

AMERICAN ARTIST VISITS NEW BRITISH BASE CAMP



Preparing Rations.



Canadian Ambulance at Lord Kitchener's Camp.

Just Back from Etaples, France, He Tells of Vast Preparations for 1,500,000 Men.

C. Arnold Slade, the author of the article which follows, is an American artist of 32, who for seven years has spent a considerable length of time annually at Etaples, where many American and British artists gather, and which, as he explains, is now the British Army base camp in France. Mr. Slade's large canvas, "Christ on the Mountain," is owned by Mr. John Wanamaker, while Mrs. "Jack" Gardner of Boston has one of his landscapes. He has devoted himself much to oriental subjects.

By C. Arnold Slade.

THE movement of the new Kitchener army to France is now under full headway and any day may see the beginning of the actual offensive campaign to attempt to drive the Germans from France and Belgium. I can state this positively, because I have just arrived from Etaples, lately made the centre of British army activities, which has now become the base camp of the British in France and which is destined to play a most important part in the war.

I left Etaples, where I had been living with my wife since the outbreak of the war, in the first week of February. Etaples, a fishing town of 4,000 inhabitants, is on the coast, in the Department of Pas-de-Calais, about fifteen miles south of Boulogne. When I left the railroads of Northwestern France were just on the point of being closed to all civilian traffic for a period of one month. That month will soon be up. When it is, it will mean that 300,000 new British troops are in camp in the vicinity of Etaples, where, for miles, stretch the tents which are to shelter the latest legions raised by Kitchener until such time as they are ordered to the firing line, and that still other new British troops are in the trenches. When I left Etaples the first of the new force had just come—four regiments from Malta, where they had been in training for five months, having been sent there from England, relieving the regulars that had been garrisoning the island and who went to the front in France.

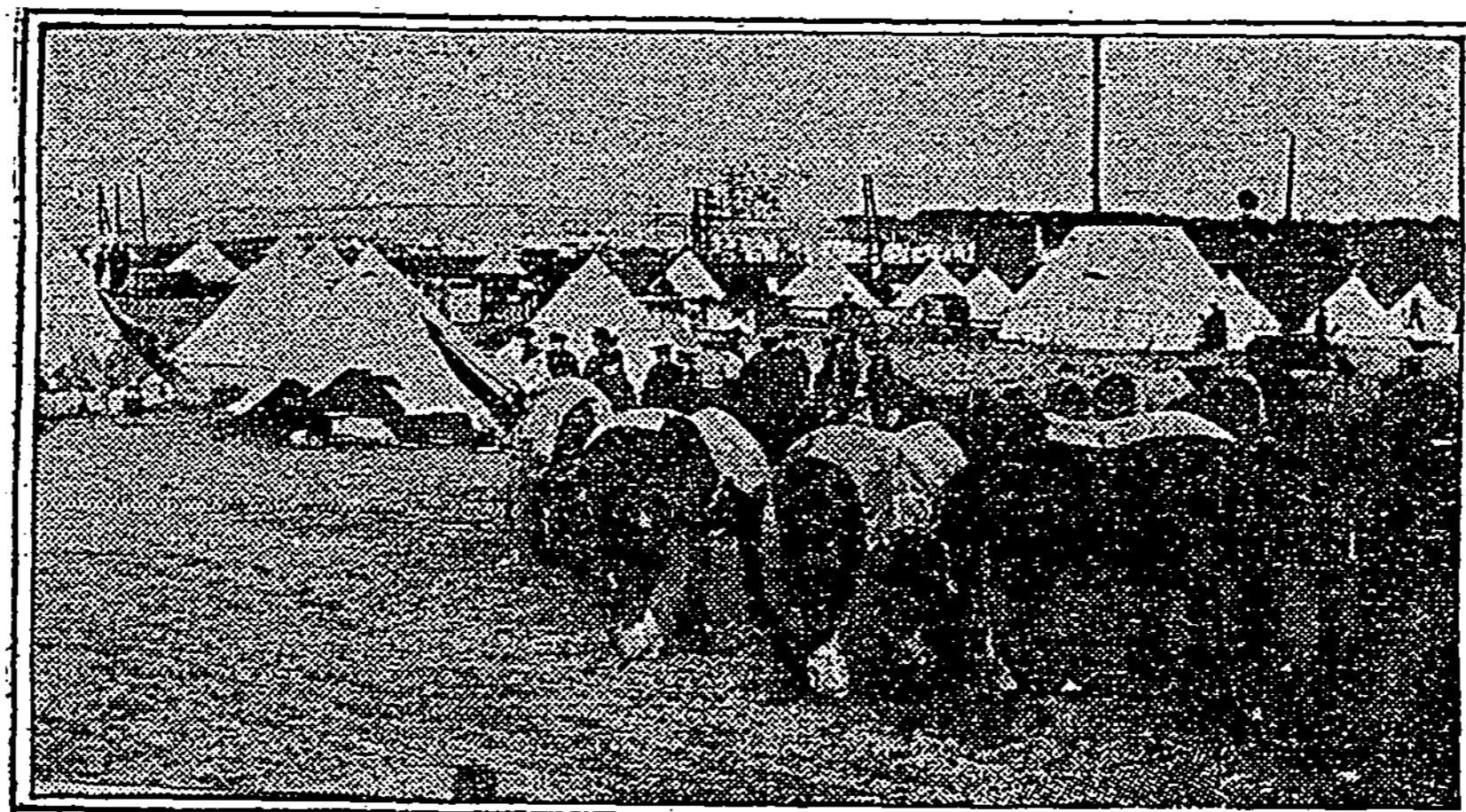
From conversations with British officers at the Etaples general headquarters, which have been established in the Hotel Regina, and elsewhere, I learned that, according to their estimates, Kitchener has raised 1,500,000 men for the intended offensive. The best estimates I have got from British officers show that 750,000 British troops, gathered from all parts of the Empire, have thus far constituted the British force in France and Belgium.

