

# The "Whiz Bangs" Are Home Again



CONVALESCENT ENTERTAINERS, "THE WHIZ BANGS."

After weeks spent in the mud and noise of the trenches, after the doughboy had once more become a normal American, and after the wounded had lain for weeks suffering from the terrible wounds of battle, the problem of providing suitable amusements, something wholesome with which to divert their minds and sustain the morale so necessary to the army, was one of the gravest which confronted the officers in command of America's best.

The Y. M. C. A. and Knights of Columbus provided a variety of rest huts, but the boys needed something in the line of amusement, something which would take the place of shows and vaudeville performances back home. Therefore when some or two of the convalescent men on their own initiative put on a performance for amusement of the wounded in Base hospital 46 at Bazouilles-en-Meuse, officials immediately took steps to keep the organization together.

Lawrence Hager, a resident of Bridgeport for some time before entering the service, was one of the boys in the company. He had been on the stage with musical comedies, among which were "Harry O," "There She Goes," and the Lakeside Opera company at Denver, Colo.

Reviewed by Royalty.

Mr. Hager entered service with the 32nd division, Co. A, 320th machine gun battalion on April 24, 1918 and sailed from New York to Liverpool. During his way in London his division paraded before the King and Queen of England, and finally was sent across the channel to France. Here they were placed with British troops in the Toul sector. The division was afterward brigaded with French troops in the Marbache and St. Mihiel sectors, and were fighting almost continuously. Mr. Hager states that he was in the engagement in which Colonel Pike was killed, and the division was also in engagements at Balmey, Chaperentry, Fleville, Chabery, in the Viergette sector, and in the Argonne forest, from September 30 to October 31. On October 15 he received a wound in the forehead at St. Jovin during an advance, and the scar which results will be a constant reminder of the many days spent under fire of the German guns.

Making his way to the dressing station, the only one left of his squad, Private Hager received first aid and was later placed on a Red Cross train and arrived at Base hospital 46, where he remained ten weeks. It was during his convalescence here that he met Val Marconi, well known among theatre goers of the United States. Marconi has thrilled audiences of this country from coast to coast with his superb playing on the accordion, and at the time of entering the army was engaged in playing at the Hippodrome in New York. He had been also one of the best drawing cards at the La Salle theatre in Chicago for a long time.

Connected with an ambulance corps, he spent his spare time in playing for the sick and wounded in base hospitals and nursing camps to the ward in which Private Hager was recovering from his wound.

The reunion was a pleasant one for both who had known each other in the professional world of the states and in the company of convalescents. It was learned that several more well known entertainers were located in the same hospital. It was then decided to give a vaudeville show for the entertainment of the sick in Base Hospital 46. Preparations were started at once and permission was obtained from the military authorities.

Among the professionals rounded up to supply the talent were many whose names are familiar to Bridgeporters.

Val Marconi needs no introduction as his reputation on the accordion has afforded many Bridgeport theater patrons hours of pleasure.

"Sunshine" George Hall, who appeared with Mrs. Vernon Castle in the screen film "Paris" and who was connected with the Mary Bennett screen offerings, before entering the service is also familiar to many local people who secured his monologue "Back From the Front" was one of the numbers, which never failed to please the doughboys.

Victor Orz, whose wonderful voice is better known in the west, was a



LAWRENCE HAGER.

member of the Oregon Opera company, was another whose services were enlisted.

Charles Bauer, another familiar vaudeville entertainer, has also appeared in Bridgeport with a vaudeville team known as Bauer and Saunders. He was a member of the singing trio known as "That Trio," and joined the troop.

Jack Weyman, whose anti-Louis Edwards presentation "School Days" has given local people many laughs was also rounded up for the entertainment.

Johnny Ryan, a clever dancer who appeared in Chicago and the middle west with a "Jazz" specialty act, offered to appear with the boys, and was a delighted addition to the organization.

The name of Charles Spield, another member, is one which needs no introduction. His connections with Remick's music publishing house in New York and his many compositions have been sung in thousands of Bridgeport homes. It was largely due to his efforts that a fine program was arranged, and several of the songs rendered were of his composition.

Jack Bolton, formerly with the "September March" company was also asked to join.

Charles Bowman, a backing comedian, completed the organization. Mr. Bowman has appeared in theaters all over the world and was at one time booked in an English music hall with our own Charlie Chaplin.

### The Whiz Bangs.

The organization was called the "Whiz Bangs" and was the original company, and while many "whiz bangs" companies have since come to life among the entertainers of the A. E. F., these were the real original company.

