

THE LISTENING POST



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SHRAPNEL BILL STORIES. (A. D. 1967)

By 16264.

No. 19141981 Private Somme Smith (draft, second generation War Babies Battalion) hurried along the trench shouting down each dug-out entrance for Shrapnel Bill, but without result until he came to the last and the deepest. In answer to his call Shrapnel Bill slowly emerged enquiring gruffly : "Well, what's all the excitement, young fellow ?"

"You're wanted by the M. O." answered Smith.

"Shrapnel Bill hobbled along the trench to the dressing station with the help of his cane, and entering the M. O's sanctum did his best to stand to attention, a feat which was becoming increasingly difficult owing to the fact that age and several decades of taking cover from shell-fire had bowed him into the shape of a question mark.

"I have some good news or you", announced the M. O. "I have just received a letter from the A.D.M.S. with regard to your case. Your long and faithful service in France has brought you before the notice of several high officers who are personally interesting themselves in your behalf".

Bill could not believe his ears. Was this the old, heart-less M. O. before whom he had paraded year after year in the vain hope of wearying him into signing a recommendation for his return to civil employment ? Tears of joy rolled slowly down his long, white beard. "Oh, Sir", he said between sobs of happiness, "thank you so much. I'll be just in time for the christening of my brother's great grand child".

"Don't be foolish", said the M.O. sharply. "I wrote to the A.D.M.S. that you had been through the battles of Ypres, the Somme, Vimy, the first battle of Antwerp and the fourth of Berlin, and that you had never had the good fortune to make Blighty. Moreover, I added that your wooden leg was a constant source of annoyance to you on account of getting caught in the rungs of the bath-

mats, or being removed in your sleep by the younger soldiers to use as a block for loop-holes when sniping was bad. I concluded by saying that you had increasing difficulty in getting around the trenches with the help of a cane only".

"Thank you, thank you, Sir", said Bill. "I'm sorry to leave the boys, but I've been looking forward to this for many a year. Pardon an old man's emotion. I always said I'd pull out of this war if they had to send me home by parcel post, a bone at a time".

"Not so fast", remarked the M.O. "The letter I have received states that your age and service have been fully taken into account. That they hear with regret that you have never made Blighty, and learn with sorrow of your increasing disability, and as a special mark of consideration have decided to grant you permission to use a crutch for which you will indent through Ordnance in the customary way. That will be all. Good afternoon".

- Just Out : "What's that bag up in the sky ?"
Old Timer : "Observation balloon".
J. O. "Whose ?"
O. T. "Ours".
J. O. "What's that white puff of smoke near it ?"
O. T. "Shrapnel".
J. O. "Perhaps that's Fritz trying to hit it".
O. T. "PER-HAPS !"
J. O. "What does W.D. stand for on that guy's pack ?"
O. T. "Water Detail".
J. O. "Must be an important branch of the army".
O. T. "Huh ! show me".
J. O. "Well, I see it on all the lorries and equipment".