

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 off 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 boy's face, leaving it clean and manly—glad, too, and yet wistful.

"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 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 backed-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 nothing to say except 'Yours truly,' if they only knew!"

That sailor was a Mr. Example of our young men in France; unfortunately in his determination to do his duty, but unremotely 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 own heads 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.

WITHOUT A WHIMPER.

Yet all that is borne without a whimper. The sailors read, and see the accounts of cheering crowds bidding Godspeed to this or that departing regiment; they feel that all the public's heart is going out to the army. They don't at all realize their own devotion, and their attitude is almost that of apology for 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 taste of fat 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 kissed you

goodbye and cried a little and told you to send home all your socks for mending, and your father's shaken hands with you and cleared his throat and said you'd be coming back to put him out of business, and you'd held your head high and joked—if you remember that, you will agree with me that to be homesick is to be as miserable as it is possible for the human being to become. But to be homesick and yet to give a home to the homeless is to be something very nearly heroic. Of that I saw, in this port, a recent instance:

I came across three little children—boys—standing in a doorway on a quiet street, the eldest perhaps twelve years old, the youngest not a day over five. They would have been remarkable among the other children of this somewhat rowdy port if only for their cleanliness and for the cleanliness of the elderly woman that was manifestly caring for them. They were the more remarkable because each wore a sailor's cap, on the band of which was inscribed the name of a certain boat in the Mosquito Fleet, and because they were all dressed in an infantile replica of the uniform of able seamen in the United States Navy.

WHY SAILORS ARE WORTHY.

"But, yes, monsieur. They were all that was left of a family. The father was killed at Verdun, the mother died in an accident at a factory of munitions; so that good sailors upon one of your country's little ships have adopted them, and are keeping them, and will educate them. They have rented for them rooms in this house, and they have employed me to keep them, and whenever their ship is in port, these sailors, they fail not to come here and receive word of their wards, and they give them chocolates till the little ones are ill."

What do the chocolates matter? There is something worth doing for men who will take upon themselves such obligations as this.

SOMETHING WORTH DOING—AND THE Y. M. C. A. is trying to do it. There are a headquarters and other buildings in every French port that is used by our navy—fifty buildings in all—conducted by workers whose pay does not quite meet their expenses and whose tasks continue from sun to sun.

MANY DIFFICULTIES.

At no one place are there often more than three hundred men ashore at a time, and so it is easier to establish the personal relationship between the association worker and the sailor than between worker and soldier in the soldier's butts at the American camp. But the ports are cities, whereas the camp stretches among remote villages, so that the forces against which the naval branch of the Y. M. C. A. has to contend are the stronger.

went to an evening entertainment given by the British Y. M. C. A. for the American Y. M. C. A.'s patrons in the rooms of the French equivalent of the association. There was a reading room full of magazines and a growing library, free writing materials, a piano around which was grouped a day-long chorus of sailors, moving picture shows, a hall for basket ball, a baseball grounds, fifty clean beds at a franc apiece a night—and a clean bed is a luxury as well as a moral force—an apartment house for seventeen petty-officers permanently employed ashore, a photograph over which I've seen a lonely lad sit all afternoon running off songs reminiscent of his childhood, a canteen that sold chewing-gum, and candy. These may sound like trifles to Americans at home, but to the American sailor abroad, to whom only the Y. M. C. A. provides them, they become something large and vital. They become America.

"There's good grub on our tub, but not enough that's sweet. Gimme some more of those gum-drops."

"What's this? Lemonade? Yes, but what's it made of? Citron-syrup and seltzer! And you call that lemonade? Oh, well, give us another glass of it; it's as close as a fellow can come to it over here. When you go in to be able to afford a soda fountain!"

MEETING FRENCH GIRLS.

If I heard those comments once during an afternoon that I passed in a naval Y. M. C. A. I heard them a dozen times. Unbelievable quantities of chocolate are sold in a form that may be easily heated and drunk during night-watches at sea, and the millionaire that wants to do effective work against alcoholism could do none more effective than to donate soda fountains and hot chocolate machines to the association in these ports.

One innovation introduced recently is thus far working well: parties of young French women of the best up-



"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 came 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 rescues 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 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.

"I'll tell it," persisted the second. "Our crew's clothes were so much better than the slops 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.'s 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 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 and steak-and-fried-onions."

It is said that Mrs. Astor used to help wait on table when the service was short-handed, 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 Y. M. C. A. has to deal, is all sorts. They are of the two extremes and every grade between, but once they are in Uncle Sam's navy there is no distinction. Each man is offering all he has to his country; that makes them kin. Let me exemplify:

I was just coming in from my first cruise with the Mosquito Fleet. The

quartermaster leaned against the 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 bred-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

ware on his pack—cakes, cookies, canned stuff, cigarettes."

"Much obliged for running over," said the lieutenant. "We sure appreciate it."

That seems to be the attitude of the officers and men at the front towards the Red Triangle. "Much obliged and we appreciate it—Say, if it wasn't for the 'Y' we sure would be up against it."

"I'm going ahead to some of the observation posts," the "Y" man told me. "Want to take a chance?"

We arrived at a town and found a lieutenant sitting down in a trench. Before him a narrow slit opened into a pile—and into utter blackness.

HOW OBSERVER WORKS.

"Observation post," said my conductor.

The lieutenant was glad to see us, especially when I told him I was recently from home, and took us within. There, in a little room in which one could barely stand upright, was the paraphernalia by which the Hun is supervised in his goings and comings, and by which our artillery is informed if it is hitting the mark.

Facing the Hun was a narrow horizontal slit across the wall. Over this hung a curtain, because Fritz in his observation posts across No Man's Land might see that slit through his glasses if light were allowed to pass through it and then very shortly there would be no observation post. Provided it suited Fritz's humor to abolish it.

We looked through the glasses at the beautiful mountain slope opposite, famous in the history of the war, and which now is the most formidable barrier in the way of our troops if they set out to take back from Germany a city which France claims for her own. With the naked eye this mountain slope seems quiet and peaceful. There is no sign of life, not even of smoke from a mess fire. Through the glasses, as they are directed by the lieutenant, barbed wire entanglements, lines of trenches, concrete gun emplacements and what not can be sharply distinguished.

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 behave 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."

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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 volunteers. He said he wanted men that would go down into that furnace bulging with fatal gas—fellows that would walk straight into those lungs 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.

"Yale, 'himsy-four,'" he said. "But I'm an old hand. I've been at sea, but I'm 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, 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 sweeping 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 caddy wrist of the slim 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—

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 belted.

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 I was comin' to me; but I'm not such a fool but what I can learn a lesson. I'm cuttin' out the booze. That man there treated me square, and saved me from trouble aboard ship, and after tonight if any slob 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, and brave in 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, and are one beset with the temptation of every nerve 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?