



On a Jaunt in a Donkey Cart—A Soldier and a Y. M. C. A. Girl at Vals-les-Bains.



Doughboy on a Picnic with Y. M. C. A. Girls in France.

War Work of Roosevelt's Daughter-in-Law

Wife of Eldest Son of Late ex-President, Who Directed First Leave Areas, Tells How Men Were Tagged at Dances and Sang Hymns in Baccarat Room

MRS. THEODORE ROOSEVELT, the late ex-President's daughter-in-law, just back from France, was the first American woman sent abroad for war service by the Y. M. C. A. She reached Paris, indeed, only a few weeks after Pershing, and she had a French class for Americans in those far-off days when most of the pupils were ambulance drivers, because so few soldiers had arrived. She worked in the first canteen in Paris, and she was in charge of all the women's work in establishing the first American officers' hotel. Then, when Mrs. Roosevelt had been about six months in France, came the army order creating "leave areas" for the men.

It was creation pure and simple: nothing of the sort had ever been done before in any army; the American soldiers, it was decided, ought to have leave areas, and therefore leave areas must be "arranged"; the soldiers were to have one week's holiday in each four months of service, and during that week they were to have a happy time. That was the army plan, and that was as far as the army's "general order" went; the execution was turned over to the Y. M. C. A., and the Y. M. C. A. turned the women's end of the work over to Mrs. Roosevelt.

She has had seventeen months of "war work"—teaching French, running a canteen, attending to all the manifold details of hospitality in an officers' hotel, doing executive work in a Paris office, coming in contact with soldiers in every branch of the service, and of every rank as well, meeting, too, every different type of war worker, and being herself responsible for the assignment of workers to specific tasks. But of all the varied kinds of service that make up young Mrs. Roosevelt's comprehensive war experience she considers the leave area work the most important, as it was certainly the biggest. It is a branch of work of which not much is known here, and it is Mrs. Roosevelt's own work. She is one of the little handful of "first" Americans who were responsible for the success of the leave area scheme. There are still leave areas in France, and women working in them; there will be for a long time to come. And although in talking of her war experience, Mrs. Roosevelt has a way of skipping the importance of her own part in the day's events and plans, it is the work of the leave areas that has first place in her story.

"It was just about a year ago," she said, "that the general order was issued establishing leave areas; the soldiers were not allowed to go to Paris, for many reasons, and there were many reasons,

too, why they could not be scattered all over France—they would be almost sure, many of them, to overstay their leave, for instance—through no fault of their own, but owing to circumstances and their ignorance of the country; they didn't speak the language; they might get out of money, or into trouble because of their strangeness in the country—altogether, it was obviously impossible to turn them loose. So the army decided on the leave area plan, and the Y. M. C. A. was instructed to establish the first leave area. That was in Savoie, and a little company of Y. M. C. A. workers, under Franklin Spencer Edmonds of Philadelphia, was sent to Aix-les-Bains to open the first centre there. I was sent, with Miss Edith Stedman of Boston, to look after the women's end of the work.

"What were our orders?" Mrs. Roosevelt laughed as she echoed the question. "Well, beyond the general instructions I've quoted, we really hadn't any. What we were doing was a gigantic experiment. We were directed to 'go down to Aix and see what could be done.' We knew that we were to go to Aix, and we knew, too, that we were to have the use of the Casino there; but what we were going to do with the Casino, or with Aix, we hadn't the slightest idea. To be told to use the great Casino at Aix was like being told to use a Noah's Ark, so far as any definite knowledge beforehand of its uses went. And, frankly, we were rather afraid the whole thing would fail. It was so tremendously important! We were so terribly in earnest over it. And if it failed, its failure would be so conspicuous.

"Well, we went to Aix—Mr. Edmonds and about ten other men and Miss Stedman and I—and the first thing we did

was to persuade the hotel keepers to open the hotels for our soldiers. We made regular contracts with all of them, and they were quite willing to open the hotels, though it was so far ahead of the season. As for the Casino—it was magnificent and enormous, a very large building with a theatre attached. We set up the canteen in the bar—the marble counter was excellent for serving chocolate. And when the men got there they were greatly amused when they learned that the only place where it was possible

to hold religious services was the baccarat room! There were great terrandas everywhere, that were fine for the men to rest and sleep on when they wanted to; and though the weather was cold (Aix is in the mountains) the air was dry and bright and wonderful, the finest air, I think, that I have ever known.

