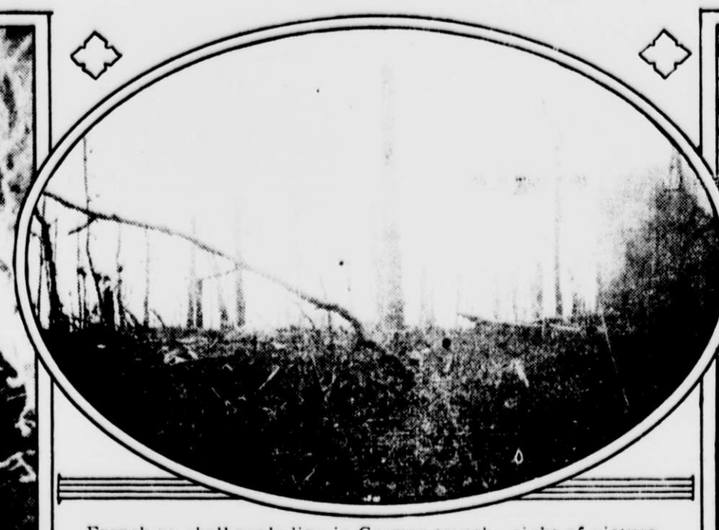
WAR AS SEEN AT CLOSE RANGE BY A YOUNG AMERICAN

Graphic Story of Life in the French First Line Trenches Told by One Who Was in the Thick of It

By WILLIAM T. MARTIN.

French torpedoes being prepared to be fired from mortars into the enemy trenches.



French 75 shell exploding in German trench—right of picture.

First aid ambulance in a first line trench in Bois-le-Pretre, showing how the wounded are protected from shell fire.

Only by looking at the great war in detail can the human mind grasp its horror. This is the story of one young American in the trenches, a determined newspaper man who made up his mind to see the war at close range and who won the French War Cross in so doing. He has not exhausted the thrills in this instalment. There will be others.

IT is night. The almost indescernable forms of the small party of soldiers moving noiselessly close to the buildings on one side of the street of a deserted town seem uncanny. With the exception of the faintest swish of the marching men there is no life as far as the senses can reach. It is January, 1916, on the front in France.

The men are returning to the first trenches after the periodic four days rest given by their regiment with each twelve days in the first line. They have been at a village in back enjoying the novelty of being out of shell range.

The town the party passes through is within half a mile of the Germans. Before the war 20,000 people lived here. Now soldiers sleep in the cellars and the other parts are full of strange things. On the march the soldiers take the side of the street protected in a sense by the tall buildings that tower irregularly. On the other side, that facing the German lines, is nothing but ruins. A lighted match held in the middle of the street would seem like a powerful arc light at home.

With the collars of their sodden coats turned up, brushing the backs of their steel helmets, the men plod on with the swinging gait of French soldiers. It has rained steadily for the last five weeks except for a day here and there, and the soldiers are wet to the skin from the match up. In their jackets, where it is less wet, they carry a few delicacies given them in the rear. They figure how to keep these dry; themselves they are not bothered about. They have had months of this. The rain this everything.

There are ten men in the company and the writer. The soldiers have fought together for over a year. They represent most of what remains of two companies of fine fellows—five hundred in all. Danger has made them inseparable friends. Each excursion back has seen something taken from their ranks. On each trip into the men wonder who will be the next.

Because of its continuity this wonder has become sort of subconscious thought with all and with their resignation to fate they joke about it. A year at the front has left its marks on their minds and faces.

As we pass out of the town there is a rumbling as of distant thunder. It is the heavy guns at work in a far off sector. Possibly an attack. It seems strange that the trenches can be so near in this wilderness of dead things.

Suddenly there is the poop, poop, poop of a machine gun; several sharp rifle cracks; the sharp report of an exploding grenade and all is silent again. We have taken an outside road which in daytime is viewed by the Germans from their positions on the opposite hill a quarter of a mile away. The road is forbidden to army equipment but the soldiers themselves risk it. Now the careless pounding of their heavy boots on the hard road would probably bring a shell or two.

Frequently we pass forms gliding by in the opposite direction—men coming down on leave—and an occasional low word is said.

Some distance on there is an intersection. Here the company slackens their pace more by instinct than from the long imaginative masses of exploding bombs up ahead, and the soldiers know they are not alone.

