

"Shadows of the Salient"

No. III.—THE REST CAMP

By Ex-Sgt.-Major Hector Macknight



LONG, long march by a large, large body of men.

Men who are happy, though they have passed through the "Valley of the Shadow of Death."

They have been in the Salient for over four months.

Four months of heroism, four months of sacrifice.

They are arriving at a beautifully situated French town of some four thousand inhabitants.

And good fellowship radiates, so that the French people, used as they are to soldiers of all allied nationalities, crowd to their doors and windows and say to each other with knowing looks:—

"Canadiens—tres bon!"

For the Canadians are beloved by all.

Belgium behind them for a few weeks, around them hop vines in full growth, fields of waving corn, gardens resplendent with vari-colored growth—an appreciative populace, big barns in large farms for billets—"and Paradise were Paradise enow!"

The companies are divided and allotted to their respective billets.

The farm in which I find myself a guest with my comrades in arms is a spick-and-span, well-to-do-looking place.

The "Madam" is a typical Northern Frenchwoman and the two "Mademoiselles" are vivacious.

These women work hard, they do men's work and women's work too.

Are not all the able bodied males fighting for La Patrie?

"Ah, oui, Monsieur, c'est la Guerre!"

"It is the war!" Most marvellous of people, the French. They make the best of everything. The death of a cow, the high price of some necessary commodity, the impossibility of obtaining some luxury (a simple luxury at that) the loss of a husband, or son, a "fiancée" or brother—these are the natural outcome of the war.

So they shrug their shoulders, these loyal people; their Country and their Country's honor come first—personal feelings are subservient. It is the discipline of Love. "Pour Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité."

For Liberty, Equality, Fraternity—kin in their sacrificial devotion they have but one excuse, one explanation, one resignation.

"It is the war!"

And should you propose something that is impossible, should you suggest something that is not in accordance with the dictates of their wartime faith and resolution, they will answer invariably:

"Après la Guerre!"

The pretty demoiselle is importuned by the love-sick youth to become engaged to marry.

"But no! After the War? Ah! Yes!"

This doesn't sound much like a description of a Rest Camp, but it represents the atmosphere of this and other rest camps.

Would it were God's will that such an atmosphere existed in the land where these words will be read.

Would it were a part of the daily routine on board the ship upon which these lines are penned—for I am going back after my brief sojourn in Canada.

I too have had more than rest camps and front lines to occupy my misery-infested mind.

But slower than my French brothers to accustom myself to the inevitable, it is only after an interval of fruitless "kicking against the pricks" that I am able to mount to my little upper berth and compose myself to sleep with a murmured "C'est la Guerre."

But "to our Muttons" as our Allies say—Rest Camp!

I throw myself down in luxuriant straw and pull my blanket over me.

Instantly I am sleeping the sleep of the dead-weary.

You shall wake up in the morning and spend the day with me—for to-morrow holds untold joys and I would have you share them.

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"REVEILLE" on a sunshiny morning. Down to the brook for a glorious splash and back to breakfast.

Everybody talking, everybody in good spirits, Who wouldn't be a soldier? Glorious rest after arduous duties well done!

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The O.C. Company is speaking.

We are formed up in Quarter Column for inspection. All traces of dirt and dishevelment have vanished.

We are like so many new pins, every particle of brass is shining, clothes are brushed and carefully mended, rifles glisten with oil and "elbow grease" and shell helmets are washed till they look like new.

"Stand at ease! Stand easy and pay attention, men."

Shuffling a little and displaying no little excitement, we await the news, for rumor has been busy overnight.

"We are going back." "We are going to have some sports." "We are going to get a double pay." "We are going to drill eight hours a day." "We are going to

*"Rest Camp may be very fine, far from harm,
But there is calling, where shells are falling,
A Cuckoo near a farm—"*

French Parody, "Dear Old Zillebeke."

drill four hours a day." "The chaps who relieved us are falling back!"

Busy, busy rumor—an Old Maid's party has nothing on the Army.

