

Extracts from Letters from Soldiers

Items of Interest from the Boys in Trench and Camp

Somewhere in France

"Suppose you have no idea how railroads are operated over here. In my poor way I will try and explain as much as I can. Some of them are narrow gauge and are known as light railways, and some are standard gauge. Some of the roads on the western front are operated under American rules. The rest are operated under French rules. Each division generally consists of from 25 to 70 miles of both single and double track, and is generally connected on each end by another division. In some places there are American and Canadian companies running into the same junction or terminal. Of course, at such places there is always the usual railway atmosphere—the telling of stories and experiences, the like of which none but American railroad men can tell.

"There are several different kinds of power used, both American, English and French built locomotives, and gas tractors. The steam is used to within a certain distance of the firing line, and the rest of the way gasoline engines are operated, as there is no steam or smoke from them, and they are not so liable to be detected by the enemy. Railroad-ing over here offers some very fine opportunities to young men, who like plenty of excitement and are not afraid to take a few risks, and are wishing to do their "bit" for their country.

"All the equipment used near the front is camouflaged in very good shape. For instance: Not long ago I was going out on a trip, and my intention was to get on the caboose, but before I knew just where I was I was up on the pilot of the engine. So you see we have some very good artists "over here." We camouflage the barracks also. Another instance where I got the wrong start: I was on my way to the mess hall, but when I got to where I started for, I was in a small patch of woods. And, of course, that meant being late for mess.

"Next month we will be wearing our second service stripe. Of course, all the American soldiers are very proud of their service stripes. At least I was when I got my first one last February.

"We are having some nice summer weather here now. The sun comes out, and it is nice. As soon as the sun sets, it cools off and is very comfortable, provided a person has plenty of clothes. The nights are pretty cool.

"While on my trip to spend my furlough, I had occasion to see lots of refugees. In fact, I rode for a short distance in the same compartment with about six women. Some of them were old, perhaps sixty, and some were young, with children. There was one in particular that I noticed. In the course of the ride I talked to her. She had with her a baby, two months old, and her mother who was 59 years old. They had been riding five days and nights and had lost everything except what they carried in a little sling. It was in the morning, and they were cold, hungry and travel worn, for traveling in this country is much more tiresome than "back there." Everything possible is done for their comfort, but it is a very small item considering all the people that are thrown into the same condition. Everybody ought to be thankful that nothing like this will befall our homes back there, like it has these poor French people. Even though they are sad, they are at least cheerful."

Somewhere in Italy

"I can hardly realize that I am really "over there." This is a wonderful place, and perhaps a little later I can tell you where I am, but for the present cannot tell. After an early supper, about 4:30, we slung our packs and paraded for miles through the streets of an ancient and quaint old city. I wish you could have been here then. That parade alone was worth any cost.

The streets were so narrow and the crowd so great that we marched in a column of fours, instead of company front. Men, women and children lined the streets to give us a welcome equal I am sure to the welcome given the first expeditionary forces to arrive in France. We were showered with flowers and red, white and blue bouquets; they would grab ones hand and follow along as far as possible, and all one could hear was "Eviva L' America," "Eviva L' Italia."

"In going to our barracks we ascended a long hill through a street not more than twenty feet wide. On our side of the street were the walls of dwellings rising straight up from the street, while on the other side were the walls of an old ruin, perhaps a ruined castle. I could not help but think, as we walked along, that the armies of all European countries had perhaps walked those same streets, but that we were the first American troops to ever set foot there. We lined up in front of large Italian barracks and in the court of a fortification and listened to five speeches of welcome. Here we learned that the welcome we had received had been arranged on very short notice, as no one in the city knew we were coming until the ship came into harbor. It was a beautiful view from the barracks, as one could see all over the city, and look straight down onto the nearby houses. As there are very few lawns, the houses rising straight from the street, the people live on the roofs. The roofs are divided off into sort of rooms, only of course no ceiling. The next forenoon we were confined to barracks but all were allowed to go down town in the afternoon.

"Another fellow and I walked miles through the most interesting streets I have ever been on. Some are beautiful with almost Oriental splendor, while others, right next to the most beautiful, are not more than ten feet wide, with no sidewalk at all. When supper time came we hardly knew what to do, as our Italian, as yet, is not fluent. Finally, we picked out a very fine cafe, and went in. One waiter could give the English words for the things on the menu. We had a very nice supper for a total cost of 8 lire and 5 centissimi, or about \$1. We used the evening, until 10 o'clock to continue our sight-seeing. Saturday morning we again slung our packs and came out to our present camp. It is a beautiful sight. It is a sort of a resort, and has a palace of the Queen in the near vicinity. Our camp itself is partially surrounded by the ruins of an old fort; in fact, one sees ruins of old forts or perhaps castles all over. We are living in Squad Tents, ten to a tent. How long we stay here is doubtful, or what we are going to do here is doubtful. We are not near the front.

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Growing An American Soul

Rev. J. Fontana, pastor of the German Evangelical Church, New Salem, was on trial at Bismarck for two weeks, charged with having uttered from time to time seditious language for the purpose of interfering with the military activities of the government. The jury returned a verdict of guilty and passing sentence Judge Amidon said in part as follows:

You received your final papers as a citizen in 1898. By the oath which you then took you renounced and abjured all allegiance to Germany, and to the Emperor of Germany, and swore that you would bear true faith and allegiance to the United States. What did that mean? That you would set about earnestly growing an American soul, and put away your German soul. That is what your oath of allegiance meant. Have you done that? I do not think you have. You have cherished everything German, and stifled everything American. You have