

Armentières and Its Mademoiselle

MEDALS

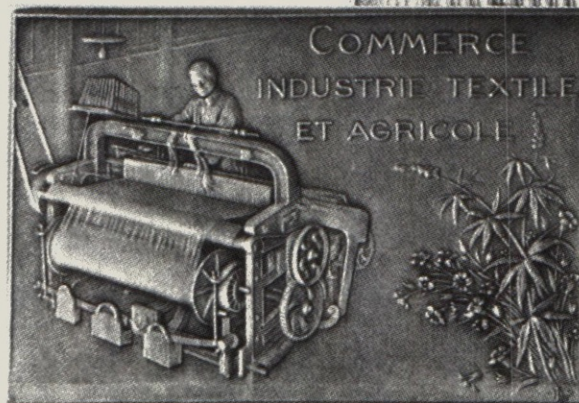
A silver plaquette honors a French town's industrious spirit, while a simple tune from World War I pays tribute to its most popular resident.

IMMORTAL FAME IS a strange thing. The Earl of Sandwich, for example, spent many years as a dedicated public servant, eventually rising to a position of great renown and power, yet all but students of history have forgotten this. One day while playing cards, however, he asked a domestic servant to place a slab of cold roast beef between two slices of bread; consequently, his name shall live as long as people eat sandwiches.

So, too, the anonymous mademoiselle from Armentières, France, is not only immortal, but also has spread the fame of her native town to the four corners of the world. What made her the most famous woman in French military history since the Maid of Orleans? The fact that she hadn't been kissed in 40 years!

Armentières was the site of a number of battles during the First World War. The city itself, in the department of Nord, was an important center for the textile industry, and remains so to this day. In the years prior to the war, a beautiful, silver plaquette was issued by the Chamber of Commerce of Armentières and two of its suburbs,

by Peter S. Horvitz
ANA 98800



Actual Size: 56 x 38mm

Armentières, France, has long enjoyed a reputation as an important center of the textile industry. This undated, silver plaquette, issued in the years just prior to World War I, illustrates the town's pride in its métier.

THE FIRST WORLD War, during which Armentières was taken . . . , produced hundreds of patriotic anthems and jingoistic songs of separation and conquest.

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Bailleul and Merville. This undated, rectangular piece measures 56 x 38mm and was executed by Edmond Eugène Émile Lindauer, who also designed France's nickel coinage of 1914.

The obverse depicts the arms of Armentières flanked by those of Bailleul and Merville, resting among branches of bay and oak. In the background stands the old Armentières town hall, with its 17th-century belfry. (The building was destroyed during the war and replaced with a modern-style structure during the 1920s.) The inscription on the plaquette reads CHAMBRE DE COMMERCE/D'ARMENTIÈRES/BAILLEUL ET MERVILLE. At the lower right is the artist's name:

E. LINDAUER.

The reverse shows a worker weaving cloth on an automated loom. In the lower, right corner is a spray of plants and flowers. The inscription reads COMMERCE/INDUSTRIE TEXTILE/ET AGRICOLE. The worker and his machine represent the textile industry; the spray, agriculture.

The First World War, during which Armentières was taken and destroyed by German forces, produced hundreds of patriotic anthems and jingoistic songs of separation and conquest. Most of them have found their appropriate place

in the dust heap, but one, simple tune has haunted the memory of the English-speaking world ever since its composition, and certainly shall be sung by people from all walks of life (rendering it a true folk song) for many decades to come. The subject of that song is none other than a certain, mysterious mademoiselle from Armentières and, since 1917, her hometown has been more renowned the world over for her "long un-kissed" state than for its textiles.

The authorship of *Mademoiselle From Armentières* (or *Hinky Dinky, Parlay-Voo*) is a controversial and unsettled question. The earliest-known, printed version of the song, which surfaced in Nancy, France, around 1917 or 1918, does not carry the name of its author. The words and music have been credited to many, however, including Will Hythe, Harry Carlton and J.A. Tunbridge, and Alfred J. Walden (who wrote under the name of Harry Wincott). The lyrics also have been ascribed to Edward C.H. Rowland, with his friend Lieutenant Gitz Rice reportedly setting them to music.

A number of claims also have been made about the song's origins. One



Actual Size: 26mm

French sculptor and medalist Edmond Eugène Émile Lindauer created the silver Armentières Chamber of Commerce medal, as well as France's nickel coinage of 1914.

DESPITE THE CONFUSION over who wrote it and who inspired it, the song's simplicity was catchy, and soon led to hundreds of improvised verses and versions.

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account purports it was based on a waitress in an Armentières cafe who refused to kiss a general. Despite the confusion over who wrote it and who inspired it, the song's simplicity was catchy, and soon led to hundreds of improvised verses and versions. It spread like wildfire among British, Canadian, Australian, South African and American troops. A few opening verses tend to reappear, but most printed versions differ markedly. While the song has a reputation for bawdiness, most published texts do not reflect this. Undoubtedly, the following renditions do not completely represent the song's entire range of expression. The first verse in all versions, however, is fixed:

Mademoiselle from Armentières,
Parlay-voo,
Oh, Mademoiselle from Armentières,
Parlay-voo,



REISIE LONETTE

Mademoiselle From Armentières

(Hinky Dinky, Parlay-Voo)

Lustily Traditional Army Song

F *C7*

mf 1. Ma-de-moi-selle from Ar-men-tières, Par-lay-voo, Oh,

F

Ma-de-moi-selle from Ar-men-tières, Par-lay-voo,

C7 *G9*

Ma-de-moi-selle from Ar-men-tières, She has-nt been kissed for for-ty years,

F *Bb* *F* *C7* *F*

Hink-y Dink-y, Par-lay-voo.

Mademoiselle From Armentières was one of the most popular songs to come out of World War I. Because it was such a catchy tune, it spread among the troops, who created hundreds of humorous, new verses (many of which were unprintable). Although the origins of the song remain undetermined, Denes Agay, author of *Best Loved Songs of the American People*, notes, "the lilt and character of the tune strongly indicate roots in French folklore."

Mademoiselle from Armentières,
She hasn't been kissed for forty years,
Hinky Dinky, Parlay-Voo.

In most variations, the early verses include mention of the Armentières locale and the mademoiselle, but incorporate such changes as:

Our top kick in Armentières,
Soon broke the spell of forty years.

or

She never could hold the love of a man,
She took her baths in a talcum can.

or

She might have been old for all we knew,
When Napoleon flopped at Waterloo.

Subsequent verses usually stray from the original topic and concentrate on the unpleasanties and injustices of military life, such as: "The officers get all the steak/And all we get is a belly ache." Thousands of different verses must exist.

The song's international popularity is reflected not only in the numerous renditions that have been created, but also by the many references that provide two correct pronunciations of Armentières: as it is said in French—"ahr-mahn-tyar," with a weak accent on the first syllable and a strong accent on the third, and as it is pronounced in the song—something like "are-men-tears," again with emphasis on the third syllable. However, to join in the singing of one of the most popular songs of our time, one need not know the original pronunciation of the city where its famous, and rarely kissed, subject dwelt. •

Sources

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A teacher in Philadelphia, Peter S. Horvitz has collected coins and medals since he was five years old. Winner of the Token and Medal Society's Odesser Memorial Award for outstanding contributions to Judaic numismatics and exonomia, as well as the American Israel Numismatic Association's Milton Fishgold Literary Award, Horvitz has written more than 100 numismatic articles for various publications. He has authored several features for THE NUMISMATIST, the most recent of which, "The Last Prince of Mexico," was published in the June 1993 issue.