

# Comic Images from “Over There”: Soldier Produced Comics of WWI

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In the Somme Valley, the back of language broke. It could no longer carry its former meanings. World War One changed the life of words and images of art, radically and forever. It brought our culture into the age of mass-produced industrialized death. This, at first was indescribable.

—Robert Hughes, *The Shock of the New*.<sup>1</sup>

War is a game played with a smile. If you can't smile, grin. If you can't grin, keep out of the way till you can.

—Winston Churchill

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**F**rom the beginning of warfare, soldiers have kept themselves entertained with images of fellow soldiers, their enemies, or the conditions in which they fight. It is a way to pass the time, while contending with the situations in which they find themselves. However, there is far more that can be learned from drawings produced by soldiers. These cartoons serve as a vignette into their minds, and can tell us what their fears and desires were as well. The cartoons also give a visual perspective into life in the trenches as they were experienced or later reminisced by those who penned cartoon memoirs. As such, this essay will allow readers to see examples of life in the trenches from a humorous point of view, which is not always possible in combat or in other written histories.

World War I was the first wide scale war in which a variety of new forms of combat were introduced. It was also the first war in which mass production and widely disseminated information developed into forms of entertainment for people. Here I examine the significant war cartoonists of World War I primarily from the Allied side. Some cartoonists are quite famous, such as Bruce

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Hughes (2015). “The Spectacle of Skill: New and Selected Writings of Robert Hughes”, p.29, Vintage.

Bairnsfather (1887-1959) of the British Army, whose cartoon "The Better 'Ole" was indicative of British humor as well as soldier conditions. Others that are not as well-known but contributed substantially to the field included Abian Wallgren (1892-1948, US Marines), Alban Butler (1891-1949—US Army), as well as Bud Fisher (1885—1954, US citizen in the British Army), who gained renown for drawing *Mutt and Jeff* before WWI. Many of the cartoon histories or memoirs have been forgotten over time in favor of the more famous artists like those listed above. However, most armies had some form of illustrated humor for the troops, either through "trench journalism,"<sup>2</sup> camp papers, or books at rest and recreation areas removed from the front lines.

Military cartoons were often an offshoot of political ones from illustrators such as Thomas Nast in the U.S. or the drawings in *Punch* Magazine of England, but also an evolution of the American cartoons the *Yellow Kid* and *Little Nemo in Slumberland*. The military cartoons were drawn to show the dangers of combat but at the same time make light of things as to not worry people back home who were reading them, or give soldiers a light-hearted way to endure the very real and deadly conditions around them. A distinction that should be made is the difference between editorial/political cartoons and those of a solely comedic nature. The main difference between these two styles is that the political cartoons are single panels that may not necessarily be humorous, but are in some form thought provoking or shocking. Multiple (three or four) panel cartoons which have a set up for some sort of a visual gag are often associated with Sunday comics and are often denoted as comic strips. This is a significant difference as Allied forces tend to either use visual humor, or otherwise use comedic

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<sup>2</sup> Trench Journalism refers to small (less than 8 page) papers or pamphlets produced on or near the front lines. These references would be more immediate than larger division papers such as the American military publications like *Stars and Stripes*. Adam Matthews in England ([www.amdigital.co.uk](http://www.amdigital.co.uk)) has a substantial digital holding of these papers and his assistance was invaluable in this project.

illustrations. The German cartoons tend to be more heroic or at least visually humorous but not necessarily exaggerated.<sup>3</sup>

The cartoonists also left a lasting impression on those who came after them. Bairnsfather later illustrated books in World War II, while all Allied and Axis forces had some sort of cartoonists on hand for World War II.<sup>4</sup> This legacy continues even to this day, in various forms. Most importantly, it is a window into how the soldiers see themselves, as well as life at home. References are made to music, dancing, drinking, gambling, women or souvenir grabbing which is commonplace for soldiers of all armies.

The cartoons used as part of the paper had to meet two basic criteria: they had to be either published in a military publication or book form of a memoir; and they had to be drawn by soldiers to show conditions in the field. This distinction eliminates political or editorial cartoons from the war, which were produced for civilian papers and not always indicative of what soldiers experienced in the field. The cartoons depicted are not the only ones available, but seem to be representative of the conditions or attitudes during the war. Even one hundred years later, there are still books that may be hidden away and have not yet been re-discovered.

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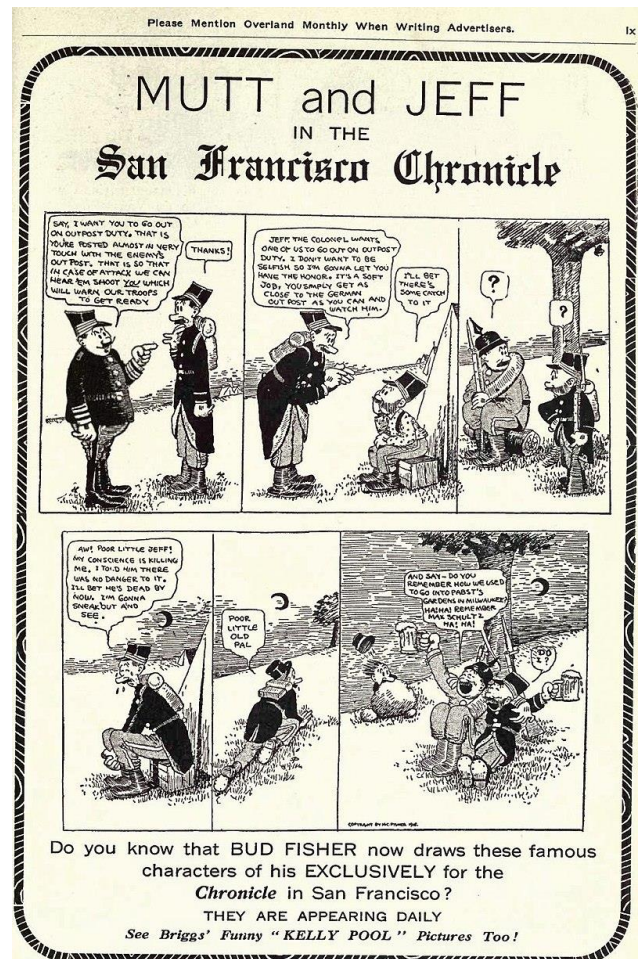
<sup>3</sup> While German cartoons are not as easily accessible, a quick look comparing those to Allied cartoons would show subtle but significant differences. German publications include *Muskete-Kalendar*, *zwei kompanie*, and various German unit papers. For further reference, [hathitrust.org](http://hathitrust.org) would be an excellent source for material, if one were to type German military cartoons.

<sup>4</sup> Some of the World War II artists and their works include Dave Breger (GI Joe) George Baker (Sad Sack) Bill Mauldin (Up front) and Will Eisner (firepower, Army Motors). For a more extensive list of World War II artists, refer to *The Comic Art of War* by Christina Knopf (McFarland, 2015).

## Origins of the Cartoon Era

The era of modern cartooning started with the publication in 1894 of Richard Outcault's *the Yellow Kid* in the *New York World*.<sup>5</sup> Soon after a fight over publication rights between the *Herald* and the *Post* (which was the crux of the phrase "yellow journalism", and involved publishing titans Joseph Pulitzer of the NY World and William Randolph Hearst of the NY Post) a slew of other cartoons soon appeared in print. While *the Yellow Kid* was not the first comic published, nor the first colored comic, it was the first to obtain widespread success so it is seen as the model of the medium. A variety of other cartoons soon followed. These new cartoons were drawn in a variety of manners from realistic (Windsor McKay's *Little Nemo*) to the frivolity of caricatures of race and ethnicity (Rudolph Dirk's *Katzenjammer Kids* as an example).<sup>6</sup> The slapstick format of the cartoons was not far removed from Vaudeville and its exaggerated body form and humorous set up and pratfalls. Often of critical importance was some sort of "living prop" such as an animal which could help to set up the joke.

