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Biggest Christmas Party in Canada Continues for Five Days This Week

This is the story of Canada's biggest Christmas party, a party for the wives and children of servicemen. This party goes on, afternoon and evening, for five days. It is given here as published in "The Torch," the official journal of the Canadian Corps Association.

The Author

Joyce Tedman Howell, author of this article on Christmas parties for servicemen's children is herself the wife of a serviceman and mother of a four and a half-year-old child. One of Canada's most brilliant women writers, she now handles publicity for important wartime organizations. Her writing career began on the Toronto Daily Star after she had attended universities in Toronto, Berlin, Munich and Bonn. Her husband, a lawyer, went overseas in 1940 and is now serving as gunnery officer aboard H.M.C.S. Kitchener, Corvette K 225. An older brother, Lieut.-Col. Philip Tedman, is assistant Quarter-Master General for the First Canadian Corps and landed with the first troops in Sicily. A younger brother, who also is in Italy, is Capt. Blake H. M. Tedman, with the Fifth Canadian Division.

The Story

(By Joyce Howell)

The bells of Christmas are sacred to home, hearth and happiness. But for the men overseas, Christmas is a strange, new experience. Home is a haven which they carry in their hearts and which they long to come back to. In the meantime, Christmas, with out home, is still Christmas because they want it so.

The universality of the Christmas spirit, with its traditional story of the happy event which changed the pattern of thinking among free men, and which has stood for a symbol of eternal hope for mankind, is forever new and different, wherever it happens to be remembered or celebrated.

Christmas is incredibly lovely to the mind of a child. Aside from his expectation of good things to eat, wonderful toys to play with, and the ever present feeling of excitement in the air, there is a deeper significance which lives in the minds of all fathers and mothers for their own child—the hope of the future.

Fighting men overseas and in Canada need not fear that their children, who happen to live in the vicinity of Toronto, will lack for a happy Christmas in spite of the fact that Daddy doesn't happen to be around right now. The Citizens Committee for Troops in Training entertains something like 20,000 families of these men at wonderful Christmas parties in the Fort York Armouries every year and this Christmas the parties are scheduled from December 14 to 19. Unit auxiliaries attached to different services, numbering 25 in all, issue invitations to wives and children, of 12 years and under, to attend these parties which have become an important tradition in wartime Toronto.

Held in Armouries

Families of the following regiment are invited to attend: Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada, Canadian Armoured Corps, Canadian Post Corps, Canadian Provost Corps, First Hussars, Forty-eighth Highlander, Governor General's Horse Guard Headquarters, M.D. No. 2, Irish Regiment, Queen's Own Rifles, Queen's York Rangers, Royal Canadian Artillery, Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps, Royal Canadian Army Service Corps, Royal Canadian Dragoon Corps, Royal Canadian Engineers, Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve, Royal Canadian Ordnance Corps and R.C.M.E., Royal Canadian Regiment, Royal Regiment of Canada, Toronto Scottish Regiment, Veterans' Guard of Canada.

Every afternoon and evening thousands of mothers and their children throng the armouries, which is real not an armory at all on these occasions. Bizarre backdrops of Mick Mouse, enormous beyond belief an over-sized pumpkins, and Mother Goose and the whole gamut of the nursery world laugh down on the wide-eyed children, whose interest is absorbed from the moment they arrive until they leave, two or three hours later. The stage presentation with a beautiful fairy princess as a central figure also boasts of clowns, magicians and dancers among other attractions. Of course, Santa Claus is the most important figure of all. He makes his entrance onto the stage amid a fanfare of loud and wonderful music.

Presents For All

Every child at the party receives a Christmas present from Santa himself. A long line of saucer-eyed youngsters wait patiently as each one reaches his throne... a hand-shake, a pat on the shoulder, and a good wish, all part of the fun to be remembered long after the party is over.

Christmas trees twinkle down on thirsty, hungry guests as chocolate, milk, ice cream, orange drinks and candy sticks are dispensed free from booths with such fabulous names as "Puss in boots", "Hey Diddle-iddle", "Goldilocks", "Humpty-Dumpty," etc. Some children hug baby dolls to their chests, others carry blackboard around with a rather superior look some have painting books while others have blocks, bead dolls, games and wooden toys. In spite of the lack of metal, Christmas is still Christmas and wooden toys have ingeniousness taken the place of metal ones.