The plan for the Etaples camp, as I have gathered it from my frequent talks with the officers who were there in January and early this month, is that 300,000 men shall always be encamped there, ready to move at a moment's notice to any part of the battle front. As troops move out of the Etaples camp other troops will move in from England; this movement going on until the whole 1,500,000 have reached or passed through Etaples. The officers were of the opinion that in eight or nine weeks from the beginning of the movement, the whole 1,500,000 would be in France, so that all this Kitchener army should be in France about the first week in April. But the

commencement of the offensive will come long before that. Indeed, the first move of the offensive may be said to have come with the arrival of the Malta regiments—the vanguard of the vast host—at Etaples.

The troops are being landed at several ports—at Boulogne, Dieppe, Havre; Cherbourg, and the Brittany ports. Each transport is conveyed by battleships or cruisers, with torpedo boats and destroyers, the shipping of troops being, of course, a very risky business. Yet I heard of no instance in which a transport with troops aboard had been sunk, although

has been taken over by the British from the French, thus enabling the French to strengthen the lines further east. With the coming of the troops now in transit, the British lines will extend still further south, and it is planned that shortly the British will take over the lines from the French as far as the vicinity of Peronne, about thirty miles from Arras, or even beyond. This again will let the French make their lines to the east more massed and formidable, in preparation for the big offensive. The nearest point to Etaples on the British front is about forty miles away.



Camps like this extend from Etaples to Boulogne

I heard of some narrow escapes. Four German submarines were waiting near Plymouth for the transports with the first Canadian contingent aboard, but the submarines were sighted in time to be avoided. Subsequent Canadian contingents will go to France direct, and will not be taken to Salisbury Plain in England, for training, as was the first contingent.

