge at 2:30 next morning—had the midnight to 4 A. M. watch—when the starboard bunker blew out. The fire had crossed the ship. We did our best, but before 4 o'clock there were three explosions on the port side, and then we knew that it was time for desperate measures.

"The captain called for volunteer. He said he wanted men that would go down into that furnace bulging with fatal gas—fellow that would walk straight into those jungles of death and shovel away the top coal so as to uncover the burning core. That was the only way to save the ship.

COLLEGE BOYS FIRST.

"Well, sir, the first to volunteer were the college kids—and Four-Stripes gave them the job."

"By squads of four, with a petty officer to each, they jumped into that hell. Shovel? You ought to have seen them! Three minutes a shift, they were to work, but they were gassed so quickly that eleven kids were carried out, one right after the other, on the backs of their shipmates. Sawbones stood on deck with the pulmotor and pumped them through, but a lot were caught sneaking out of their bunks to go back and fight the gas again. It was as tough a job as I've ever seen at sea, but those boys did it; they conquered the fire and saved the ship. Since then, you don't hear much laughing at the College Kids."

"Somehow that quartermaster had given me a hint about himself."

"What's your college?" I asked.

"Yale, 'ninety-four," he said. "I'm an old hand. It was these kids I was talking about. Don't mention my being a college man to anybody aboard. I don't want to seem to be putting on side."

That is one example. Here's another:

To an orderly entertainment at a Y. M. C. A. building came one night, a brilliantly illuminated boatswain's mate. He was a splendid specimen of physical manhood, six feet three inches, and as hard as nails. But he was intent on "starting something." He stopped, with one bellowing command, the singer on the stage. He knocked down two of his protesting friends, spilled a crowded bench and swaggered up to the secretary in charge with the majesty of a breaker swooping toward the beach.

"I'm going to break up this show," he said.

It looked very much as if he would, too.

Now, the secretary in charge was a quiet and unassuming man. He had done wonders in his work among our fleet in French waters, but he spoke in a small voice and moved gently.

"If I were you," said the secretary, "I wouldn't interfere."

"The hell you wouldn't!" said the boatswain's mate and shook a mighty fist.

A MISS AND A HIT.

"Please don't," said the secretary. "The big fist shot forward—

It didn't hit anything. It was shunted aside as a little twist of the metal switch shunts a train of coal cars. It dragged the boatswain's mate after it into vacant space—and, as the boatswain's mate went by, something caught him—something uncommonly like an express engine—on the point of the jaw, and sent him smashing to the floor.

Then the quiet secretary picked the giant up in his arms and carried him to a back room, of which the two were the only occupants.

"I hope I haven't hurt you," said the secretary. "I tried not to."

The secretary was a Presbyterian minister. He was also a Colorado rancher. And also he had been the best boxer in Princeton during his day there; his name is O. F. Gardner.

He nursed that boatswain's mate back to sobriety and got him on his ship in time to escape reprimand. The next night the sailor turned up again at the Y. M. C. A. building.

"I've come here to apologize," he said.

"That's all right," said the secretary.

"No, it ain't," the sailor persisted. "I made a nuisance of myself before all this crowd, and it's before the whole crowd that I've got to apologize. Here, you swipes!" he belched.

BOATSWAIN'S APOLOGY.

Every man in the room fell silent. The boatswain's mate addressed them:

"I want to tell you fellows," he said, "that I was a fool last night, and got what was comin' to me; but I'm not such a fool but what I can learn a lesson. I'm cuttin' on the booze. That man there treated me square, and saved me from trouble aboard ship, and after tonight if any slab tries to get fresh around this place, why any such guy's got to tackle the two of us."

Some college men and some men that have hardly been to school at all, a group of millionaires and a scattering of rough-necks, but every one sound at heart and brave in action—these make up the Mosquito Fleet. The worst aren't bad, they are only lonely. The best are enduring a dangerous and, what is more, a hideously monotonous, life afloat and one beset with the temptation of emotional reaction ashore. For both sorts the choice lies solely between the sordidness of a foreign port and the Y. M. C. A.

"Which are you for—the Y. M. C. A. or the port?"

PURPOSES OF BARRAGE

"The theory was to wall in that section of trenches," he said. "Part of the guns enclosed the locality in a barrage while others of us played on the communicating trenches to keep reinforcements from coming up. The idea is to keep in the area all the men who are there and to let nobody come in to help them."

"But you can't see those trenches. How do you know you are hitting them?"

"Observers," was the curt answer. "We know the location of the trench and then register upon it. The observers correct our fire until we have the range exactly, and then we wait for the time. Orders come that there will be such and such a barrage on 'J' day and zero hour. And we are ready."

The thing that tapped one on the shoulder about these boys was their attitude toward the guns. They seemed to feel toward them as a person might feel toward a splendid fighting bull dog.

The seventy-fives called out the highest esteem.

The ninetyeights were good; they did the business, but the seventy-fives! Now there were guns.

"They won't let us fire but six times a minute,"

a sergeant said with the air of a man who had been personally offended.

TORN BY HUN SHELLS

All around the emplacements the ground was torn and upheaved by Hun shells which had been sent over as a compliment to this battery. Out in the field were two great craters sharply visible over the rear.

"Hey," called a man from the other end of the line of bomb proofs, "here comes a Y. M. C. A. man with eats!"

Boys coozed out of caves and bomb proofs with their tongues fairly hanging out. Their station is on the spot so they have little chance to get over to the canteen. The "Y" man, being competent to fill his job, knew this, and made frequent trips over with a pack of his

WHAT FRITZ IS DOING

"Look along the top of that ridge. What do you make out?"

"Nothing."

"Right under the hair in the glass now. Sharp. The hair is touching the top of it."

Still I made out nothing.

"Camouflage."

Just then a shell came over and burst on top of a stone wall behind us. Maybe it was intended for us, and maybe it was just a warning for us to be aware of ourselves. Anyhow I was impressed.

"See," said the lieutenant. "They could get us if they wanted to. Say, Wharton." Wharton was the "Y" secretary. "Give me a can of peaches on the strength of that."

High in the air over our heads we could hear the planing-mill hum of a couple of American aeroplanes taking a look-see. They were not fighting planes, but observation planes. Their duty was to get more direct and accurate information than could be had from any listening post.

"This morning the Boche got one out there," said the lieutenant. "They were after him with machine guns. I saw he was in trouble and saw him coming down. His machine was on fire and he jumped out with his hands up. He hadn't a chance. And they came out and got him."