This sort of entertainment in print was also illustrated by Bud Fisher who created *Mutt and Jeff*. The format was simplistic yet effective: Mutt was lanky and had ideas to make wealth, while Jeff was



<sup>5</sup> Robert Harvey, *Children of the Yellow Kid: The Evolution of the American Comic Strip*, (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1999), 27.

<sup>6</sup> Ron Goulart, ed. *The Encyclopedia of American Comics* (New York: Facts on File, 1999), 212.

stocky and slightly slower of wit (actually noted early on as an escapee from an insane asylum). This allowed both characters to feed off of one another, with comic results. The slapstick nature of the cartoons also emulated the comedy films of the day as well, such as the *Keystone Kops*. Of the two, Jeff was literally and figuratively the underdog, but he was also the more simplistic and trusting of the two.<sup>7</sup>

What is the clear result of the early paper cartoons was that these comic illustrations could be used to describe events with humor, even those events that were not always funny or lighthearted. It was referred to as “bigfoot” comics, and was a style that dominated cartoons for the next two decades. These cartoons, whose format had started out in various weekly magazines like *Punch* in England and Canada, or in the newspapers as the *Sunday Funnies*, soon found their way into military publications as well, such as the *Wiper Times* of the British Army, *le Petit Echo* (French army) and US publications such as the US Marine Corps *Recruiters Bulletin* and *Marines Magazine*. The cartoons were a way to entertain troops by giving them a laugh, as well as a small reminder of home life. For the American services, when they arrived, they established Stars and Stripes as a weekly paper, and brought on board US Marine Abian “Wally” Wallgren as the staff cartoonist. His work appeared every Friday—the day of publication for Stars and Stripes—on page seven. This work is probably the most known of US cartoonists.<sup>8</sup>

## References to New Forms of Warfare

One of the subjects of humor was the ubiquitous reference to the “forty and eight” rail cars used to transport soldiers from rear areas toward the front. Most all of the Allied cartoonists made some sort

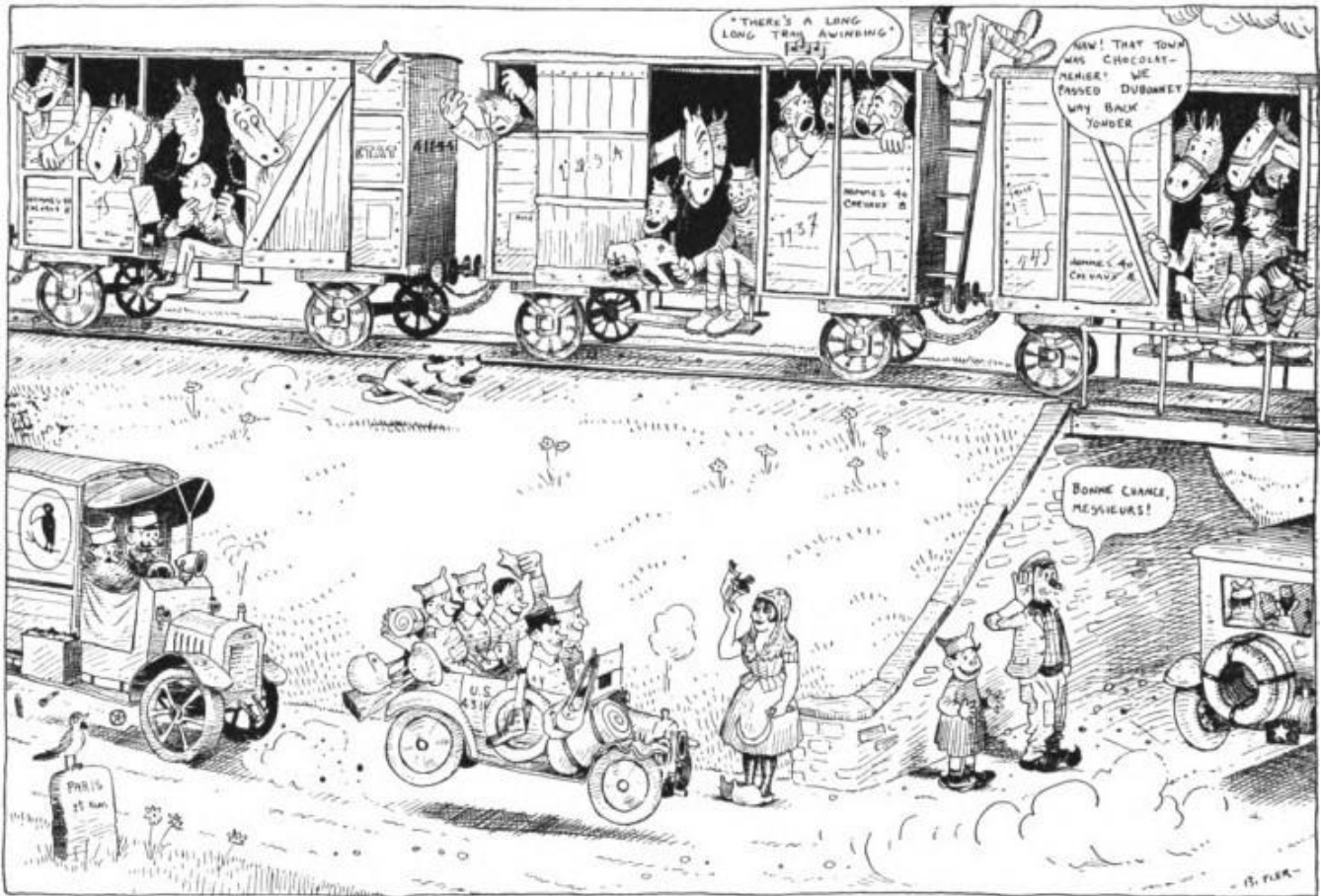
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<sup>7</sup> Ron Goulart, ed. *The Encyclopedia of American Comics, 1879 to Present*, 270-271.

<sup>8</sup> Cord A. Scott, *The Mud and the Mirth: The humor of World War I Marines*. Paper presented at the USMC WWI Symposium, July 16-19, 2018. Forthcoming, 2019.

of joke, or at least depicted the cars and the crowded conditions in which the soldiers found themselves.

Transportation also became a form of entertainment as well as a new sight on the battlefield. Some cartoons referenced aircraft, air balloons, tanks, motorcycles and cars, all of which were new to



OFF FOR THE BIG SHOW

the battlefield. The car became a central focus of the new cartoons as well for their comic nature as well as a dangerous conveyance for the troops. This was in spite of the French troops that were ferried up to the front lines during the invasion of France in August of 1914 by taxicabs from Paris to the front in a desperate attempt to staunch the German advance.

Cars were of particular interest for illustrators, and often the cars and trucks held a novelty that had opportunity for comedic impact. For example, one cartoon, illustrated in *Oh Canada!* showed the German driver of a staff car in the ditch, while the German general runs away from the accident scene. The idea was that the Germans could not control their own machinery, let alone win any significant victories in the West against a modern army.<sup>9</sup> The car was most often employed for shuttling around general staff, so any joke which meant that the “little guy” could triumph over, or at least humiliate, the powerful person was also humorous. One Wallgren cartoon noted that for privates, delivered into a French town for a “danse”, were being offered a great privilege and acted in a manner that reflected their new status by stating “Home, James” as one might address a personal chauffer.<sup>10</sup>



The fact that the cars could bog down easily in inclement conditions could serve as the butt of a joke as well. Alban Butler had one cartoon, which noted that when General Summerall, artillery commander of the First (U.S.) Infantry Division had his car break down after being stuck in a snow drift. An underling (in this case Butler) had to come out with a horse to retrieve him.<sup>11</sup> The vehicles, especially

<sup>9</sup> Canadian Army. *Oh, Canada!: a Medley of Stories, Verse, Pictures, And Music*. London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent, 1917. 75.