At present the British battle line begins at Middlekerke, about four miles south of Ostend, in which region the Belgian troops are helping to hold the line, and extends all the way to Arras, about sixty miles. As more and more British troops have reached France, more and more mileage of battle front

Some idea of the nature of the fighting to which the British are looking forward may be gathered from the fact that the French wounded—those able to travel—are being moved out of practically all the hospitals in the area between Dieppe and Havre on the coast and from hospitals well inland opposite that area, the French going to the south of France, and that it is being sought to have 175,000 free beds for the British wounded by the time the offensive is well under way.

Not only are the French hospitals in the regions named being emptied of those able to travel, but the British themselves are preparing new hospitals the whole way along the coast from Boulogne to

Havre—120 miles or so. Summer hotels are being turned into hospitals, as well as commandeered villas of wealthy people. Among the commandeered villas is that of the millionaire Count Constanovitch, who married an American, and villas of a number of rich Americans. Peeresses and other British women of prominence are in charge of several of these new hospitals; many of which are already fully equipped and only waiting their tenants—thousands of the young men who are now being rushed toward the battle line.

An idea of the all-embracing way in which the British are commandeering buildings and converting them into hospitals for the new army may be got from a consideration of the hotels at the famous resort of Le Touquet, practically a part of Etaples, and widely popular in the season as a second Monte Carlo. At Le Touquet the British are about to take over the Hotel Hermitage, (now a French hospital,) and put in 800 hospital beds; they are taking over the Hotel Atlantic, 800 beds; Grand Hotel, 350; the great Casino has been taken over by a hospital corps under the direction of the Duchess of Westminster, and 350 beds installed; the Hotel Golf has 350 beds, and it is in charge of the first Canadian Hospital Force. At Montreuil-sur-Mer, nearby, there are beds for 800 Indian soldiers.

For ten miles south of Etaples the great beach, one-fourth of a mile wide, will be used as a hospital camp, with 5,000 hospital tents, the tents extending toward Berck-sur-Mer. Opposite the main railroad station at Etaples is an emergency hospital. Lady Angela Forbes has established a canteen at Etaples, where the soldiers may buy various little luxuries at cost price.

Another fact significant of the operations in contemplation is that the entire area of Northwestern France is being cleared of refugees, who are being sent to the south, while even the entire civilian population of towns and villages in close proximity to the present battle front is being sent away in preparation for the coming offensive.

Etaples has been chosen as the base camp for the whole British Army on the Continent because, first, of its location as a strategic railroad centre, from which troops can be rushed north, south, or east; and because, second, of its great springs of fine water and its other natural advantages as a camping ground for enormous bodies of men.

For weeks before I left men had been busy building the wooden floors for the tents for the huge soldiers' encampment of Etaples. (I do not now speak of the hospital tents.) The encampment is about 500 yards from the sea, on high rolling ground. The tents are the round regulation army tents, each tent holding from ten to eighteen men. The tents are arranged in regimental units, each unit complete in itself, with cooking and other departments. There are miles and miles of these tents.

Before I left a fine water system was being installed, with great mains on a colossal scale, suited to the vast needs which must be met. It will be a great improvement over the old system by



Beginning a Camp of 300,000 Men

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which water carts used to go around among the troops already on the ground and distribute water, each man being allowed a gallon a day.

At Etaples, too, the official bathing establishments have been organized. Gas and other factories, and the big fish market, have been turned into bathing places, with quantities of hot water, and a regular military bathing system, by which the soldiers can be handled with speed in details of 100 at a time.

The populations of England and France are at present entirely ignorant of the great movement now under way, of the establishment of the base camp at Etaples, and of the tremendous preparations in general, so secretly is everything done.

The British manage splendidly in everything, and their troops are amazingly well equipped. There seems to be nothing lacking, and everything is the latest, newest, best. The hospitals have the finest kind of operating tables, beautiful enameled beds, powerful and smoothly running ambulances, and complete equipment in every detail. The soldiers have elaborate kits, new and natty uniforms, and most of them have their pockets full of spending money. The British equipment lacks nothing that money can buy. The horses are superb.