Suddenly from over the hill on the right a rocket flares above the trenches, hangs for an instant high in the air and bursts into a great ball of green fire, making day for an instant then leaving the strange land in more inky blackness than ever.

Instantly there is the rattle of machine guns, a murmur of low voices and the muffled rocking of heavy wheels as the leader of the long line of ammunition carts to the batteries [illegible] in the trenches get the [illegible] in that instant and [illegible] come up through [illegible] inhabited by soldiers [illegible] rest. The trenches [illegible] and there is more [illegible] movement.

[illegible] alongside the caravan [illegible] straight road. We have [illegible] soldiers and another rocket shows a whole column marching [illegible] top of the road [illegible] village, the last one [illegible].

[illegible] of the troops, with the exception of a few who press on, [illegible] much confusion but [illegible] and return to safety [illegible] the sector there are [illegible] almost as many guns as [illegible] the United States army. [illegible] The task of feeding it [illegible] This force takes care of [illegible] front which for several [illegible] been the most hotly [illegible] on the west en front.

[illegible] is a light along the [illegible] side of the road in the [illegible] of the houses. The men take [illegible] the other side of this [illegible] also are down. The [illegible] of horses wagon [illegible]. The Germans drop [illegible] the road at this time [illegible] as many as a score [illegible] time. This street runs [illegible] the work goes on.

[illegible] approach the centre of the [illegible] take a road to the right [illegible] the trenches. A low car [illegible] automobile with large pel [illegible] sides glides noiselessly [illegible] the dam to a dressing station some distance on along the protected side of the street. The ambulance is American and is driven by an American. It goes for wounded who are being brought down from the trenches according to a message telephoned back to the base a short time ago. Soldiers in the road and drivers pay the American machine the greatest deference.

As our party proceeds up the long winding road we suddenly and unconsciously lower our heads and crouch before the consuming roar and merciless shriek of a shell tearing through the air. It goes over and shrieks into the street with a deafening, ripping crash. Two more shells follow and we wonder what is happening behind; but the soldiers keep on walking.

Several minutes more, guided periodically by the blinding glare of the rockets over the trenches, we come upon a graveyard. It is a typical front cemetery, full of trenches and individual mounds according to the time at the disposal of the grave diggers, marked by little crosses and pathetic emblems of fellow comrades, little houses of stone, rude inscriptions and the like. Here lie 10,000 of the men who have fallen in this section of the Argonne. As we pass we can remember much.

Past the cemetery the road enters what is left of a wood. Frequently sentinels block the path and demand the watchword. Five months ago the Germans were at this point, but they have since been driven to the other side of the hill. There is nothing but darkness on either side of the road, but the soldiers know that to enter a foot would be impossible. Barbed wire intertwined so thickly among the trees makes this section now almost impregnable.

Some distance on there is the hint of a light from a dug out or something on the side away from the Germans. As we pass we see two men bearing a stretcher before an open door that reveals the light of a candle inside and hear some one saying weakly:

"I thought I was dying and I tried to tell the fellow next of mother—to tell her I was all right, but I guess I'll live."

There is a terrible rumbling crash that seems to tear away the hill and the earth shakes as one of the overground mines explodes. But whether in a French or a German trench the soldiers do not know. Immediately several high explosive shells tear across from the German side and explode with deafening crashes in the woods on the left.

The earth shakes again and stones, ground and pieces of trees fall back into the wood near the soldiers, who again press on after crouching for an instant. Then there is the report of several exploding grenades from somewhere in front, and all is quiet again. But not for long, for almost instantly the silence is broken by several sharp reports from somewhere in the rear and an instant later shells tear through the sky overhead with the sound of ripping silk to spread injury and death a second later in a German trench.

They are the French 75 guns at work. "Swell!" says one of the soldiers and there are similar ejaculations from several of the party whose tongues have been momentarily loosened by the throb of nervousness a second ago. Then some one in the crowd with a boyish voice and French facetiousness tells a funny story of an experience several days before.

Here the road is barbed shot. The [illegible] gun trained on the position of [illegible] and it is necessary to be in walking in the trenches. Several entrances are gone over and various signs read before the right one is discovered. Progress immediately becomes laborious. Somebody leads the way. To get hopelessly lost in this tangle of ditches is a matter of a few seconds to the unacquainted and new ones are being dug all the time.

