

SOAR Curricular Material #17

***Their Bit* (March 1919—Excerpt on Chemical Warfare Service—Abridged Version)**

In following the events of the war, that has just ceased, especially the events which occurred after our entry into the conflict on April 6, 1917, are we not prone to follow and glory in the deed of valor of our men on the battlefield and to neglect giving credit to those who, unable to give their services on the battlefield, whatever the cause may have been, gave their all in whatever their causes may have been, gave their all in whatever work they may have been assigned to? *We need not be told that we cannot choose our work in the service*, and a lamentable excuse of an army we should have if that were the case. It is not the wish of the writer to take away any of the credit of those who so nobly served on the battlefield or overseas, many of whom have made the supreme sacrifice, that you and I might enjoy the liberty we have always known and which is most dear to us, but *to give some little praise* to those whom he met in the various camps of the United States during fifteen months of service, more especially to the men in the service who labored day and night in the numerous toxic gas plants throughout the country, in order that their brothers overseas might have the necessary weapons with which they might successfully combat the enemy. He refers to the men of Chemical Warfare Service, which branch of the service was organized as a separate corps as of August 1, 1919, although toxic gases were being manufactured previous to that time under the supervision of the Ordnance Department. The public knew very little of the activities of this corps for “War Reasons,” and *the writer does not doubt that some few who see this article will learn for the first time that there was a branch of the service known as the Chemical Warfare Service*. All that the men in this branch of the service knew of it was that the gas was needed “over there,” and without any further questioning, they set to it and manufactured it as best they could and as rapidly as possible, of times with the crudest of apparatus and with great personal danger to themselves. The Chemical Warfare Service was composed largely of men who, previous to their entry into the service, had had training along chemical lines, and of limited and domestic service men. *Since the writer was stationed at the Stamford Plant, of the Edgewood Arsenal*, located at Stamford, Conn., and as it is the only plant with which he is acquainted, he shall confine himself to a short description of the work of these men who were stationed at that plant. Possibly you can better appreciate and understand the dangers incurred in the manufacture when you are told that *in one plant of approximately seven thousand men there were 2200 cases of men that were gassed or burned; 900 of them being serious*. And yet their motto was “Carry On.” The men themselves having been honorably discharged from the service and are again in civilian life. All of them have done their small part, and insofar have *helped to turn the history of the world to a brighter and happier future*.

~~R.D.H. '15

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Document-Based Question and Analysis

- 1) What is the main idea of this article?
- 2) What is the purpose of this article?
- 3) Who are the author and the intended audience of the piece? What lets you know this?
- 4) “*We need not be told that we cannot choose our work in the service.*”
 - a. How does this statement reflect the ideas of Volunteer Military Service and the draft system that were discussed in the 1918 *Comenian* articles we read in class?
 - b. With which system of recruitment are you more in favor of? Why?
- 5) What was the Chemical Warfare Service?
- 6) Describe the conditions of the CWS that the men stationed in the plants faced. Be sure to also include the number of deaths or injuries that resulted in the plants in your response.
- 7) “*Since the writer was stationed at the Stamford Plant, of the Edgewood Arsenal...*”
 - a. How might this fact about the author affect the credibility of this piece?
 - b. How would this writer’s experience cause a bias or particular viewpoint on the CWS in this article?
- 8) In what way(s) have the men in the CWS “*helped to turn the history of the world to a brighter and happier future?*”