

SNUFFY

BY

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King Bruce in his blue tunk became absorbed in a spider. A man in jail for life studies a small bug. The writer of Snuffy, with the Canadian forces at the front, in the midst of more noise than ever happened for so long a time to anybody makes a hobby of a Trench Rat

SNUFFY derived his name by reason of a physical infirmity over which he had no control, inasmuch as he had no access to the Sick Parade, nor painful knowledge of the doctor's orderly with his "Number Nines" and iodine.

If Snuffy had been one of the "boys" he would never have been reminded of his misfortune by such a callous nickname. But Snuffy was not one of the "boys" and was ignorant of the insult intended, although he had often heard the word in the midnight stillness of the gun-pit.

For "Snuffy" was only a rat—not a trench rat, like some of his plebeian fellow rats, but an aristocratic, blue-blooded artillery rat. The difference may seem rather trivial to the uninitiated; but Snuffy was well aware of the gulf that separates the classes, having been a trench rat once himself.

"Snuffy" had had a long and honourable career. He could look back on the old days before the War. Things were different under the old regime. Food had been as plentiful then as now; but men had seemed to have more leisure and inclination in those days to devise and set pit-falls for the feet of the unwary. Then, too, there were dogs in great numbers, all actuated, it seemed, by the same ignoble ambition.

Better days came with the War. Men became too engrossed with setting pitfalls for the feet of their fellow men to devote much attention to rats. Dogs became persona non grata in the war zone. It was indeed a Golden Age in rat history!

Snuffy was born in an old Belgian barn, and was full grown before the War broke. That calamity upset his whole domestic system. Snuffy found himself a helpless neutral caught between two vast and exceedingly hostile armies. The happy scenes of his childhood became a battlefield. The great wave of the Hun advance surged up and was stopped. There was much froth and great turmoil.

Snuffy did not know that the road to Calais had been closed; but he knew that his home, the barn, had had strange inmates in very accessible places; that it had been shelled unmercifully, greatly to his discomfort; and that it had finally been burned, leaving it a total loss, with not a morsel to eat in its charred ruins.

He had to go somewhere, so he went east into the lines of the invaders. This was really a mistake. The people he found there were orderly folk who had few scraps to throw away. Food, he found, was hard to get, and not very good when procured.

HE had no sooner got into the routine of trench life than he found himself in the heart of another battle. The trench he had innocently chosen for his future home was in advance of the main German line and formed a small salient. It received early and vigorous attention. There was a bombardment of sorts, followed by an infantry attack, in the course of which khaki-clad figures swarmed over the parapet and engaged the occupants of the trench at close quarters. When it was over, Snuffy found that the new comers evidently intended to stay.

His diet changed immediately. Scraps of bully beef replaced sausage ends, and hard tack crumbs. Snuffy discovered, make very good eating. For some months everything went well with Snuffy, with the exception of one comparatively trivial mishap. He grew fat and sleek; his coat was good and had the

smooth lustre of a healthy Belgian rat. With his glossy back and smooth white belly he was really very handsome. The Tommies got to know him on account of his size and the glossy softness of his fur. One of them dubbed him "Horace."

The one untoward incident mentioned in the preceding paragraph arose out of an interesting phase of trench warfare. The trenches at that point were very close together. It was an easy matter to hurl a small object from one line to the other. It was before the days of hand grenades and Mills, bombs; but Thomas Atkins is an inventive and restless person, and the manufacture of hand-made bombs is a fascinating pastime. One of those impromptu concoctions was disguised in a jam tin with a brilliant lithographic reproduction of various luscious fruits on the outside and hurled

into the German trench where it exploded in the hands of an overly optimistic young Teuton with disastrous results. The Huns, having no grenades with which to retaliate, could only give vent to their displeasure by hoarse cries of rage and a shower of stones and any other small, hard objects they could lay their hands on. One of these missiles came in contact with Snuffy, crushing his foot, and injuring him permanently, so that he walked and ran thereafter with a slight limp.

Snuffy had the thrilling experience of, being in the first intensive bombardment the Germans directed against the British lines. It was that which led him to the conclusion that the infantry was not the branch of the service for which he was best fitted. After being buried and shell shocked and frightened almost to death, he fled.

For a day or two he was homeless behind the lines. Then he attached himself to a battery of field artillery, being fascinated by the garbage hole behind the dug-out that served for a cook-house.

It was some months later that a Canadian battery took over the position. In that period Snuffy went down hill. He was getting old; a member of his own species chewed part of his ear off in the course of a dispute over a piece of meat; part of his tail was hacked off by a gunner who tried to stab him with a clasp knife during one of his nocturnal visits to a gun pit; he got the mange and lost most of his glossy coat. And to make matters worse he developed that awful snuffling complaint. No other rat ever had an affliction like it. It was a combination of a cough, a wheeze, a gasp, a whistle, and a hic-cough. In a still dark gun-pit, at the hour when witches walk, it sounded ghastly. He would walk a couple of steps and then snuffle again. One could lie in his bunk at night and follow his course around the pit by his snuffling.

