

"Keep Jolly!" Somme Veteran Tells Our Men

Soldiers at the Front Would Go Crazy If They Didn't Joke, Says Lieutenant Alexander McClintock, U. S. R., Formerly in Canadian Army

PRETTY nearly the worst thing the soldiers have to do in this war," said Lieutenant Alexander McClintock of the United States Reserve, "is to sit around and think about it.

"When I was at Plattsburg," he added, "it seemed to me that those in charge were running one grave danger—that of working the officers 'stale.' The latter were supposed to be above the average of all-around intelligence, but they were worked up there harder than men are worked in any training camp in Canada or England."

Lieutenant McClintock is a Kentuckian, just down from Plattsburg with a brand-new commission. It is not because he is an officer in the new American Army that he can talk about the war and the soldiers, but because he has recently come back from active service in Flanders and France. He was a Sergeant in the 87th Battalion, Canadian Grenadier Guards. He was wounded in the battle of the Somme. He won the Distinguished Conduct Medal for conspicuous gallantry in action and received the personal thanks of King George. He is the author of "Best o' Luck," (George H. Doran Company,) one of the breeziest of the war's first-hand soldier narratives. And he has just been spending a short time on furlough in New York before leaving for Camp Dix.

He has some interesting things to say about "the front." And he has, withal, some words of warning for us in America. If every man, woman, and child doesn't wake up and help, he says, we may lose this war.

"I say that the idle times and the thinking are 'pretty nearly' the hardest things for the soldiers," he explained, "because, of course, there are actual physical experiences now and then that are worse even than nervous idleness—standing up to your knees in water for seventy-two hours, for instance. But, generally speaking, it is true that the hardest part of soldiering is the mental part, and the times when the men are not fighting, but just sitting 'round, are the hardest times to bear—the times that break men down if they're not careful.

"You can't tell a man 'what it will be like at the front.' You can talk and talk and talk, but you can never make it tangible for him. In general, I think it is quite true that the soldier who goes into it for the first time is going to find the mental side harder and the physical side easier than he had expected.

"It is the thinking about it all that drives men crazy. I've known men to go all to pieces just sitting around thinking. It gets on your nerves if you let it. The only thing to do is to laugh at everything. Keep jolly! Make fun of it all! You hear about the Tommies' jokes. Well, they'd go crazy if they didn't have their jokes. So they make a joke of everything.

"For instance, there's the daily intelligence sheet that is sent out from General Headquarters; it's a serious little report of whatever may have been found out in the last twenty-four hours that's of value or interest. You'd think it was queer to see a sober-looking Major stop another officer and ask if Comic Cuts had come out yet! But that's what every one calls that daily report.

"That's just a sample. They give absurd names to everything. The Tommies call the 'R. I. P.' that is put on a soldier's grave 'Rise If Possible.' When the rats were bad in Belgium and we were amusing ourselves by shooting at them along the parapet I heard a pal of mine tell a rookie that those trench rats were so big that he had seen one of them trying on his greatcoat. Lots of their jokes would

seem rather appalling to you people here at home. But they must have their jokes, and the more they can make the better for them.

"You people here at home when you send your men over—keep 'em jolly! That is what keeps them sane.

"As for the actual fighting—well, you don't know what you're doing then. In action a man is dazed, his senses are benumbed, everything he does is automatic, he actually doesn't know what is happening. It was only the other day, for instance, that I learned what had happened on the day I was wounded. I ran across a man who had found out about it, and he told me that we were told to take two German trenches, and, by mistake, took three. I wasn't in at the end; I was wounded just as we got the first trench. But it is actually true that I didn't know anything about it. I wasn't picked up right away, either. I lay there from 6 in the morning until 2:30 in the afternoon before they got me."

"Lay there-suffering all that time?" murmured the reporter in shocked sympathy, and Lieutenant McClintock laughed.

"Oh, the suffering wasn't so bad," he said. "I was hit through the thigh and busted an artery. I twisted a tourniquet around it and lay there and smoked cigarettes until they found me. I've known worse things.

"I tell you," he went on emphatically, "you people at home want to send the boys cigarettes. Not many at a time, but often. They need cigarettes. It's with a cigarette in his mouth that the soldier goes over the top. If it's night he can't light it, but if it's daytime it's lit.

And, like as not, when the fighting is over he's still got that cigarette. People used to send me 500 or 1,000 at a time, but that was too many; I hadn't any place to carry them. The thing to do is to send a hundred every few days.

"About the automatic quality of the fighting"—he went back to his earlier subject—"that is where the value of the discipline comes in. The soldier in action hasn't any head. He's got to be a machine. I learned about discipline, all right. I was under Byng.

"Oh, those Canadians! And Byng! When you think what they've pulled off! The Canadians are the most wonderful lot of troops that have been in France at all up to now. There have never been troops like the Byng Boys—they call all the Canadians Byng Boys," he explained, "from the London musical comedy 'Bing Boys,' and the name of the commander, Byng. There has been a great deal written and said about the English making the Canadians take the worst places. Of course that isn't true, and there are two reasons why it isn't. One is that Fritz has it in for the Canadians. The other

is that when there was an especially tough job to be done General Byng always asked the honor of doing it.

