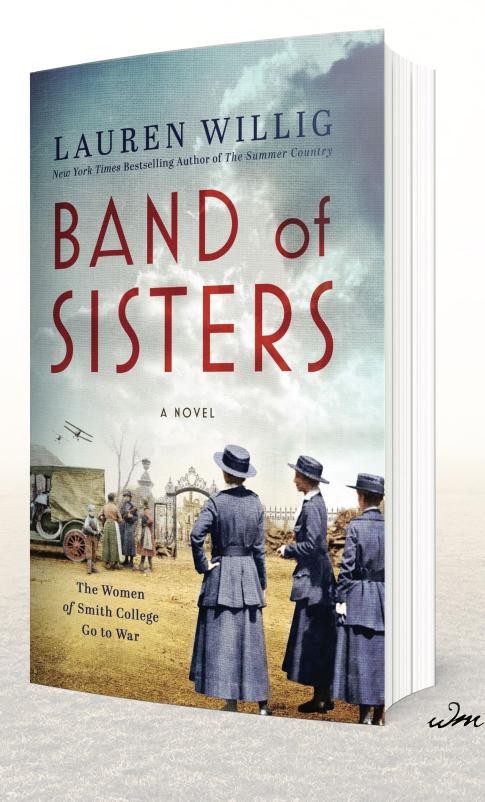
# **Reader's Guide**



# Band of Sisters Table of Contents

Reader's Group Guide	Page 3
Q&A: Interview with the author	Page 4
The History of the Grecourt Gate: Watch Lauren Willig (video)	Page 6
The Unit: A pictorial history	Page 7
They Were WHERE Again: The Smith Unit in maps	Page 8
A Day in the Life of the Smith Unit: Their schedule as explained by one of the members	Page 10
Take the Blessés to the Camion: a Smithie lexicon	Page 11
Cooking for a Dinner Party with the Smith College Relief Unit	Page 13
Band of Sisters Accidental Oatmeal Muffins	Page 15
Thanksgiving in the Somme	Page 16
Suggestions for further reading	Page 17

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- 1.) At the start of the novel, Emmie Van Alden says of the Smith College Relief Unit, "We're not looking for glory. Just to do something decent and worthwhile." Do you think she-and her fellow alumnae-would have gone if they had realized just how difficult and dangerous the work would be? Would you have answered the call the way they did?
- 2.) Kate and Emmie both have fraught relationships with their mothers. Emmie's mother is "the niece of a senator and the second cousin of a former president" and a major power broker in New York society. Kate's mother is an Irish domestic worker. How do Kate and Emmie deliberately choose different paths from their mothers'? How does their wartime experience affect the way they perceive their mothers—and themselves?
- **3.)** Kate reflects: "The difference was, in college, she had really thought she was just like everyone else, that being secretary of the literary society and volunteering with the dramatic society washed out all the differences, made her one of them." Did an elite education truly turn out to be an equalizer of social class? Does a working-class immigrant background still carry a stigma in certain corners of American society the way it did in the early 20th century?
- **4.)** How did being female make the women's relief work in France more challenging? Were there ways they could use their gender to their advantage?
- **5.)** When Kate first realizes that Dr. Stapleton had sexually assaulted Julia, she is surprised: "It was the unprotected women who got taken advantage of. The maids and the shopgirls. Not the Julias of the world." Why didn't Julia's privilege protect her from Dr. Stapleton? How do Kate and the other women find ways to keep themselves safe once they know that he's a predator?
- **6.)** Is Kate right to be furious when she realizes that Emmie has paid her way? How would you have reacted? What did you make of Emmie's response when Kate finally confronts her? Was Emmie acting purely out of generosity?
- **7.)** Did your opinion of Julia change as she reveals her true circumstances-disowned and penniless after refusing to marry for money as her mother wanted? Were you as surprised as Kate?
- **8.)** What do you think the future holds for the characters in this book after the story ends? How do you imagine their lives continuing in the years after World War I?



