

"It's not what you say, it's how you say it," says this expert who sugarcoats the bitterest pill and changes fear words to cheer words



Elmer's Magic War Words

by MURRAY TEIGH BLOOM

ELMER WHEELER is an engaging, quick-witted extrovert who is destined for a secure niche in American folklore as a professional man of few words. His choice words, seldom worth less than \$500 each, have already affected some 25,000,000 men and women who remain blissfully unaware that it was Elmer's fine Texan hand which induced their utter lack of sales resistance in divers items ranging from cigarettes to automobiles.

It was Elmer who taught Walgreen's soda jerkers to lure malted milk customers with "One or two eggs today?" instead of the unprofitable "Wanna egg in it?" His phrase, "They won't roll," sold 30,000,000 square clothespins at a rather higher price than the traditional round rollers. It was his fertile mind that sprouted the simple query: "Have you tried the *scientific* toothpaste?" and boomed sales for Squibb's dentrifice. He dou-

bled sales of Barbasol with an equally effective: "How would you like to save six minutes shaving?" He tripled sales by simplifying it to: "How would you like to cut your shaving time *in half?*"

Yes, as America's foremost salesman — a salesman's salesman, you might call him—Elmer has done yeoman work in teaching the business world how to use the right word at the right time.

In a typical pre-war year Elmer grossed a cool \$50,000 as president of his Tested Selling Institute. Statler Hotels, Johns-Mansville Corporation, American Airlines, R. H. Macy, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and the Texaco Company and sundry other blue chips have helped feather Elmer's nest.

But this, as the saying goes, is War. Today Elmer, 38, chunky, cheerful and chock full of ideas, believes we

need new verbal "sizzlers" to meet the impact of war conditions—in personal relations and in business, as well as in the actual conduct of the war.

For the past year Elmer has been hitting the lecture circuit like mad, thinking nothing of doing two and even three lectures a day before huge audiences of business and sales men, telling them exactly how to meet wartime conditions. For example:

Don't talk war to customers. It depresses them and takes their minds off the things they wanted to buy.

Don't use the word "substitute."

"Nylon," says Elmer, "really isn't a substitute for silk. It's a new material and is superior to silk in many ways. The same is true of plastics. Always stress the newness and superiority of the item."

To prospects who say, "I'll wait until the war is over before buying," use this reply: "The war may last a long time and you may need this long before the war is over. You may not be able to get it then. If you can still purchase it, the price will no doubt be considerably more than it is now."

To customers who say, "It's unpatriotic to spend money in wartime," Elmer advises this answer: "Yes, it certainly is unpatriotic to spend money foolishly in wartime but it is not unpatriotic to spend money wisely." Never, never, warns Elmer, resort to ridicule, flippancy or wisecracking in a case like this. And above all avoid using that careless advance agent of inflation: "Better spend your money while it's still worth something."

The retailer who wants customers to carry packages and save his truck tires should have his clerks say: "You will get this day after tomorrow on the new delivery system, but it will make a small neat package to fit into your purse." Never say, "Lady, we got to be patriotic and carry packages. Now I'll just put a handle on this and it won't be too heavy for you." Instead the Wheeler-trained clerk will say: "I'll have this wrapped small with a handle, and you can have your dress for tonight." Elmer saved Stern's Department Store in New York some \$7,000 recently on carrying charges with similar sizzlers.

In the clothing store the young man is hesitant about the suit. "Well," he says, "I may be drafted." Is the Wheeler-trained salesman stumped at this? He is not. "Yes," he says, "you may be drafted. We're all subject to that. But if so you will have a *new suit* to wear when you return, and that's more than most fellows will have. You won't have to wait six months to buy one and you won't be looking around for a job in a uniform, as many men did after the last war."

BETWEEN lecture engagements, Elmer can usually be found on his Dallas, Texas, ranch. He calls it Sizzle Ranch ("the *smallest* ranch in Texas, where the East peters out"). And there's word magic all over the place. Visitors aren't served plain drinks; they get *drinkriegs*, including such fearful "sizzlers" as Warmed Over Death, Virgin's Dilemma, Devil's Walking Stick (lemon, tequila, sugar, touch of

grenadine and some berritiaga). On the wall of your guest room you will find this information:

The Perfect Visitor

He wants to be invited back so he neither stays too long nor drinks too much; he doesn't discuss others not present, and above all lets others dominate conversation. He talks about things everybody present understands and wants to hear. He uses the word "you," seldom the word "I." He is a connoisseur of good jokes, whiskey and women. He can handle them all—with tact. The pleasure he receives from visiting is excelled only by the pleasure he brings his host. Don't make the host twice glad—glad he invited you and glad you're leaving!

For a long time now Elmer's been thinking of the role of words in the war. He thinks much of the Nazis' success can be traced to the fact that they out-worded us.

"Why, they scared us to death by their language," he will tell you. "They don't call a battle a battle—it's a *blitzkrieg*. Two submarines become a *wolfpack*. Hitler never says he'll beat England—he's always going to *destroy* her."

