The Mud and the Mirth

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The Mud and the Mirth: Marine Cartoonists in World War I.

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CHAPTER TWO

The Early Publications

The first U.S. Marine Corps publication to extensively feature cartoons was the *Recruiters’ Bulletin*, which began publication in November 1914. The premise of the bulletin was to offer suggestions on the nature of the recruiters, their goals and achievements, and the ways in which they might increase their wartime enlistments.¹ The newsletter also featured a considerable number of cartoons focusing on the humor in recruitment, which often centered on common stereotypes within recruiting activities. Clearly the use of cartoons—either in drawn form for the publication or in one case the discussion of an animated movie to be shown in movie halls to spur recruitment—was of some importance.²

The editorial staff for the *Recruiters’ Bulletin* included enlisted men with a captain overseeing the operation out of New York, through the U.S. publicity bureau. This gave the staff a certain amount of leeway for content, but at the same time it was well formed within the parameters of the Marine Corps, especially for the recruiters. This publication served as a type of in-house magazine, where the jokes might be intended for a specific audience.³

As with many of the publications of the era, not all of the copies survive to this day. But for the ones that do, the stories are interesting. One story, written by Captain Frank E. Evans, concerned the authorization of an animated cartoon to be used for

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¹ *Recruiters’ Bulletin* 1, no. 1 (November 1914), 6.
² *Recruiters’ Bulletin* 1, no. 2 (December 1916), 24–25.
³ *Recruiters’ Bulletin* 1, no. 2 (December 1914), 7.
advertising purposes. The article was titled “Department of New Ideas” and was suggested by another Marine Corps captain, F. M. Eslick, a recruiter from Missouri. He suggested that the National Film Publicity Corporation make four films of 25 feet in length (7.62 meters) with the total cost of $300. For the four scenarios, the themes are simple but effective. The first centered on a picture of the globe, ships, and the tantalizing words “Do you want to see the world?” These animated films would be considered typical advertisements in today’s markets in length as well as story.4 But they are still effective. The second called on patriotic duty and invoked the idea of not just the soldier or sailor but of the American fighting man in general. The third scenario played off of a lack of job opportunities.5 The final one dealt with the skills of the Marine.6 Overall, while not specifically a cartoon in either sense of the word, it was still an idea that was recognized as a new form of both popular entertainment as well as effective recruitment.7

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6 Recruiters’ Bulletin 1, no. 2 (December 1916), 25.

7 There is some confusion around the terms comic, comic strip, and cartoon. For the purposes of this discussion, a comic refers to a single panel drawn using a static image with a verbal punchline. A comic strip refers to a three- or four-panel set of images that are meant to tell a story using consecutive visuals. A cartoon refers to a motion picture using animation to record a sequence of drawings rather than real people or objects. The terms are often used interchangeably, however, which can lead to considerable confusion. Recruiters’ Bulletin 1, no. 2 (December 1916), 24–25. For more on the public relations-style films during the period, see “WWI Films at the National Archives in College Park, MD,” Archives.gov, 5 May 2020.