So many thanks to everyone on my Facebook author page who supplied me with questions for this Q&A! I wasn't able to fit all of them into this Reader's Guide, but here's a sampling:

#### Q: What would your YouTube history reveal about your interests/hobbies?

A: That my three-year-old is obsessed with dinosaurs. If my next book has a paleontologist in it, you'll know why. (So. Many. Dinosaurs.) Aside from the dinosaur videos . . . While I was writing *Band of Sisters*, anyone looking would have been convinced that I was a classic car fanatic. So much of the Smithies' time was spent wrestling with their vehicles—and I've never learned to drive a modern car, much less a 1917 one! I spent a lot of time watching car hobbyists demonstrate their vinatge vehicles on YouTube. You want to know how to crank up an early Ford? I'm your girl. (Just don't ask me to drive your Volvo.)

# Q: When you travel for either research or fun, what's the first thing you have to do in a new city?

A: Walk! I'm a city girl, so I'm used to walking everywhere. The first thing I do when I get to a new city is wander until I get the lay of the land. I've walked the soles off my shoes in more places than I can count.

# Q: The balancing act between fact and fiction in historical fiction is notoriously tricky... What was the biggest challenge for you in telling this story?

A: Usually my issue is trying to fill in missing facts—in this case the biggest problem was that I was drowning in facts! And all those facts were amazing. I just wanted to use it all. But, of course, I couldn't, or the book would have been five thousand pages long and had no plot. That was the killer for me—stepping away from the source material and the urge to cram in all the incredible things that happened so I could focus on my characters and their emotional arcs within the frame work of all those amazing things the Smithies actually did.

#### Q: What was the coffee of choice while writing this book?

A: As my longtime readers know, I love pairing coffees and books. In normal times, I write at Starbucks, where a specific flavor lets me know it's time to fall into the world of whichever book I'm writing. In this case, the pandemic struck right when I was midway through writing *Band of Sisters*. Mercifully, Nespres so and International Delight came to the rescue, so this book was brought to you by those blue Nespresso pods and hazelnut creamer. I'm thinking possibly salted caramel mocha for the next one ...

#### Q: What's your favorite relaxation technique?

A: Aside from gin? Reading! Absolutely reading. There's nothing like slipping into another century or another world entirely. When I'm particularly stressed out, I love to escape to familiar fictional worlds, like Robin McKinley's Damar, Georgette Heyer's Regency ballrooms, or Trisha Ashley's small English villages.

#### Q: What's your favorite muffin flavor?

A: Accidental oatmeal muffins! (You can find the recipe a few pages on in this Reader's Guide) They're a sort of oat-y, raisin-y, maple-flavored muffin. I stumbled on them by accident during lockdown last spring and they've become the universal family favorite, and also the fastest, easiest muffins I've ever made. Which is fortunate, since I wind up making them with some regularity.

#### Q: Mountains or beach?

A: Mountains! My happy place is the Hudson Valley, where I can roam the woods, rambling happily over hills in search of fairy glades and possibly the odd, forgotten Norman castle. (I know, I know, it's the wrong country for that. But a girl can dream, right?)

#### Q: Netflix or Hulu?

A: BritBox. Or Acorn. Or even better, both. My seven-year-old is convinced I only watch shows involving British people murdering each other in ingenious ways (and solving the crime in even more ingenious ways). That is, of course, totally unfair. I also watch sitcoms about Shakespeare and heartwarming programs about curmudgeonly doctors in small Cornish villages.

#### **Q:** Poirot or Marple?

A: Lord Peter Wimsey! Okay, that's not fair. I should stick with the author I was offered, in which case: Marple. Someday, I would like to be as divinely omniscient as Miss Marple and solve murders in small English villages.

#### **Q:** Instagram or Twitter?

A: Instagram, for British manor houses, Scottish castles, and what my friends are cooking for dinner. I still haven't quite figured out how to use Twitter yet... and I get the feeling I'm probably happier that way.





