

RETROSPECT-IN-BRIEF.

ARMISTICE IS SIGNED! sounded very "bon" when it came through "dinkum" on Nov. 11th. eh? Of course we had been anticipating it any moment for days before; and the "Furph Kings" had been continually giving out the "good oil". But at last it was honest "dinjin" fact, and it was at first somewhat difficult to realise fully all that it meant.

In now looking back over that era, there is little doubt that the desolate and impoverished region in and around MONTBREHAIN where we were billeted was the "fly in the ointment", the factor of our individual and collective calm. Infinite thoughts crowded one's brain. Few, if any, had that "push-a-tram-over" feeling-Armistice in itself was not sufficient to breed it. Inspiration was necessary, and it wasn't about, -especially in "pints".

We had been in this village previous to going on and covering the Scotties in their Oise Canal stunt, and had returned to clean our varied paraphernalias when the great news hit us. And times changed indeed. The war-worn-living-for-the-day" idea naturally gave place to some meanderings into the future, to glorious, soul-stirring anticipations. Home & all it's associations seemed to suddenly come almost within touch; dreams of years past appeared on the brink of materialisation. These thoughts were well-aided over the billet fire, and soon it was "Wonder how long it will be before we get a start on with demobilisation and "What will we be doing meantime?" Both problematical, -and who of us did not ponder over them? All would have desired to be off home at the "touts", but that was well understood to be impossible, the shipping difficulty, in itself, being fully realised.

Withal, the dull monotony of waiting, ekeing out existence the while in villages destitute of sparkle, would periodically play on the nervous tension & draw a squeal out of some of us, but everyone knew that everyone else was a jolly sight more philosophic than he sounded.

For a time, Football took hold, and there was many a good game & thumping afternoon at Rugby, Aussie Rules, and Soccer.

On two occasions there were brushes in connection with the details of "Carrying on", & it is sufficient comment so far as these notes are concerned to mention, that the "Heads" readily removed any established source of grievance.

Soon after the move to HAUTMONT towards the close of the Year, papers relative to Demobilisation, and also the Educational Scheme began to appear in their thousands, & on them we severally scratched a kind of "Military auto-biography". Things were moving in the right direction, and even though slowly, it was highly gratifying. The huge Demobilisation Machine was in operation, and everyone hoped that Divinity in it's wisdom would keep on suggesting to the Engineers all manner of improvements toward that solution of primary importance-Speed.

Meanwhile, there were veritable thunderstorms, deluges of brains. A School was set up and classes formed in the various Arts for the benefit of the keen and uninitiated. Those not over addicted to the mental tearings of fagging, remained in ambush, and in anticipation of a soft "oop" and sheets in Blighty, most emphatically impressed on themselves (and their application for Non-Military Employment paper) that it would be to their benefit for ever and ever amen if they had a course of -say, "Shipbuilding". But the majority of us came "proverbials"- "Sandbag Mary Ann".

There were murmurs of a draft going off. Who? How many? on it? Calculations were ripe. 'Twas refreshing, invigorating, rejuvenating, almost too good to be true. Do you recall the tears you shed on the 5th & 6th. March as you looked upon our first departing quotas, or were you "touring" Blighty, France & Belgium? Our religious Editor" could no longer contain his pathos when someone suggested to him that they were about to leave the dear, kindly, motherly care of the Army, and howled suitably to the occasion.

But how about LOBBES. Wasn't too dusty living the life of a retired "Beef King" out in the country, and doing the 4 or more Kilos. to parade by Car Electricque, What! Kiwied & otherwise generally polished, one stepped from his "Maison" on to the line, manicured whilst going along to the "Arret Fixe" nearby, boarded the on-coming tram and proceeded to "Here Sir," Who said "Portholes."

C. Whiting.

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