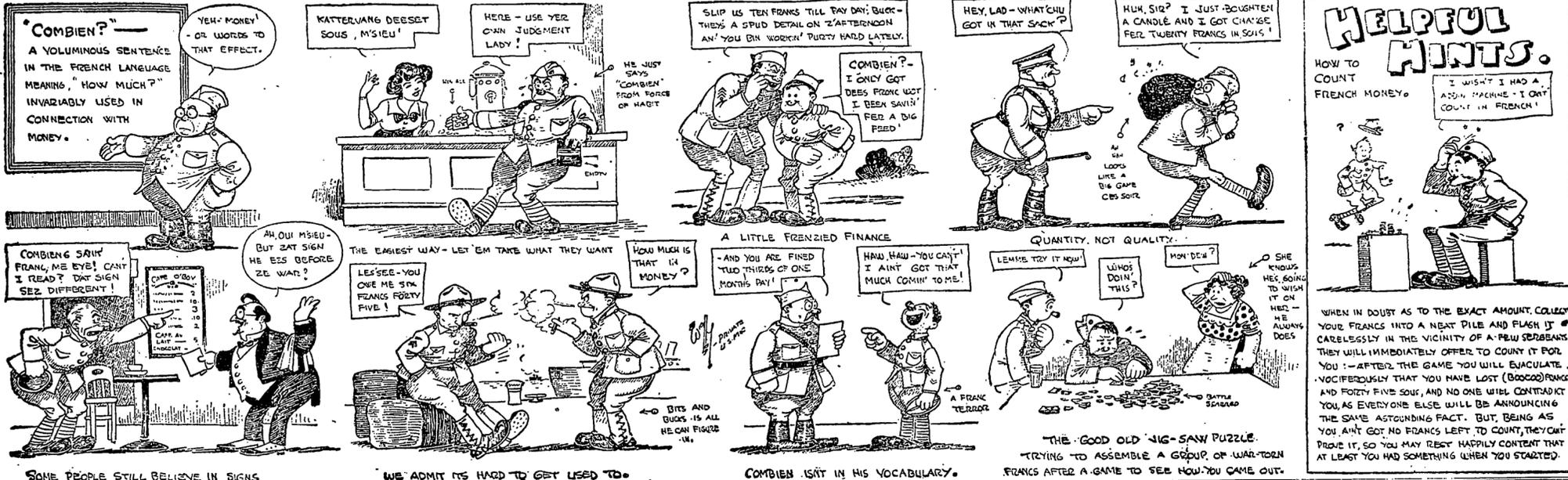


THE BATTLE OF COMBIEN

—By WALLGREN



SYSTEM WITH SOUL AT BIG BLOIS CAMP

Clearing House for Soldiers Decides Fate of Thousands Weekly

OFFICERS STAND REVEILLE

It Blows at 6 a.m., Too—Physical Grading of Discharged Patients Main Task Classification

High on a hill looking away toward the River Loire, across a valley to the walls of a castle in which some of the fiercest and most momentous deeds of French history were enacted, is a great walled camp, where the military fate of thousands of American soldiers is being decided every week.

The only American Army classification camp at Blois, in France, is the clearing house for soldiers—officers and enlisted men—who for any reason are detached from units in which they came to France and are going through the army machinery that will place them back in their original unit, in another military organization, or return them to the States as unfit for further military duty in France.

By far the greater number of soldiers who pass through the classification camp at Blois are wounded or sick soldiers just discharged from hospital, men who so far as possible by the workings of the Army system will be returned to the same regiment or unit in which they were serving when wounded or taken sick.

More Than a Reservoir

But Blois is more than a reservoir, with one gate open for incoming men and another for outgoing. For within the walls of the old French barracks enclosure there is a system with a soul, which attempts to appraise every individual soldier, weigh his worth to Uncle Sam and send him out to serve where he is best needed and at that for which he is best fitted.

Except on direct orders from headquarters, where a company commander has requested that a man fit for immediate duty at his original station be returned to that unit, the men discharged from the camp are sent to replacement camps where the assignments are made.