The History of the Grécourt Gate Watch Lauren Willig





**The Unit** A pictorial history



Official photograph of the Unit



The Unit on board the Rochambeau



Chateau at Grécourt



**French villagers** 



The Smithies and their truck

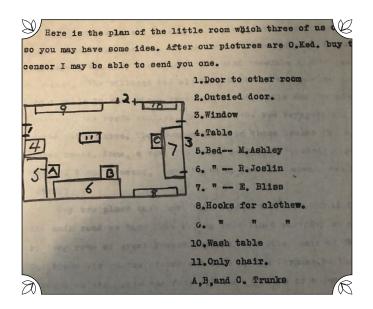


### They Were WHERE Again? The Smith Unit in maps



#### Map of region

Not only did the Smith College Relief Unit members write copious letters home, they also wanted to make sure their loved ones (and the readers of the *Alumnae Quarterly*!) knew exactly where they were, so they sent home marvelous, hand drawn-maps of everything from the region, to the grounds of the chateau, to the inside of one of their barracks.



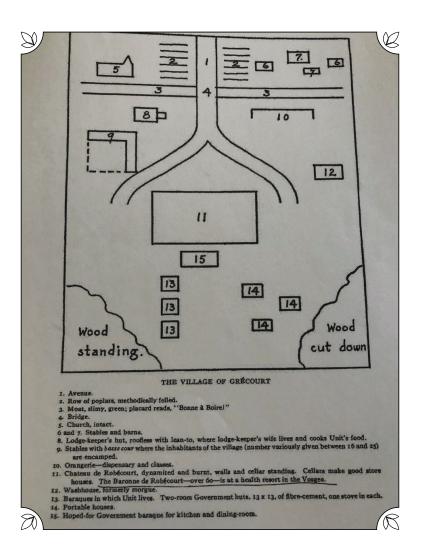
#### Map of a barrack

Want to know what it was like living with the Smith Unit? One of the members sent home this plan of the room that she shared with two other members. The walls were whisper-thin and the only heat came from wood-burning stoves that smoked constantly (because, as their Canadian Forester friends pointed out to them, they didn't take the time to dry out their wood properly).

When two members decorated their room, requisitioning various items to create curtains and dressing tables, the others mockingly referred to them as "the Sybarites" and their room as "the Honeymoon Suite."



### They Were WHERE Again? The Smith Unit in maps



#### Map of headquarters

This was the Smith College Relief Unit's home base, as drawn by one of the Unit members and sent in to the *Alumnae Quarterly*. You can see the castle in the center, the Unit's little barracks lined up in back, and, my favorite, the moat, "slimy, green", with its placard reading, "Bonne à Boire".

## A Day in the Life of the Smith Unit ITIIIII Their schedule as explained by one of the members

Here's a look at a day in the life of the Smith College Relief Unit, as recounted in the November 1917 Smith *Alumnae Quarterly*. Allowing for the lag in publication, this was written when the Unit had been at Grécourt for about a month.

"The Unit rises at 6:30 a.m. May I list that from which the most warm-blooded member rises? 'Flannel nightgown, sweater, woolen stockings, bed-socks, so-called mattress improved with a steamer-rug, sleeping-bag, four blankets.' If you can think of any other warm thing, add it to this list and you will have the bedtime equipment of the colder-blooded. It seems that the 'Baraques' with one stove in each 'will be much more comfortable when it is cold enough to justify lighting the fires' but nothing can be done about the portable houses. However, the Red Cross coal had even then reached Rouen, and the news of that alone warmed us all. (We were all shivering.)"

"After the most warm-blooded member has emerged from her chrysalis, she subjects herself to the following routine:

Breakfast 7:30	Milk, war bread, coffee, jam
Dispensary 8:30-10:00	
Visits to Villages 10:00-12:30	
Lunch 12:30	Generally soup and one vegetable
Rest-hour 1:00-2:00	Never comes off
Visits all the afternoon	Some days lunch out
Dinner 6:30-7:00	Usually some meat, and sometimes soup or eggs, vegetables always, cheese often, fruit sometimes, dessert if one of the Unit cooks it

After dinner-The worst part of the day. The cold is really intense, we really cannot write letters. Tell everybody that please."