Babies of five weeks and more are deposited in a comfortable, quiet nursery with willing volunteers to take over, so their mothers can join in the

fun and forget their responsibilities for a little while. St. John Ambulance V.A.D.'s are there too, just in case Johnnie eats too much ice cream, or Jane swallows her sucker stick by mistake.

The stamp of army boots, the camouflage of khaki, the abruptness of military commands have given way to shrill young laughter, bright snow-suit and a concerted attack on "Jingle Bells". The show goes on, afternoon and evening, for five days and nights.

Not Haphazard

Haphazard? Oh no! There's nothing haphazard about these parties. A committee of able, responsible women plan everything. But the children only see the fun, the excitement and the froth of color and music and noise and entertainment. Miss Elsmore turns in the general oversers of all these parties, and works in close conjunction with the regimental auxiliary Christmas party convenors. Others on her immediate committee are Mrs. Gordon Balfour, Mrs. C. S. Band, Mrs. O. D. Vaughan, and Miss Laura Pettit. Ecstatic hours in a juvenile paradise are spent happily here in spite of the world's turmoil, and from some of the small ones, brave, incredibly touching phrases are heard.

Some children at the party have laddies who will never come back. One little lad, asked if his father was overseas, replied:

"My dad has been killed, but they said I could come to the party, just the same as last year. Maybe they'll let me come next year, too."

At one of the parties, two little boys naively and proudly, were wearing the uniform of the 48th Highlanders of Canada... correctly tailored and faithful in every detail.

"Just before our Dad went overseas," said one, "he had these uniforms made for us." Then he displayed his Glen-garry cap, his plaid kilt, and his sporran. Both boys were the centre of a solemn, admiring group of children.

Father Reported Missing

Five weeks previously their dad had been reported missing in action in Italy.

The engineers were getting a big hand one afternoon for their part in the Mediterranean fighting.

"Why are they called Sappers?" a woman asked. "I don't like the word sapper." Whereupon a colonel in charge of the military part of the children's parties, explained that "Sappers" went back to the days of William the Conqueror. With his stick the colonel traced on the Armouries floor the method of "sapping" when preparing for an attack.

"An ancient and honourable name Sapper, always to the front in wars, and aren't they in there right now in Italy?" said the colonel.

One day the committee's telephone rang, just before the parties began, and a troubled voice over the wires said:

"I'm afraid I won't be able to bring my five children to the party this year. You see, I'm in the hospital now, waiting for a sixth."

However, the children were not disappointed, because a committee member arranged to have them brought and taken home afterwards.

Another mother, not content with ringing her own four children, brought along the child of a neighbouring soldier's wife... the wife was ill... so all six had a wonderful time.

Daddy Went Too

One little girl had her Daddy back from overseas in time for the big Christmas party.

"I knew he was coming but Mummy didn't," she said. "It is amazing," said the little girl's mother. "Diane kept telling me he would be here for Christmas and I begged her not to hope too hard... and, well... here he is!"

Eyes shining and thrilled beyond measure were a sergeant's two lads, aged 8 and 9 years. Their Dad was back home again.

"They were almost babies when I went away three years ago, and now look at them!" said the sergeant proudly. He was wounded in a bomb explosion and was sent home as an instructor for eight months, anyway.

Fourteen thousand toys are given away every year at these parties; 6,500 wooden spoons are used for adult refreshments; 15,200 cups of ice cream and 21,000 cups of cold drinks were consumed... impressive figures for an impressive piece of work.

Each candy stick, every toy, and all the fun-packed minutes which go to make up this gigantic undertaking, are all part of that indefinable something called "morale."

And don't think the men overseas don't know it. They are grateful, and in their hearts is a prayer for those at home who make Christmas a living tangible thing for their families, long to be remembered as the best Christmas ever... till Dad comes home.

AT HOME

"Ah, my friend," said a gentleman to a newly-married acquaintance, "so you're married at last. Allow me to congratulate you, for I hear you have an excellent and accomplished wife."

"Accomplished! She is indeed," was the enthusiastic reply. "Why, my friend, she is perfectly at home in literature, at home in music, at home in art, at home in science—in short, at home everywhere except—"

"Except what?"
"Except at home."—Wall Street Journal.



At this time we would thank the public for co-operation and goodwill throughout the year, and for the patience and kindness shown under the war conditions, also wishing one and all

A Very Merry Christmas
and a
Happy New Year

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THE SEASON'S GREETINGS



May we at this Yuletide season express our sincere appreciation of the support and co-operation shown us in the past year... expressing also best wishes to all for a

MERRY CHRISTMAS
and a
HAPPY NEW YEAR



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