 Soldiers Learning to Read as Well as Fight

Books in Camp Are Used Twice as Much as Those in City Libraries—Many Men Acquire Valuable Habit for the First Time

A

enlisted man called at the library of one of the national army camps and asked for the best available book on motors. The librarian gave him one, the best in stock.

"Not this one," said the soldier, after a glance at the title page. "I read this in the train on the way here. I want something new for the conditions for it. It is rather elementary." This scientific draftsman and illustrator had been trained for an army arm; the other to the United States, is only one of a million and a half of men whose work is and always will be as important to the American Library Association has undertaken to supply, both in America and France and aboard the ships that ply between the two countries. Dr. Herbert Putnam, the Librarian of Congress, is the director of this war service in books, with headquarters in the Congessional Library, where a great area of floor and shelf space has been placed at the disposal of the home office staff.

Dr. Putnam began this work on the assumption that man, under proper conditions, readily and naturally becomes a reading animal, and that under those conditions he will read books more rapidly. Many army officers were skeptical, but the facts of the last three months prove that they were wrong. The Congress of Congresses was not right, with reference to the highly trained and educated army officers, like the illustrator of the book on motors, but with reference to the man in the street.

"With more than half a million volumes already in our camp libraries," said Dr. Putnam, "the books have to be read. We cannot keep up with the demands of the soldiers. Many more volumes are needed, and the need will be greater as the war lasts. Contributors who have helped by generous subscriptions to the soldiers' book fund, (to the extent of a million and a half dollars), and those who are helping by sending books are rendering this country a double service. They are adding to the facilities for wholesome entertainment and recreation in the camps. They are helping direct to make the reading habit more widespread among Americans than it ever was before. The war has brought the permanent good result of this war camp service of the American Library Association, and has given a lead, which if it is not to be matched by the book in his hand is an incentive, to another man, to several other men, to go and get the books. These men, living together, recommending books to each other, will get to talking about books. They will want more, and the fact alone will give us an incentive for making reading a habit that we should not get among those same men dwelling apart in civil life and with so many distractions. So much and habits for them ever to come to a regular thing."

That Dr. Putnam is talking of facts and not merely expressing the hope of a philosopher is indicated by the actual returns from the camps and by the enthusiastic reports of the sixty or more officers who have been advanced for the army work or who have been lent for the purpose by the public libraries of the great cities and by the universities.

Averages for all American towns which have libraries report that 50 per cent. of the population of each community is enrolled as library borrowers and that 20 per cent. of the civil communities is about three books a year. At the present time, within three months, the average number of books taken by 40 per cent. of the soldiers in the camps and cantonments have become users of the libraries, and they are reading the available books at the rate of a book a month for each man. No other form of camp recreation can show such a response as that, not even the moving pictures.

In the Library in the National Army Cantonment, Camp Lewis, Wash.

The conditions in favor of the camp libraries are these: Every soldier has from four to five hours of leisure out of every twenty-four. Most of that time comes in an unbroken interval between the end of the day's work and the time for cooking dinner in the barracks. The individual soldier spends most of those free evenings on the reservation, and the facilities for amusement other than reading cannot provide for more than a small part of the men at one time. In a military community of 40,000 men, for example, the space in all the amusement rooms and lecture halls and motion picture shows of the V. M. C. A., the Knights of Columbus, and similar agencies will not accommodate more than 8,000 or 9,000 men at a time. The reading room of the American Library Association will take care of only a few hundred men, but the great advantage of the library is that its facilities circulate and may be taken to the living quarters of the individual users.

Therein lies the great usefulness of the war camp book service. There is no red tape. A soldier needs no identification but his uniform to enable him to take out a book, and he leaves only his name and the designation of the library or battery as security. No hard and fast rules have been drawn to regulate the taking of books, except that the man may be kept, but so far the desire of a man to finish one book and get another has been a reasonable and easily explainable. The librarian and his assistant will do everything possible to advise a reader who is not sure what he wants, and he should be told about a book which is not in stock they will get another from the nearest city library, generally within twenty-four hours. That is part of the system in which the Library of Congress and all public and college libraries are operating with the camp libraries. If necessary the directs book will be purchased. That, for is provided for in the system which Dr. Putnam has built up. On the other hand, no advice is given unless. Every soldier is treated as normal, intelligent human being who knows what he wants, and he has the full run of the shelves from which to get the thing that most appeals to him at the moment. The only instructions are librarians as to what they shall place the disposal of soldiers to be the same books that they would have the "live, open shelves" of their public libraries.

 Naturally, the books of fiction lend numerically in the class statistics, showing how each war library is used. And the fiction class the leading group are books of adventure and detective stories.

The nonfiction the greatest call is for technical books on electricity, gasoline motors, tractors, and artillery. Second in nonfiction comes books on the war.

The private reading bowl was a recent graduate of Princeton. Sitting on the windowsill while reading a book called "Heart Throbs."

"Don Quixote" is another book in the great class that is popular. Some of the soldiers were so tired of saying they have never read, and they are going to get square on that by having a big time in doing so. Some of the officers keep its Shakespeareans on the shelves enough to gather any dust. They are reading a book every month out of the civil life of the United States and put them into the army without getting any business, to make a parade, perhaps a division. They bring their tastes and habits of reading, and are as far as possible under the circumstances, and the thing is somewhat contagious. The young man who likes to read will carry his book out for the blue or homesickness around in his pocket is bound to have some influence on the man who has not yet found the reading habit but they are living together and working together day in and day out.

When the books begin to arrive for the library at Camp Sherman as army truck driver, off daily for an hour or two, vehicle in two hours. With the paying off of the first every year, one of the soldiers with the poet to "be something of a radical," that truck driver began his reading of the books, interested in them. The next day it was the book man, up from the University of Chicago who keep all of Gen. Pershing's time. A Southerner camp librarian reports that he of "Peer Gynt" has been in constant circulation since he opened his circulation system. There is always something of the" in the army, and thousands of American soldiers know of books, the hundreds. Mr. Britten and, though they if the publish they do not know before they put them on uniform. Currently he shows the British officers that a more and all good books of History, especially military history, are more than holding their own. The library here, the book boxes, refusing pay, is of the way the men show their gratitude to the people who have contributed. In all the camps there has been much labor in the management and in the choice and shelving them, arranging tables and desks, and so on. In every case the soldiers have done the work and have refused to take any money out of the labor funds provided for just such work.

When the work was begun Dr. Putnam made an appeal to the public for $1,000,000. A million and a half was contributed in money and half a million books. The money that was given included $100,000 to the Carnegie Corporation for the specific purposes of erecting library buildings, at not cost not exceed $1,000,000. Each building is 40 feet wide and range in length from 89 to 120 feet. Each library has shelf room for 12,000 books and will accommodate 250 men at a time.

About the order of sort of book that is not for them, the soldiers, the ridiculous thing in pale pink or baby blue covers, tied with ribbons or a silk thread. Men are not interested in the soldier, no matter what its contents may be.

Of course, the work is to be extended to France, and singing is provided for all troops on the voyage. The work is not that of a large-scale army, the librarians in charge of the book-distribution stations at the army's embarkation ports try to do to the man who gets a book for himself as he goes aboard ship.