#### Around that same time (late October) another Unit member wrote home:

"We had a unit meeting Sat. night for our reports and the work is really astonishing—the doctors saw over 500 patients, the children we have here every week are over 300, and the social service people have visited 120 families—don't you think that is pretty good—starting with eleven villages we now have fifteen under us ... My schedule works out like this—Monday—all day trip off with store to Canizy, Offoy, Sancourt & Douilly—In the cars go social service people & people to play with the children, so much of the work is combined. Tuesday, store at Chateau all a.m. Wednesday, store goes to Esmery-Hallon in p.m. Thursday, store at Grécourt all morning. Friday, all day trip to Eppéville, Verlaines, Brouchy, Aubigny & Muille-Villette. Saturday, store at Grécourt all morning.

"The rest of the time I do supplies strenuously & there is always a trip off somewhere for purchasing etc... That schedule sounds all right but consider that it means all that every week & in the vilest weather for of course we can't consider rain or we would never accomplish anything."

Of course, as another member pointed out, "You never do what you expect to in this place," making all of these schedules mere guidelines as their plans were upended by unexpected deliveries of livestock, breakdowns, and other daily dramas.

To get a real sense of what the women's lives were like in the Somme, check out the Further Reading portion of the Reader's Guide, where you'll find links to their letters in the *Smith Alumnae Quarterly*, detailing all of this and so much more . . .



The women of the Smith College Relief Unit were all changed by their experience in France–and so was their prose.

Reading the letters of the Smithies in France and their compatriots, the American ambulancemen and aviators, one of the things that jumps out is the zippy new dialect they all adopt, an enthusiastic mix of Franglais (anglicized French) and war slang.

#### Here, for your amusement, are some of the more widely used terms:

- Camions: trucks. The drive at Grécourt was constantly being blocked by Red Cross camions, because Dave, the Red Cross driver, had an unerring ability to land himself in the ditch by the gate (by accident or design, they weren't quite sure). Other camions in the Smithies' lives included army camions, of which there were many rumbling down the roads. Their own vehicles, however, they referred to as "the machines," or, more specifically, "the White," "the jitney," and "the Ford truck."
- Essence: gasoline. There's never enough essence to keep the camions running properly, and don't even get the Assistant Director of the Unit started on the price of essence. A dollar the gallon! Outrageous!
- Blessés: the wounded. Later, the Smithies make the distinction between petits blessés and grands blessés (the walking wounded and the gravely wounded), but the general shorthand for the wounded is simply blessés, as in "I'm taking chocolates and newspapers to my blessés today—they do so love the English papers."
- Poilus: the rank and file of the French army. Very useful for things like hanging oiled paper over the empty windows of the Orangerie.
- Tommies: the rank and file of the British army. Very useful for things like laying "duckwalk," a
  contraption of wood and wire designed to stop you from sinking knee-deep in the mud. Will work for tea.
- Sammies, alternatively known as "our boys." American soldiers were Sammies for Uncle Sam, as in "we saw a group of Sammies at Saint-Nazaire."
- Amis: Quakers. Literally, "friends" in French. There were a group of American Quakers based at Ham who helped the Smithies with their building projects. Some of the group thought the Quakers ought to be shunned for their pacifism, but, on the whole, the Amis were regarded as great friends of the Unit. Used as in "we had a group of Amis to tea today."
- Boche: Germans. When one thinks of World War I slang for Germans, "the Hun" is usually what comes to mind, but the Smith Unit were all about the Boche. Also used as in ...



