

The costumes nearly finished me? You see this little town is so primitive that I was afraid of suggesting modern peasants if I used some things, whereas walliots and strips of burlap for leggings would have a military connotation. Luckily I was able to get lots of burlap - good and dirty too - and we hunted up some dull brown stuff and some good green. I got two of my shepherds settled the day before and the third by five o'clock Christmas afternoon, but I couldn't see Joseph until 15 minutes before the curtain was due to go up. Then in the inspiration of desperation I threw things at him and pinned them on and I'm blessed if his costume wasn't about the most effective of the lot!

I was lucky in having men who looked their parts; so the costumes weren't as all important as though I'd had to try to make little girls into middle aged shepherds. But I'm not apologizing I'm pretty conceited about the spectacular side of that play - the pictures were really good. The first rehearsal was on the 21st I think --

Of course coaching took a lot of my time, but there were drinks. I made friends with the two school-teachers here and they and two friends came to my room and spent hours verifying my list of presents, making sure each child would get something appropriate and marking each toy with a name. Cowling had tied up each toy and when, late Christmas Eve afternoon we got panicky, fearing unexpected children might turn up and be disappointed, the sweet lamb walked all the way into St. Aignan bought about 50 extra toys and walked all the way back. It was because of instance after instance of good will such as that that we were able to pull it all off.

The Y notified us that we were to give 3.35 francs worth of stuff to each man for Christmas. We could have had a line and handed out the packages, but that seemed so awfully impersonal and cold. So for the two evenings before Christmas our billet was open, with a lantern at the gate to show the way. We had a wood fire blazing in the fireplace and a string tied across for the stockings. We covered the mantel piece with mistletoe, holly and toys and candles and pulled a bench in front of the fire and set a big table full of toys in one corner. It was just as Christmasy and jolly as could be.

The fellows came by ones and dozens. I was surprised to realize how much they enjoyed it. I haven't hung up my stocking in ten years they'd say - and often - "I got something to write home about now." They adored the toys. There were a few woolly lambs that squeaked and the boys played with those until I thought the children would never get them. Tin horns and swords they loved too.

I took down string after string of socks - hundreds of them. The ones that touched me most were those that were still damp - some really wet! The boys had been so anxious that they should be clean.

Fowler, one of our steadies, brought a huge bed stocking about three feet long - all made of flowery cotton flannel. We left that up all evening and it caused much amusement.

Christmas Eve was a busy day in our little billet. The hall was used for rehearsals all day long. F.T.'s room was turned into a packing department and a half dozen boys filled socks all day. My room is larger so we divided it into two. Cowling and the sweet little French school mistresses worked over the toys on one side, while a borrowed sewing machine and a heap of material scattered over the bed marked off the costume department, on the other.

In the meantime, a day or two before the supply company had lent me the camionette and I'd carted out enough lumber from the Y to make a small stage. I say I because the only way to get anything over here is to go all on what you want. You can never rely on anyone's promise to bring anything. Something always breaks down somewhere unless you do it yourself - but we got the lumber. And then Ingen and I drew plans and discussed methods, and by Christmas Day he'd made me the darlinest little folding stage. It is only five feet deep and 8 feet long, but the sides are V shaped so the front is about 13 feet long. It sits on saw horses 18 inches high - it couldn't be higher or the people would hit the top of the tent. The support posts fit into sockets and the curtain is stretched on wire over them. The back curtain