"We made arrangements for 4,000 men at Aix, 500 at Chambéry, and 700 at Challes-les-Eaux; these were the leave centres of the Savoie area, and they were near each other, so that the soldiers could go on trips from one to another. In Challes-les-Eaux we had the Casino, a very good building, though not so large as that at Aix-les-Bains; Challes-les-Eaux

is a charming place, right out in the country; Chambéry is a town—we had the lower floor of a big house there—and Aix is a magnificent resort. So you see we had a variety!

"We had a funny time in furnishing the rooms; you know you can't buy furniture in France now, and in Chambéry we needed a good deal of furniture, we found, so we rented it from the refugees! A great many people who had fled from Northern France during the invasion had brought their furniture with them, and there was a good deal of very beautiful

furniture stored in Chambéry that we were allowed to rent. Where we couldn't do that—of course the supply of refugee furniture was not inexhaustible—we got hold of kitchen tables and such things and painted them ourselves. In those first days we did a great deal of work of that sort—the women workers made all the curtains, for instance—and it was great fun!

"It was the end of January when we reached Aix. On the 16th of February, the first contingent of soldiers arrived—150 men from the 1st Division. And you can't imagine how frightened we were for fear they wouldn't have a good time and the whole thing would fail!

"You see," she explained, "the men hated it, before they came. I suppose you know that they called Aix-les-Bains 'Aches and Pains,' and when they first gave it that name, before they got there, they meant it! In the first place, every soldier wanted to go to Paris. He didn't see why he couldn't go to Paris, and he didn't see how he could have a good time anywhere else! Then he didn't like the idea of being told to go to some definite place; he thought it was going to be a place with a lot of discipline and reveille and drill. And because they knew it was all in the hands of the Y. M. C. A. some of the soldiers were afraid that they would be expected to go to religious meetings all the time! You see, they had no idea what it was going to be like. And as for us, having to invent it all, we were terribly afraid it was not going to succeed! At first the soldiers had to pay their own expenses, but that was found to be a poor arrangement, and was changed; the army pays the expenses for them now, and has refunded what the soldiers spent under the first plan.

"We had a big demonstration to meet the first arrivals. The town had a Reception Committee headed by the Mayor, and we had the famous negro band of the 369th Infantry—formerly the old 15th New York National Guard—under Lieutenant James Europe. When the men got off the train they were covered with yellow mud up to their waists! They had been sent for at 3 in the morning, ordered right out of the trenches and told to hike to the train, which left at 5. That helped to make them cross. It seemed as if every single one of those 150 had a grouch! Fifty of them declared at once that they could not pay the hotel expenses and demanded to be sent back.

"They were ordered to go to their

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Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt, Who Has Just Returned from Y. M. C. A. Work in France.

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hotels and told that the matter of their expenses would be arranged. Then they had their first look at the Aix Casino, and we heard them say, 'We can't go in there until we are policed!' So they hurried to change their clothes and wash up and then to look things over. Well, at the end of that day there were only five men who said they couldn't afford to stay!

"It was funny about those five," Mrs. Roosevelt added, reflectively; "we found they were five of a party of six who had come down in the same compartment; the five had no money, and the sixth had a thousand francs! We thought he must have been very lucky!

"But the Y. M. C. A. fixed it all up about the hotel expenses, so no one had to go back—and no one wanted to!

"Some months later a Y. M. C. A. worker in a town near the front was stopped in the street by a soldier. 'I never let that uniform go past me without shaking hands with the wearer,' he said, and when the woman from the Y. M. C. A. said she was very glad he felt that way and asked him why, he replied that he had spent a week at Aix, and added, 'It was the best week I've had in Europe, but it was more than that; I think it was the best week of my life!'

"That is the way they felt about it, after they learned what it was. The leave area work was one of the things that, once started, just went on itself to big success."

The explanation of its success—and its start as well—and the soldiers' sudden conversion from prejudice to childish delight, is best found in Mrs. Roosevelt's story of what the men on leave did, and what provision was made for their entertainment.

"The first two days most of those men just slept in the sun on the piazzas," she went on. "They said they didn't want anything but just to be left alone to look forward to real beds at night. But, of course, there were several kinds of things arranged for their amusement.