"Byng is a wonderful leader. He has one unvarying rule, and there is no exception to it—if you lose a trench you stay until you get it back yourself! He is great on discipline, as every one knows. It was Byng who said what you often hear quoted: 'Discipline is self-control reduced to a habit.' It is, all right, in his army!

"As for the Canadians—well, I'll tell you one typical thing. One time last year they sent word from England that they didn't want any more officers; wouldn't take any more; the officers were told that they were free to leave the army and go about their business. But do you think they did? No, Sir! They resigned their commissions as Majors and Captains and re-enlisted as privates, so as to stay in the game."

Lieutenant McClintock enlisted in the Canadian Army as a private in October, 1915. In July, 1916, he reached the front, and was stationed with his battalion to help in the defense of a bad corner of the Ypres salient. After some hot fighting there he and his comrades were transferred to the Somme front.

"It was there that I stood in water up to my knees for seventy-two hours," he remarked, "but the exposure didn't seem to hurt us. The men are never sick. They are inoculated, you see, for everything under heaven except shell shock! And the rum ration twice a day keeps them from catching cold. Don't make any mistake about that rum ration. It's an important thing; it is not a stimulant, it is a medicine.

"Are the soldiers scared when they go into battle? Of course they're scared. If a man isn't frightened when he goes under fire, it is because he lacks intelligence. There may be soldiers who don't get scared, but I'm not one of them, and I've never met one of them yet. But, remember this—there's one thing a man is more afraid of than he is of the Germans, and that is showing his mates that he's afraid! So they all go over the top together. It's the elbow-to-elbow influence that does it."

Sergeant McClintock, as he was by that time, was wounded in the battle of the Somme in October, 1916, after, as the official communication from the Canadian War Office stated, he had "displayed great courage and determination during a raid against the enemy's trenches," and had "rescued several wounded men at great personal risk." On the Friday before Christmas, when he was in bed in the English hospital to which he had been sent, the King made him a visit. He tells the story of it in "Best o' Luck":

At about 3 o'clock on that afternoon,

when we were all having a good time, one of the orderlies threw open the door of the ward and announced in a loud voice that his Majesty the King was coming in. We could not have been more surprised if some one had thrown in a Mills bomb. Almost immediately the King walked in, accompanied by a number of aids. They were all in service uniforms, the King having little in his attire to distinguish him from the others. When he neared my bed he turned to one of the nurses and inquired:

"Is this the one?"

The nurse nodded. He came and sat at the side of the bed and shook hands with me. He asked as to what part of the United States I had come from, how I got my wounds, and what the nature of them were—how I was getting along, and what I particularly wished done for me. I answered his questions and said that everything I could possibly wish for had already been done for me.

"I thank you," he said, "for myself and my people for your services. Our gratitude cannot be great enough toward men who have served as you have."

He spoke in a very low voice and with no assumption of royal dignity. There was nothing in the least thrilling about the incident, but there was much apparent sincerity in the few words.

After he had gone one of the nurses asked me what he had said.

"Oh," I said, "George asked me what I thought about the way the war was being conducted, and I said I'd drop in and talk it over with him as soon as I was well enough to be up."

There happened one of the great disappointments of my life. She didn't see the joke. She was English. She gasped and stared at me, and I think she went out and reported that I was delirious again.

Really, I wasn't much impressed by the English King. He seemed a pleasant, tired little man, with a great burden to bear, and not much of an idea how to bear it. He struck me as an individual who would conscientiously do his best in any situation, but would never do or say anything with the slightest suspicion of a punch about it.

Soon after the King's visit, Sergeant McClintock was notified that he had been awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal, which was formally presented to him by the British Consul General in New York City on Aug. 15, 1917. As soon as he recovered from his wounds he came home, and, having been restored to military "fitness" once more, he volunteered for the Second Officers' Reserve Training Camp at Plattsburg, and is now in the service of the United States.

"The men at Plattsburg were wonderful," he said. "Just think, bankers and lawyers and business men that you'd have to try a week to get a ten-minute interview with, up there digging ditches! And you've got to hand it to the men in charge for the way they put them through it!"

To Lieutenant McClintock, as to most people just back from France and England, the United States in general seems appallingly unaware of the war. Not the soldiers, nor the Government, but the people, have failed so far, he says, to wake up to the fact that we are at war.

"The spirit of America?" he said. "There isn't any! They simply don't realize that we are in a war. When they do think of it, they think we've already won it.

"And we haven't won it. As things stand now, we are losing it. We are the under dog. The sooner we realize that the better. I tell you frankly, that I do not feel by any means sure of the outcome of the war. Look at the maps! Germany is ahead everywhere. We can beat her, but we can only do it by fighting as she has—as a united and aroused nation. Every man, woman, and child in Germany is fighting this war against us. We've got to fight it that way against Germany. It will be a long war in any case. It will be a long war with us as victors only if we all, every single one of us, give all we can, our money, our strength, our thought, our lives. The worst thing in this country now is the German propaganda. We've got to work against that. We've got to wake up.

"It is harder for us, because it is all so far away, and we can't get the idea of it all at first. But we've got to!"



Lieutenant Alexander McClintock, Now of U. S. Army, Formerly a Sergeant with the Canadians.