

A Quiet Day in Flanders

Contributed Exclusively to the Whig by A.M.I.

The majority of the people at home seem to look upon life at the front as an unceasing round of hard fighting. They think of a continual roar of artillery, and of a constant life of attack and counter-attack. This is a somewhat erroneous impression, for there are times when periods of great quietness come to the men, and during the lull between the end of the battle of St. Eloi and the beginning of the third battle of Ypres there were many days of quietness on the line in the salient.

On one of these days, No. 8 platoon of the 1st Battalion were lying in support at Voormezele, close to the line at St. Eloi. A few days before they had moved from their reserve lines at Keningheist, and had taken over the Convent School farm, at Voormezele from a platoon of a sister battalion from Montreal. Things were quiet in the salient just then, but it was the calm before the great storm which was to break loose on the 2nd of June and which was to wipe out so many gallant Canadian boys.

This is a story, then, of a typical quiet day in the St. Eloi sector. The night had been spent in hard digging. Owing to the superiority of observation which the German had then, it was impossible to work during the day, so all trench digging and improving of positions had to be done at night. Before daybreak the working parties came into the convent, and after breakfast the routine "Stand to arms" commenced. For an hour the men stood at their posts, which were loopholes in the walls of the convent, but nothing happened. Then sentries and gas guards were posted, while the main body of the men fell to sleep.

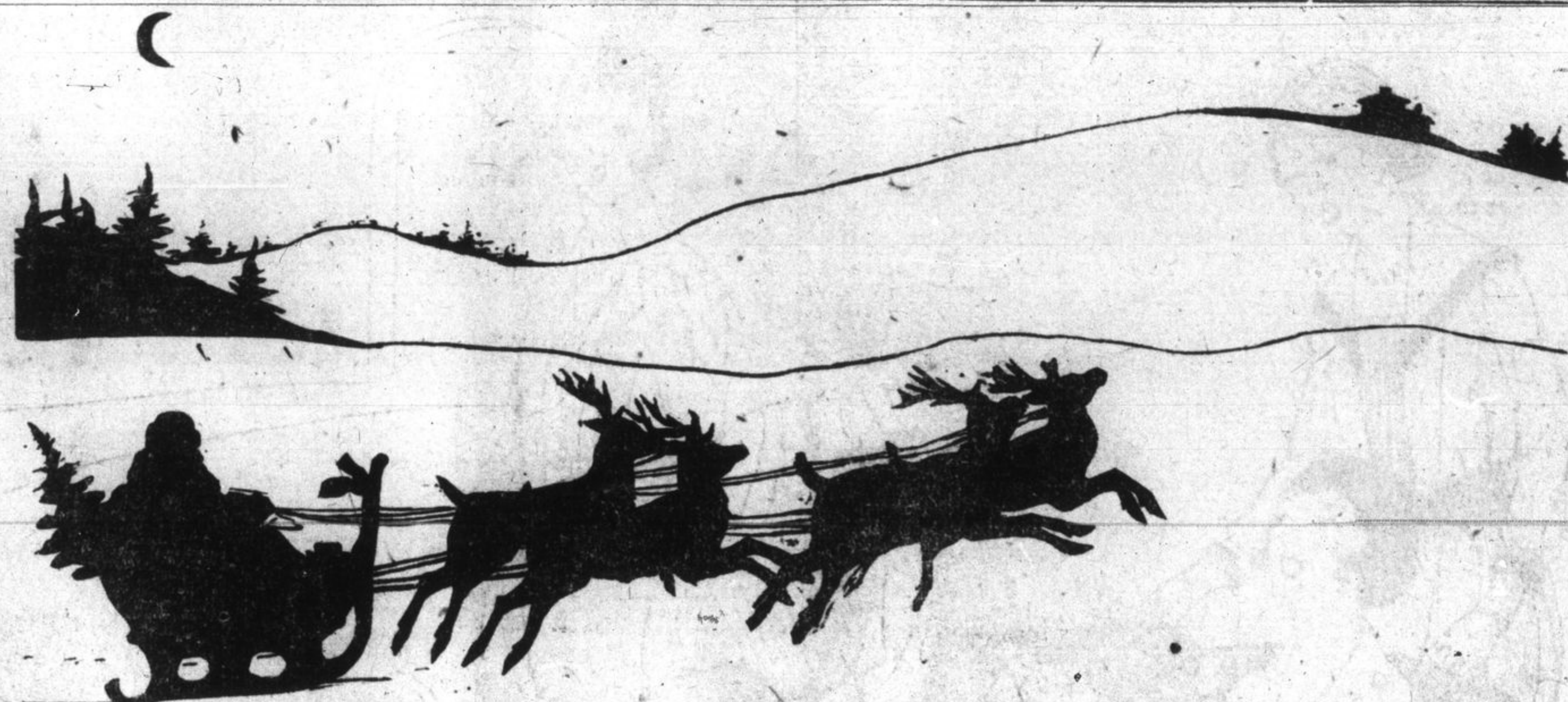
At 3 a.m. the first streaks of dawn showed in the east. Gradually the day broke, and the sun began to shed its first rays. And with the rise of the sun the last flickering star shell shot up and faded away. The scout aeroplanes, up with the lark, buzzed lazily around, followed up closely by little balls of fluffy white smoke from the shells of the Archies. The night's work was over, and another day's work was begun.