The trenches are better this winter. The water is now up to the knees and in spite of a wooden flooring it is difficult to make headway.

At frequent intervals the trench divides and subdivides. At most of these places are signs denoting the directions but conveying information only to the initiated. Frequently the men pass soldiers coming back and bid each other good evening.

We are near the first line now and guided by the rockets. These seem weird and ghostlike. As they roll about in the air high overhead, reminding one of a great eye of some fiendish creature of another world, they make strange things with the splintered stumps of trees, the few dried leaf clusters here and there that seem to cry for mercy in the wind and the men passing through the trenches.

It is no longer a land of men, beating hearts and thoughts. A former world and hopes of other days are but memories with most of the beings who pass their time here. It is something apart from the world of their past lives as though they are living on another planet.

The ground above has been tossed about several feet deep for over a year. They say there was once a beautiful forest here and a haunt where the roundabout swains saw their sweethearts. The wood took its name from a priest. But now there is nothing but blackened stumps, an occasional gnarled branch and a few warped leaves clinging shiveringly on and blood soaked ground.

Human voice is scarcely heard now except in distress. As we listen, from somewhere out there comes a low, whining voice that sounds as if it is pleading. We have been hearing it subconsciously for the last several minutes. It could almost be the call of a wild thing. Like the countless other voices of months back out there, it becomes weaker and weaker and the soldiers say they can do nothing.

In the interval since the last rocket we have fumbled around in the trench and lost our way. The next glare shows we are walking away from the first line some distance down a connecting trench. As we are about to turn back there is a dull thud and a faint chug, chug, chug that sounds like a steam engine in the distance. Instinctively all of the parts fall face down in the water where they stand. There is a tense interval of a second or so. Then a terrific crash, seeming to shake the world, and we lie there in muscled tensity with our heads held out of the water toward the side of the trench.

A shower of debris fills the air and falls over us. Fortunately none of the party is hurt. The Germans are bombarding the trenches with the overground mines.

Wagon trains carrying supplies to the trenches through a street in which German shells often fall.

Like Ghosts in Silence and Darkness the Men Advance to the Line and Death Marches With Them

By the light of another rocket we once more make for the first line. A couple of hundred feet further on we pull up at the brink of a hole big enough for the cellar of a house. Dust and suffocating smoke arise from the crater and overhead hangs a great cloud. Morning probably will show a few remains of what has been in the trench, but there is not much of a tale to tell.

The soldiers now vividly cursing the "Boche," the "dirty swine," find a trench to the right by the light of another rocket and a minute later we are in the first line. The soldiers scatter along the line relieving various sentinels. The latter look haggard and ghastly by the light of the rockets. They are glad of a release from the strain for a six hours rest in the third line before the next watch.

The Germans have been bombarding the trenches with mines and grenades, they say, and in their faces are lines of terrible strain. Their comrades do not ask how many have been killed and wounded. They give each other parting salutes and bid a good night and good luck.

The relief poke their rifles through the little holes at intervals of about sixty feet and watch. The trenches are arranged in a snakelike fashion so that when a shell strikes no more than two or three men will be killed or injured. The water here is a little higher than the knees. First trenches as a rule are merely ditches.

A sergeant with our company walks along the line for short distances making observations. At one point a short trench shoots off perpendicularly toward the Germans. It stops about half way between the French and German lines, which at this point are about 90 feet apart. A man of exceptional hearing is stationed at the end. He is a New Yorker and more American than French, but that is another story.

He waits there to catch what is possible of what the Germans are saying. Several times the French were warned of impending attacks in this manner. The Germans have discovered his place, however, and he expects every watch to be his last. He commands the respect of his regiment and has been decorated. Like the other soldiers he knows that to be slightly wounded is the best that can happen. He has his hopes.

As the sergeant comes to this ditch one of the sentinels near by turns from his hole and greets him. He is the boy with the boyish voice and he had an indelible smile. He points jokingly to the German trenches and says something to the sergeant as he passes on. He offers me his gun to fire at the Germans.

I follow the sergeant down the line at his offer to show me the nearest machine gun. Hardly have we reached the first safety turn when there is a dull swish, followed by a sharp, tearing explosion at the place we just had left. We duck and the soldiers around us as a shower of light debris falls on our heads and shoulders. It was a grenade. Something drops into the trench at my feet. It is heavy and wet and looks like part of a uniform.

