

# Reminiscences of Army Life

By "Steelback"

"Reminiscences of Army Life" the story of soldiering in the British Army back in the late days of the last century and the early days of this century, appears as a continued story in The Liberal. The first instalment dealing with the start of "Steelback's" army life in 1881 appeared in our issue of November 28th.

In a letter to the Editor "Steelback" says: "I would call your attention especially to the remark I make when I say 'There—the secret of the Empire's greatness is out.'"

This statement is an absolute fact. It was not until the war of 1914 that the rations of the British soldier—or should I say the lack of rations?—this would, perhaps, be nearer the mark—began to interest those whose duty it was to see to these things.

Boards of officers would meet to discuss new methods of attack.

Field days would be held to try them out. Inspections by officers of foreign powers, new uniforms, new arms and equipment, but nobody seemed to notice the quality and the quantity of food supplied to the soldier.

Ruminating on my story you will perceive, perhaps, how cheaply, except for loss of life, the Empire's present status was won.

The daily papers inform us that we are having a difficult time in

keeping the Empire intact. The cost of keeping the Union Jack at the top of the pole is going to be tremendous, but in thinking of holding on to what we got so cheaply we mustn't forget that times have changed.

Enviousness and greed have developed to such an extent in some countries that if we have to live up to our statements of 'What we have we'll hold' we all have to back the British Government to the best of our ability and place our trust in Almighty God and the endurance of the Army and Navy who, encouraged by the capacity of the people to take it, will offer a resistance that our enemies cannot overcome.

Let us piously remark: 'So be it!'

## CHAPTER 7

### On to Ireland. Some Incidences on the Way

The first stage of our journey to the land of the Shamrock and pretty Colleens had begun, and in due course we arrived at Holyhead, Anglesey, Wales, pulling into the station about 11.30 p.m.

Holyhead is the chief mail packet station for Ireland. We boarded one of the small packets which was, apparently, awaiting our arrival. The last man of our party had scarcely cleared the gangplank when the whistle sounded. The hawser was cast off, and in a little while the lights of Holyhead had disappeared. The Irish sea has a reputation for possessing a very uneven temper, and we had a sample of this shortly after we had left port.

Our fellows gathered on deck, and some of us, forming a ring around the mast gave the air a specimen of our vocal abilities, singing that well known refrain "Who killed Cock Robin." The answer to this query is revealed later on in the song, the sparrow being credited with the crime, but he had nothing on us. We murdered him, dissected his body, and flung dismembered parts to the winds of heaven without the least display of feeling.

If you assume from this that the singing was something out of the ordinary your assumption would be about right.

The ship at this time was trying its best to get stern first, failing this it would stand on its head, so to speak. These actions on the part of the ship had a tendency to cause breaks in our rhythm, and some of the fellows got so disgusted at the performance, that was the excuse they gave, went below.

There were quite a few who were hanging their heads over the side of the ship, apparently admiring the heaving waters, accompanying the motion with heaving bodies.

They gradually drifted away until there were only two of us left to carry on the program, so we decided that any further efforts of ours would be wasted, so we went below too. It was quite a job getting to the companionway owing to the tossing ship, but after a struggle we made it.

What a sight we saw. Some lying some sitting, were the civilian passengers, and without exception they were sick—very sick.

This was my first contact with the real native of Ireland. They had been harvesting in England and were returning home. As we stood looking at the passengers the ship's Bos'un came along with two of the crew. The Bos'un asked us if we would mind helping to make the people more comfortable. Willingly we responded. It would have been a very unsympathetic person who could have resisted the appeal. We laboured and struggled for more than an hour but eventually we cleared up the mess.

I think the men passengers were the worst. They certainly made the most noise. The women were quiet enough, but absolutely helpless. They lay in their vomit making no effort to help themselves.

I only heard one speak, a young woman. She asked to be lifted up. We complied. She wasn't exactly in a presentable condition, but even in her misery she was worth looking at a second time.

Early the next morning we were nearing Dublin, and about 7.30 we made fast to the quay. The civilians were the first to go ashore and a sorry sight they were. They showed the effects of the rough passage, and it can be safely assumed that mental prayers were offered to their patron Saint for their safe return.

We followed the civilian passengers ashore, picked up our kits, and were soon on our way to the station, where we entrained for New-

bridge, and here we were met by the "Drums".

## CHAPTER 8

### Joining the Battalion

The drums in this case were not what was generally known as "Drums and Fifes". It was a real band. There were no wood instruments or trombones, but, apart from this, the instruments were the same as a band but were made of copper, and it was generally known as "The Copper Band". It had a distinction all its own. It was the only one of its kind in the British Army.

