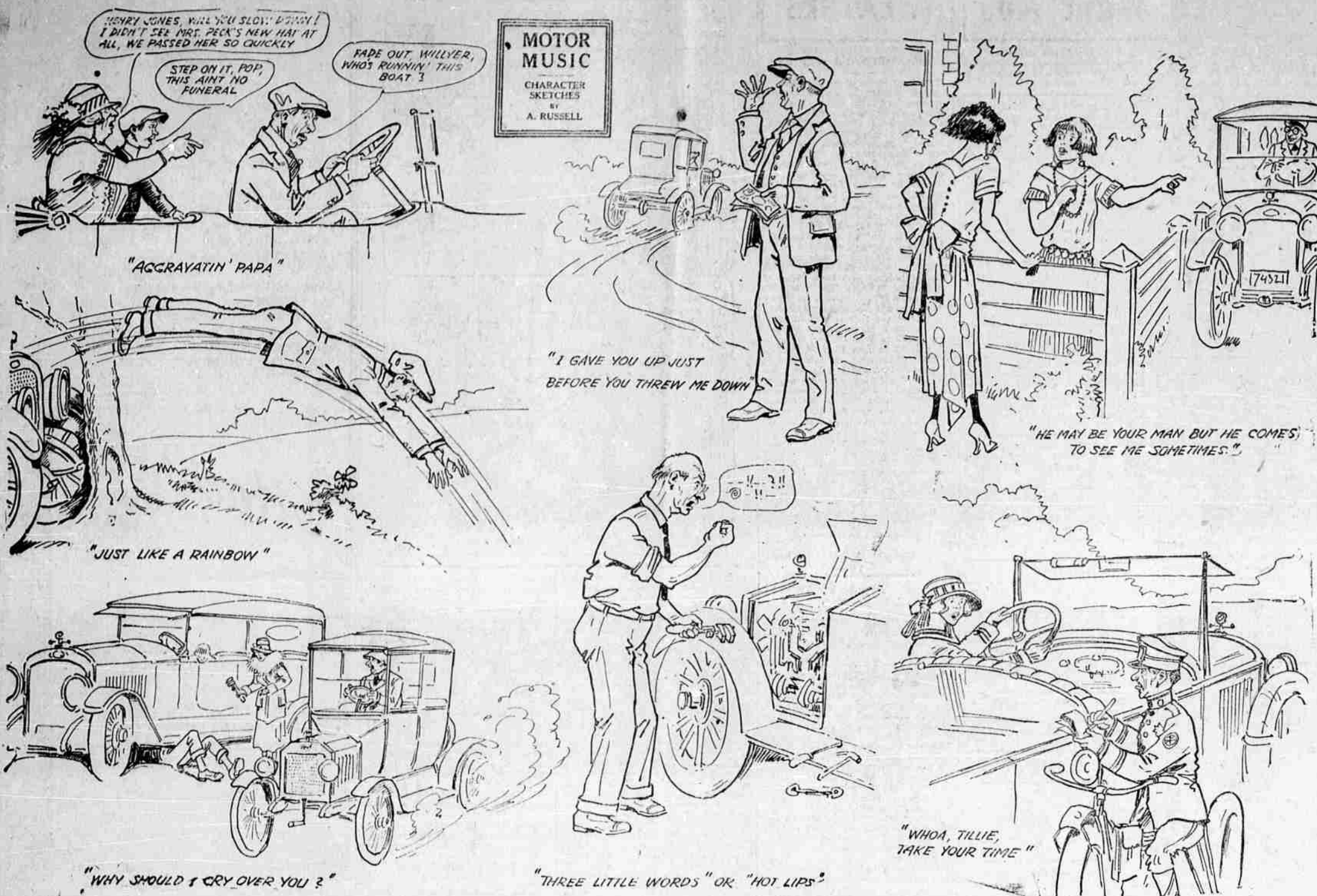




Play Time Needed in Peace as in War

SERVICE WITH FIGHTING MEN - Article Three

In Leave Areas for Soldiers, Health and Happiness Replaced Restless, Hectic Life in Crowded Paris

IN commemoration of the service of good will rendered by the people of France, the American Y.M.C.A. during recent months has been presenting memorial tablets to various municipalities of that country which were centers of what, during the war, were called leave areas. These were an absolute novelty in the annals both of military and of welfare service.

One of the serious problems for the leaders of the American army in France was the question of soldier's leave. One army was 3,000 miles from home. The French and British soldier, on leave could reach home in a few hours. Yet there must be periods of rest and relaxation if our own men were to be kept at a high pitch of efficiency. It was proved in England that workmen could not toil satisfactorily if called upon to work seven days a week. Neither the mind nor the body would endure continuous tension.

On the other hand, the interruption from the routine must be of such a kind that the soldier would return more fit for his duties than when he went on leave. How could it be accomplished for the American doughboy?

AREAS SELECTED FOR BEAUTY AND INTEREST

The leave periods, to be of service to the individual and to the army, required change of environment, not merely freedom from army restrictions or duties. Paris, which every one wanted to see, was crowded, congested and, like any other great city, no place for healthy relaxation. The visit to Paris was apt to result in dissipation. Then, too, there were the military police. And there was danger of endless complication if soldiers on leave were permitted to scatter themselves all over France.

General Pershing discussed this problem with various advisers in July, 1917. The leave idea, originally proposed by the Y. M. C. A., and developed by experiment and improvement, was the subject of many conferences. A leave area was a section of country selected for its natural beauty, historic interest and facilities for recreation and amusement, and officially designated as a resort for American soldiers on leave.