"Each centre had its athletic field, and there was always a bulletin telling of the events of that day and the next; there was something going on outdoors

every day—baseball, regatta, field sports, a climb up the mountain, an all-day picnic, a bicycle ride, or a long hike—and every evening there was something going on in the theatre—vaudeville, concert, or stunts. We had regular vaudeville acts, either from the Overseas Theatre League or from a circuit in Paris, and we had the tours worked out so that there was always a new program. In some centres the Overseas Theatre League had a stock company. Then there were movies every day—we had a regular circuit of films, too.

"But one of the very jolliest things of all was stunt night. That was always arranged by the men themselves, and everything they did was not only most amusing, but beautifully done."

As the leave area in Savoie proved its immediate success and the first contingent of 150 men was multiplied up into the thousands—the men used to go back and tell their comrades about the good times they had, and there was a perfect rush to get to Savoie—the number of workers was, of course, increased at once. There were between forty-five and fifty American women in the leave centres of the Savoie area, about thirty of whom were in the big centre at Aix. One of the things that Mrs. Roosevelt recounted from her experiences at Aix was the arrangement of the dancing with 4,000 soldier boys and 30 girls.

"We had to have a regular plan," she explained, "so that it would all be perfectly fair and every one would have a good time. So we got baggage tags in seven colors and made the men put them on their collars, and then we would run up flags; when the blue flag went up the men with blue tags could cut in, &c. We never followed any set order, so they never knew whose turn would come next. It worked beautifully."

Of course amusing the boys, important as that was, was not the only thing for which the Y. M. C. A. was responsible in the leave areas. A funny report reached Mrs. Roosevelt last Winter that she had come to France "to give the doughboys American breakfasts"; and although that was laughably incorrect, it did have some vague connection with what was a big part of her work—the Y. M. C. A. canteen. For the canteen

did serve a breakfast, and a very popular breakfast it was!

Then, too, the Y. M. C. A. hosts and hostesses in the leave centres saw to it that all their young guests' clothes were mended. But that work, like the cooking, dishwashing, and scrubbing, was done, not by the young women from overseas, but by Frenchwomen who were employed for the purpose. It was here that Mrs. Roosevelt explained the economy in the use of the American girls' work, strength, and time.

"The American women were over there to be of service with the soldiers," she said; "they waited on them in the canteens, played games with them, went on picnics and hikes with them, were always there to talk with them, entertain them, assist them all they could. It was felt that it was a waste to use the American women in the kitchens or behind the scenes where Frenchwomen could do the work as well. There were not many American girls there, after all; they were needed with the men. Moreover, the Frenchwomen needed the work, so it helped them, too; and it was a saving of money as well, for we could employ Frenchwomen for less than the Americans' expenses amounted to.

"The women who went to France had to be prepared for almost any kind of work, it is true," she went on; "especially at first, during the beginnings of things, the American women had to be ready to meet emergencies and to do most unusual and arduous things if the need arose. But they had to be ready, on the other hand, to sit all day long in an office in Paris pounding a typewriter—and that is what some people have not always understood."

Mrs. Roosevelt herself has had her full share of sticking to her precise duty when there were more romantic and spectacular spheres of action elsewhere. Much of her work was done in Paris, and—although she was in the French capital during raids and long-distance bombardments—her particular kind of war service never took her near the front lines.

"I expected to be two weeks in Aix, and I staid there three months," she said. "Then I was transferred to Brittany to work in the opening of the leave area there. After that we opened one in

Auvergne, then just as I was about to leave France—on the Riviera. Those four were the principal leave areas. But a good deal of the time after the work was begun in Savoie, I was in Paris in charge of the women's end in the office there. The Women's Bureau would select the women workers and send them to me to be assigned to the different areas and centres as they were needed. The bureau was so good," she added, thoughtfully, "about sending just the kind of women we needed.

"One of the things we always did," said Mrs. Roosevelt, "was to go to the train and see the boys off when they left us. We went to the station and shook hands with every one before they got on the train, and then we stayed and waved until the train was out of sight. And they always waved to us and sang and cheered. We knew we were the last American women many of them ever saw.

"One time, while I was at Aix, such a pathetic thing happened. A crowd of boys came down from the trenches, all ready to enjoy their leave, and the first day they all roamed around the place, seeing everything there was to see and getting good and tired, as they expressed it, so that they'd enjoy their sleep on real beds that night. They were all thrilled by the thought of the real beds. At 6 that evening orders came that they were to go back at 8. And off they went, in a special train. They never got their beds. Of course, they had been suddenly needed in the fighting; they wouldn't have been summoned like that for anything but the front. And not one complained. They went off as they had come, cheering - cheering and singing. 'Where do we go from here?'