When on the march, the band proper would regale us with music we didn't know. Selections from operas, and other high class stuff—whereas the copper band played popular airs set to march time, which were more appreciated by the men. Such tunes as "Wait 'till the clouds roll by Jenny", "The Corn is waving Annie dear" and other old favorites, well known at that time, but long since forgotten. That was the kind of music they played for us on our way to barracks.

On arrival we were formed up in two ranks. Inspected. Told off to the various companies. Provided with the necessary bedding.

We were then allowed to fall out and take up our quarters and rest our weary bodies. We had been on the go a long time and we were tired.

At reveille the next morning we were on the job. Out of bed, make it up, sweep out, wash, dress, and out on parade for a run round before breakfast. At 9.00 a.m. we paraded at the company's store room to receive a fresh issue of equipment to replace that which we handed in at the depot before we left.

At 11.00 a.m. all of us who had joined the day before had to parade on the right of their respective company for inspection by the company officer, after that we were taken in charge by an instructor.

He was a Colour Sergeant. A man about 35 years old. He was an instructor alright. He had a large stock of patience. Never lost his temper no matter how awkward the recruit would be. He would repeat a command time after time until the movement was done properly. It had to be done right. Anything didn't do for him. He had a clear penetrating voice which was plainly heard by the whole squad, and he would be quite a distance away too. He was a strict disciplinarian but he was just. He had been a recruit himself. Newly joined officers would have to drill with us even if they had just come from Sandhurst, and they received the same treatment that we received. I take off my hat to his memory. He was a splendid fellow.

We had two months with him, and under his exacting tuition and guidance we learned the rudiments of the profession of arms in peace time and, incidentally, preparing for war. After he was through with us we were taken over by the musketry officer. The sergeant instructor of musketry was a peculiar chap. His words of command were a decided contrast to the snappy and decisive tones of our former instructor. His voice was a sort of sing song. The same tone. Never varied. From here to the right—right turn—quick march—halt—front, and so on. He was a good man. He knew all about the rifle then in use—the Martini Henry. He was a good shot—the best in the battalion and when firing kept both eyes open.

It is difficult for some men taking aim to keep their left eye closed, and his remedy for this was to use both eyes. He quietly instructed the recruits in this method. It wasn't official. I gave his idea a trial, and after a time I found it the better way. It requires a bit of practice to become efficient, but after a time it is just as easy to get the back-sight, the foresight, and the object aimed at, in line, as it is to focus a pair of field glasses.

We spent a month at musketry and were dismissed drills.

### 'CAREFUL—WE'LL GET MAD', IL DUCE WARNS

"More Blows We Get, More Dangerous We Are"

New York, Dec. 14—The Italian radio warned Britain in effect last night: "Be careful or we'll get mad."

In a broadcast heard here by the Columbia Broadcasting System, the Italian announcer said:

"There is one thing British propaganda fails to take into account, and that is the peculiar temper of the Italians. The Italian is a light-hearted and easy-going fellow until he is aroused. Sometimes what he needs is just a little slap, then he stands up and fights to a finish, and the more blows the more dangerous he becomes. The British ought to remember this."—(A.P.)

# VOTE - NO

## One year may not be long enough for a good council-- But it is too long for a poor council.

The present system of annual Municipal Elections has in the main given Ontario municipalities good Municipal Government. A safeguard for continued good municipal government is to retain the right of annual Municipal Elections.

Under the present system, if the people who pay the taxes are satisfied with the performance of a municipal council they have the privilege of avoiding an election by giving the council an acclamation.

Under the two term legislation, should a vacancy occur in council in 1942, the new member or members are appointed by the remaining members of council, not elected by the people.

The most democratic system, is the present one of annual Municipal Elections.

The Two Term Legislation, with its vicious provision for the appointment, not election of men to fill vacancies, is a threat to one of our most democratic privileges — the right of annually saying who will spend the ratepayers money for the coming year.

Bureaucratic government can come into existence so very easily in these days of turmoil, we must be always on guard. To lengthen the term of municipal councils under the proposed legislation could easily become an open invitation to bring bureaucracy into the realm of municipal office.

TAKE NO CHANCE ON A TWO YEAR TERM — VOTE NO

Retain The Right of Annual Municipal Elections

"Are you in favour, as a Wartime measure, under the Government Extension Act, 1940 of the municipal council elected for 1941 holding office for two years?"

YES

NO

X

(This space donated by The Liberal in the interests of Continued Good Municipal Government)

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