Officers ordinarily receive their assignments to duty through headquarters, S.O.S. In general their life at the camp is practically the same as that of the enlisted men. They must stand reveille at 6 a.m. and answer special roll calls at 8:30 and 1:30. Lights in all quarters must be out at 9:30 p.m., and all officers are required to be in quarters by 11 p.m. Officers also must read the lists of bulletins posted on a board seven times a day, waiting for their own assignment to appear.

Divided in Four Classes

The principal function of the Blois camp, however, is the physical grading of soldiers, mostly those discharged from hospitals. Classifications are under four main divisions, several of which are subdivided. They are:—

Class A.—Men fit for the front.
Class B1.—Men temporarily unfit, but likely to become A. Fit for heavy duty away from the front.
Class B2.—Men likely to become A, but, when classified, fit for light duty only.
Class C1, C2 and C3.—Grading for convalescents who would ordinarily be unfit for Class A.
Class D.—Physically unfit. To be returned to States.

These classifications are the ones which are relied upon at the replacement camps in making assignments. They are made when the man enters the classification camp. And entering the classification camp is some complicated but speedy job.

The men arriving at the camp usually show considerable wear. Most of them have had long train journeys and their clothing is old and worn, their faces grimy and unshaven. They feel just as they look. They are lined up for enrollment in an entrance company. They present their service records and any other credentials, and give information required.

Then the men are passed through a string of barracks buildings. They go in at one end, dirty and unkempt. They come out at the other end, newly dressed, clean shaven, with trimmed hair, and with that springy feeling of a man just bathed. And in those buildings they have told all their troubles, including the hair-up in their allotment, the court martial that was an accident and the family worries back home—and they have been looked over by a collection of medical officers.

Through the Mill

The work of sending the men through is handled with the expedition of a well-ordered assembling room of an automobile factory. The soldier tells something or acquires something almost at every step. He starts near the entrance

by having a sheet made out, with his name, unit and other details given, and blank spaces for all the departments he will pass through.

After telling how much he was paid last and when, and straightening out his allotments and insurance, he takes the venereal examination and passes to the medical examiners, by whom he is graded A, B, C or D. If necessary, his date is set when he will be notified to appear before the board again for regrading.

From the medical officers, he goes to the vocational classification room. Here he is questioned as on his calling in civil life by a series of questions under a system devised by Thomas A. Edison.

Chance for Every Job

If he had been shoeing horses in the States and had come to France as an Infantryman, he may find himself in the Cavalry or Field Artillery after this examination. If he had been a piano maker in the States, he may find himself transferred from his Artillery unit to a repair shop of the Air Service. Misplaced chauffeurs, draftsmen, and clerks in special lines all are picked out here and listed with the possibility they may get into just their line of work.

The soldier then passes to the next room, where his kit is inspected, and he receives shoes, any new clothing he may require—and two sacks of tobacco. Here too he is assigned to one of seven permanent companies for drill purposes, inspections and quarters.

The bath-room is next. Men go under the showers in squads on a time-table schedule. When they have dressed they pass on to the barber-shop—the best one in France, everybody in the camp says. There are eight chairs, manned by soldier-barbers. Shaves and haircuts are 25 centimes each. There is even a 25-centime shoe shine.

Schools at the Camp

There is one lieutenant in charge of all this entrance work, but all the details are handled by enlisted men—most of them privates.

Schools for typists and stenographers are maintained at the camp, and it is planned to provide other special training.

Many special units are formed at the Blois camp. Prisoner of war guard companies are made up here, and special types of labor companies are also organized.

ADOPTED PARENT NOW BENEFICIARY

Amendment to War Risk Act Also for Alimony Payers

A father or mother by legal adoption may now be made the beneficiary of a soldier's war risk insurance, under an amendment to rules announced by the War Risk Section, S.O.S.