- Boche baby: A baby with a French mother and German father. The Germans had occupied the area for nearly three years before retreating in March of 1917. They were not always respectful of the female population. Some of the liaisons were consensual. Many were not. The Unit delivered and cared for several Boche babies, adamant that whatever their fathers might have been, the children would be raised to be well-loved children of France.
- Avec les Boches: With the Germans. In the villages the Smithies came to serve, the Germans had rounded up most of the able-bodied men and women and sent them to work camps in Germany. Every family the Smith women worked with had at least one, and sometimes several family members away "avec les Boches," their fate unknown. Not long before the German retreat, the Germans had rounded up the teenage girls to be sent away, and the stories the Smithies heard of daughters and sisters avec les boches were truly heartbreaking.
- Boche button: Some sort of soil-based infection. Cuts, even very minor ones, tended to fester, due to something in the soil. Many of the Unit wound up with cuts that just wouldn't heal. In their letters, some of the Unit referred to this as "Boche button." I'm not entirely sure why French soil was the fault of the Boche, but there you go. I'm also convinced the Smith Unit invented this one purely to drive future researchers mad; I haven't been able to find it anywhere other than their letters.
- War bread: The food everyone loved to hate. (More on this in a later post.) Due to the requisitioning of flour to make bread for the army, bread for civilians got... grainy. Now, we'd probably call it artisanal and charge more for it, but at the time it was simply war bread and deeply despised by locals and Smithies alike.
- Les Collégiennes Américaines: the Smith Unit. This gets extra points for being peak Franglais—something that sounds like it ought to translate properly, but doesn't. When the Smith Unit arrived in France, their founder decided they needed a snappy nom du guerre, a French handle by which the French press could refer to them without stumbling over the syllables of "Smith College Relief Unit." The only thing is that in France, "collégiennes," as in the UK and everywhere but the US, tend not to be university students, but middle schoolers. The Smith Unit were many things, but they were not twelve. Over their time in France, the Smith Unit dropped the "Collégiennes" and became known as Les Dames Américaines instead.

Now you, too, can speak like a member of the SCRU!



We all joke about cooking with pumpkin in October, but guess what? The Smith College Relief Unit was doing it, too, back in 1917!

They might be afflicted with rationing and war bread, but the Smith College Relief Unit found themselves the object of relentless invitations to dinner from neighboring groups of lonely American and Canadian soldiers. Feeling they ought to return the favor, in October of 1917 the Smith Unit got out their favorite recipes, rolled up their sleeves, dug up some dishes (no, really! They'd been buried by the gardener's wife so the Germans wouldn't get them), and invited twelve officers from the neighboring 11th US Engineers for dinner.

Of course, nothing quite went as intended ... They wound up short of dishes and had to run around washing out their tooth mugs to serve soup in and then rewashing them for dessert. The exhumed dishes turned out to be a bit loamy and had to be stealthily rewashed on the sidelines, with hopes that their guests wouldn't notice. And, of course, unexpected guests showed up in the form of a random British major, an American Army surgeon, and a French army camion with a delivery of pigs. Because that's the sort of thing that happens when you're the Smith Unit.

Here's the menu, as reported by one member of the Unit: "Pumpkin soup in cups, soup plates, tooth mugs, and glasses; roast beef, potatoes, cauliflower au gratin . . . Chocolate rice pudding in said tooth mugs washed over—sounds good doesn't it—and it was."

Would you like to dine like the Smith College Relief Unit? Get out your tooth mug and here are some recipes the Smithies might have used ...

#### - Pumpkin Soup (or potage au potiron)

"Take three pounds of ripe pumpkin, peel and remove the seeds, cut into pieces of moderate size, and place in a stewpan over the fire with a pint of water; let it boil slowly till soft, strain off all the water, and pass the pumpkin through a colander; return the pulp into the stewpan adding nearly three pints of milk, one ounce or more of butter, a pinch of salt and pepper, and a few lumps of loaf sugar; boil for ten minutes, stirring often. Pour it boiling into the dish, on very thin slices of bread. The sugar improves the flavor but may be omitted. It can be seasoned with a blade of mace or a little nutmeg."— from Jennie June's American Cookery Book, 1878.

Or

"<sup>3/4</sup> cup cooked squash, 1 quart milk, 1 sliced onion, 2 tablespoons butter, 3 tablespoons flour, 1 teaspoon salt, few grains pepper, <sup>1/4</sup> teaspoon celery salt. Rub squash through a sieve before measuring. Scald milk with onion, remove onion, and add milk to squash, season, and bind."— from *The Boston cooking-school cookbook*, 1896.