<sup>10</sup> Wallgren *Wally in the AEF*, 102.

<sup>11</sup> Butler, *Happy Days* p. 11.



for the trucks used as part of the convoys became part of the new way of war, as were the traffic jams when moving men and materiel to the front.



The use of motorcycles was a safer and more reliable form of transportation at the time.

Motorcycles had better range, more maneuverability and could be extracted from muddy conditions much faster. Motorcycle riders also had (and still have) a daredevil-like aspect to their lives, and so the



cartoons that utilized drivers showed their fearlessness, especially when going to the front. Some cartoons showed the fear of a motorcycle rider hitting something such as the back of a truck in the convoy as was shown by Butler.<sup>12</sup> In another cartoon illustrated by Dudley Hess in his book *“Going Thru” with a Golden Spoon: an Illustrated History of the 52<sup>nd</sup> Brigade Field Artillery*, shows a dispatch rider plowing forward with an officer in the sidecar as bombs explode all around. The accompanying story “The Three

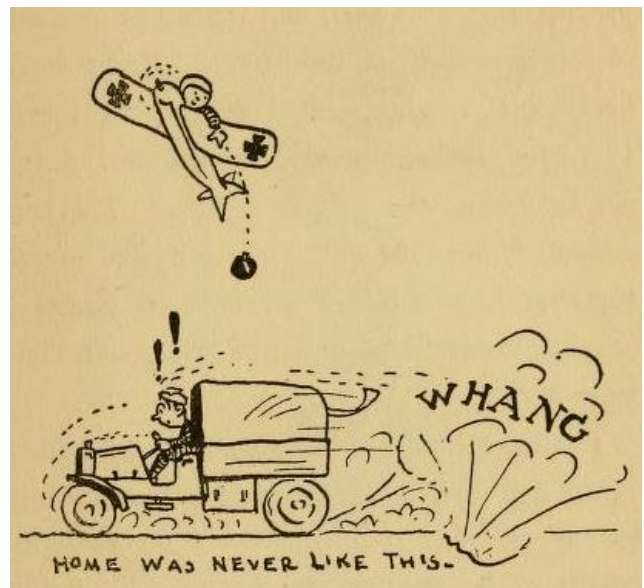
<sup>12</sup> Butler, 66, 67, 73.



Weehled (sp) Steed that had the speed” noted that the Harley Davidson motorcycles that had the velocity to carry them through dangerous areas.<sup>13</sup>

The use of mechanized transport and combat implements, such as armored cars, tanks and aircraft were also part of the cartoons produced. Butler liked to use Schneider or Renault light tanks as part of the scenery and had them in part of a convoy as noted earlier. Other cartoonists showed the tanks as a form of consternation as they broke down habitually and did not have the same fear factor as was stated on the battlefield.

One cartoon book, the paper *The Gnome* (issued by the Middle East Flying Brigade) specifically noted the life of the aviators. The author “Colonel Boarde’s Rapide Graduation at ye City of Flyghte” had illustrated the maps of the region but had changed the sights on the map to one of satire and old-style locales. Of greater interest were the two from later issues that describe the “prehistoric pictures” of early aviation. The one cartoon shows the “Zero School of Military Aeronautics” in which a caveman (with stripes on his bearskin) shows men how to fly their primitive planes, or shoot with slingshots. The second picture showed early cooperation with a “tank”, in this case a dinosaur.<sup>14</sup> One unique cartoon, from Kirkland Hart Day in the book *Camion Cartoons*, showed a German plane bombing a US transportation truck. Day’s book was interesting as it described his role in a supply

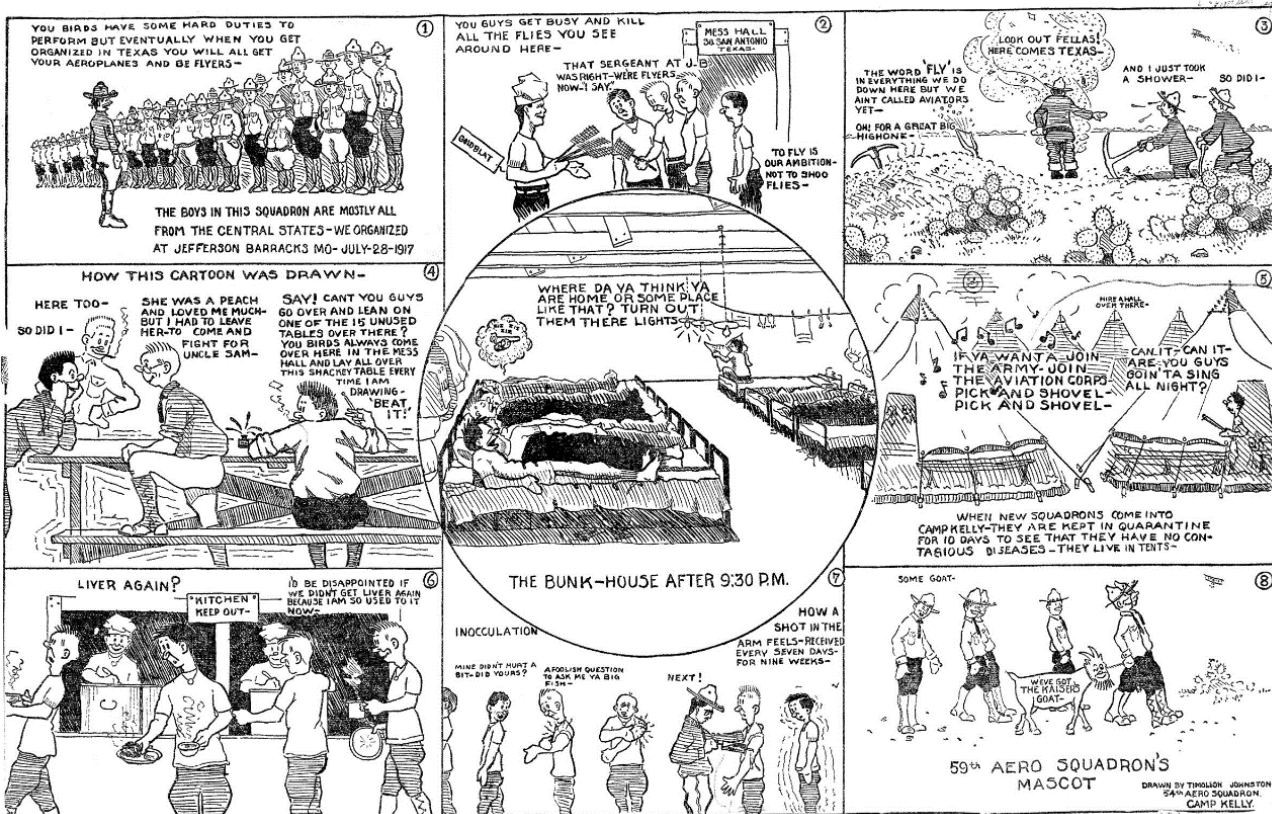


<sup>13</sup> Dudley Hess. “Going Thru” with a Golden Spoon: An Illustrated History of the 52nd Brigade Field Artillery 38-39.

