

Folk & Traditional Song Lyrics

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I'll Tell You Where They Are

I'll Tell You Where They Are

If you want to know where the generals were,
I'll tell you where they were,
Yes, I'll tell you where they were,
Oh, I'll tell you where they were,
If you want to know where the generals were,
I'll tell you where they were,
Back in gay Paree!

(Spoken) How do you know?
I saw them! I saw them!
Back in gay Paree!
I saw them,
Back in gay Paree!

If you want to know where the colonels were,
Way behind the lines.

...the majors
Playing with the mademoiselles.

...the captains
Down in the deep dugout.

...the sergeants
Drinking up the privates' rum.

...the privates
Up to their necks in mud!

(From Dolph, "Sound Off")

It appears that the song was sung in the trenches early in World War I.
Perhaps with reference to the Battle of the Somme, a new verse was added
for British versions:

If you want to find the regiment
(If you want the old battalion)
...
I saw them, dangling on the old barbed wire.

Later still, this was combined with the previous verse and became:

If you want to see the Privates, I know where they are,

...

They're dangling on the old barbed wire.
(They are hanging on the front line wire)

There are many American and British versions. Some of the variations:

I know where they are (or were)
I know where he is

Our Seargent -

He is lying on the canteen floor
Clipping the old barbed wire.

Our Quartermaster - boozing on the Private's rum

Our General - miles and miles behind the Line

The Lieutenants - riding the Sergeant's ass.

The Privates may be "Up to (various body parts) in mud"

Sometimes: If you want the bloody general - etc

Endless take-offs are possible:

If you want to find your husband . . .

Some Books it's in:

Brophy and Partridge: *_Songs and Slang of the British Soldier_*, 1930

Lomax, Amer Ballads & Folk Songs, 1934

Carl Sandburg, *American Songbag*, 1927

JJ Niles and Douglas Moore, Illustrated by A.A.Walgren, *Songs My Mother Never Taught Me*, 1929

EA Dolph, *Sound Off*, 1929

Roy Palmer, *What a Lovely War - British Soldiers Songs from the Boer War to the Present Day*, 1990

J B Priestly, From Margin Released, 1962, observed that 'In the trenches the troops would sing a wide range of songs, including the marching songs, nonsense songs and other popular songs of the time. The patriotic songs seem to be unknown.'

On record:

"If You Want to Find the Colonel", on Bob Davenport's "Postcards Home"
(Topic, c. 1977).

Some other titles:

"I'll Tell You Where They Were."
"If You Want to Know Where the Privates Are"

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