First a few German aeroplanes drifted across the blue sky, hovered around for a few moments as the "Archies" gunners found the range, and then turned tail when a few British machines came in sight and passed overhead, winging their way towards the German lines. Behind Hill 60 a German "sausage" balloon floated to and fro in the morning

breeze. Doubtless its observers were keeping a sharp lookout for any movement in our trenches, for in those days to stand up or move around in the trenches meant a shower of "whizz-bangs." Everything was strangely quiet. The Convent School, now almost roofless, and with great holes where shells had pierced its sides, indeed seemed a place of the dead to the sentry at his post near the gate. But even in its ruin it was a place of beauty. The shells of the Hunns could destroy the works of man, but old Mother Nature had survived, and had clothed its surroundings with surpassing beauty. The grounds were pitted with shell-holes, and here and there were broken masonry and piles of bricks. But the warm sunshine and the spring rains had awakened the plants and the trees, and the sentry feasted his eyes on a riot of color beyond the power of pen to describe. The brick and stone of the convent had been overgrown with creepers, bearing flowers of white and purple. In the garden the plum trees, pear trees and apple trees were in blossom and added beauty where chaos had reigned supreme a few weeks before. A narrow path, shaped by an arched pergola of weeping willows, led up to what had once been the convent chapel. The grass had grown long and thick, and amongst it were gorgeous patches of scarlet poppies, blue cornflowers, and yellow mustard. In the remnants of the flower beds deep red and yellow wallflowers raised their heads, and the iris, the emblem of an unconquerable France, raised its head above the bricks and stones which cumbered the earth. A hedge of young cedars marked the boundaries of the grounds, and in spite of barbed wire entanglements, and the trenches dug behind them, they made a brave show. Just outside the grounds was a thick little orchard, then in full bloom—its pink and white blossoms making a pretty picture.

And with the rising of the sun the birds began their songs. From the orchard came the call of a cuckoo. On a pear tree close by the convent wall a starling made love to his mate. In the courtyard dozens of sparrows were hunting for crumbs of bread or "bully-beef" and away up in the heavens, as if jealous of the aeroplanes, soared skylarks, pouring out its soul in song. Nature was predominant. Peace seemed to be over all. And yet we were in the very midst of war. In concealed positions all around were countless batteries,

and less than a thousand yards ahead, behind a vast network of barbed wire, lay the German trenches. Now and again the crack of a sniper's rifle broke the silence, but that was all. Nothing could be heard save the warbling of the bees, and the sighing of the wind as the trees swung to and fro. It was hard, so hard, to realize that there was such a thing as war, and yet we were at the heart of it, in a position where three weeks before the flower of the Second Canadian Division had lost their lives. The day wore on uneventfully. The passing aeroplanes alone told of the war. The tired garrison slept on, until, just before noon, a messenger



FOR YOU, DEAR!—Silhouette by Justice Charles B. Wheeler; verses by Chancellor Charles P. Norton.