<sup>14</sup> *The Gnome*, issue 2 (Jan 1917) 4 (May '17) and 5 (Aug '17).

detachment of the American army, where trucks were an essential part of the military essence.<sup>15</sup>

These early depictions of knights of the air even became part and parcel of the jokes for the military. One series of American cartoons from the 58<sup>th</sup> Squadron, training at Camp Kelley, Texas, showed the image and the reality of life in the air corps. In one cartoon panel the Cadets are



commenting on the fact that they joined the air corps but only saw flies overhead or used the modern technology of pick and shovel.<sup>16</sup>

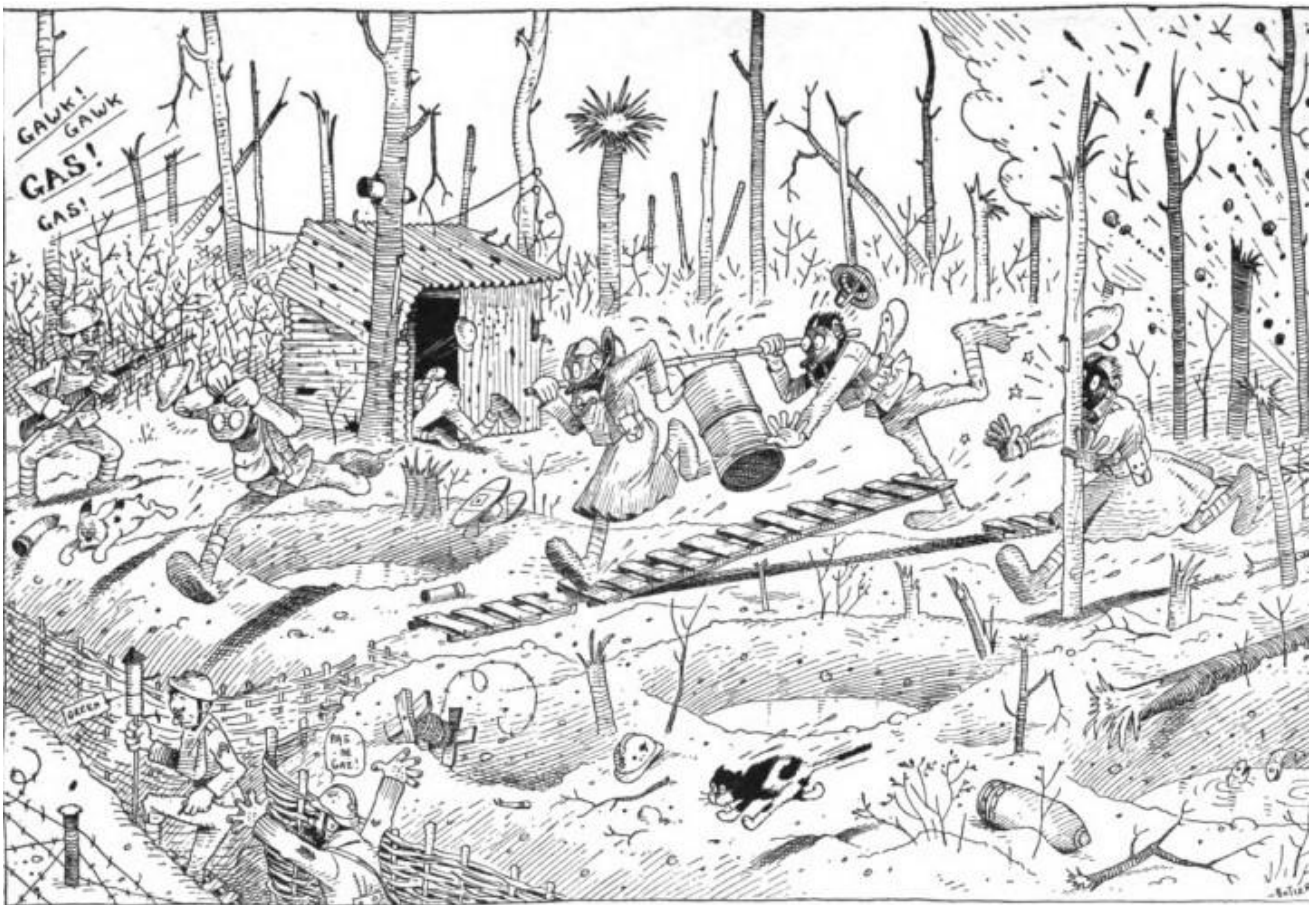
Other cartoonists noted the role of aircraft as a part of the landscape. Butler had two artillery observers being strafed by an aircraft at one point, while others noted and made fun of the observation

<sup>15</sup> Kirkland Hart Day. Camion Cartoons (Boston: Marshall Jones, 1919), 53.

<sup>16</sup> Timoleon Johnston. 58<sup>th</sup> Aero Squadron illustrations. 1918.

balloons, or the poor souls who had to be in those stationary targets. Some planes were drawn with leaking oil or otherwise in some form of disrepair.

While combat was horrific enough, the added use of gas in combat necessitated the use of gas masks. These early masks were often odd looking, and gave rise to all sorts of humorous cartoons. Some dealt with the training and how soldiers had to put the masks on in a hurry. Other cartoons noted the use of gas masks to work on odorous tasks such as peeling onions, dealing with dirty laundry or extensive perfume. One of the most encompassing cartoons for technology, conditions, and even pets was the need for soldiers to place gas masks on animals for units, be they horses, mules, dogs or cats! The cartoon "Gas Attack" from Butler showed American troops shoving masks onto animals, often with a considerable amount of resistance.<sup>17</sup>



<sup>17</sup> Butler, *Happy Days* (Washington DC: Society of the First Infantry Division, 1928), 24.

## Reflections of the Conditions of Combat

Often the cartoons had a central punch line that made light of the conditions on the battlefield. Whether it was the cold, wet trenches, the poor shoes, or the differences in food, all made a joke of the dirtiness and conditions that did not allow shaving or the like.

As with so many nationalities, the transformation of citizens to soldiers was a common one. Many of the armies, especially in the US, Canada, or even England, were not professional soldiers. The cartoons often made fun of the process that transformed these men into soldiers. One booklet, which was meant as a souvenir of training, was the book *Training for the Trenches*, written and illustrated by Alban Butler. Several cartoons poked fun at the idea that trainees couldn't remember which hand to salute with, which way to handle their positions or duties, or most importantly, how to shoot. Given the fact that many of the soldiers called up were from agrarian or labor positions where education (or even reading) was not emphasized, the cartoons were not only a way to laugh at the situation, but also a way to influence the soldiers by illustrating to them how to effectively work together.<sup>18</sup>

Another important factor which plays into the creation of the cartoons is rank. For the British, Canadians and some Americans, most of the cartoonists were from the officer ranks, so their perspective of combat conditions, while quite similar, may not always be the same due to conditions in the field, rank and decision making, and so on. For many soldier/artists who produced art for the trench papers, they were of the enlisted ranks, so the jokes might also take a swipe at an officer or two. Many of the cartoons discussed the differences between how the enlisted men fare in the trenches (limited lighting, no stoves, cold rations) while the officers were perceived to have warm bunkers with wood floors, hot meals, and most likely, more alcohol than the enlisted ranks.<sup>19</sup>

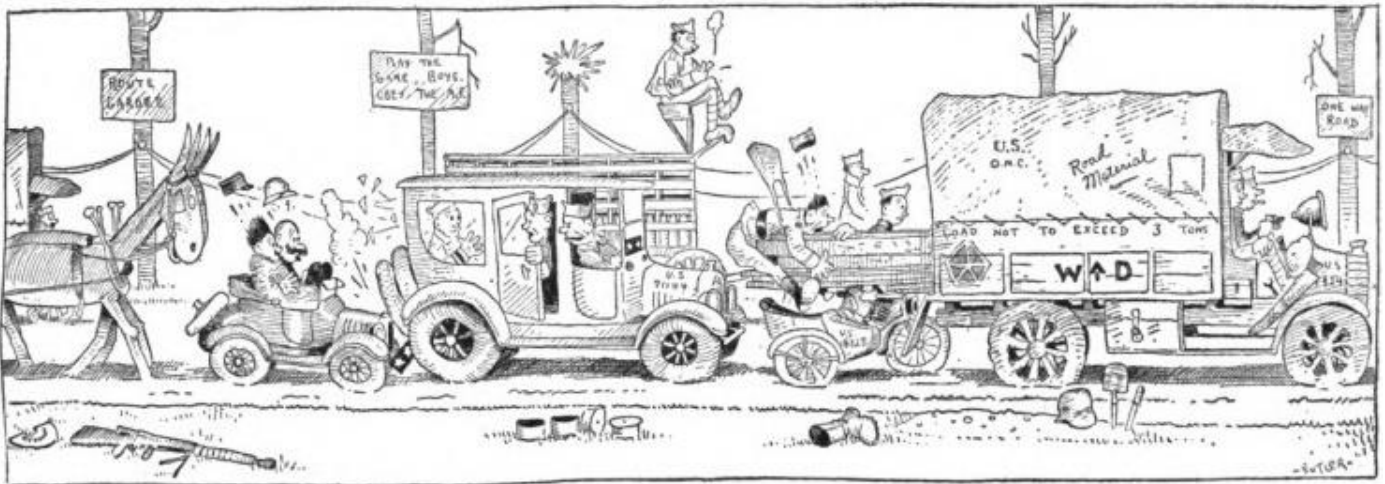
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<sup>18</sup> Alban Butler. *Training for the Trenches* (NY: Palmer Publications 1917), pp. 8, 12-13.