But the O.C. has a sheet of paper in his hand:

"There will be Battalion Sports to-morrow afternoon in the fields in rear of Headquarters Billets. Companies will parade in clean fatigue and march to Headquarters, arriving there at 2 p.m. promptly. Entries will be submitted by Officers Commanding Companies. A list of contests, etc., will be posted in each billet, etc., etc., etc. Decorations for services deserving of special recognition will be awarded at 4 p.m. by General X.

A list of N.C.O.'s and men to be decorated will be posted in each billet, etc., etc., etc."

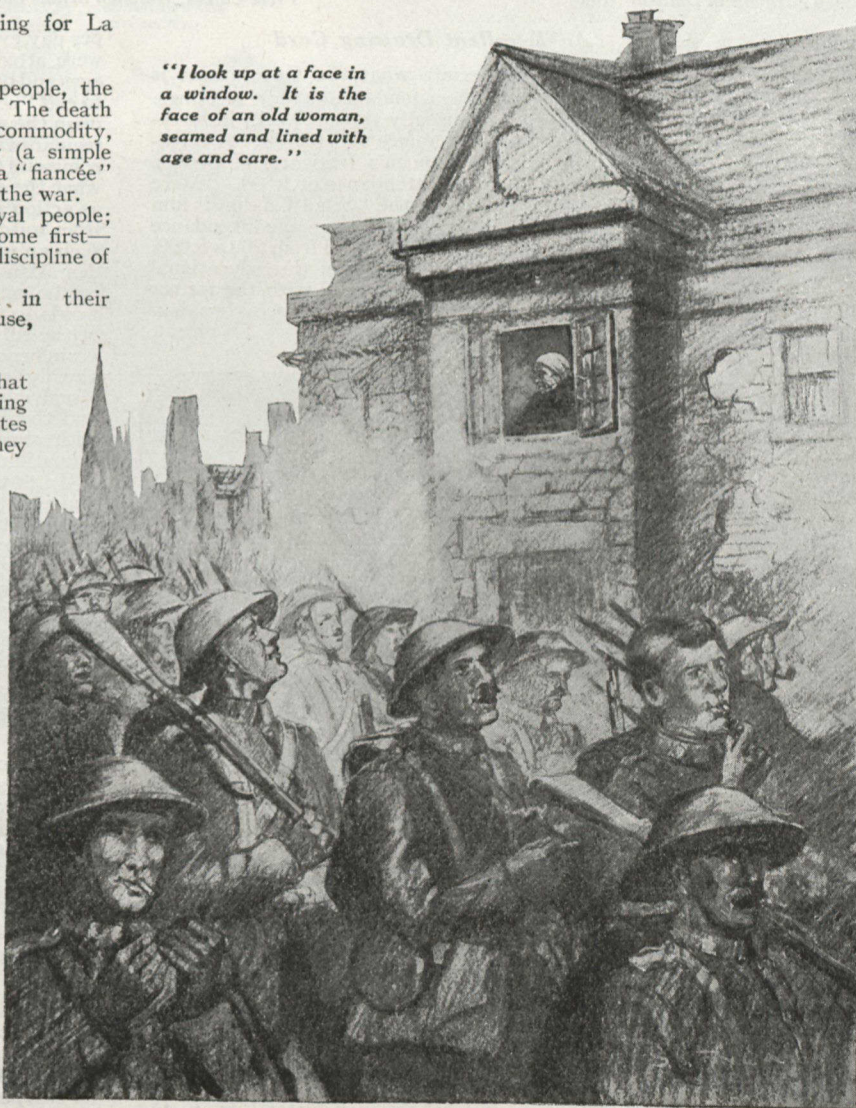
And when the Sergeant-Major has dismissed the parade, rifles and equipment are hurriedly put away and we gather in knots to discuss this wonderful new phase of life.

"Sergeant Boffer gets the Military Cross!"

"What the — for?"

"How should I know?"

*"I look up at a face in
a window. It is the
face of an old woman,
seamed and lined with
age and care."*



"Old Sam Binks gets it too!"

