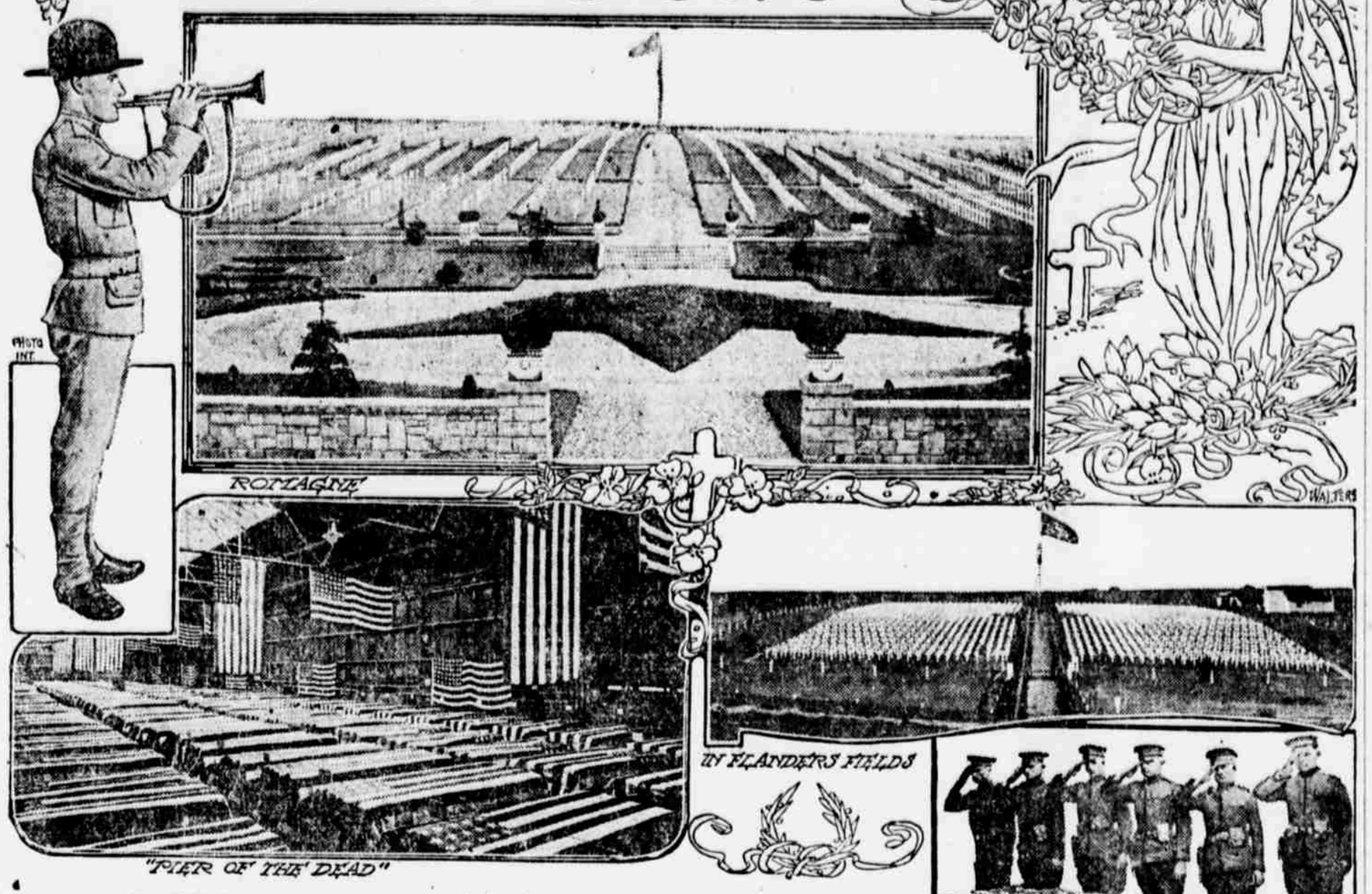
Bringing Home Our Soldier Dead



By JESSIE DELL,

(Historian, Quartermaster Corps, United States Army.)

TO THE quartermaster corps of the United States army has fallen the reverent task of bringing home the soldier dead, returned for burial under the stars and stripes.

On March 30 last, the army transport Cambrai reached New York with 1,224 flag-draped coffins. With her arrival, the solemn duty of the quartermaster corps of returning the bodies of those who fell in France, was practically completed.

