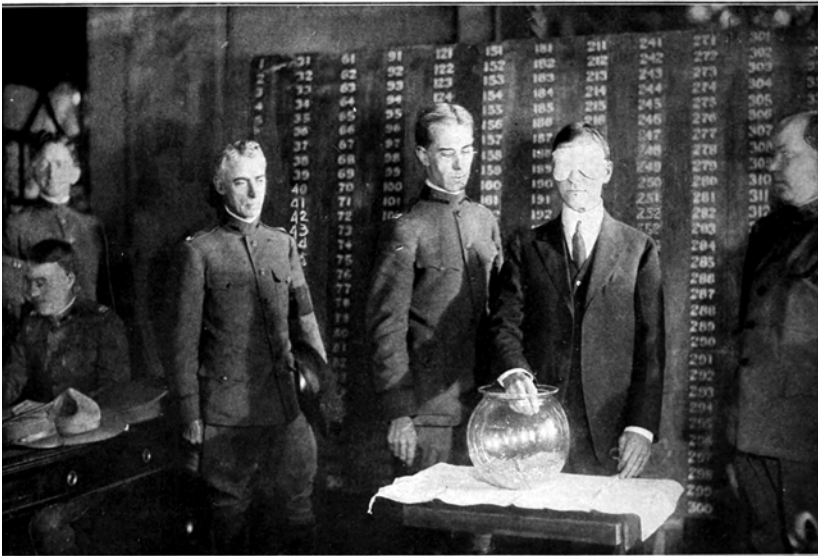


## Chapter 60

# Trenches and Tanks

NOW came the time when we realized our need for preparedness. The situation abroad was critical. The Czar of Russia had been forced to abdicate his throne. Now the country of Russia was in the hands of communist revolutionists who deserted the cause of the Allies. If help were to come from America, it must come quickly. We had to face the fact that we were a nation lacking ships, ammunition, supplies, and trained soldiers. But though we were a nation unready for war, we knew ourselves rich in strength, patriotism, and materials from which we could form the things needed.

Uncle Sam took a deep breath and settled down to work, and everybody helped. The Selective Draft system was used to gather soldiers. The President commanded all young men



*The Selective Draft system was used to gather soldiers*

to write their names and where they lived on cards and send them to Washington. These cards were then numbered and put in small drawers so that they could be easily retrieved when wanted.

When the information had been gathered, the government official in charge of the cards made an announcement. On July 20, 1917, he would begin to select the names of young men who would enter the new fighting force. The selection was made in the fairest possible manner so that all might be treated alike, and no one could say that his name had been picked out on purpose. Many slips of paper, each with a number printed on it, were deposited in a large glass jar. Then the officer in charge of the draft closed his eyes, pulled on a blindfold, and drew out a slip from the jar. The paper was then opened, and the number on it decided who would enter the new American Army of Liberty.

Some young men chosen had people dependent on them for support, were physically unfit, or could furnish some equally good reason for exemption from military service. They were excused. The rest were sent to training camps to be drilled into Yankee fighters. Many had never in their lives held a gun, and some had never seen a gun fired. But they were quick to learn, prompt to act, and eager to do their part in the Great War.

These camps sprang up in different parts of the land and were like complete cities. Here the men were taught military rules, made accustomed to outdoor life, and were fitted to endure the hardships which so many later suffered on the battlefronts.

To furnish clothing, food, and equipment for our men, big factories worked overtime for the government. Huge ship-building yards hummed day and night in an effort to provide ships to carry the soldiers and supplies overseas. Munition

plants turned out thousands of weapons and enormous quantities of ammunition. Airplanes, too, were built—the eyes of the army. And along formerly quiet roads rumbled hundreds of great trucks bound from their factories to seaports where they would start on their journey “over there.”

The money for these costly preparations came from the people in the form of taxes and investments in War Savings Stamps and Liberty Bonds.

Good food and plenty of it is one of the most practical necessities for a victorious army. Without it, no soldiers, however brave and well supplied with weapons, can win a war. That was why everyone had to be so careful not to waste a bit of food while the war lasted and why everyone was urged to plant a war garden. Besides our soldiers and our own people here at home, we needed to help feed our Allies. So a special group of men was appointed to control our food supply and see that everybody had enough, but none went to waste.

A Fuel Administrator was also appointed to regulate the distribution of coal because the war factories used so much that the supply was not enough to fill all needs.

When our men were ready, they sailed for France — many thousands going over at a time. Knowing they were coming, the Germans ordered their submarines to be on the watch and to sink every Yankee transport ship. But we, too, were on the lookout, and American or English war vessels always crossed the Atlantic with our boys to guard them against attack. No American transport ship was ever sunk on its way to Europe.

These steamers also carried many Red Cross nurses and Salvation Army Lassies to France. They went to look after the comfort and welfare of the soldiers. The Salvation Army Lassies kept near the firing line. In their huts, they were always ready to serve the tired fighters hot coffee and doughnuts.