"Good old Sam! Good old Sam!"

"Old Sam Binks!"

"He deserves the V.C.!"

"You betcher."

"I remember—"

When a soldier starts with "I remember—" there's something coming that will occupy your time to advantage, but here are an hundred soldiers, all remembering something.

Something Old Sam Binks has done.

"Good Old Sam!"

* * * * *

Sam Binks is a chum of mine, and I know where to find him.

He is in the kitchen of the farm playing with a refugee orphan of about seven years of alloyed joy.

Sam has little boys of his own at home.

"Hello, Sam!" I say, and he just nods.

"Glad to hear the news," I continue.

Sam takes no notice.

"Good Old Sam!" I say enthusiastically.

I hold out my hand.

He shakes it limply, still sitting down.

"Gee, but I'm tickled to death old man," I persist.

"Hell of a nice kid, that," says Sam as the former Infant of Ypres makes a swipe at the cat with Sam's belt.

I pour myself out a glass of beer in silence.

A phrase keeps dinning itself into my ears.

"—and all the Poms and Vanities of this Wicked World!"

Sam has the kiddie on his knee now. I am an interloper, pure and simple.

"Where are they?" I muse.

The Poms and Vanities, I mean!

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THE band is playing popular airs, the men are gathered in groups awaiting the signal for the final of the 100 yards dash.

Four splendid specimens of manhood take their places amid great excitement.

Bang! They are off.

Vaguely I remember that once I did the "hundred" in 10 1/5 seconds. I wonder what time they are making.

"Rogers wins! Rogers wins!"

"Good old Rogers—!"

Good old Everybody, it seems to me, and I am content with it. Is this not the soldiers' Utopia?

Then there is a wild scramble for places to view the decorations.

General X is to the point. Just a few simple soldierly words as he pins the decorations on the breasts of our heroes.

Cheers upon cheers and self-conscious nonchalance on the part of the decorated ones.

Then our Colonel mounts the platform.

Something in his face, something in his manner, seems to foretell unpleasant news.

I am filled with evil forebodings.

What can it be?

He clears his throat, looks around as though hesitating to acquaint us of some calamity.

"Men," he says, but he does not smile.

"Men, when we left up there, we left everything in good order and condition. We maintained the line. When the enemy drove our comrades back, we went to it again and re-established our positions."

Serious inroads have been made on those positions in the last two days.

The Canadians are responsible for the Salient.

The enemy must be taught that he cannot drive at us with impunity.

The Brigade is going back.

The Battalion must once more show the world what stuff it is made of.

We leave to-morrow, our stay here has been cut short.

"C'est la Guerre!"

Almost stunned by this unexpected news, we look at each other and then hastily away.

Somebody yells out:

"Good old Colonel!"

An officer turns toward us. He is only a Lieutenant, but he wears a medal. He is one of the lucky ones.

"What do you say, boys?" he cries.

"Hip, Hip, Hooray!"

Three times it belches forth like the noise of a cataract roaring down the steeps.

It is not a cheer. It is the Lion's roar of defiance.

Faces are set, teeth are clenched, fists are doubled and chins stuck out.

"A tiger!"

"Hip, Hip, Hooray!"

And then the tension breaks. We laugh and seize each other to dance deliriously.

Some of us wrestle.

The Lion is sharpening its claws.

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WE are marching through the town behind the band. Our French friends line the streets and block the windows and doors.

"Au revoir, Canadiens!" they cry.

"Bon chance, Messieurs!"

I look up at a face in a window.

It is the face of an old woman, seamed and lined with age and care.

Tears roll unheeded down her cheeks. She does not hide them.

Grief she has seen and is not ashamed of. This is but an additional straw to the load of her care and misery.

I wonder how many sons she has lost, this Mother of France.

Her lips move in prayer.

"Oh! Dieu, Dieu, mes enfants!"

"Oh God, God, my children!"

I shout up to her, "Au revoir, Ma Mère!"

She calls back, "Bon chance, Monsieur!"

"C'est la Guerre!"