A little later we step into a connecting trench to let pass two brancardiers bearing a wounded man in a trench hammock. The fellow is drawn into a ball and badly torn at the stomach, for his waist is running with blood.

As they pass, we have time to catch a glimpse of a twitching but conscious face. It is the face of the boy and there is still the trace of a smile. "I'm all right," he says as the sergeant springs over the youth and with an ejaculation clasps a hand. "It's all right with me, Henri," the boy says quietly. "They got me this time but it's not bad."

The sergeant's duty is here for the present. He cannot go back to the dressing station in the third line, so he says in a breaking voice, "God take care of you," and shakes his fist at the German lines with a look of utter hate and despair for the two were great friends.

Some time later at the first aid station in the third line, the brancardiers have just crowded a stretcher against the wall to make room for two badly wounded men. On the stretcher is the form of a comrade, a boy who died on his way down and on his face there is still something of a smile.

On the way back, again I can hear the voice from somewhere in the waste over the trenches, begging for help, cursing for help and crying for help. It says the same things over and over again and is now faint and almost indistinguishable. My guide, who has seen a year's fighting, shakes his head and says there is no help.

It is hard to try not to listen to it. It is useless almost for the voice calls on and dies away as we go back.

"The four days is a well earned rest. It is great to be alive then," my friend remarks with a shrug.

TOWN MEETING REVIVED RIGHT HERE IN NEW YORK

Borough President Marks Adopts Odd New England Plan for Discussion of Civic Problems

BY MARCUS M. MARKS,
President Borough of Manhattan.

IN these days of rush and absorption in business affairs the people as a rule have been quite willing to trust their representatives in government to act upon their own individual judgment. This has indicated a lack of civic spirit which does not augur well for the success of our democratic institutions, for a "government by the people" cannot long survive unless the best sentiment of the community is expressed in the actions of the duly elected officials.

How can an official properly represent his constituents without first obtaining a knowledge of their needs and their judgment in a comprehensive and intelligent manner?

It was this thought that prompted me to develop a plan for the scientific crystallization of the best sentiment of the people of the Borough of Manhattan. The borough easily lent itself to division into the following sixteen neighborhoods, each having a pretty clearly defined local character:

1—Fifth avenue	9—Greenwich
2—Washington Heights	10—Washington Square
3—Riverside	11—East Side
4—West End	12—Gramercy Park
5—West Harlem	13—Murray Hill
6—Broadway	14—Kips Bay
7—Central Park West	15—Yorkville
8—Chelsea	16—East Harlem

The problems of Manhattan are great and varied. The average population of each of these sixteen communities is about 150,000 and the types vary materially, for example between the East Side, the Greenwich Village and the Murray Hill neighborhoods.

After months of study I selected from each section an advisory commission of twelve. Business men, manufacturers, bankers, professional men, architects, builders, engineers, educators, settlement workers, mechanics and clerks were included in this selection. Party lines were ignored. It was indicative of a real awakening of civic spirit that the busiest and most important men and women of the city responded to the call without hesitation.

The purpose of the commissions was clearly defined as that of "cooperation with the Borough President in efforts to give him the best sentiment of their respective communities upon matters having to do with the welfare of the people living in the districts covered by such commissions."

The members of the commissions agreed to "study the interest and needs of their respective localities and to advise the Borough President as to improvements that should be undertaken or economies effected." The Borough President in his turn stated his intention to "consult the members of the various commissions upon any matter arising which affects their district concerning which he shall deem it necessary to get the sentiment of the community." Thus the Borough President is enabled to get full and unbiased information as to the wishes of the people. The scope of the commissions' functions is further outlined in the following statement:

"Naturally, pavements, streets, sidewalks, encumbrances, sewers, street signs, public and private buildings, baths, comfort stations and markets fall most particularly under borough supervision, but the Borough President will gladly cooperate in any matter which comes before the Board of Estimate and Apportionment, the Board of Aldermen or the local improvement boards, such as unused city owned properties, port and terminal improvements, transit, bridge approaches, illumination, recreation facilities, schools, &c., in which the commissions may take interest."

Through the appointment of these commissions nearly 200 of the best people in the borough have come into closer touch with the machinery of government and have developed a more intense interest in the affairs of the city.

