

CHRISTMAS IN THE TRENCHES DURING THE GREAT WAR IS RECALLED BY NEW YORK MAN

(New York Sun)

Though more than fifteen years have passed since the Armistice, millions of veterans — former allies and former foes — recall with vivid clarity Christmas at the front; for it was then more than at any other time that men longed to be home with their families rather than shivering in frozen ruts that zigzagged across a white, desolate countryside. It was Christmas, but hardtack tasted no different. Men's feet grew black with standing for days in icy mud. And there was no lull in the staccato rattle of machine-gun fire, no Yuletide spirit in the whining shells that blew flimsy barricades to pieces and tore through the roofs of shallow dugouts. Organized killing went its ghastly way, though at home clergy in spotless surplices preached "Good will to all men"; choirs sang and congregations flitted with anxiety to sit down to turkey and plum pudding.

Christmas, 1914, and to some extent Christmas 1915, were periods of comparative quiet on the Western front. A feeling of comradeship was in the air. Troops of both sides felt the Christmas spirit and at certain places along the trench lines enemy soldiers fraternized in open defiance of the orthodox rules of warfare. Bitterness acquired vicariously, inspired by propaganda and artificially instilled by lectures whose official task it was to keep ablaze the flames of imagined hatred, vanished beneath the softening influence of the Christmas season. The war had not yet lasted long enough for soldiers to become case-hardened; it was not so easy to shed blood when the saintly messenger was making his benign rounds.

Christmas 1917, was of a different order. The war was dragging endlessly. It seemed as though it might go on until, as men joked grimly, their sons grew up and went out to take their places in the trenches. Soldiers who in the beginning felt no real animosity toward the enemy now nursed a dull resentment, each side blaming the other for prolonging the months of misery. At Christmas the guns intensified their hymn of hate.

A picture of the Allied front between La Bassee and Armentieres—town of undying lyric fame—is typical of winter warfare. There the Germans were entrenched on the lower slopes of Aubers Ridge, while Allies occupied the swampy land below. For miles there were no trenches in the accepted sense; only barricades built of much held together by wire mesh. Duckboard laid across foul-smelling marshes connected first and second lines. Dug-outs could not be built in the marsh. Flimsy shelters erected between the barricades afforded the only shelter. In many places there were no shelters at all; men stood and slept in rain and snow; lived and died like water rats. The mounds of slime were feeble protection against shells and trench mortar bombs, the "tin" roofed shelters no shelter at all against the freezing sleet that swept down from the North Sea. Under such conditions war lost every shred of glamour. Men were prepared to die in action, but they had no stomach for dying by inches in that sea of icy mud.

Periods of rest in the shell-wrecked, drafty barns behind the lines were misnomers. Men presumably recuperating after six days in the front lines went back again at night to repair barbed wire entanglements, to carry bombs for the devastating mortars, or new duckboards and screening to replace that which constantly was being destroyed. The real cold weather of December and January was a blessing in disguise, for then the mud hardened and men could walk over it without plunging to the waist. Soldiers in the front line slid along the ice that filled the trenches. Wagons and trucks bringing up food for men and guns crossed over frozen sump holes in which they hitherto had been bogged.

Extensive operations were impossible under winter conditions, but more nerve-racking than the bar-rage of a major attack was the guerrilla warfare that went on unceasingly. Beginning with small parties, trench raids grew in scope until sometimes they involved an entire battalion. Civilized men crawled across acres of snow and mud to kill or to

be killed, capture or be captured. Losses on these night excursions—and rain and sleet only made conditions more favorable for the raiders—were often heavy, and looking back on them one wonders what good purpose they accomplished.

Peace conferences might be more successful were the delegates men who recalled having gone out on those bloody and purposeless expeditions. More deadly in its ultimate aim was the mining that went on all through the winter in preparation for the spring offensives. During the winter of 1916-17 the British and Germans carried on a dramatic warfare underground, each digging tunnels that ran far under the enemy trenches. Beneath Messines Ridge, to the south of Ypres, the British constructed no less than five miles of galleries under the German positions, culminating in a huge mine beneath Hill Sixty. On the morning of June 7 1919, nineteen mines containing a million pounds of ammol were touched off. Never before had there been such a mighty explosion. The top of Messines Ridge was blown to pieces. Hill Sixty, with its forests of barbed wire and elaborate concrete defenses, virtually disappeared.

But it was to gain that spectacular end that men toiled through the winters boring tunnels into the earth. "Peace on earth" was bitter irony to miners burrowing under it with the sole object of blowing their fellow men to smithereens.

CENTRAL KINGSCLEAR, N. B.

Jan. 6—The men folk of our district are kept busy shoveling snow, and trying to keep the roads open, due to recent heavy snowstorms and blows.

Central Kingsclear school will open again soon with Miss E. M. Ashfield in charge.

Mary Hurley who attends school at Edmundston has returned to Edmundston after spending the holidays with relatives in this place.

Mr. and Mrs. Simpson of Halifax spent the Christmas holidays with Mrs. Simpson's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Harry Mills.

Little Carman Kilburn son of Mr. and Mrs. R. G. Kilburn has been quite ill at their home but is now improving.

Mrs. A. Jewett and daughter Ruby spent a few days this week with Mrs. John Black.

Miss Fanny Fox and Estella Fox, who have been spending holidays at their home will resume their teaching duties on the 8th at the same schools they had charge of last term.

Mr. and Mrs. Don. Burnett are spending the winter months at Mr. Frank Burnett's.

Miss Genevieve Goodine and Mrs. Leo Goodine were the afternoon guests of Mrs. James Mills on Wednesday.

