

THE 88th DIVISION IN THE WORLD WAR OF 1914 - 19 18

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ENTERTAINMENT

During the stay of the Division at Gondrecourt, under the direction of the Division Entertainment Officer, an effort was made to furnish entertainment to every man in the Division every night. Y. M. C. A. productions, local talent shows or moving pictures were presented in every town in the divisional area almost every night. During these months the several units of the Division organized minstrel and vaudeville shows from talent within the organizations. The 175th Brigade, the 313th Engineers, the 351st Infantry, with two shows, the 352d Infantry, the 313th Sanitary Train, all produced shows. They toured the Division and Second Army area. The first show of the 351st Infantry and the 313th Engineers show toured the Third Army area in Germany. The 175th Brigade show played in the Second Army area and in the S. O. S. and Paris, and met with success everywhere.

In April, Miss Margaret Wilson visited the Division and sang for the officers and men throughout the towns of the area and met with an enthusiastic reception everywhere.

The last and biggest show produced within the Division was the Division Show, a Song and Dance Revue, entitled "Who Can Tell." It had for its purpose not only to entertain but to present a genuine "doughboy show," a show that would fairly represent what the doughboys could do. **Who Can Tell" was staged under the direction of Dinnie MacDonald. Captain Arthur B. Kachel, the Division Entertainment Officer, was general manager. The music of the show was composed by 2d Lt. Edward J. Collins. The book and lyrics were written by Elbert Moore, Dinnie MacDonald, 1st Lt. Wm. D. Darrow and Musician H. L. Gear. The Jewish Welfare Board contributed 75,000 francs for the costumes which were made by Landolff, Paris. The Salvation Army, the Y. M. C. A. and the Knights of Columbus assisted in furnishing property. The men of the Division contributed 15,000 francs for the general expenses of the show.

After six weeks' preparation, the show was produced. During this time, the music was composed and orchestrated; lyrics were written; an orchestra of 35 men was selected and trained. A cast and chorus of 125 men were picked and drilled. Doughboy amateurs were trained until they performed like professional actors and actresses. A theatre consisting of two aviation hangars had to be constructed to house the show. A stage had to be built and scenery painted.

On April 21st, 1919, the Division show was presented in the double hangar theatre at Gondrecourt. Musician Harold Gilles as Head Waiter, detective and Hiram Scarum was the chief comedian of the show. His Scarumville act was a distinct success. He was ably assisted by Musician Charles Tolstel, Sergeant Milton Strauss and Musician Frank E. Soil. Corporal Carl McKee, as prima donna, sang and danced his way to success. He sang "Love Divine" and the "Clover Leaf Song." Dinnie MacDonald, Musician H. L. Gear, Musician Charles Tolstoi, Private Kenneth Foley, Sergeant Rollo S. Thorpe, Sergeant G. Harrington, Corporal H. A. Mench and Private Walter Peterson sang other song hits of the show.

Private W. R. Smith as Mrs. Gondrecourt played with distinction an important and difficult role. The chorus of West Pointers, Scotch Highlanders, French and Italian soldiers, of graceful show girls and dancing ponies was the distinctive feature of the show. There were graceful dancers and clever comedy. The gypsy scene was picturesque and the Persian scene was strikingly beautiful and spectacular, and the captivating music of Lt. Collins enshrined the American doughboy in the hearts of the French and American audiences.

"Who Can Tell" was presented eleven successive nights at Gondrecourt. Twenty-five hundred men of the Division were brought in by trucks each night to see the performance, until all the men of the Division and many French people and many troops of nearby units had seen it. From Gondrecourt, the Division show went to Coblenz, where it showed two nights. From Coblenz, the show went to Paris. In

Paris the show was presented for the first time in a real theatre — the Champs Elysees Theatre. For six nights, commencing May 12th, the show played to a packed house. After the first night, several thousand persons were turned away nightly. President Wilson and party attended the last performance of the show. In its edition of May 14th, the dramatic critic of the Chicago Tribune in a letter addressed to the editor made the following comment:

"There have only been two things of real importance in Paris since you went away — the threat of the Germans to leave the Peace Conference, and the opening Monday night at the Champs Elysees Theatre of the 88th Division Show, 'Who Can Tell.' Some show, Boy, some show! It's the best amateur show I have ever seen on either side of the water. There are a lot of Broadway shows getting three dollars that ought to be sent to warehouse to let this one in for a run."

"It isn't a show — it's a production. In costumes, it makes the 'Garden of Allah' look like a rookie. I think Major General William Weigel must have assigned the whole regiment to the cast, for when they came out over the footlights on those run-around boards in the orchestra, they filled the duckboards and the whole stage."

"And a pony ballet! With the cutest little fat legs you ever saw. They got a hand every time they came on. You would never know they were doughboys until they began to sing. 'Who Can Tell' is a kind of musical burlesque with enough of a plot to keep the show in military channels for three hours."