There are left over seas now only 325 bodies to be brought back to the United States, the last of the 44,418 of those Americans who will be buried in the homeland. About 32,000 more will sleep forever overseas, according to the desires of their next of kin.

At this time it is fitting to tell our people just how America has been returning to the bosom of their native land the mortal remains of thousands of her sons who followed the flag—

Into that realm where battle flags are furled
And war drums throb no longer.

This sacred duty, under the direction of Major General H. L. Rogers, quartermaster general of the army, is performed by the graves registration service through the cemeterial division, and the efficent, sympathetic and reverent manner in which it is done has been a source of satisfaction to every one.

That one may visualize the work involved—its methods and operations in preparing our soldier dead for the last journey—we will endeavor to draw a picture which will show, step by step, how this has been accomplished.

Early morning sun finds the field operating units ready for the day's work and with trucks containing all materials necessary—tools, implements, caskets and shipping boxes—they start on their way to the sacred regions where lie our soldier dead. Each unit has its corps of highly-specialized and technical men in mortuary affairs (embalmers, undertakers and technical assistants) to perform this service. The working squads or laborers are composed chiefly of ex-service men.

Guards and watchmen attached to each unit are also discharged American soldiers, and during the time that the bodies are under the jurisdiction of operating units, this guard is constantly on duty over them. A commissioned officer filling a dual capacity of commanding officer and inspector is in command of each unit.

Once at the graves, excavating is commenced. When the bodies are reached, only one is allowed to be lifted to the surface of the ground at a time, in order that no possible chance will be taken in confusing identities. This is a requirement rigidly adhered to. The outer wrapping of the body is removed and search is made for identification tags and marks; when found they are securely fastened to the remains; the body is then wrapped in a new, clean blanket.

The identification disk and long narrow strip of aluminum, showing name, rank and organization, taken from the cross or star which marked the grave, is pinned to the blanket over the chest of the dead. Tenderly lifting and placing the body in a metallic container is the next step, using soft, flat cushions as padding to hold the body steady; after this a soft, clean sheet is carefully tucked in, further insuring against the shifting of the body during transportation.

After this the metallic container is placed in its silk-lined casket of chestnut wood or oak, and it, too, is securely fastened; across the head of the lid is attached a narrow aluminum strip showing the name, serial number, rank and organization of the soldier, and the number of the grave and cemetery from which the body was taken. The casket is then placed in the shipping box, which has been secured by the blocks of white wood or chestnut, covered with white plush to prevent marring or scratching the casket.

Name, rank and organization is then stenciled on each end of the shipping case. A tag giving the name and address of the consignee is tacked to the side, and the whole box is enveloped with our flag, which remains until the body is placed on the transport for sailing.

The sun sinking low in the West sees all bodies which have been exhumed entirely prepared for shipment, for this is another requirement which is rigidly adhered to. The bodies are then placed in local storage under constant guard of American watchmen. And thus the day's work is done.

All evacuations being completed within that section, the bodies are then removed from the local storage, and accompanied by convoys and guards, are taken by rail or river barges, as conditions allow, to the concentration point for that particular section.

Port officers maintain at all times a close liaison with the field operating unit in order to obviate misunderstandings, to prevent delays, and to permit satisfactory and definite plans being made in sufficient time for sailing. These concentration points are under the personal and constant supervision of commissioned officers and watchmen who are honorably discharged American soldiers.

The ports chosen as shipping bases are: Brest, St. Nazaire, Bordeaux, Toulon, Cherbourg, Calais, France; and Antwerp, Belgium, through which, during last year, 20,918 bodies were returned to America. Cherbourg has had the greatest number to handle, as evacuation of bodies for return from areas of Romagne, Thiacourt and Belleau all passed through this port, to the number of 25,000.

Finally the news comes from one of the six ports that the transport is ready for its precious cargo. Officers, convoys and guards then place the dead on special French trains or barges which have been draped with American flags. Departure is taken amid large gatherings of the population of the town and a guard of honor, comprising two or more companies of French soldiers who come to pay homage to our dead.

Quickly the news spreads that "les Americains" are taking their dead heroes home, and all along the line of the journey many are waiting. Priests are there, and these men of God gently and lovingly chant the prayers for the dead, while children with arms full of flowers are waiting to place them in the care of the guards or drop them on the barges as they slowly pass by. Every honor is shown both by civil and military France; and so the journey becomes a triumphal procession of America's heroic dead.