On Christmas Eve, when the Sand Man sprinkles
The sand in your sleepy eyes,
You just look out at the star that twinkles
In the Milky Way in the skies.
So hurry and get to the land of dreams!
I tell you this because
The star up there that brightly gleams
Is the shop of Santa Claus,
And it's just stuffed full with pretty toys
For good little girls and good little boys.
But Santa Claus and his reindeer team
Can only come to you in a dream.

When old King Nod has worked his spells,
And you lie cuddled in bed,
Down the Milky Way, with a jingle of bells,
Will dash the reindeers' sled,
And coming out of the night so black,
If you watch out, you can see
Kind Santa Claus with toys in his pack,
And the nicest Christmas tree!
You'll hear on the roof his deer's hoofs patter,
You'll hear their horns in the merriest clatter,
And if you look up through the chimney place
You'll look right straight into Santa's face!

My child, you can never be sad and old,
If once you see Santa Claus's smile,
For it never lets the heart grow cold.
And those you have lost awhile
Will come laughing down the shining past.
While hands wave to you from afar
Of those you are waiting to meet at last,
High up in Santa Claus's star.
So Santa Claus gives the sweetest toys
To gray-haired girls and gray-haired boys
Who on Christmas Eve in the firelight beams
Sit too, with you, in the land of dreams.

arrived from the cook-house to announce that dinner was ready. And then there was a hurried awakening, a scramble for mess tins, and soon the boys were sitting outdoors, safe in the shelter of the convent wall, enjoying a dinner of hot "maconchie" stew, bread and rice pudding.

After dinner, rifles and ammunition were cleaned, and then the boys once more settled down to fill in their time. Some sat in the shade of the trees and wrote letters to the folks at home, while others read the newly arrived Canadian newspapers. A few began to stroll through the grounds and orchard, although at the risk of attracting the attention of the enemy.

Behind the convent lay the village of Voormezele, pronounced "Warm-as-ell" by the British Tommies. Its houses were in ruins, but the gardens behind flourished beyond the dreams of any gardener. In one ruined house was a cradle, left there, no doubt, by some heartbroken mother.

In another was a sewing machine; in others were beds, left there by the poor refugees in their hurry to escape from the invaders. In the centre of the village, at Devil Man's Corner, on Suicide road, stood the remains of the church. The roof and walls had gone, but the tower stood intact, raising itself high above the rest of the village and pointing like a huge accusing finger towards heaven. Truly it was a heartrending sight to look upon the ruins of this little village. What a place of beauty it must have been in the happy days before the madman of Europe let loose the dogs of war! And now it lay crumbled in the dust.

In the late afternoon two German shells exploded near by, but, as if ashamed for having broken the stillness, the firing ceased as suddenly as it began. At five o'clock supper, consisting of bread, butter, jam and tea, was served, and soon the shadows began to creep over the stricken land.

The day-birds ceased their singing, and a nightingale took up their song. Then the star shells began to flicker between the lines, the cracking of

rifles disturbed the silence. And the garrison of the convent school, carrying pick and shovel, filed off to work in the trench close by. Day was over. The night's work had begun.

With men it's wine, women and song; with women it's ice cream soda, men, grand opera and chicken salad.
People who use religion as a cloak in this world will doubtless manage to keep warm in the next without a cloak.
Silence sounds awfully loud when the boss comes in unexpectedly. Behavior is a mirror in which every one shows his image.

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