

THAT FIFTY FRANC PAY.

To the Civilian, and otherwise uninitiated, I shall have to explain what is meant by what is known as "That Fifty Franc Pay." Each year, just before Christmas—it's an established thing now—a paternal Government allow the overworked front-liner an extra pay of fifty francs, in order that he may purchase sundry articles to send home.

Considering that one has to purchase at least three or four articles, and has no conception of what to buy when starting out, the way some fellows handle that fifty francs and get the goods would make a careful housewife back home look like a spendthrift.

Last Christmas we were up round that little burg Bailleul, where lace shops and estaminets abound. So one bright morning, when the Paymaster had been obliging enough to come through, Mac and I, after much hard thinking, decided that we would go to the big town and get some lace. We packed our fifties and an all-day pass along with that same feeling a youngster has on fair day in his home town.

Mac thought the day was fine enough to warrant walking, but my calmer judgment came to the rescue, and I decided that if there was any walking to be done it would be on my way back, so we climbed on a lorry at Locre, which in due course landed us in the square at Bailleul.

Our first duty was to get our fifties spent, so we entered the nearest lace store, and Mac stepped up bravely and said: "Je désire du lace, madam, s'ils vous plait." Madame gave him a tired look for a minute, and then said: "Certainly, sir. This is all hand made," and proceeded to array the counter with all sorts of lace things that no one could name. Mac, slightly shell-shocked at the way she took his best French, stuck to his "seventy-fives" and says, "Combien, madam?" I was getting a bit nervous, so started edging to the door, and when I heard Mac say: "Holy smoke! sixty francs," I got out. Pretty soon he joined me on the corner, looking so thoughtful that he'd forgotten to salute a Redcap. "Say," he said, "I'll match you whether I get your fifty or give you mine."

"Nothing doing," I declared. "Follow me and see what happens."

I'd spotted a little place with some lace in the window, and in we went.

"Bon jour, madam," I opened. "I want some lace." She looked at me a minute, and then said, "Non compris," and shook her head, as though it was all my fault. Mac smiled out loud, and, as I have a reputation, I started to reason with her. "Donnez-moi this," and I picked up the smallest thing I could see. I must have touched the spring that set her going, for what followed is worse than a whizz-bang. I got the "oui, oui," at the start, but after that couldn't follow fast enough. Still, I couldn't let Mac see I was beaten. So, looking as though I knew all about it, I pulled out ten francs. The lady only stopped long enough to take the money, so I gave her another five, but even that only caused a momentary lull, and I handed over another with that sort of peace-at-any-price feeling. However, she stopped talking to me and began to question herself low and soft for a while, rolled up the parcel, and started to figure on about three yards of paper. I was getting anxious, and trying to make sure that I had fifty to start with when the lady smiled and handed me a half franc. Knowing the worst, though not my purchase, I turned to Mac, and advised him to carry on with a little of the old life stuff, but Mac was wise to something, for he left me looking through the window of an estaminet while he went to the corner to talk to one of those fellows with the band on his arm who waves a flag when he wants you to stop. I wouldn't condescend to go over, but watched him by the reflection in the window. After pointing all over the compass for a while Mac came back and said that he knew a good place to eat, so I let him lead the way to a place where we did get pretty good grub, at least the waitress was cheerful, anyway, and she would take all kinds of time to smile at me while taking the order. After I had finished my eighth egg Mac stuck me for the dinner, and then said to follow him to a place where they could understand a Canadian.

Mac, who once lived in Aberdeen, bought about six different pieces, and then had a few francs left, so I stepped up to get mine. Say, that little Mademoiselle sure missed her calling. She would have made her for-