

**ON THE EDGE OF THE
STORM: THE STORY
OF A YEAR IN FRANCE**

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On the Edge of the Storm: The Story of a Year in France by Shepherd Knapp

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SHEPHERD KNAPP

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The Story of a Year in France

By

SHEPHERD KNAPP



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PREFACE

This is not a war story in the ordinary sense. It contains no descriptions of battles and front-line trenches. The War forms its background only; and the boys in khaki who figure in it appear in their human and personal capacity, rather than as units in the fighting machine. For it was when they had a chance to rest and play, time to talk and laugh and smoke and eat, that they came to the Y.

The letters from which the narrative is taken were, with a few self-evident exceptions, written to my family and the people of my church.

SHEPHERD KNAPP

Worcester, Mass.

November 11, 1921

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I. AT ST. NAZAIRE, THE PORT OF ENTRY

BEGINNING WORK

August 18, 1917. Here I am at the Y tent after my first day of active service, certainly a most eventful day. Of course, I am not permitted to say where I am, except that it is at the American camp known as Base No. 1. You can hardly imagine the strangeness and interest of this adventure, to me so entirely new: the military background; the being a part—though so small a one—of the military system; to wear khaki in a world where all is khaki; to be subject to military regulations. That is all curious; but the really interesting thing is the contact with the men. I have already had opportunity to get into touch with any number of Uncle Sam's boys, and that does seem worth while from the start. They are a fine-looking set of fellows; you would be proud of them.

I got here early yesterday morning, and breakfasted with the District Secretary. Later I saw the six or seven others. We had dinner in one of the Y tents in the town, the food being brought from the army mess, my first experience of that. Supper I got from the soldiers' mess myself, here at the camp, using my mess-kit. Breakfast the same this morning. That, as much as anything, makes me feel like a part of the Army. Another thing that seems funny enough is the saluting, trying to keep my right hand free so as to salute all officers, American and French.

All the afternoon I was behind the counter in the canteen, selling chocolate and candy and cigarettes to the boys, and having chats with a lot of them. It was great!

IN CHARGE AT THE CAMP

August 26. It seems to be settled that I take the position of Senior Secretary here at the camp, and I am working hard at the task of organizing the work for the eight of us who now make up the staff. It is particularly puzzling, because, until we get into our splendid hut, now nearing completion, every-