The British Tommy has bought out the stores in many villages over a wide area in that part of France which may be called English—for it is certainly absolutely under British control—and in some instances storekeepers have had to appeal to the commanding officers and have had rules made that not more than six men shall be admitted to one store at one

time. The storekeepers are actually carried off their feet by the rush of business.

Boulogne is practically an English city now, and the whole sweep of the coast south toward Havre is under British control. English money passes just as readily as French money. The British soldiers pay for everything, whereas the French, being in their own land and in a desperate war, do not.

I understand that stories have come to the United States that the soldiers in the trenches are suffering from lack of food. I know little about the other armies at first hand, but I do know that the British soldiers are faring well in the trenches, for I have talked with dozens of them with the trench mud still wet on them. There is ample food in the British trenches except when very heavy firing is going on, and then the men have a thick soup, almost a stew, which comes in cans, and which has some sort of ingenious gas arrangement by which, when the tops are taken off the cans, the soup is heated. Under heavy fire they have this soup, but in routine times the trench menu for Tommy Atkins is about like this:

BREAKFAST — Bacon, loaf bread (chiefly sent from Boulogne, where the army has huge bakeries,) jam, tea, tobacco.

DINNER.—Beef soup, with vegetables and meat in it, or beef, green onions or other vegetable, bread, tea, tobacco.

SUPPER.—Bacon, bread, jam, cheese, tea, tobacco.

The officers, and some of the men, have been having a lot of pheasants, thousands of the birds being sent from England. I have had pheasant many times at officers' mess. On occasions there has been

so much beef for the soldiers that some of it has spoiled and had to be buried.

Where British troops are not on the firing line, but are being held in reserve some miles back, order is maintained—and this system is also in vogue at Etaples—by mounted police. Order is kept as well as it is in New York City. At 8 o'clock these police make a round-up of the cafés and other assembling places. If any man is found who has not a permit allowing him to be out, he is arrested and sent up to Boulogne to be court-martialed.

The British have, of course, absolute power over the French inhabitants. As an instance, two English Colonels arrived at the Hotel de la Gare, Etaples, a few nights before I left. They told some of us Americans they had not slept in a bed for three weeks. They commanded their orderly to reserve rooms for them, and turned into the dining room. The orderly obeyed, but the landlady—who has been making a small fortune since the war—proceeded to give the rooms to other travelers who arrived shortly after the Colonels, and from whom she thought she would get more money.

When the Colonels found out that their rooms were gone, they summoned the landlady. One of them fixed her with his monocle and said, in perfect French: "Your hotel is closed for the rest of the war."

There the matter rested for a couple of hours, but a few of us Americans managed to get the affair straightened out by having the landlady apologize, and having some men give up their rooms to the Colonels. The British power is absolute, but just, and quite in accord with the reasonable rights of

French citizens. The British pay so well for everything that they are quite winning their way into the hearts of the French peasants.

In the early days of the war we Americans at Etaples saw tens of thousands of the British troops who passed through by train on the way to Belgium. These were the troops that had been in the great retreat early in September almost to the walls of Paris, and a little later were going back by railroad. The American artists, organized into two shifts, each on duty for twelve hours, gave their services to the canteen established at the railroad station to supply hot food and drink to the exhausted soldiers, all trains stopping at Etaples.

We learned that one of the main contributing factors accounting for the sudden shift to the east of the German forces, leaving Paris to one side, was the sudden appearance of a French army of 40,000 men, which had been mobilized by automobile. The German air scouts had failed to realize that individual motor cars were mobilizing an army corps, as the airmen were on the lookout for marching bodies of troops.

Shortly before leaving Etaples I heard, from a rather high British officer, something which is interesting as to British discipline. This officer told me that, as a result of the friendliness at certain points of the front exhibited on Christmas Day between British and German soldiers, when the opponents chatted and skylarked together, a number of officers had been court-martialed and shot for permitting their men to have anything to do with the Germans. The British commanders take the ground that this is treason.