The first night the Canadians were in the pits he paid them a visit. They were new to the game and unused to the society of rats; and they rose as a man from their bunks and drove him out into the night with sticks and maledictions. After they went to sleep he came back.

The advent of the Canadians wrought a new change in Snuffy's life. The second night of their presence, when he visited the garbage hole behind the cook-house, he found it saturated with a strong solution of creoline. It was very disagreeable. It was not long before he found that creoline is not only disagreeable to the taste, but far from an aid to the digestion.

To further ensnarl the tangle of Snuffy's victualing problem, the gunners had converted their grub shelves into closed cupboards. At the front batteries practice what is known as sub-sections messing. Each gun crew draws its rations prepared from the cook and consumes them in the privacy of its own gun-pit. Odds and ends of bread, hard tack, cheese and other edibles are preserved against the day of need, and usually kept on an open shelf. The rat who could not find some way onto an open shelf would crawl away into the great open spaces and die of shame.

Snuffy made a tour of all the four gun-pits. Each one sported a cupboard with a door which there was no getting through. In number four pit there was an odour that interested him. Beside the little stove, manufactured from an oil drum, he found a

greasy tin. It was redolent of grease and fried egg. The gunners had had a late supper of which eggs purchased at a Belgian farm just behind the lines formed the "piece de resistance." As Canadian gunners in France are very voracious animals, there was little left in the pan but redolence, and Snuffy got very little satisfaction from it. A few crumbs of French bread, acquired from the same source as the eggs, were lying on the floor. Snuffy devoured them, but they served only to whet his appetite. The feast had been rounded out with coffee made from a prepared product sent in a parcel from home. The tin was in a corner. Snuffy investigated the sticky tin with his nose, but was not impressed.

Then all at once he caught the divine odour of cheese and his nose twitched with excitement. He sensed its direction and started towards it. His course brought him to a bunk.

The gun-pit was of a peculiar formation, being in the shape of an "L." The pit proper, in which were the gun and the ammunition racks formed the upright of the letter, and running off from the trail bed was a sort of annex in which were the bunks. A sand-bag wall had been erected dividing the pit into two rooms. The bunks came flush up against one side of the partition. On the other side was the locked cupboard which had given Snuffy so much trouble.

The bunk to which Snuffy came was a double-decker affair with the lower bed about six inches from the floor. Snuffy mounted this with ease and started to traverse the sleeping figure. The modern rat seems to have no fear of man. In fact, it would appear that it is a point of honour to walk over every sleeping man encountered, just by way of expressing the profundity of the rodent contempt for the lord of creation.

The sleeping figure stirred uneasily and thrashed out wildly with its fist just as Snuffy passed over its chest. The sweeping motion of the blow hurled the rat to the other side of the bed into a chink in the sand-bag wall. The now fully awakened Gunner sat up, fumbled for a match-box and struck a light, peering about with that look of disgust and apprehension with which mankind usually surveys a rat at close quarters.

SNUFFY wisely withdrew into the chink, which was in reality a passage through the wall due to the loose piling of the sand-bags. The Gunner carried on a fruitless search until the flame threatened his fingers, when he threw away the match and lay down with the solemn vow never again to eat so much before retiring.

Snuffy was about to get out of the recess which had been his refuge when the penetrating, tantalizing odour of cheese, which he had forgotten in the excitement, set his nose twitching again. This time it was stronger, and "sniff, sniff"—yes, it seemed to come from the other end of the passage through the wall of sandbags. Very cautiously the rat made his way along the little tunnel to the other end. Here he found the cupboard which had been locked against him. And there were no boards at the back.

Snuffy was just about to pace into this cupboard when he scented another odour, very faint and yet very fresh, which filled him with hate and froze him with fear. CAT! Snuffy stopped, looked, listened, listened and sniffed. Nothing happened.

He peered cautiously into the cupboard, set ready to dash back into the hole at the least warning. What he saw was a small ball of black and white fur curled up in a corner, its contents quite evidently asleep. Had it not been for its unmistakable feline odour Snuffy would have doubted that it was a cat—it was so small, in fact it was so ridiculously tiny that one would almost have said it could be placed in a tea-cup.

It was really much too young a kitten to be away from its mother, and it was only the abducting hand of a Gunner, with an eye to the future and a horror of rats, which was responsible for the untimely separation. To make some compensation, he had put the kitten in the cupboard overnight for protection.

Snuffy eyed the kitten suspiciously for a little time and finally concluded there was nothing to fear. There was good cheese to be eaten and Snuffy was soon feasting on the gun crew's spare rations.

The next night Snuffy again sought the cupboard