

Trench Routine

By Private R. W. TROWSDALE.

IN THE TRENCHES IN FLANDERS.

DEAR OLD BOYS,—I am going to keep my promise, made some time ago, to let you have a line. I think I may as well give you an outline of a day's doings, in order that you will be able to see for yourself what a grand time we have out here—not forgetting to mention the little personal comforts such as hot and cold water connections in the front trenches, electric cookers, warm baths for the asking, a double rum issue every night and morning, and the unrestricted use of stilts when the mud rises higher than the waist-line. Believe me, my boy, we're having "one 'ell of a time," as the British Tommy would say.

Well, to begin with, we "carry on" from where we left off. To be quite correct, we don't leave off at all—because trade union hours are not recognised in the trenches. All the same, this life is one long, sweet song—a sort of continued story made up of chapters and spasms. The imaginary line between waking and sleeping is so very imaginary that it is hard to find signs of our connecting files, so let us begin in the middle of the day, which is where *they* begin with us.

A QUESTION OF LUCK.

Dinner may or may not be over. Much depends on the supposition that you have been able to "bum" or steal some firewood from the adjacent section, and also whether the Q.M.S. has softened his heart and given you something to constitute a bill-of-fare. If this particular fare is steak, be sure to thump it well, using your rifle-butt for the purpose, and take great care that the juice does not spill when the "tea-bone" starts in to that out. You can easily recognise the advent of the thawing season: the steak will take on a sort of salamander tint, which reveals the interesting fact that it has at last shaken off its Arctic associations.

If you are a good "rustler," you may be able to get in first on the silver-plated spirit stove, but it is generally found that such stoves are useless, owing to the fact that the "spirit" has been spirited away. In that case, you will probably have to make your little smoke from wet planking—a task which, had it been known in Biblical times, would have robbed Job of his reputation!

Dinner over, you settle down in your dug-out for a quiet snooze. Perhaps you sleep, but more likely a fatigue party will be called for, with your name on the honour roll. Then it's you for a course in the latest of society steps, the Giddy Glide, which is liable to increase your knowledge of the work of a navy and also to extend your repertoire of swear words.

As soon as you get back to your lines, the N.C.O. on duty is waiting with the polite request that you will relieve So-and-So on guard. You may have planned that time for letter-writing, but you pretend you are pleased to be serving your country in any humble capacity. After you have done a few months of this life you will find that you need a mighty fine imagination and the digestive powers of a camel to save getting "the hump."

ON "WORKING YOUR TICKET."

An hour of two of sentry-go passes quite pleasantly, because all you have to do is to

look out on a beautiful landscape of wire entanglements and small stacks of empty bully-beef tins. All you are *really* supposed to do is to look for Germans and other deadly poisons, but as the periscopes have not yet got a smelling attachment, you cannot expect to focus anything except the aforesaid landscape.

There is one consolation, however. If you do your duty nobly and keep your optic glued on to the lens of your 'scope, you may possibly work up a nice "crick" in the neck. This complaint should entitle you to a place on the sick parade next morning and the chance of testing a "No. 9," which is a pilule containing some embrocation and certain other ingredients. If the M.O. should make you swallow the "No. 9" in his presence, you stand a chance of getting a job on "sanitary fatigue," which, if it does nothing else, at least keeps you on the move. And that, so the doctors say, is good for the circulation.

If you should come through sentry-go without getting a "Blightie," it shows that you



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have still a lot to learn. Of course, if you look long and far enough, you may spot an empty rum jar, and you may even work yourself up into believing that it contains something which might benefit humanity as a whole and yourself in particular. That is what the M.O. would probably call an "optical delusion." If you rescue the jar and fail to sniff anything, then you can claim to possess a defective sense of smell, and you might be able to work your ticket to the Base or to "Blightie" that way. But it needs quite a bit of "gall" to carry the bluff through to the bitter end.

"'ARF A MO" AND OTHER LUXURIES.

At this hour, the Germans will probably start in on their regular afternoon rendition of the revised version of "The Hymn of Hate." The process is locally known as "strafing," and consists of the expenditure of much good steel, iron, and other component parts of big shells. Consequently, it is considered safer for one's health to imitate the rats, and seek temporary oblivion in the bowels of the earth. Working parties are called off and you get a short holiday, although it is a matter of satisfaction to know that your pay goes on just the same. The beauty of being a soldier is that there is no "short time"!

So you crawl into your dug-out and lie on your back and smoke that fragrant weed known to the forces as "'Arf a Mo." This latter is a brand of tobacco and cigarette formerly made exclusively for the wealthy classes, but owing to the enterprise of Bert Thomas, Lord Northcliffe and the *Daily Mail*, it has, at great expense to the patriots, named, been "cornered" for the sole use of the troops on active service. I repeat, therefore, that you lie on your back, with a pile of sandbags for a pillow, and imagine that you are lolling in a swell West End joint and smoking a Bock Panetela. You can see what Imagination has done for the Masses.

Then comes tea-time. A couple of enemy rifle grenades may flavour your beverage with a few ounces of parapet. But it is advisable to swallow the entire mixture without registering a kick, because if "Fritz" overhears you he may send over a coloured visitor named Jack Johnson. This is the guy who, a few years back, spoiled Jim Jeffries' Fourth of July celebration in the States. Jim got a husky cowpuncher called Jess Willard to administer a sleep pill to the nigger. But one pill is not enough to wipe a nigger off the map, and the Kaiser enlisted Jack Johnson in his Munition Department and made him godfather to the souvenirs which bear his name. (Perhaps the Censor will object to this premature disclosure of one of the secret histories of the war).

THE "STAND-TO."

The evening "Stand-To" precedes the "pregnant hours" wherein anything may happen, from an Anglo-German "conversation" across "No Man's Land" to a gas attack by the enemy. If you are not on guard, you are permitted to go to sleep on a damp, slimy slab of earth or wet sandbag, with your feet in a mud bath, and you are also permitted to dream of the happy days in store when you will probably have rheumatics in every joint, and neuralgia and toothache and other pleasant companionships. These recreational exercises will keep you more or less employed until dawn, when there is another general "Stand-To." A "Stand-To," by the way, is a sort of institution designed to break life-long friendships. Platoon Sergeants are understood to get extra pay for doing what in Lancashire is known as "knocking-up." As luck has it, there is a scarcity of gramophones in the trenches. If there were many recording machines around, somebody or other would get a nice little haul of blackmail. Fancy anyone offering to sell to your wife or your best girl a record of your language at the "Stand-To" hour!

The early morning "Stand-To" is rather worse than the other. But by that time your sense of smell has become rather acute, and you can easily detect the proximity of your "best friend" by the "atmosphere" which the presence of the Platoon Sergeant creates!

Occasionally—and these are dismal days—you get extra fatigue duty in lieu of the rum issue, but this is immaterial, as both are said to warm up the system. But then, some fellows would "grouse" at anything! That is the worst of recruiting an army from the monied classes!

After the rum issue, there is "that tired feeling." Then comes sleep, and forgetfulness, and peace—save for the peculiar nasal music which characterises some fellows when they are folded securely in the arms of Morpheus.

And, being one of the bunch, I turn in, too!

Your Friend,

A CANADIAN SOLDIER.