

PROFESSIONAL COLUMN.

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PROBLEMS IN NOMENCLATURE WHICH WAR RISK BUREAU HAS TO TACKLE

Difficulties the Bureau Experiences in Answering Letters and Maintaining the Correct Addresses of Demobilized Men—Many Become Transients and Others Give Only Fragmentary Information.

Washington.—Eccce homo! Behold the man!
"Get me this man's name so that I can report definitely on the status of his insurance."
That, together with a slip bearing the memo, "James Hall, (3,721,505) McCall, South Carolina. Beneficiaries: Mrs. Ella Stalks (wife), Mrs. Fannie Stalks (mother)," was handed to a file searcher in the bureau of war risk insurance.

The man's name was given as Hall, while those of his wife and his mother were given as Stalks. Patently, something was wrong somewhere. Just what was wrong, however, was not so evident. To find out what and where the error was, was the job.

Finding the error somebody else made is always the job of the war risk index file searchers, and it's a tough job if they fail to get at the bottom of it.

Going into the index files section where are listed the names of nearly five million men who were inducted into military service, the young woman made a complete inventory of all

the bureau from an army camp, and ended as follows:

"Respectfully,
"Private Divis Spruce,
Hastings, Pa."

Miss Blue Sweater was assigned to the letter with instructions to secure the man's policy number that certain information requested as to the standing of his insurance might be furnished him.

The name of Divis Spruce could not be found in the files. Then came the time for imagination and deduction. No matter how the name was split to make some other plausible name, the files could not produce results.

Finally the young woman decided to address a letter to the man at Hastings, Pa., requesting him to furnish information about himself. In due time the letter was returned to the bureau as unclaimed.

This did not put an end to the search by any means. Imagination and deduction again were brought into the case, and a further study of the original letter was made.

Of course! The Spruce Division! The Spruce division was a part of the American army.

Miss Blue Sweater secured a roster of the Spruce division from the war department and searched through the nearly 40,000 names for a man who lived at Hastings, Pa.

In this she was rewarded. The list showed only one man from that town. He was Herman Miller. With this information the young woman had no difficulty in finding the card of Herman Miller, (policy number 1877,155; serial number 898,255) of Hastings, Pa. This man was furnished the information he desired, and in thanking the bureau he admitted he had forgotten to sign his name to the letter.

Searchers From All Sections.

Girls from every part of the country are employed as searchers. If a complex case arises involving a man's identification, and his home is in Maine, a girl from that state is assigned to run down the mystery and she nearly always does. Should the state be California, a girl hailing from the "Coast" soon has the correct data carefully listed in the files.

There are innumerable "wonderful" cases under investigation every day, but these girls are not unlike the heroes from France who never exploit the "wonderful" things they themselves did in line of duty.

Handwriting experts are employed to determine the identity of many signatures, since every conceivable form of handwriting reaches the bureau. Often the body of a letter will be per-

fectly legible, but the signature will prove to be one of those nonforgeable jumbles of pen strokes which are the delight and pet hobby of the writer and the despair of every hopeful reader.

Silent letters in names must always be taken into consideration. The name of Hlynack is a good example where the silent letter is the key letter for searching, but at the same time it is particularly dead in pronunciation. This name is pronounced Lynack, and in the hurry of writing, often names are misspelled, when on the surface they appear very simple and correct.

Foreign names are often typed incorrectly because the soldier at the time of making application for insurance may have been unfamiliar with English and made a mistake in repeating the spelling to the army or navy clerk. This is a great source of worry to searchers.

Names Spelled Many Ways.

Frequently one man's name may be spelled in four or five ways. If relatives, parents or someone interested in his welfare inquires about his insurance, each will spell it in their way. Girl searchers must determine which is the correct spelling and then verify it from the man's original signature.

A clever piece of deduction was that in the case of Andrew Good of North Dakota. His name could not be found

in the files and was turned over to one of the cleverest searchers. Since the man's address was given as North Dakota, she assumed, in view of the fact that there were many Indians listed from that state, that his must be an Indian name. She immediately added Thunder to his name and found the record card as Andrew Good Thunder, in less than three minutes after she had been asked to lend her aid.

Carelessness or unavoidable haste in writing up insurance applications on the Form 1-B, by which a man entering the service requests or disclaims government allowance to dependents, and failure to include complete identifying information in a letter of inquiry, constitute the largest single cause in the bureau's delay in answering mail.