The port is reached, and there on its great "Pier of the Dead" the bodies are gently laid side by side, under the watchful care of the military "Guard of Honor" comprising a company of men detailed from the American forces in Germany.

Before it goes on the transport, each shipping case containing a body is carefully gone over to ascertain if it is in perfect condition for ocean transportation.

The tag showing the name and address of the consignee, which has been tacked to the side of the box, is then removed, and name and address stenciled on the side instead. The port officers, who are commissioned officers of our army, are present when this stenciling is done, the quartermaster general holding them personally responsible for all discrepancies and inaccuracies. Everything finished to the satisfaction of these officers, the bodies are finally placed on the transport, the warning bell is sounded and the transport slowly moves away.

The military attachments stand at "Attention" while their bugles salute the dead. All flags and ensigns of shipping, or those on vessels of the various navies of the world, which may be represented in the harbor, are lowered as our funeral ship solemnly passes out, and then begins the long, last voyage of our soldier dead.

Simultaneously with the sailing of the transport, a cable message bearing the names of the dead returning speeds on its way to Washington and is received by the chief of the cemeterial division, who immediately takes steps to provide that every care and attention shall be attendant upon the arrival of the sacred cargo at the home port.

Let us leave for awhile our dead as they cross the great Atlantic and let us get a glimpse of the fields of honor in whose beautiful, broad, white acres will repose for all time those whose nearest of kin desire that they shall stay sleeping in France. The quartermaster corps has spared no effort in making lovely and lasting monuments to the boys who made the supreme sacrifice. Grounds, graceful and majestic, were chosen and arranged with a simple dignity that seems to be eminently fitting for the resting places of the dead.

At the present time, only five cemeteries in France and Belgium have official approval and sanction for their permanency, but the advisability of increasing the number of national cemeteries abroad is receiving favorable consideration; it is recently that Thiacourt has been added to the number. In this cemetery lie so many of the men of the air service whose daring and brilliancy will ornament many pages of the World's war history. Already extensive plans are on foot to make our cemeteries over there great national memorials; and to insure the success of the undertaking, plans for beautifying and ornamenting have been placed in the hands of a special commission appointed by the secretary of war.

It is headed by the chief of the cemeterial division; other members are: Charles Moore, secretary of the National Fine Arts commission; James L. Greenleaf, New York landscape artist; and William Mitchell Kendall, the well-known artist of New York. Their ideas when carried out will make the "American Fields of Honor" the most impressive war cemeteries in the world. And every one will be an outpost of America in France or Belgium, for wherever lies the grave of an American soldier, lies, too, a spot that is forever America.

Romagne, which is our Argonne cemetery, originally held in its bosom 23,000 of our men who fell in the Muese-Argonne offensive, America's greatest battle. There every State of the Union, as well as the territories of Hawaii, Porto Rico, and the Philippine Islands, had representation. No spot in France is more historically famous than this, the Argonne sector, where lies our largest field of honor.

Here France's greatest battles have been fought, but none so great as that of 1918, when America and France again fought side by side, as in the days of Washington and Lafayette, and again for the principles of freedom and liberty. So, Romagne-Argonne, our beautiful and largest cemetery, stands as a monument to America's share in the world's greatest struggle.

Belleau, whose name memory lovingly links with the heroism and sacrifice of our men of the Second division, lies in a green, fertile valley, densely wooded, with loved and shattered Chateau-Thierry near its portals. This cemetery is and always will be of the greatest national pride and glory to the United States, for it was at Chateau-Thierry that the American soldiers cried, "They shall not pass!" and, like a barrier across their path, halted the Huns on their way to Paris.

Suresnes cemetery, in the winding valley of the Seine and surrounded by a semi-circle of hills, is like a white gem in an exquisite setting of emerald. Old Fort Valerien, whose massive gray walls crown one of the hilltops, stands like a grim sentinel guarding our dead. Lying off in the distance can be seen one of the world's greatest cities—Paris—whose beautiful Washington boulevard, curving in graceful lines, connects it with our cemetery.

Flanders Fields, familiarly known by its old name of Bony, is the spot made historically famous to America by the Twenty-seventh and Thirtieth divisions, whose united effort as the Second corps, furnish one of history's most brilliant pages. Boys of the North and South, sons of the men who wore the Blue and the Gray—who can say that, in spirit, the great commanders of that long past war were not near to guide their boys, as they advanced to meet a common enemy, on the battleground of Flanders Fields.