I am a firm believer in the conservation of neighborhood pride; in fact, when you get right down to the root of the matter, there cannot be a prosperous city unless each home has local pride in its surroundings. Civic patriotism depends upon this pride. One who strives to improve home conditions is bound to be a good citizen and the combination of such good citizens makes the ideal city.

Local improvement boards, made up of the Aldermen of each district, with the Borough President as chairman, are charged by the Charter with the care of local improvements. So, when borough commissions advise action in such matters the Borough President brings them to the attention of the Aldermen in the district affected. Some of the broader questions discussed by the advisory commissions are brought for action to the Board of Estimate.

At this particular time all of the Manhattan borough commissions are studying the bus franchise situation, and the Borough President will be in a position to know what the best sentiment of the community is regarding, first, the development of an entirely new bus system, and, second, the development of the present bus system of the Fifth Avenue Coach Company, particularly across Central Park and in Washington Heights.

The Greenwich Commission diligently studied the needs of Jefferson Market, which had been practically abandoned, and largely as a result of their advice and cooperation this market has been renovated and its future brightened.

The Washington Square Commission cooperated with the trustees of Sailors' Snug Harbor in the perfection of plans for the betterment and artistic improvement of the Washington Square neighborhood.

The Riverside Commission has taken up actively the problem of doing away with the nuisance of fumes coming from the Jersey shore and annoying the residents of Riverside Drive and other West Side streets.

The Central Park West Commission has studied the relocation of the tracks on the west side of Central Park. The situation is dangerous and must be improved, and the Central Park West Commission will be helpful in solving this difficult problem with the least possible delay.

The East Side Commission was unanimous in advising the Borough President to continue the Bowling baths. The advice and the cooperation which this commission gave helped considerably in conserving this most useful activity.

The Chelsea Commission has been very active in recommending various social improvements in the central West Side district.

As a complement of the plan of the borough commission the New England town meeting is being adapted to our Manhattan needs. Whenever the commissions are in doubt as to the policy they desire to advocate and wish to further sound the sentiment of their localities meetings similar to town meetings are held, usually in the local school house.

At each of these meetings the question in which the neighborhood is interested will be discussed from every standpoint and then the advice that comes to the Borough President will be truly representative.

Among the charter duties of the Borough President are the construction and maintenance of pavements and sewers. Formerly the President or his representative, the Commissioner of Public Works, would decide upon what was necessary and proceed with the work without giving full opportunity for expression of opinion on the part of citizens. For example, a street was to be paved with granite, and the first intimation that the people along the route had of the proposed pavement would be when they saw it being laid.

In the spirit of the neighborhood advisory commissions the Borough President now gives press notice in advance of the type of pavement to be used and also places a sign upon the street corner notifying the residents of the proposed repavement. This has a double purpose. The first is to have all subsurface connections, such as steam, water, electricity and gas, made before the new pavement is laid in order to prevent unnecessary cuts thereafter, and the second is to see the approval of the neighborhood regarding the type of pavement to be laid.

Recently, granite having been selected for Front street, some of the business people on that street were aroused on account of the fear of noise coming through the rumbling of wagons over stone pavement. A conference was immediately called in our office, and after the business people learned, and in fact saw by personal observation how the new type of improved granite pavement had developed in smoothness and in reduction of cost and annoyance of repairs, they unanimously approved the proposed action of our office. Without such a conference there would have been unrest and opposition.

In the case of the proposed repaving of lower Broadway similar conferences have been held and intelligent judgment which will be generally satisfactory must result.

The New York Central surface tracks have been the cause of much public criticism in recent years. There is now a tentative agreement for their removal. This will particularly affect Riverside Drive and Eleventh avenue.

The advisory commission idea has just been applied to the solution of this important problem by the appointment of a Borough of Manhattan Port and Terminal Advisory Committee of twenty men and women, each of whom has been a close student of the West Side situation both as an individual and as a representative of some civic association.

The advice of such a committee will be very helpful in protecting the public in this negotiation.

Formerly at the hearings by the local improvement boards, sewer reconstruction was almost universally opposed by citizens. The cost of such reconstruction had to be borne by the owners of the property under a local drainage area assessment, and without really knowing the needs of the situation the opposition expressed itself.