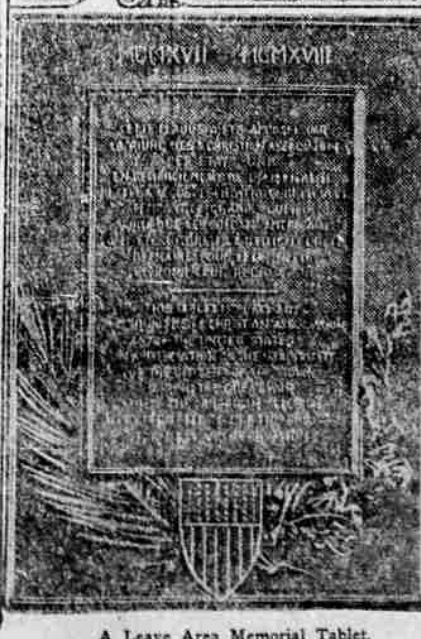
During the experimental period the

Association handled most of the expense. When in final operation, the Army paid for food and lodging and exercised general control; the Y. M. C. A. furnished all social and recreational features, and the soldier was provided with real rest and recreation without cost to himself.

When the character of the 19 leave areas was once understood the whole army was eager to go. Every man was entitled to seven days' leave every four months. Nearly half a million men spent their seven-day leaves in the areas, and the total entertained, including shorter leaves, reached nearly 2,000,000.

The leave areas, as described in "Service with Fighting Men," were located in Alpine resorts and the Riviera, the valley of the Rhine, the southeast of Brittany, towns in the Pyrenees and the Cote d'Or—all places where beauty of scene and mild or bracing climate had attracted rest or pleasure seekers for many years.

The first area opened, at Aix-les-Bains, was the pattern for all the

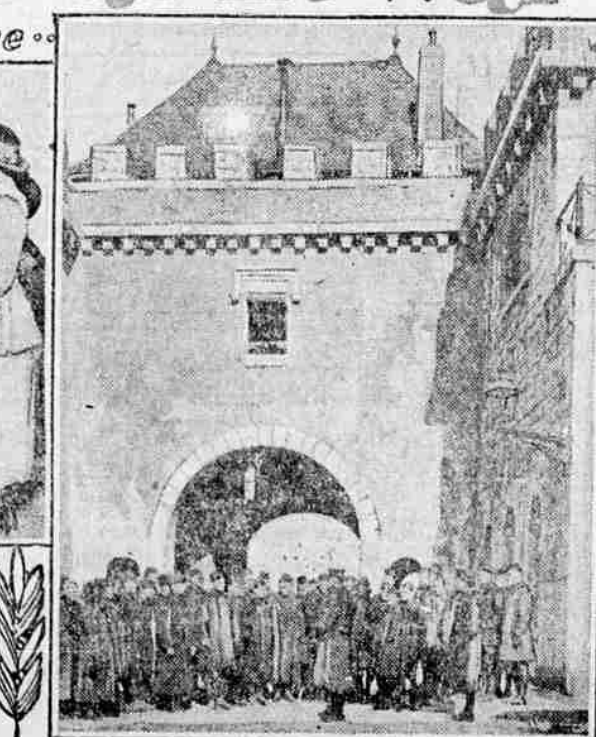


A Leave Area Memorial Tablet.

general label. Here the Grand Cercle Casino was located, and its theater, dance hall, restaurant, lounge and recreation rooms devoted to the pleasure of soldiers. Social features were everywhere emphasized. Because many soldiers had scarcely

spoken to a fellow country-woman since leaving home, the predominance of women among the workers did much to help them to make the most of their leave and forget the horrors and monotony of their past months. The women's work was or-

ganized and guided for nearly the whole first year by Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. Athletic sports of all kinds were on duty—baseball, football and tennis, mountain climbing, skiing, swimming and similar out-of-door ac-



Nearly two million men spent their leave time in the recreation of vacation areas. Snow sports, water sports and trips, open air entertainments, picnics and sightseeing tours afforded a pleasing relief from the arduous duties of army life and brought to the soldier renewed mental, moral and physical fitness. The American Y. M. C. A. has been presenting memorial tablets to municipalities which were centers of leave areas. One such tablet is shown at lower right. The legend on the tablet expresses appreciation for the hospitality shown by the citizens to our soldiers.

Activities. Lake and river steamers were chartered for daily trips, and hikes to places of historic or scenic interest, with competent lecturers as guides, were features of all areas. In short, the soldier on leave had a wide choice of occupation. And there was neither reveille nor taps; if a man wanted breakfast in bed at noon he could have it. Concerts by famous bands, moving pictures, theatrical entertainments, and best of all, American girls to talk or dance with, were at hand at all times; the soldier had only to enjoy himself. Early in the experiment the leaders had seen the need of training those who served in the areas. The tried workers of the first winter were therefore used to man the points, and the inexperienced were sent for training to a special area. Nearly

every one of the 685 secretaries in the department served an apprenticeship before being permanently assigned. Those who observed the leave area work realized more fully the need of recreation for the great masses of men in industry today. Society is only beginning to recognize that to many the struggle for a livelihood is as monotonous and grinding as was the work in the Service of Supply in the army. The need of decent recreational facilities for all men working under strain is real and pressing. Individuals and companies have here and there begun to meet this need, but the whole body of society has only begun to sense it, not only as a necessity but as a responsibility and an opportunity.