The amendment enables many soldiers to change beneficiaries. Many, having been unable to name their adopted parents, had permitted their insurance to remain in force only as a protection for themselves against total or permanent disability or had named some other beneficiary. Many, on being informed of the ineligibility of the adopted parent, have permitted their insurance to lapse. If not more than six months have elapsed, these applications may be reinstated upon payment of back premiums and notification to the War Risk Section.

Must Be Legal Adoption

The War Risk Section emphasizes that the adoption must have been a legal one in compliance with the statutes of the State in which the parties resided.

Another change in rules relates to payments to soldiers' divorced wives who have been awarded alimony decrees. It provides that if a soldier has had a decree of alimony entered against him and has remarried, the amount of the alimony will be deducted from his allotment provided he has a compulsory allotment in favor of his wife.

Under the new rule, however, the Government undertakes to pay a divorced wife who has been awarded alimony an allowance equal to the amount of alimony decreed, but not exceeding \$15 a month.

A third revision of rules specifies that where there has been a change in the family conditions resulting in a change of the amount of allowance paid by the insurance bureau, the amount of payment for any one month shall be determined according to family conditions existing on the first day of that month.

AFTER THE COURT MARTIAL

No. 1.—What's the answer, Jack?
No. 2.—Two-thirds of three months and two months in the brig.
No. 1.—Not so bad as three-thirds of two months.
No. 2 (after figuring deeply).—Why not?
No. 1.—Cause they might permute you in the brig.

HOW THE YANK IS FARING IN ITALY

If you do not know what "Esercito Americano" means, it is because you belong to that somewhat larger fraction of the A.E.F. which is visiting France rather than Italy. If your adventures in Latin ever carried you as far as Caesar's Commentaries, you may remember that early Roman Poch was forever assembling an exercitus and going forth to conquer somebody with it. "Esercito Americano" is simply American Army as written in a fine Italian hand.

The A.E.F. in Italy is some three months old and is just about fluent in Italian as the A.E.F. in France was fluent in French about this time last year. It has been going through the same pathetic struggles on the question of whether to turn to the left or right, whether to try to order two fried eggs or trust to luck.

Aside from the fact that the dough-boy in Italy says "bon giorno" when he means "bon jour," and says "presto" when he means "tout de suite," he is not greatly different. Indeed, he is remodeling the helpless Italian language pretty much as France's tongue has been altered by the Yanks.

Instead of saying "buona sera" when he means "good evening," he says "bbay Sarah," and gets away with it. Does he say "A rivederci" for "Au revoir"? He does not. He says: "I leave you dirty." As for "come state," which is Italian for "how are you," he says "come and start me," and the Italians understand.

The Yanks have been very pally with the British troops in Italy. The Tommies at one superb camp on the Riviera welcomed some passing Americans with loud cheers and profuse apologies that something had gone wrong with the Scotch plan to skirl them in with bugpipes.

The Tommies there assembled confided to the newcomers that this was a cushy front and promptly invited them to a game of cricket, which polite offer was firmly declined.

Unfounded, the Tommies bided their time, and when some American jacksies chimed to pass that way later, they immediately proffered the cricket field as a baseball diamond, and proved courteous, but somewhat confused, spectators at the Army and Navy game then and there played.

The canteen in an Italian caserma—that means barracks, as any one who has ever slept in a caserne might guess—is much taken aback by the rush

of business which a nearby American detachment involves. One caserma had blankets and white sheets waiting for the newcomers, but the canteen was quite unprepared for a detachment of millionaires. Or so the Yanks seemed when compared with the Italian soldiers, who are paid 10 centesimi a day. Ten centesimi sounds like a small fortune till you try to exchange it for sous, of which it is worth exactly two.

Men with 24-hour passes swarm to the nearest restaurants. The thing to ask for is a trattoria. This is not something to eat, but the restaurant itself. Once inside the trattoria, it is better not to aspire to meat. It will be rabbit, no matter what you order.

Eggs are safer. Order "due uove frutte." That's easy. Or "due uove alla cocca." But would you recognize "uove in frittata" as an omelette? "Caffe nero" will do to wind up the meal. But bring your own sugar.

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