<sup>19</sup> Butler, *Happy Days*, 13.

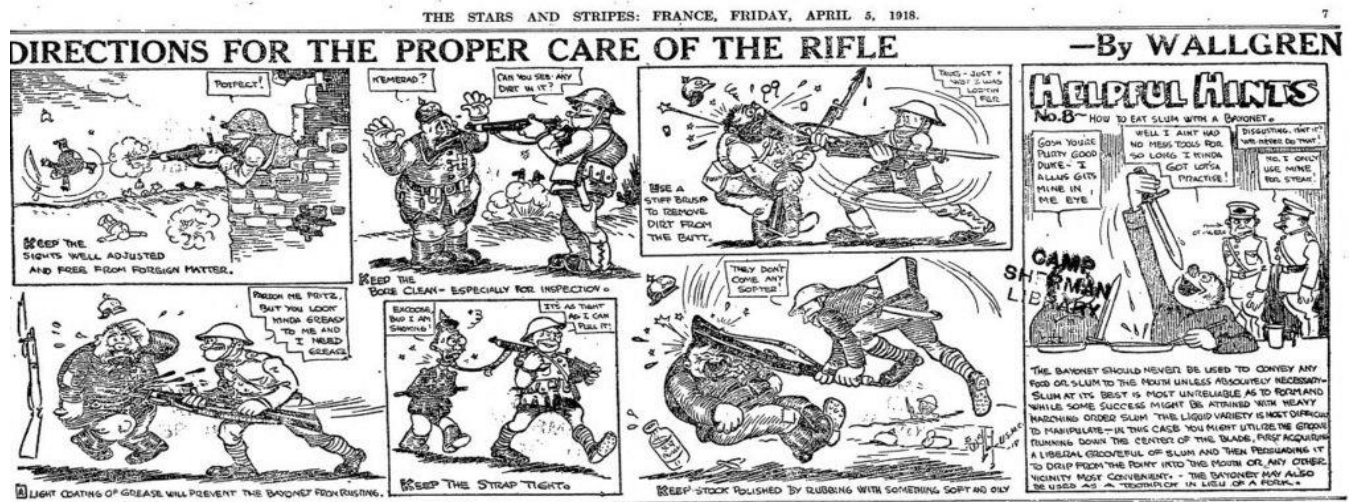
One book of soldier cartoons was insightful as it was produced before the major fighting which altered the opinion of their unit. The book *Oh Canada* was written in 1916, before the Somme Offensive began in July of that year, or more importantly for the Canadians before the Passchendaele offensive of 1917. The cartoons in that particular book were humorous but not always directly related to the combat conditions. Most of the cartoons were centered on drill and the life back in the rear.

A particular telling cartoon produced by Alban Butler in *Happy Days* was reflective of opinions concerning weapons. As US troops are marching towards the front lines in Soissons France in the late summer of 1918, there are depictions of the usual detritus on the side of the road. One item lying in the ground is a weapon, which would be at best dereliction of duty for a soldier. In this case, the weapon depicted is clearly a Chauchat light machine gun designed by the French and offered to American forces to augment their lack of equipment. However, the weapon proved so ineffective that it was often discarded when the opportunity presented itself.

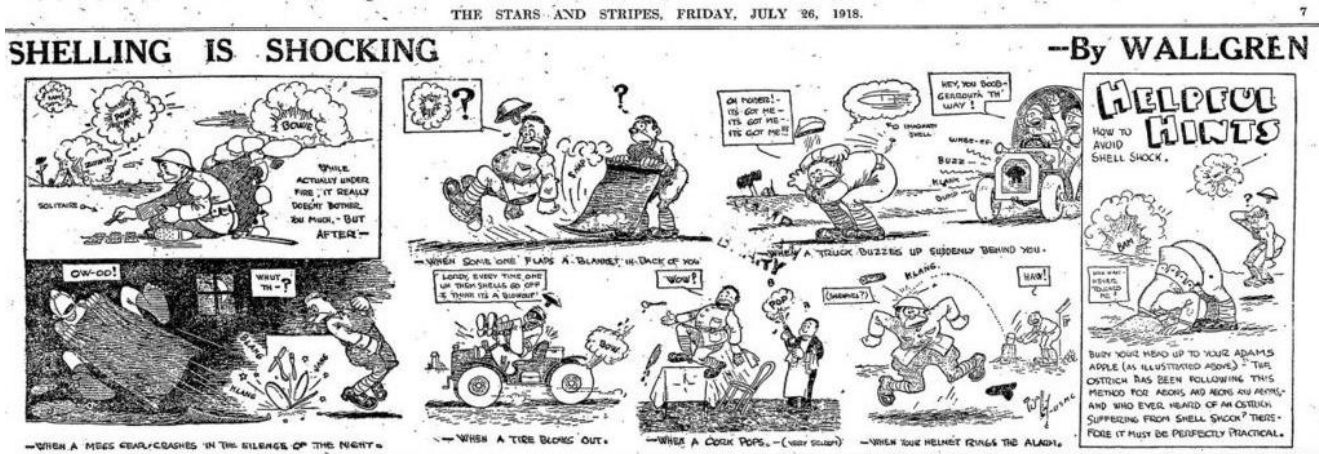


**MOVING INTO THE MEUSE-ARGONNE**

Of all the cartoons for combat, the most "real" in terms of combat were those from Wallgren. His cartoon strip for April 5, 1918 "On the Proper Care of the Rifle" was explicit in the deadly arts in combat:



shooting the enemy, bayoneting them, or using a butt-stroke of a rifle to take an enemy down. While most cartoonists drew elements of the battle scene, such as destruction, aerial combat or wounded men, Wallgren illustrated the above, plus other cartoons that dealt with subjects considered bad for



morale, such as shell shock ("Shelling is Shocking"<sup>20</sup>) and the possibility of being shipped from the Western Front to the frozen wastes of Siberia ("Just Think of the Lads in Siberia").<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Wallgren, "Shelling is Shocking", *Stars and Stripes* July 26, 1918, 7, and "Bomb, Shell and Shrapnel", June 21, 1918, 7.

<sup>21</sup> Wallgren. "Just think of the Lads in Siberia." In *Stars and Stripes*, September 27, 1918, 7.





