

A.E.F. MUST GROW LINGO OF ITS OWN

Men Have Already Taken
Words From Tommy
and Poilu

SHOP TALK IN EACH BRANCH

Infantryman, Engineer, Redleg,
Marine, Each Speaks Indi-
vidual Language

Has the A.E.F. in France a language of its own? That is, has it developed its slang to such an extent that an outsider would find it hard to understand a typical section of A.E.F. talk? Has its experience in France added to its already large stock of short cuts in language, or does it still employ the old slang of the Army and the slang of the parts of the States from which it hailed?

These are hard questions to answer, and we would like the help of our readers in answering them; for we have been asked them time and again. For our own part, we find that for all usual conversational purposes, the men of the A.E.F. continue to use the "plain United States" as it grows in their particular home town portions of that beautiful region. What purely "Army stuff" they use has been handed on to them by the grizzled old veterans who took part in the 1916 tour of border duty.

"Get by," "get away with it," "bull," "bull-con," "beefing"—all the good old phrases are heard on every hand as one walks through an Adrian barrack building or back of a company as it stands at rest. Occasionally one hears a little Mex talk—a man referred to as a good *hombre*, or an evening salutation of *buenas noches*. And, of course, interspersed with all these pieces of language there is a little left of the talk of the old Army; with prominently in the vanguard the old, old axiom, "You're out of luck!"

Borrowing From Tommy

"Crabbing," for grumbling or knocking, was perfectly good Americanese before that fateful day in April, 1917. It has not given way to "grousing," as employed by the Tommies. But from the Tommies has come "fed up," "carry on," and—in a few outfits more than usually exposed to British infection—such patent Anglicisms as "gawblyme" and—er, and the rest of them, including "not 'arf" and "strike me blind." Their use has not become general, however, nor is it apt to become so in the near future. The only really permanent acquisition thus far from the British linguistic treasure house is the expressive "dud,"—as applied to a bomb that won't go off, for example.

Perfectly good French, in the mouths of Americans, has passed for a sort of slang, if by slang one means a short-cut in expression, a handy way of describing something which cannot be tersely described any other way, a more pungent way of saying an old thing. *Allez-voes-en*, so much like "Arragh g'wan" of our Celtic neighbors, has sprung into favor in some localities, and is apt to spread. *Tout de suite* is quite as satisfactory as "in a jiff," and is so used now and again. But *allez-voes-en* and *tout de suite* are not French slang; they are dignified by enrolment in dictionary supplements, printed in good Italic type, as slang is not dignified. The poilu's *je m'en fiche*, which amounts to "I don't give a"—whatever one doesn't give—is about the only piece of real French Army slang that has been taken over bodily, or that is apt to stay taken over.

Armies today are so made up of specialists, so divided into units of specialists, that to find a universal language, a sort of khaki Esperanto that will go anywhere, is exceedingly hard. Engineers, for example, will have expressions of their own that will be Greek and Arabic and Hindustani to the humble infantryman, while the doughboy's lingo will contain many terms unknown to the allegedly high-brow engineer. A "dynamiter," in engineer parlance, is the nth degree of knocker, crabber, kicker, sourball. A "poison oaker" is about the same thing again. And as for the aviators? They speak the language of the spheres!

Speech That Transcends Slang

The cavalryman's and muleskinner's vocabulary is, of course, a thing apart, a thing which cannot be considered here. To be sure, it contains some expressions also current in more fortunate branches of the service (particularly when employed on K.P. and fatigue), but those expressions, when used by the trooper and Missouri-nightingale propeller, develop a fervor, an intensity, an exalted emotionalism utterly unattainable by the outsider. No, the argot of those who have to deal

with our four-footed friends—hay-burners and gas-burners (for the chauffeurs share the same common speech)—cannot properly be classed as slang.

The marines—"leathernecks" as they call themselves and allow us to call them—have a nautical, nautical language that smacks more of the crow's nest than the observation post. Some of us have tried to talk to them in plain U.S. and have come back baffled by their replies. They were courteous, kind and considerate; they brought forward those of their number who had been recently enlisted (and who therefore knew a little unadorned English) to act as interpreters, but all to no avail. What slang they had we couldn't quite make out but, as they seem to have everything else, they must have that too. They seem to have a fair speaking acquaintance with all the languages of the globe, from coon Haytianese to the real Castilian; but their patter of United States talk was unintelligible to the lay doughboy.

Each Has Own Shop Talk

Artillerymen, medical corps followers, supply train tenders—what's the use? They all have their pet expressions, their own shop talk slang as well as their pet virtues. There is, as far as we can find, no really Amex slang vocabulary worthy the title of a universal code. But, in the meanwhile, we must make our way from outfit to outfit, hearing in one the "you-all" and "two-bits" of the South, in another the "I swan" and "get me" of the North, in still another the peculiar diction of the great city which is New York. Universal slang in this man's Army is as hard to attain as universal peace in this man's world.