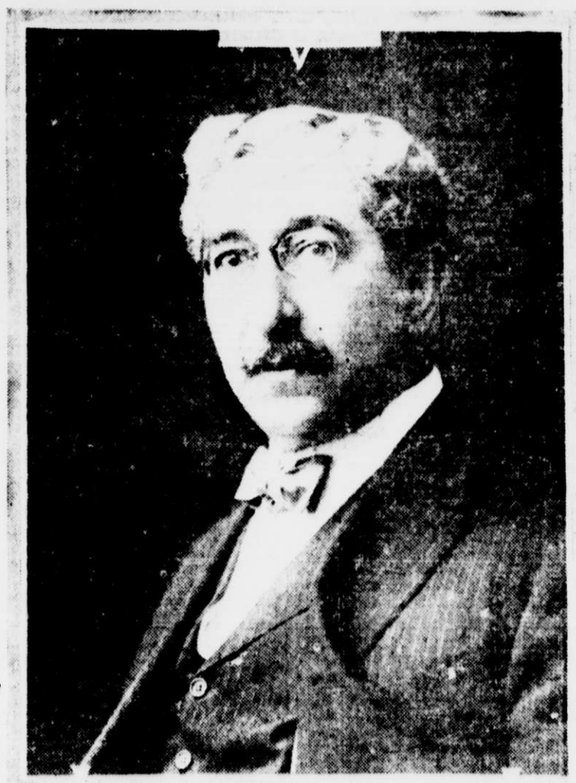
Here again, we have been permitted to introduce the advisory spirit of cooperation, and instead of opposing blindly, the owners of property in the neighborhood now retain their own expert, who investigates the situation, having at his disposal all the knowledge and information in the Borough President's office, and as a result, in almost every case the owners afterward agree to the improvement and to the subsequent assessment.

I could go on at length telling what has been done in one district after another through the advice of the various commissions.

I take this opportunity to express my most hearty thanks for the cooperation which has thus been developed.

The Borough of Manhattan is so great and its problems are so complex that the best brains should be concentrated upon the various phases of its progress. The more interest that the good citizens take in this development the more likely are we to have successful and truly representative government.

Among the best known members of the borough advisory commissions appointed by President Marks are the following: John D. Beale, Reginald P. Bolton, John Wilson, Mrs. [illegible] Guernsey, Hamilton Holt, Dr. Talcott Williams, John C. Coleman, Mrs. John F. Yawger, Miss Helen Varick Boswell, Frank W. Woolworth, Coleman du Pont, Max Morgenthau, Jr., Miss Mary G. Hoy, Percy S. Straus, Vincent Astor, Mrs. Herman M. Biggs, Mrs. A. G. Sanikovitch, Thomas M. Mulry, Joseph S. Auerbach, Dr. Thomas Darlington, Dr. Robert W. de Forest, Mrs. John G. Milburn, Miss Lillian D. Wald, Dr. Jane E. Robins, Dr. Henry Moskowitz, C. Grant La Farge, Dr. J. W. Jenks, Joseph P. Day, Dr. Austin Flint, William Fellowes Morgan, Edmund L. Baylies, Mrs. Howard L. Satterlee, Henry R. Towne, Gherardi Davis, George Gordon Battle, Richard H. Dana, Orlo T. Bonnard, Mrs. Francis H. Colon, Frederic R. Coudert, John Henry Hammond, Henry de Forest Baldwin and Frank Moss.



Marcus M. Marks, Borough President of Manhattan.

Photo by [illegible]

GRAND JURY IS A "WEAL PIE."

WHAT Thomas Mott Osborne [illegible] of the Westchester County Grand Jury [illegible] of perjury and mismanagement at Sing Sing prison has never been proved because Mr. Osborne has said little about it to reporters. Here is one of the few conversations of importance he has made, [illegible] reporters have printed.

When Mr. Osborne returned from the Grand Jury room at White Plains after having [illegible] gave testimony before the jury [illegible] later indicted [illegible] reporters gathered around him and [illegible] was what had happened. A second [illegible] was eager to learn what was the "attitude toward him."

"How did [illegible] treat you? Fair and impartial, [illegible] as one to [illegible] friend asked.

"Well, [illegible] Mr. Osborne slowly, [illegible] Papers haven't you? Do you remember Sam Weller's notion of a veal pie? 'Very good thing is a veal pie,' said Sam, 'even if you know the lady as made it and is quite sure it ain't kittens.' Well, the Grand Jury is a 'veal pie.'"