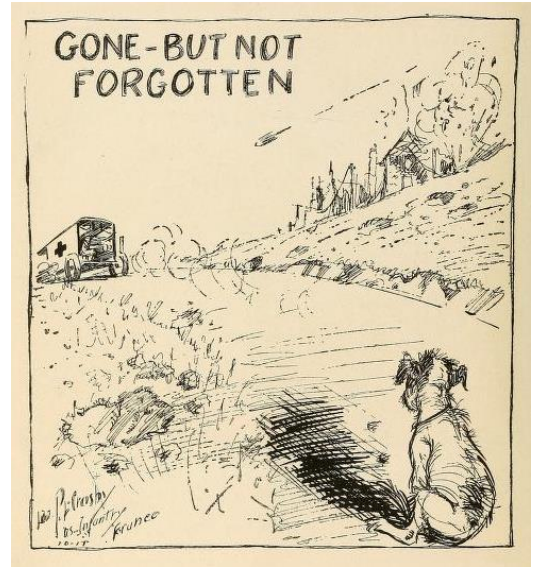
### Depictions of Animals

Since animals were often another way to break up the monotony of the war, the use of animals, as gags in the cartoons was not surprising. Dogs in particular were a key part of the cartoons. Butler used dogs as part of his cartoons on camp life in New York. Many of the dogs had names that were given by the soldiers in camp, and offered characteristics similar to their breed. There was a bulldog or two, tenacious with their food and loyal; a mutt that is constantly stealing scraps, or is underfoot. One such dog was noted on the rifle range. The dog's name which was described as "deleted by the censor", matched what was often screamed at the recruits by the drill instructor during target practice.<sup>22</sup>

Another cartoon featured a dog cart. While the image of a dog sled is familiar to many western readers, the concept of a dog cart may not be as common. In Europe, however, dogs were readily drafted to small carts in lieu of horses, asses or oxen. Several cartoons show dog carts, such as a machine gun on a platform. As was mentioned in the technological section, the use of animals and their susceptibility to gas often necessitated the use of gas masks for them as well.

<sup>22</sup> Alban Butler, *Training for the Trenches* (New York: Palmer Publishing, 1918), 15.

Most American cartoons had a dog as a feature of the cartoon. Percy Crosby used a dog as his unofficial mascot in many of his cartoons. The dog “Dubb” was a constant companion, whether he was stealing the commanding officer’s hat, or waltzing along on guard duty or even looking at the departing ambulance as it carries away his master. The observation of the dogs depicted for the Americans in particular is that they are mutts (like American citizens) loyal and friendly but still tenacious in their duties.<sup>23</sup>



Horses were also noted as a source of comedic humor. Many of the horses were depicted as emaciated as well as obstinate. The horses were used for most transportation in any army, and so they would be a constant part of the landscape. On the other hand, they were often large obstacles, could be skittish or mad in combat, or had to be tended to with specialized equipment like gas masks during an attack. The horses, if killed on the battlefield would add to the smells and sights of death. There were some limited cartoons of dead horses, but most are of the horses being obstinate in battle or on the move.<sup>24</sup>

The most common aspect of animals in the cartoons is living in the countryside. One Butler cartoon noted that the barn in which US troops was staying while in France also had the same sign as the rail cars—forty Hommes (men), 8 chevaux (horses) and 1 officer.<sup>25</sup>

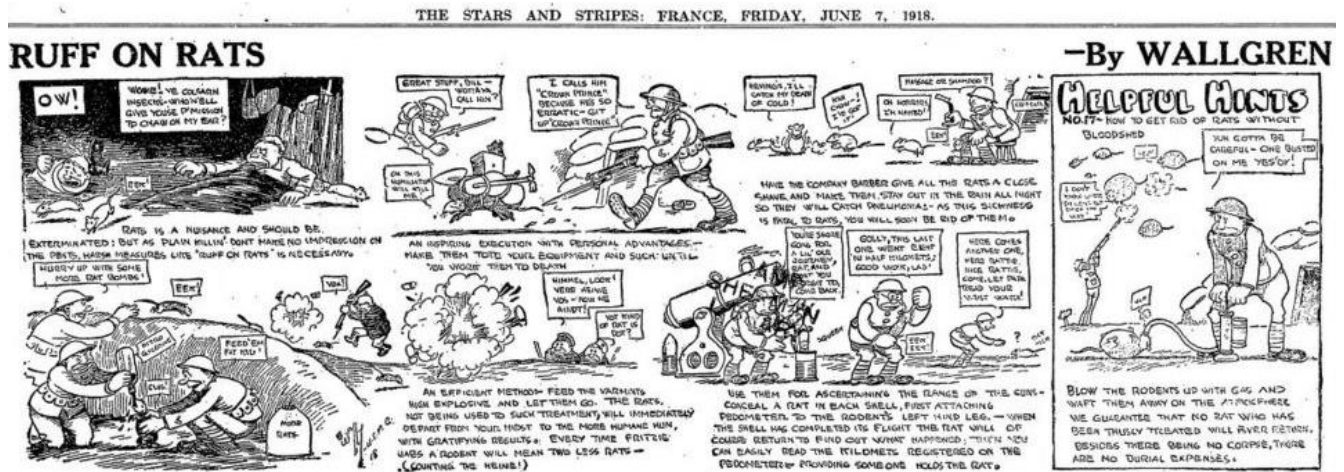
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<sup>23</sup> Percy Crosby. *Between Shots*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1918), 66.

<sup>24</sup> Butler, "The Horse Lines" 40. "A Horse Show at the Front", 48.

<sup>25</sup> Butler, *Happy Days*, 13.

Rats, while not as prevalent in comics were still a substantial part of the battlefield. They fed on the dead, both animals and soldiers, and thrived in the horrible conditions. They also aided in the spread of lice and fleas which were a constant source of misery when in the trenches. For the American cartoons, Butler noted the rats in a couple of cartoons and they were wearing helmets. Wallgren had a specific page dedicated to the vermin in the trenches, entitled "Ruff on Rats." In the cartoon, he noted



that the various ways to put the rats to effective use in the field. One was to have the rats haul equipment until they die of exhaustion. Another was to shave them, and let them out in the rain, thereby contracting pneumonia. The most ingenious was to force feed explosives to the rats, then let them run back to the "more humane Huns" for better food, where the rats would blow up, and kill both rats and Germans. The last suggestion was to blow them up with air and use them for a type of target practice.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Wallgren, Abian. "Ruff on Rats" in *Stars and Stripes*, June 7, 1918, 7.

Other forms of vermin, specifically lice, were also mentioned in the cartoons. No matter the

army, or its cartoons, the persistence of lice was a constant source of discomfort for soldiers. Not far



behind lice and rats were the general cold and damp that permeated everything for the soldiers. No matter what the focus of the cartoon, the simple fact of the matter was that the soldiers had to laugh at what was going on around them, lest they lose all hope of the future.<sup>27</sup>

### Depictions of Soldiers of All Forces

Other cartoons made far more reference to their allies or enemies than others. Unlike cartoons from WWII, in which interaction of enemies and allies was not often mentioned, there is some reference to troops that are different. For example, as there was a large contingent of colonial levies in the French and British armies, there are depictions of non-European troops. Unfortunately, many of the depictions of these troops were based on stereotypes. Algerian or Moroccan troops associated with the French were depicted as bare-foot and dingy. They often had large mustaches and noses to boot, working off the stereotypes of Semitic features.

<sup>27</sup> Wallgren. "Bon Jour. How's your itch?" In *Stars and Stripes*, July 9, 1918, 7.

The troops of African origin, regardless of whether they were from Africa directly or descendants of slaves in North America (for American and Canadian troops) were drawn in terms that looked like minstrel performers: blackened faces, white oval lips and exaggerated appendages, especially feet and hands. The speech patterns were also based on what soldiers felt they heard or what sounded ethnic. To that end, African troops spoke in Pidgin English when describing their injuries or the like.<sup>28</sup>

The illustrations of the armies are often a telling one indeed. American troops are often depicted in cartoon like fashion, as are all allied or enemy troops. For the British and French troops, the cartoon characters are exaggerated in some form but overall the troops still look more realistically drawn. This is often the case especially with Bruce Bairnsfather's work. The German cartoons depict their own troops mostly as dirty and unshaven but this was more due to the conditions in which they fought rather than the idea of humor. The overall theme here is still one of the Germans seeing themselves as professional soldiers rather than a citizen army (that could often make fun of themselves) like the United States military.

Women were perhaps the most common theme for the soldiers, regardless of nation. For the Americans, it was the obsession with French women and their seemingly loose morals. For the French, it was women who might vex them but still cheer them on at the front. Germans seemed to depict women as domineering at home, especially when a weak-willed husband was involved.