Modern equivalent: A simple creamy pumpkin soup recipe from <u>AllRecipes</u>:



Cooking for a dinner party with the Smith College Relief Unit (continued)

#### - Cauliflower au gratin

"Boil the cauliflower. Melt a tablespoon of butter in a saucepan and stir smoothly in one tablespoon of flour, thin with half a pint of milk, stir until boiling, add four tablespoons of grated cheese, a dash of cayenne and salt to taste. Pour this over the cauliflower and serve hot." — from *The Good Housekeeping Woman's Home Cookbook*, 1909 edition.

#### Modern equivalent: Smitten Kitchen's Cauliflower Gratin or Cauliflower Cheese

#### - Chocolate Rice Pudding

Okay, this one stymied me. I scoured period cookbooks from the 1870s through 1917, from *The American Housewife Cookbook* (1878) to *The Settlement House Cookbook* (1901) to the *Gold Medal Flour Cookbook* (1917) and everything you can think of in between. (Did I mention there were a LOT of cookbooks published in America between 1870 and 1917?) I found innumerable recipes for rice pudding, including ground rice pudding, rice pudding with fruit, rice pudding for invalids, and tons of recipes for chocolate puddings, mostly involving bread, but nothing for chocolate rice pudding. The closest I came was a recipe from a 1930s cookbook (too late for my Smithies, but I was getting annoyed), from a promotional cookbook for evaporated milk.

The Smith College Relief Unit did use a great deal of evaporated milk, so here's that 1935 recipe:

"1 tall cup White House milk, <sup>1/4</sup> cup rice, 2 <sup>1/2</sup> cups water, <sup>1/2</sup> teaspoon salt, <sup>1/3</sup> cup sugar, <sup>1/3</sup> cup cocoa. Boil rice in salted water until tender. Do not drain. Mix sugar and cocoa, add to rice. Add milk. Bake in a slow oven (300 degrees) for 1 <sup>1/2</sup> hours, stirring twice during the first hour. Allow to brown during the last half hour. Serve hot or cold." – from White House Milk Company, 1935, via Mid Century Menu.

#### Modern equivalent: Prepared Pantry's Old Fashioned Chocolate Rice Pudding

As they said in their letters home, "Sounds good, doesn't it?"

(I couldn't find a photo of that specific dinner party, so here's the Unit a couple of weeks later, eating a somewhat less elaborate meal—and with no tooth mugs!)

On a related note, if anyone wants to fall down the rabbit hole of period cookery, you can find a treasure trove of digitized cookbooks in MSU's <u>Feeding America collection</u>.





### Band of Sisters Accidental Oatmeal Muffins

While we were in our long, long lockdown in New York this past spring, my toddler discovered an insatiable desire for muffins. He didn't just want muffins. He NEEDED muffins, like Bismarck needed a united Germany. It was not negotiable.

I mashed bananas until the smell of overripe banana made me sick. I searched in the back of cupboards for forgotten cans of pumpkin puree. I tried making blueberry muffins without blueberries (this being in the days when fresh fruit was hard to come by and we were all in pioneer housewife mode, making last and making do and waste not want not and all those fun and uplifting stiff upper lip sort of sayings).

And then I stumbled on accidental oatmeal muffins. They were an accident because I was trying, in a rather clumsy and sleep-deprived way, to follow someone's recipe for oatmeal muffins that I'd made a few times before to okay if not wildly enthusiastic reviews and accidentally put in the wrong thing—so I had to put in a few more wrong things to make it right and suddenly I had everyone's New Favorite Muffin.

These tend to burn quickly, so ten minutes usually does it, or twelve minutes at the very most. (Unless you're like some people I could name who like the burned ones, in which case set the timer for fifteen minutes for a hard, burnt crust.)

Why Band of Sisters Accidental Oatmeal Muffins? Well, partly because flinging muffins at the toddler kept him occupied long enough for me to work on the book, and partly because it seems like the sort of thing the Smith Unit might have mixed up. Their cooking tended to be a combo of whatever came to hand (because in the war zone, you made do with what you had), with a lot of it being shelf-stable staples. They would have completely understood grabbing a packet of dried breakfast cereal and raisins because you didn't have the ingredients to make blueberry muffins and throwing it all together and hoping it would turn into something largely edible. Or grabbing the wrong packet from the cupboard because you were so tired you hadn't realized you'd mixed in the wrong thing—and just going with it because there was no way you were going to scrap everything and start over.