*Red Cross nurses were assisted by rescue dogs*

The Red Cross nurses cared for those who fell sick or were wounded in battle. These nurses were assisted by Red Cross dogs trained to search for missing soldiers who had been so badly hurt that they could neither move nor call for help. When the dogs found such men, they would trot back and get someone to go with them and bring the poor fellows to the hospital.

You might think that the first thing the soldiers did when they arrived in France was to use their guns. But, no, the first thing they did was to use their spades. They dug long lines of deep trenches or ditches and hollowed out rude rooms and passages underground. These were for shelter and defense against attack. So, too, they built strong fences and entangle-



*The men fought, ate, and slept in the trenches*

ments of barbed wire to keep the enemy at a distance. No one likes to stand very long in a ditch, but our soldiers had to do it. When it rained, they often stood in mud and water a foot deep.

In these trenches and underground dugouts, the men did more than fight, for there, many of them ate and slept. They lived there because, often, dugouts were the only safe places.

What did they see when they looked out from their trenches? In front of them, not very far away, they saw long stretches of barbed wire. Behind those cruel-looking entanglements, they saw trenches like their own, but those swarmed with German soldiers. These soldiers fired at ours whenever they had a good chance, just as our men fired back at the Germans. That was what they were there for.

Both sides used the same kinds of weapons, such as machine guns which could shoot hundreds of bullets in a minute. So, too, both sides threw thousands of cast-iron explosive shells, about as big as an orange, at each other. Those who worked the cannons fired giant shells, sometimes

weighing a ton or more. These would rush screaming through the sky, bursting with a terrific crash when they struck and tearing everything to pieces around them.

There would be days when the soldiers in the trenches, on both sides, would suddenly climb out and engage in fierce hand-to-hand fights in "No Man's Land." This was the name given to the barren strip of land that separated the combatants from each other.

But there was another kind of weapon that proved effective and was entirely different from anything we have described. This new war machine had nothing to do with war when it was invented. It was a big, strong automobile designed by an American and manufactured in California. It was built to do certain kinds of farm work on rough ground where neither horses nor oxen could be used. The machine had enormous pulling power, and in place of rubber wheels, it was propelled by a continuous band of steel plates. It was called a Caterpillar Tractor. It could easily force its way over stones, through brush, and up and down steep places where an ordinary automobile would have been upset and knocked to pieces. In doing this, the tractor could drag gangs of heavy plows, which would break up the hardest soil and prepare it for raising crops of wheat and corn.

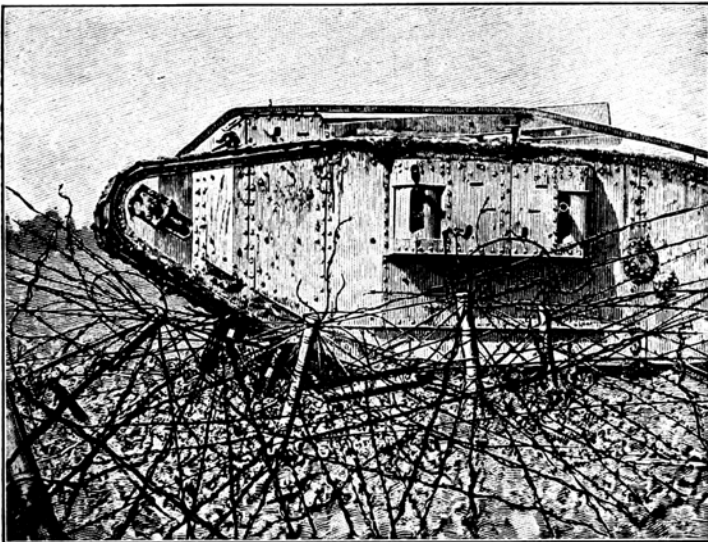
An English military officer happened to see this machine. He gazed at it in silence and then said, "This is just the sort of thing we want in the war against the Germans. This thing can be made to fight." So he bought several of these tractors before they were put together, and had the parts boxed up and shipped to England. There, some alterations were made to the strange machines, and they were covered over with plates of steel. All work was done secretly so that the Germans might not discover what they were. Luckily a report got abroad that



they were water tanks for carrying water, though, in reality, they were forts on wheels, made to carry men and guns.

When they were finished, they were sent off to the battlefields of France. As soon as the English soldiers over there caught sight of them, they laughed outright at the awkward way these new “water carriers” stumbled along. They predicted that they would speedily get wrecked. But the tanks, as they came to be called, astonished everybody by beating down and breaking through German barbed-wire entanglements and utterly destroying the enemy’s nests of machine guns. For what harm could the enemy’s showers of bullets do to these slow-moving monsters, protected by walls of steel? They stopped at nothing but went straight across trenches or down into them and out again without tipping over.

From then on, it was plain that however strange the tanks might look or act, they would certainly do their bit. They did do it and so helped to gain some hard-fought battles that might have been lost without them.



*Tanks broke through barbed-wire entanglements*