When the first entertainment had

been rehearsed, not only were the convalescent soldiers allowed to attend, but officers and nurses and all hospital attendants witnessed the performance. To say that the voluntary entertainers scored a hit, it putting it very mildly. The pleasure of both the convalescent and the home sick Americans as well of those of other nations at witnessing a real American show was so great, that steps were immediately taken to hold the organization of "Whiz Bangs" together. Permission was finally given the boys to tour the country. They were placed under the direction of the Y. M. C. A., who arranged the bookings and they were relieved from all military duties although still in the service. When some of them were offered a chance to return to the states, they refused, as they fully appreciated the great pleasure the soldiers took in witnessing a live American show so far from home.

Entertainments were given in hospitals, theatres, rest camps, embarkation camps, in fact anywhere that a tired or homesick soldier was on leave or able to witness a performance. Many boys, tired and jaded after many weary weeks of fighting, whose interest in everything had made him almost a wreck of his former self, was aroused to an active interest in things of the world, and forgot for a time the horrors which can never entirely be obliterated from his memory.

### At Monte Carlo.

One of the most interesting places visited by the Whiz Bangs was Monte Carlo. They staged their show at the world-renowned Casino, and one of the spectators was the Prince of Monaco. Other members of royalty who witnessed their performance were the Queen and Princess of Roumania and the Infanta of Spain. They also played three dates in Paris, the last one in the famous Champ Elysees theatre on April 17, 18, and 19 of this year.

In one of the rest camps, the audience for three nights in succession was composed of 7000 soldiers on leave. Everything pleased them, and their appreciation of the efforts of the Whiz Bangs was noted by the many letters to which they were called to respond.

The program consisted of a general vaudeville entertainment with the usual songs, dancing and general "jazz" added to give rest. Both sentimental and patriotic songs were rendered and most of them were the compositions of Mr. Spield. One of the numbers sung by Mr. Hager was his own.

Some of the cities at which they appeared were Akeley-Eldon, a famous health resort; Chamoni, at the foot of Mt. Blanc; Grenoble, which is noted for being the place at which the painting "September Morn" was

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The Y. M. C. A. and Knights of Columbus provided cheerful rest huts, but the boys needed something in the line of amusement, something which would take the place of shows and vaudeville performances back home. Therefore when nine or ten of the convalescent men on their own initiative put on a performance for amusement of the wounded in Base hospital 46 at Bazailles-on-the-Meuse, officials immediately took steps to keep the organization together.

Lawrence Hager, a resident of Bridgeport for some time before entering the service, was one of the boys in the company. He had been on the stage with musical comedies, among which were Harry Orr's "There She Goes," and the Lakeside Opera company at Denver, Colo.

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Mr. Hager entered service with the 82nd division, Co. A, 320th machine gun battalion on April 25, 1918 and sailed from New York to Liverpool. During his stay in London his division paraded before the King and Queen of England, and finally was sent across the channel to France. Here they were placed with British troops in the Toul sector. The division was afterward brigaded with French troops in the Marbache and St. Mihiel sectors, and were fighting almost continuously. Mr. Hager states that he was in the engagement in which Colonel Pike was killed, and the division was also in engagements at Bailney, Charpentry, Elxville, Chobert, and the Verdun



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Charles Bauer, another familiar vaudeville entertainer, has also appeared in Bridgeport with a vaudeville team known as Bauer and Saunders. He was a member of the singers trio known as "That Trio," and joined the troop.

Jack Weyman, whose antics in Gus Edwards' presentation "School Days" has given local people many laughs was also rounded up for the entertainment.

Johnny Byam, a clever dancer, who appeared in Chicago and the middle west with a "jazz" specialty act, offered to appear with the boys, and was a decided addition to the organization.

The name of Charles Spidell, another member, is one which needs no introduction. His connection with Remick's music publishing house of New York and his many compositions have been sung in thousands of

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Connected with an ambulance corps, he spent his spare time in playing for the sick and wounded in base hospitals, and one day came to the ward in which Private Hager was recovering from his wound.

The reunion was a pleasant one for both who had known each other in the professional world of the states and in the exchange of confidences, it was learned that several more well known entertainers were located in the same town. It was then decided to give a vaudeville show for the entertainment of the sick in Base Hospital 46. Preparations were started at once and permission was obtained from the military authorities.

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"Sunshine" George Hall, who appeared with Mrs. Vernon Castle in the screen film "Patria" and who was connected with the Mack Sennett screen offerings, before entering the service is also familiar to many local people was secured. His monologue "Back From the Front" was one of the numbers which never failed to please the doughboys.

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Jack Belco formerly with the "September Morn" company was also asked to join.

Charles Bowman, a blackface comedian, completed the organization. Mr. Bowman has appeared in theaters all over the world and was at one time booked in an English music hall with our own Charlie Chaplin.

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In one of the rest camps, the audience for three nights in succession was composed of 7000 soldiers on leave. Everything pleased them, and their appreciation of the efforts of the Whiz Bangs was noted by the many encores to which they were called to respond.

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