The Americans often depicted the women, regardless of nationality as fashionably dressed. Crosby had several of his objects of desire wearing outfits that would be haute couture (high fashion) for the day. He even had one woman wearing a rather clingy bathing suit for that time, or the soldier was able to see ankles while the woman he is escorting was higher up to see off of a ship. Other times,

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<sup>28</sup> Butler, "Night Bombing" 25; "Doughboys" 68; and Day, 31, 51.

women were seen as a threat. The obvious, but often unstated, threat was that of venereal disease. Women were considered a threat to fighting effectiveness. At the same time, the fear of women carrying disease carried over to a specific cartoon of an American soldier standing next to a Spanish Senorita. This woman clearly represented the Spanish flu outbreak that was affecting troops of all nationalities at that time.<sup>29</sup>

### **Life in the Trenches**

As part of the “gallows humor” that the cartoons were, the cartoons did often reflect life in the trenches. The conditions as mentioned previously centered on the ways of passing the time, be it with animals, or making fun of the enemy. The cartoons also showed the trenches. The constant water and mud which made life dirty as well as dangerous (due to the possibility of trench foot), made for all sorts of comic fodder. The cartoons often showed the bunkers which had been reinforced with wood, and the tins of food. Since food was often an important way of keeping up morale, it too was a part of the joke. One cartoon from *Oh Canada* showed a Canadian soldier surrounded by crates of food which would be considered a delicacy at the front, yet he is complaining that his mother forgot to send the olives. Such are the horrors of war.<sup>30</sup> Whether this joke was meant to be one of satire on the situation (we’re just thankful for the food, but you forgot the niceties) or the ignorance due to propaganda (we have read that you get all the great food while we have to do without here at home), the humor is present in the image.

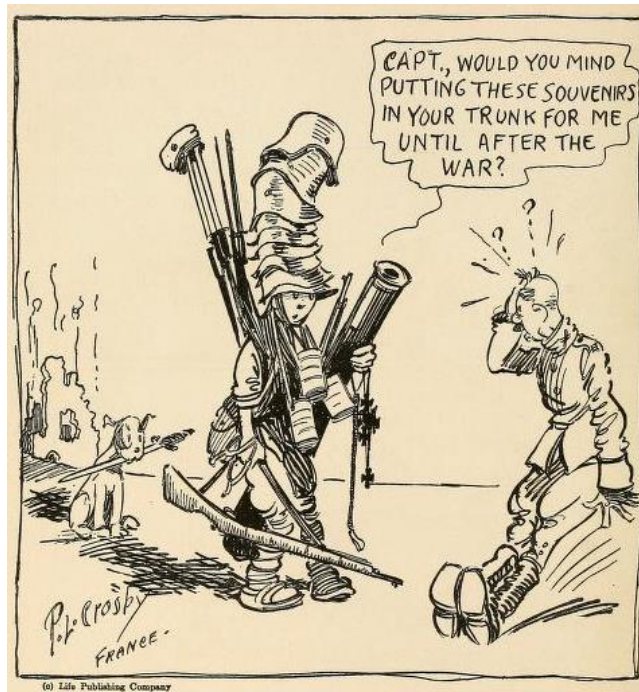
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<sup>29</sup> Every book noted here has at least one cartoon referencing a woman. Percy’s book dealt with correspondence with his girlfriend, as did Streeters book *Dere Mable*.

<sup>30</sup> *Oh Canada*, 51.



Another theme in the cartoons is the concept of taking an item that even now serves as a memento of combat. The taking of booty in some form or another is timeless, and it served not only as a form of payment to soldiers, but also served as a reminder of one's survival after a battle. These trinkets often included uniforms, weapons, boots or the latest WWI military necessity, the steel helmet; jewelry, food or liquor from enemy camps, or anything else that might be of some value to the soldier, or of possible trade back from the trenches.<sup>31</sup>



Other "souvenirs" were not as obvious. One cartoon from a book produced after the war, noted that sometimes time overseas meant not only French lovers, but children who were left behind.<sup>32</sup> Various forms of libations were often noted in the cartoons. French and American troops were shown in a couple of books sharing wine with one another.

Perhaps the one reminder of the war that no soldier wanted to take home as a souvenir of the war was some sort of substantial wound. The wound stripe was a source of pride for American troops as they had fought, but at the same time the wound was not severe as to debilitate, or kill, the soldier. Many of the cartoons that dealt with injury were meant to lighten the mood so to speak. One cartoon

<sup>31</sup> Wallgren. "What we know about Fritz." In *Stars and Stripes*, June 28, 1918, 7; and A.E.F. Souvenir Hunters, May 16, 1919, 7.

<sup>32</sup> Jack Niles, Douglas Moore and Wally Wallgren. "Quand la Guerre rest fini" in *The Songs my Mother Never Taught me* (New York: MacAulay and Sons Publishing, 1929) 57.

shows a wounded soldier, with a new wound of his butt being dragged on the ground in a split stretcher.<sup>33</sup>

The trauma of comrades wounded in combat could break anyone—man or beast—but still served as a source of material for cartoonists. Ambulance drivers were used as a subject in the cartoons as they often used technology, were at the front, but were not in “danger” at least as far as frontline troops were concerned. This was yet another form of “black humor” noting the seriousness of combat but laughing to keep one’s sanity. Several books were produced by medical staff. One cartoon noted the “conscientious objector” who was driving in a roundabout pattern not out of his objection to the war in general, but due to the shelling all around him.<sup>34</sup>



If the soldier could be brought back to the aid station or even hospital, the likelihood of survival increased substantially, even in WWI. The jokes at this juncture often centered on the sight of women from the nursing corps, and the idea that the soldiers might in fact be one step closer to home. For the soldiers who had to be cleared by the medical staff before returning, one might need to pass

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, “The Hearse Song” 188. Also in the Original Stars and Stripes Cartoon for Sept 13, 1918 “Snapped At Juvigny”, 7.

<sup>34</sup> Wallgren, “Conscientious Objectors” in *Stars and Stripes*, Aug 30, 1918, 7.

inspection. Other cartoons discussed the seeming impervious nature of one's head. A cartoon from *Oh Canada*, but which was common of the Western cartoons of the era, showed an Afro-Canadian soldier who noted that he couldn't be hurt by artillery shells as the "Boches will hab to make 'em harder n dat to bust dis chile's cranium!" While entirely offensive for stereotype in modern America, it was common of slang from the era of World War I.<sup>35</sup> What may also be of interest is that the cartoon may have in fact been drawn by an American from the South where the stereotypes were more prevalent. Often Americans who wished to fight joined the Canadian Army, which was part of the British Commonwealth and at war from August 1914.



The depictions of Colonial troops, or Afro-Canadian or African-American troops were quite stereotypical for the day. As was mentioned, they were often depicted in a minstrel fashion, and spoke in a "Steppin Fechit" fashion. However, given the fact that many of the WWII American cartoons made very little mention at all of race, these cartoons were insightful of the attitudes, and contributions, of groups that are not often recognized.

Drinking was another considerable part of a soldier's life when not in the trenches. However, the use of alcohol was a common practice among most armies, save the American army. Unlike many of the WWII cartoons in which Allied soldiers, such as "Willie and Joe" from artist Bill Mauldin, were

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<sup>35</sup> *Oh Canada!*, 23.

manufacturing alcohol or otherwise trying to obtain alcohol as an escape from the horrors of war, the WWI cartoons referenced alcohol, particularly wine, in an almost casual fashion. The concept of drinking was one of escape but was not an all-pervasive thought amongst the troops. The references in the cartoons to wine were often associated with a form of socializing with the locals or commiserating with fellow soldiers. No mention was ever made of alcohol abuse or of any issues that might rise from consumption such as the use of rum to fortify British troops before conducting an assault. The idea of American servicemen consuming alcohol was also an issue given the strong temperance movement within the US at the time. Beer was often associated with German immigrants and was therefore anti-American. The 'tolerance crusade' in the US was also winning converts in an attempt to ban the sale and consumption of alcohol both at home as well as to US troops overseas.<sup>36</sup>

## **After the War**

As with any conflict, the cessation of hostilities leads to a reflection by those who survived, and in some form or another, by those who shared similar experiences in the war. These recollections were often turned into memoirs sold after the war. These books which showed cartoon vignettes of events that were either witnessed or gathered by the author were not trench journalism collected while the fighting was going on, but were still a valid reflection of each soldier's contribution to the war effort.

