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WHAT THE "BOYS" DID OVER THERE

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LIFE IN THE TRENCHES

BY CORP. FRANK SEARS

LIFE in the trenches is made up of "cooties," "rats," "mud" and "gas masks."

We had heard from fellows who had been there before us what we thought were jokes about "cooties" and trench rats, but it was no joke to me when I looked, for the first time, at a rat almost as big as a cat. It was lying in my bunk and I heard it squeal. Looking down I had my first view of a trench rat. I threw a heavy hob-nailed shoe at him and he merely changed his position and looked around to see who had interrupted him. After that it wasn't strange to wake up and find them running across you. But I will say that if it were a matter of choice, I would select a hundred rats in preference to two "cooties," for the "cootie" is an unreasonable bird, and when a Sammie has come back from the lines exhausted, he lays down in the hopes of snatching a few hours' sleep before being called on; but the "cooties" have no respect for Sammie and they pester him until he has

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no more idea of sleep, only to start in and hunt for the "cooties" that are annoying him.

You have all more or less had fever, but I guess there are none of you, over here, who knows of the "mud fever." We all used to shy at mud, during the rainy season in the year 1917. After a heavy storm the boys hated to go out to drill, as the mud got so bad there that the only way of getting out from the drill was by going on sick report in the morning. I remember the morning six buddies and myself went over to the infirmary. I happened to be the first one in line. The doctor came up to me and said:

"What's your trouble?"

At first I said, "I don't know, sir," and he said:

"Well, what are you doing here if you don't know? Where do you feel sick?"

And I told him all over. So he called the pill roller over and told him to take my temperature. I sat down and the pill roller put the glass tube in my mouth, which always "balled the detail up." He then held hands with me for a while and I asked him what he was doing. He told me he was taking my pulse. He then gave the final report to the "skipper" who came to me and said, "You have the 'mud fever'." He then turned to the orderly and said, "Give him

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two C.C. pills and mark him 'DUTY.'" That's how I happened to get over the mud fever. We became so used to mud, up in the lines, that if our "chow" did not have some mud, or muddy water, in it we could not digest it. It was just a case of mud all over: eat, drink, sleep and wash in mud.

And now for the "old reliable," which tortured us while wearing it, but without which we should have been lost. The gas mask!!!

We were not fortunate enough to have ever received the American gas masks and have never seen one over there. The first two American divisions received English and French masks. The English mask looks like a false face with two big glass eyes, and a nose clip which resembles a clothespin, and keeps the gas from going through the nostrils. There is also a tube which goes into the mouth, with a hard piece of rubber on it to make it air-tight. This mouth-piece is a long caterpillar tube which connects the mask to a tin can containing a chemical composition of charcoal, rocks, sand and other medical decoctions. There were times when we endured these masks from eighteen to thirty-six hours. Sometimes we would just get the order to take them off, and, thinking the danger passed, would get ready to eat, when the command to

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put them on again would be given. This is done by means of horns at intervals along the whole line of trenches. Each horn gives the signal which is repeated right through the lines. It is a wonderful relief after having a mask on a long time to be able to breathe fresh air again.