#### Happy baking!



These take roughly fifteen minutes to make: Five minutes to mix together and ten minutes to bake.

- Heat oven to 400 degrees.
- Take out your favorite mini-muffin tin (not full size; if you're going full size, double the recipe and the cooking time). Go wild with the cooking spray.
- $\cdot$  Whisk  $^{\rm 1/4}$  cup oil,  $^{\rm 1/4}$  cup milk, and 1 egg.
- Add 1/3 cup brown sugar, <sup>1/2</sup> cup flour, 1 packet maple-flavored Cream of Wheat, <sup>1/2</sup> tsp baking powder, <sup>1/4</sup> tsp baking soda, and <sup>1/8</sup> tsp salt.
- Fling in a generous handful of oats. For normal, organized people who use measuring cups and aren't making these in their nightgowns with their contact lenses not in yet, this probably equates to roughly <sup>1/2</sup> cup of oats, give or take.
- Fling in a generous handful of raisins.
   Again, probably roughly half a cup, although it depends on your personal raisin preferences.
   Depending on what kind of day you're having, raisins can be replaced with chocolate chips.
- Unlike most muffins, you don't have to worry about overmixing. The batter will be very soupy. That's fine.
- Glop your batter into your mini-muffin tin. This should make 12 mini muffins.
- Bake for ten minutes at 400 degrees.



Have you ever experienced an expat Thanksgiving? I have, and it was a bit of a forlorn feeling—but nothing compared to what the Smith College Relief Unit was dealing with in the Somme for their expat Thanksgiving.

By November of 1917, the muddy season was well underway, and the women of the Smith College Relief Unit were knee-deep in mud, always cold, always wet, driving from village to village in their open trucks with the rain blowing in their faces. To top it off, their trucks, which they relied on to get from place to place and do their work, had pretty much broken down on them.

"But, alas!" wrote one unit member home from the war zone. "The Ford truck had an accident after its first day of service with all its fine new parts, the White is in Paris awaiting solid tires, and even the Jit [their Ford jitney, affectionately abbreviated] gave us trouble one day."

It would have been a pretty grim Thanksgiving, far away from their families, but the Canadian Foresters came to the rescue, ignoring little things like national differences, and inviting the Smith College Relief Unit to their chateau (which actually still had walls and a roof and doors and stuff, unlike the chateau at the Smithies' headquarters at Grécourt), for a Thanksgiving dinner and dance.

But how to get there with no trucks? The Red Cross stepped in and loaned the Smithies a truck and driver for two days. "Last night, Thanksgiving, on top of carting beds, armoires, and stores all morning and goats in the afternoon, [Dave the Red Cross driver] cheerfully took eight of us off to the wilds to enjoy a fine dinner and dance given us by Canadian officers in their lovely old chateau."

Naturally, the Smithies worked all the day, going from village to village, delivering supplies and livestock, seeing patients, teaching classes, before struggling into their very best waterproof boots and least dirty blouses and piling into the truck to be carted off through the ravaged roads to the Foresters' headquarters.

"It was a strange experience, one we shan't forget in a hurry," wrote one Unit member.

In the early autumn dusk, the Canadians' chateau, complete with moat, sat there in the woods like something out of a fairy tale. The Foresters had decorated the grand gray-paneled salon with holly and mistletoe and a big, blazing open fire in the baronial fireplace. Candles glimmered around the room. The Foresters had somehow stumped together their sugar rations to come up with tarts, pies, and plum pudding to round off the feast. There was a menu at each place with an American flag on the front and a dance card on the back, and when the meal was over, they danced a Virginia reel on the parquet floor, the Smithies "in cowhide boots, wool stockings, our now disreputable Unit suits, and our best apologies for clean waists and ties."

"Our Canadians are certainly good friends and bring us the leavings of their wood to burn," wrote the assistant director of the Unit. "They come to tea every Sunday and are just now in a fit of the blues because they are afraid they will have to move just after finding us. I always thought they rather looked down on Americans. Europe has changed their ideas it seems . . ."