Any letter addressed to the bureau on any matter pertaining to a service man should contain his name in full—first, last, and middle; it should state his rank and organization at the time "Form 1-B" was filed, or at the time insurance application was made; his present home address and former address if the address has been changed; the first, middle and last name of his beneficiary, and present and former address, if the address has been changed.

The names of the nearly five million men who were inducted under the selective draft, and those who have joined up since the armistice, are on cards in filing cabinets, which, placed one after the other, would make a line more than five miles long.

Just what complications may arise when there is failure to include this identifying data, may be imagined from the fact that a comparison shows that the repetition of names in the files of the bureau is far greater than the repetition of names carried in card indexes of commercial companies.

Many Bear Same Name.

Fifty-three thousand two hundred Johnsons were called into active military service. The Smiths were not far behind numerically, coming up to the considerable figure of 51,950. The "Brown" family with 48,000 is next.

More than half the letters inquiring about insurance come from men who either fail to give their identifying number, or their address. In thousands of cases they give their address, but due to the fact that there are others with similar names who live in the same city, and have moved this information is of little value to the girl searchers.

Actual figures show that more than half the soldiers, sailors and marines have moved since leaving the service. Few forwarded a notice of a change of address. This left the bureau with only the name of the man for record, but through its system of tracing men, large numbers have been located by the girl sleuths and their correct addresses have been listed.

Many amazing discoveries have been made in names, and the number of ways they can be spelled. One young woman has tabulated 49 ways, so far discovered to spell Aloysius.

Another has specialized in the spelling of Ignatz. She has found 18 ways to spell this name.

Still another has found that John can be spelled 24 ways.

To Bartholdt Otto Aabel, (policy number 3,263,838) of Minden, Neb., belongs the distinction of having his name the first in all the card index files. The last card in the file bears the name of Wladyslaus Charles Zysoz, (policy number 1,892,689) of 421 Maury street, Rome, N. Y.

Constant combing is necessary to keep the files up to date.

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Girl Sleuths Searching Card Index Files.

the thousands of men surnamed Hall. Among them all there was not one who came from McCall, South Carolina, nor yet one who had a wife or mother whose name even remotely resembled the "Stalks" given as the name of the two beneficiaries.

Calls for Nimble Wit.
This, clearly, was a case for the use of that specially nimble wit and fine deductive faculty which has characterized much of the work of the searchers of the index files, and given them a process of procedure which might be used to add a leaf to the book of the Burnses, the Pinkertons and the Flynns.

"Well," remarked the girl charged with producing the needed information, "this man may be 'Stalk,' since that is the name given for his wife and mother."

But search through the "Stalks" brought nothing to identify the case. "Still," she persisted, and they always do persist, these girls. "His name must be some kind of a 'Stalk,' but what kind? Corn stalks, bean stalks, and cabbage stalks are the only kind of stalks I know anything about so I'll just look them up."

And sure enough, it turned out that his name was "some kind of a Stalk." Cabbage stalks, in fact, and his index card was duly changed to read:

"James Cabbagstalks, (3,721,505) McCall, South Carolina; beneficiaries, Mrs. Ella Cabbagstalks (wife), Mrs. Fannie Cabbagstalks (mother)."

"You see that girl wearing the blue sweater over there," said one young woman.

The girl of the blue sweater appeared so young she might have just left school. She was searching some index cards, her fingers rapidly running from one to another. With each flap of the card she had taken a mental note of the inscription thereon, but to the observer she was making a speed record in touching every card in the file drawer.

Suddenly—Bang! The drawer was closed. She moved a foot to the right, began another Marathon in card movements, selected one, made a notation on a slip of paper she carried, placed the card among the others, closed the drawer, and walked toward the man who is in charge of the file section.

This pantomime was quickly enacted, and as it turned out, it brought to a close a remarkable case which had been under investigation for some days.

The "Divis Mystery."
The title of this strange case might be the "Divis mystery" with Miss Blue Sweater as the detective heroine. A typewritten letter was received by



Checking Names of Soldier Survivors.

fully legible, but the signature will prove to be one of those nonforgeable jumbles of pen strokes which are the delight and pet hobby of the writer and the despair of every hopeful reader.

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