A number of the young people gathered at Elias Goodines and had a good time dancing one night recently.

The sacred Concert held in the United Church by the Sunday School on Christmas eve was most enjoyed by all that were present. The program consisted of Christmas recitations, carols, duets, exercises, and a play entitled "There Were Shepherds."

HITLER RELENTS

Berlin, Germany, Jan. 7—Chancellor Adolf Hitler expressed pleasure that Max Schmeling, heavyweight pugilist, has a Jewish manager, Schmeling said yesterday.

"When I talked to the chancellor I mentioned my manager, Joe Jacobs, to him", Schmeling said. "He replied: 'It is good you have a Jewish manager. Foreign countries will see that we are not so anti-Jewish as is reported'."

Schmeling denied as "absolute nonsense" reports that his fight with Kingfish Levinsky was cancelled by Hitler's order.

Schmeling plans to sail for New York in the Bremen, Jan. 12.

SULING

Prof.—"Shall we let our girls' college debate with the boys?"

Prexy—"Yes but foot ball rules—acres of snow and mud to kill or to

BOSTON LADY WAS REVIVED BY FIREMEN

Boston, Mass., Jan. 5—Dead to all appearances no fewer than four times in the past 20 hours, Mrs. Theresa Veneto, 44 year old mother of five children, lived today with every prospect of recovery. If she survives she will owe her life to the incessant toll of 14 men from a Boston fire department rescue company.

Four times since she collapsed yesterday from the effects of a recent operation, the firemen, working with an artificial respiration machine were disheartened when Mrs. Veneto's heart showed no action and her pulse seemingly ceased to beat.

Throughout the long vigil, however Dr. H. H. Gerardell, who remained constantly at the woman's bedside, urged the firemen to try once again. Today Dr. Gerardell pronounced Mrs. Veneto definitely better.

"Is he a well-read man?"

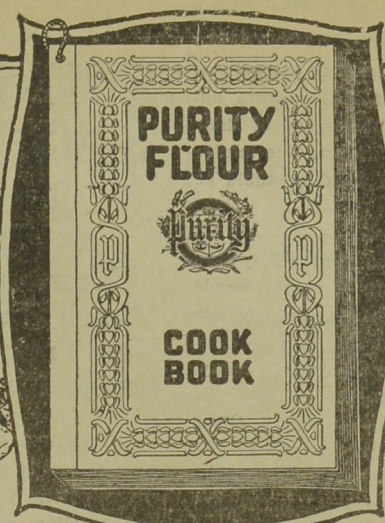
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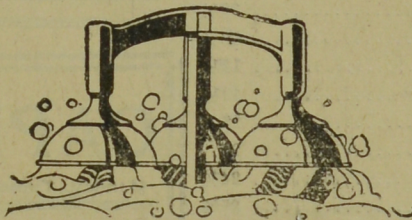
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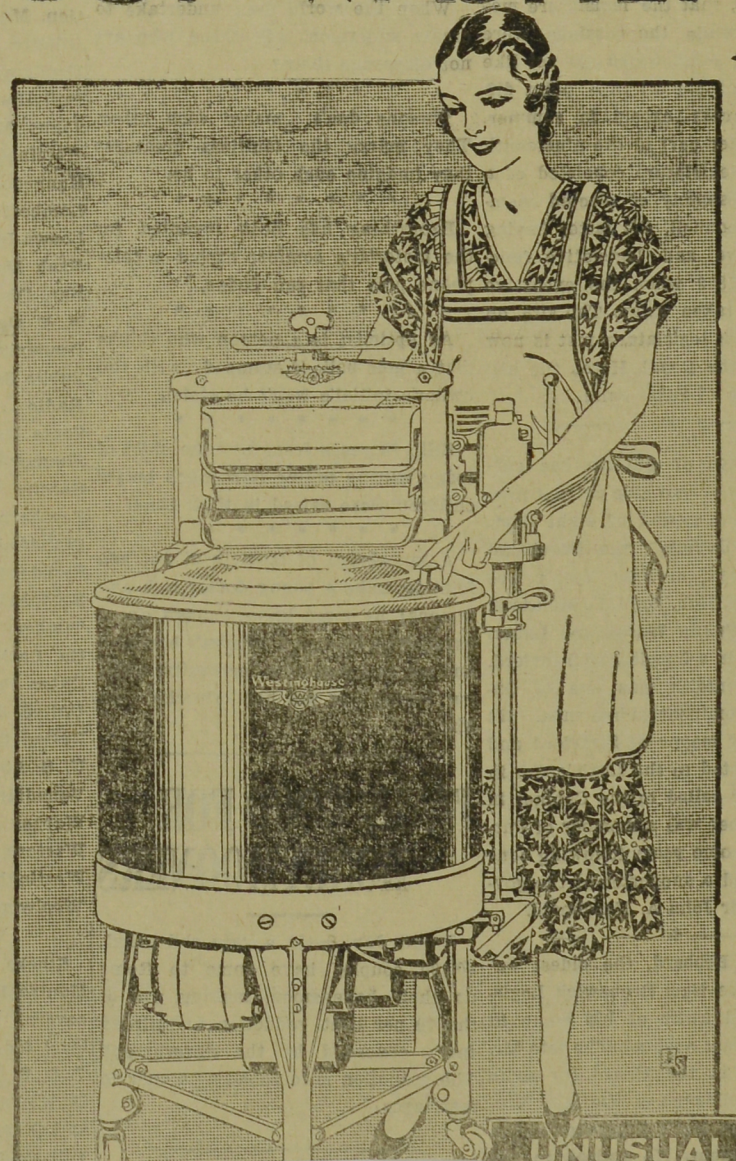
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