It was the first time the Canadian Foresters came to Smith Unit's rescue, but it wouldn't be the last . . . but you can read about that in *Band of Sisters*!

The Canadians making an American Thanksgiving for the Smithies out in the desolation of the war zone (complete with American flags drawn on the menus!) always makes me tear up a little. And if that isn't the spirit of Thanksgiving, I don't know what is.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Would you like to know more about the real women of the Smith College Relief Unit, Americans in France in World War I, or the plight of French villagers in occupied France? Here are some suggestions for further reading.

#### Ruth Gaines's Ladies of Grécourt and A Village in Picardy.

These books were my gateway to the Smith College Relief Unit. Gaines was one of the original members of the Smith College Relief Unit and published two books about her time in France. She does tend to gloss over a lot of things (hinting darkly at differences within the Unit but never coming right out with the details), but her memoirs provide a good overview of the Unit's initial time in France, with original sketches by Gaines and truly heartbreaking details about the lives of the villagers they served.

Both books have been digitized and can be read online via the links below:

- Ladies of Grécourt
- <u>A Village in Picardy</u>

#### *Louise Elliott Dalby's* An Irrepressible Crew: The Smith College Relief Unit.

If you can get your hands on a copy of this out of print pamphlet, Dalby put together a pastiche of letters from the vast collection at Smith College to create a portrait of the Unit's time in France. The story is told through the Unit's own letters, lightly interspersed with commentary by the author. The letters do tend to zigzag in time a bit, rendering the story a bit choppy, but the letters themselves are marvelous and give you a strong sense of the real women of the Smith College Relief Unit and their life in France.

#### The Smith College Alumnae Quarterly.

Speaking of their letters . . . When the Smithies wrote home from France, many of their families sent in letters to the alumnae magazine (sparking requests in later letters home to please stop sending private correspondence to the papers!). Excerpts of those letters—with anything controversial edited out—were published in the four editions of the *Alumnae Quarterly* that appeared between November 1917 and July 1918. These are freely available online through the Smith College *Alumnae Quarterly* archives and I encourage everyone to click and read!

- <u>November 1917</u>
- February 1918
- <u>April 1918</u>
- <u>July 1918</u>



#### Mary Allsebrook's Born to Rebel: The Life of Harriet Boyd Hawes.

Are you as intrigued as I am by the enigmatic founder of the Smith College Relief Unit? This engaging biography was written by Hawes's daughter. Hawes's life was so crammed with incident that the Smith College Relief Unit only plays a small part in this narrative, but it is well worth a read.

#### *Dorothy and Carl J. Schneider's* Into the Breach: American Women Overseas in World War I.

The Smith College Relief Unit weren't the only American women pitching in to help France at war! This monograph covers a range of American women serving France in World War I: Hello Girls, college women, African-American nurses, the Red Cross, aviatrixes, entertainers. And, of course, the Smith College Relief Unit!

#### *Ed and Libby Klekowski's* Eyewitnesses to the Great War: American Writers, Reporters, Volunteers, and Soldiers in France, 1914-1918.

More Americans abroad during the Great War! This sometimes laugh-out-loud-funny account of Americans blundering about France during World War I helps put the Smith College Relief Unit into context by showing the activities of their brothers, cousins, and friends—including an entire Andover class who tried to sign up as ambulancemen!

#### *Helen McPhail's The Long Silence:* The Tragedy of Occupied France in World War I *and Ben Macintyre's* The Englishman's Daughter: A True Story of Love and Betrayal in World War I.

This is the backstory to *Band of Sisters*. If you want to know what the villagers endured, what the children experienced that stopped them from playing, what life was like under German occupation, these are your books. *The Long Silence* takes a more analytical approach, synthesizing material from across the region, while *The Englishman's Daughter* takes a more personal approach, detailing the effect of the German occupation on one village. Both make very clear just how hard those years between 1914 and 1917 were for those in the occupied zone, and put the Smithies' observations very much in context.