Examples of the memoir style book of visual recollections include *with the 332<sup>nd</sup> Regiment in Italy*, by Private Fred Reinert, who served with the American forces in Italy at the end of the war. The jokes used in his book were universal to soldiers regardless of combat area. There were also jokes

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<sup>36</sup> Editorial on Prohibition in *Stars and Stripes*, January 24, 1919, 4.

concerning the locals and the differences in uniforms and culture. Reinert even included serious sketches as a way of depicting the architecture.



THE ARMISTICE—FRONT AND REAR

Another book which offered insight into the military, but not in a combat situation, was the book *Quips and Memoirs of the Corps*. This was a book on the Quartermaster Corps of the Army, not the US Marine Corps. The book was published in Washington DC in 1919, and was a collection of poems cartoons and reports from the Quartermaster Corps in Washington as well as various posts and was compiled by officers who served on “zone committees.” The cartoons were not as dramatic in theme as those from the front line—how much danger is one in the supply area? Paper cuts that can kill?—but did show the variety of skills sets that were needed to effectively operate the military and keep it supplied for war on a continual basis.



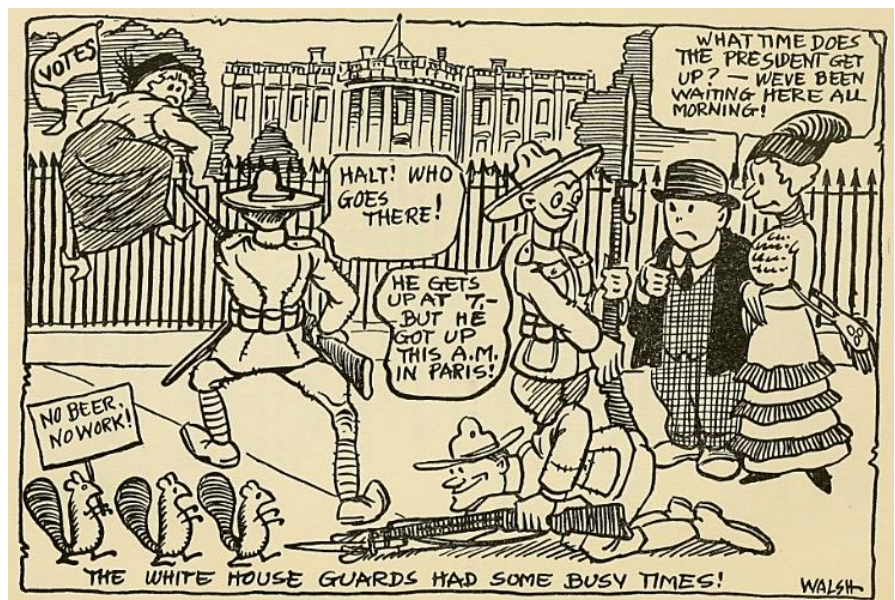
While many of the cartoons in these books could have been universal to any aspect of life in the military—adjustment to military life, drill, etc.,—other gags were unique to the life in the military in the



*Wail from the Subsistence Division*  
 Oh! that some inventive man  
 Would patent, make and sell  
 An onion with an onion taste—  
 But with a violet smell.

31

House fence, while another guard has taken squirrels prisoner. The animals have protested the lack of beer. While entirely nonsensical, the issues of politics became part of the joke.<sup>38</sup>

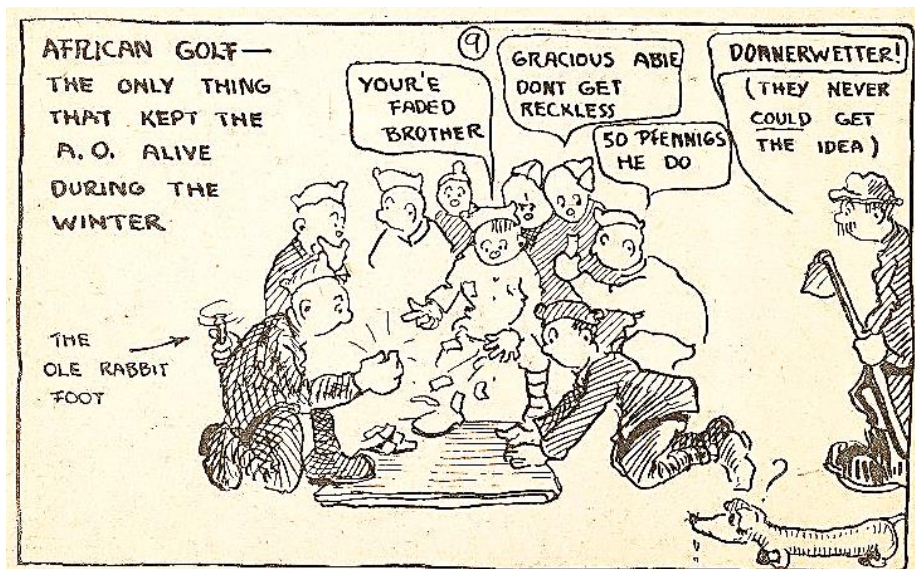


<sup>37</sup> *Quips and memoirs of the Corps*. 1919. [Place of publication not identified]: [Q.M.C. Souvenir Book Committee], p 31.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 83.



Other books centered on life with the occupation army such as Powter McGuinness' book *When I was in Germany*. This particular book often dealt with the training aspects and garrison life prior to combat. The only reference to combat was marching through the French forest in 1918. The rest of the book was centered on life in Germany while the soldiers waited for their orders home. Again, some of the cartoons were indicative of life in the army but also portrayed racism. One cartoon from McGuinness mentioned gambling—particularly dice for money—but the game was called "African Golf".<sup>39</sup>



Other books produced to assist veterans came out after the war as well. Some books noted that the cartoons were reprints from various camp newspapers. These books occasionally offered the veteran a very modest living, as they were sold to aid in transition back to civilian life. Often the books were sold at veteran's hospitals, veterans gathering places or even transportation hubs. One booklet produced well after the war for the Tennessee Veterans Association talked of the experiences that one

<sup>39</sup> Powter McGuinness. *When I was in Germany*.

had in the "Great War": the general themes of army life, and the gallows humor of the battlefield and laughing when one could do little else to protect themselves.<sup>40</sup>

## Conclusions

While certainly not a complete catalog of the works of this sort, the cartoons and comics drawn by troops wither in service or in the field through trench newspapers, give us insight into the training, conditions and attitude of the combatants. It is yet another way of gaining insight into the thoughts, humor and worries of the troops often seen in the "gallows humor" form. Obviously however there is a lack of complete openness concerning all aspects of the war, from the stench of dead bodies to the unintended consequences of unprotected sexual contact resulting in diseases such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, or other forms of venereal disease. Cartoons which dealt with these issues as well as cartoons and comics that dealt with training of soldiers would become part and parcel of World War II. However, the illustrations of World War I provide a starting point for the historian to look at the new forms of expression, as well as a way for soldiers to vent their frustrations and feelings in a way that was allowed, and even encouraged to an extent by officers.

However, the illustrations of World War I provide a starting point for the historian to look at the new forms of expression, as well as a way for soldiers to vent their frustrations and feelings in a way that was allowed, and even encouraged to an extent by officers.

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<sup>40</sup> John Permelee. *Who Won the War? Dedicated to the Legion State Convention at Nashville, Tenn. 1931.*

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