In smashing the Hindenburg line, many of the division's bravest sons were left to sleep in the field they had so gallantly defended—"In Flanders Fields where poppies blow"—the deep, rich crimson of those poppies; how they cover every hillside and dell! Growing thickly among them are the white lilies of the valley and the beautiful blue cornflowers. And "Old Glory," floating high and wide, finds its colors reflected in these flowers below.

So peaceful and restful! It seems such a little while ago that the boom of cannon and the scream of shell had sent fleeing from their native haunts the sky larks now returning whose little throats all through the day pour forth floods of melody—a requiem over the dead, a psalm of thanksgiving to the Great Creator for bringing again to their home peace and quiet.

Child Training at Home

HABIT FORMATION

By OLIVE ROBERTS
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MOTHERS are often heard to say, "My children have such untidy habits, and I don't seem to be able to break them. I talk all day long, but it doesn't do any good."

No mother needs to endure her children's untidy habits, or any other undesirable habits, if she goes about training in the right way, and is willing to take a little trouble to carry it out. Four simple rules based on psychology, may serve to give such mothers an insight into the means of forming right habits. If carried out faithfully, these rules cannot fail to produce results.

First decide for yourself what habit you wish to form. Then start enthusiastically and determinedly to break the old and launch the new one. Say to your children, "Beginning today, we are all going to hang up our wraps, and put our books and rubbers in the proper places when we come home from school. Let's see who remembers every time, and doesn't have to have mother tell her once about it." Arouse as much enthusiasm as you can about the matter. Be careful that you do not start to break and form anew too many habits at one time. Select one or two habits to work out, and keep at them until you are reasonably sure that they are well fixed. Then start on another.

May Be Hard Task.

Second, permit no exceptions to occur after you have once started. No matter how good the intentions of the children are, they will lapse into the old ways after a few days. That is when you will have to work. You will find that eternal vigilance on your part will be the price of your children's good habits. When Mary comes home in a hurry to go out to play, she will throw her books on the nearest chair. Don't say, "Oh, well, she is little, and it is hard to remember all the time. I'll let it go this time." That is where you will fail. Even though Mary has already gone away to play, she should be called back immediately and told in a kind manner, "You forgot your books today. Put them away, and then you may go to play." One or two experiences of that kind will soon make Mary more careful.

Third, repeat the desirable action as often as possible. We all know that the habit is most firmly fixed which we have been practicing longest. Seize every occasion to perform the act which you wish to become a habit, and its acquisition will come all the sooner.

Do Not Depend on Talking.

Last of all, act, don't talk. Professor James says, in his Talks to Teachers: "Don't preach too much or abound in good talk in the abstract." When Mary throws her coat on the floor and her rubbers in the middle of the hall, don't tell her that nice little girls don't do those things, or that she is a careless girl and should know better, and a great deal more to that effect. Simply call her as soon as you discover what she has done, and tell her quietly and good-naturedly to put her things away immediately, and then see that she does it. Such treatment as this is far more effective than mere talking.

THE KINDERGARTEN A NECESSITY; NOT A LUXURY

P. P. Claxton, federal commissioner of education, has said that during the year 1920, the American people spent more for luxuries than they have spent on education in the entire history of the country.

This nation, with its vast resources can well afford to provide all of its children with every educational advantage, beginning with the kindergarten, and when we come to recognize in prevalent waves of crime, anarchy and unrest, the tragic results of neglecting the impressionable years of childhood, the kindergarten will be considered a necessity, not a luxury.

GETTING STARTED RIGHT, IS ADVICE OF HENRY C. WALLACE.

Every farmer knows that success in producing fine stock depends upon getting the young animals started right.

The number of drafted men rejected for physical disability during the war shows that we need to pay more attention to building up our children physically. The kindergarten, with its admirable system of physical culture, and its sunny, airy rooms, where the children spend three happy hours each school day, furnishes the best possible environment, and physical as well as intellectual and social training.

It is too bad that kindergartens are not available for a far larger percentage of our children. Early training such as is given in the kindergarten should make healthier children, and better children in every way.—Henry C. Wallace, Secretary of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

Cheap cynicism is always cynical about the wrong people.

No innocent bystander ever had misgivings.