Looking homeward, Elmer thinks our Army propagandists have to go a long way before they get the idea of word magic. If they were adept at applied psychology, nothing called the American Expeditionary Force would have been allowed to leave this country. To Elmer the AEF sounds like a bunch of professors travelling somewhere to dig up ruins. He prefers something like *Invaders of Destruction*. Other revisions which are favored by Elmer:

Infantry. Sounds like kids. Should

be *Warriors* or *Bayonet Boys*.

Bomber pilot: *Finger Man?*

Cavalry. *Stallion Stukas* is better.

Rainbow Division. Sounds soft. How about *Rattlesnake Division?*

Flame-throwing tanks should be *Arson Squads*. Mop-up crews might be called *Buzzard Brigades*.

Nor does Elmer have any particular affection for such everyday words as morale and tax. He thinks *Lift*, *Spirit* or *Pick-up* would serve better than the first word and he favors *Life insurance* for tax.

THE SUGAR rationing business got Elmer's goat. Not because his tooth is any sweeter than yours or mine but because wrong, very wrong, words were used. Says the Dallas Sage:

"Brother Henderson comes out and announces: 'I've bad news for you. From now on you can have only eight ounces of sugar every week. We are in desperate need of sugar.'

"You were depressed. So was I," declares Elmer. "Many quietly raided the stores of sugar. But suppose Mr. Henderson had used cheer words instead of fear words and had said: 'I've *good* news for the American people. From now on they can have *eight full ounces* of sugar every week per person.'

"Why man, you'd run home to your wife and shout, 'Say, what are we going to do with eight ounces each of sugar every week?'"

Some grocers came to Elmer for advice on how to prevent hoarding, yet retain the good will of the customers. Elmer devised three sizzlers,

which have been used with notable success so far:

"The worms may eat from the bottom of the barrel up, Mrs. Jones, faster than your family can eat from the top down."

"This doesn't keep so well, Mrs. Smith, and the loss in waste may be more than what you will save by buying so much now."

"A penny saved is a penny earned, but a pound turned bad is a pound wasted."

"WORDS," Elmer is fond of saying, "help win battles as well as bayonets. Words can be used to demoralize people. Good propaganda makes the enemy uncomfortable, worried, disgusted with its own country."

Elmer thinks the United Nations are missing great opportunities to get at the Axis through stout-hearted men in occupied lands. He would like to see planes regularly drop certain types of leaflets in industrial sections of the overrun countries. These should be simple affairs, mostly pictures—which can be seen at a glance. Even as they would lay on the sidewalks, untouched, they'd be doing a potent selling job.

The pictures would show how to commit scientific sabotage—just what part of the machinery should be tampered with; how to make time bombs;

how to utilize makeshift materials such as ordinary sand. The photo leaflets should be very specific. They should tell the oppressed just what factory or what railroad junction in their community should be sabotaged to do the most good for the Allies.

With these photo sequences Elmer suggests accompanying lines such as:

"Just a pinch of sand but look what it could do for your country."

"How one person, You or Your Neighbor, can kill 1,000 Germans."

But the Allies must first glorify sabotage. Comparisons must be drawn to show that sabotage is nothing

other than "life insurance" and "self preservation." The idea is best put across in this line:

"You Kill Him—or He Will Kill You."

A query from a soldier recently set Elmer to thinking about some of the unusual problems of the men in the armed forces.

"What," this soldier asked, "are the magic words for getting a date from a gal in a strange land?"

This is not the sort of stuff that changes the course of wars, but it's mighty important to our young men overseas.

Elmer's principles in this matter are simple and effective:

"If she doesn't talk your language

Coming Soon

*A behind-the-scenes story of
WARTIME RUSSIA
told with thrilling pictures by
MME LITVINOFF
wife of the Russian Ambassador*

—smile. Foreign people look at your eyes to try to understand your thinking. So sell with the eyes.” Elmer admits that there are times when a simple gesture is far more effective than a number of magic words.

Other tested Wheelerpoints for the boys in khaki:

How do you handle the cigarette moocher? Next time he asks, ask him: “Mind letting me have a quarter, Joe?” This, of course is putting the conditioned reflex to work for you.

What do you say to the fellow soldier who owes you money and forgets to pay it back? Honest but forgetful. You say:

“Do I owe you any money, Jim?”

The best way to handle an officer whose rank you aren’t certain of, says Elmer, is to give him the highest reasonable title. If you’re not sure whether he’s a lieutenant or a captain, say “Good evening, Captain.” No one ever got into trouble by raising someone’s rank verbally. But you’re in for it if you de-rank him.

—*Suggestions for further reading:*

- PUBLIC OPINION
by Smith \$4.00
Prentice-Hall, Inc., New York
- NEWSPAPER AND SOCIETY
by Bird and Merwin \$5.35
Prentice-Hall, Inc., New York
- CONQUERING THE MAN IN THE STREET
by Ellis Freeman \$3.50
The Vanguard Press, New York



Good Impression

A SOVIET OFFICIAL tells of meeting two American millionaires who had been to Russia before the present war and who were most enthusiastic. They were particularly impressed by two Soviet gentlemen with whom they had played poker quite a bit and who also had taught them many lovely native songs. While the games were going on, the Russians used to sing dreamily. The Americans memorized the tunes, even the Russian words of these songs. They also lost about \$5,000 in the games.

The Soviet official politely asked the Americans to sing the songs. The Americans did, chant-

ing the Russian words. Then, smiling grimly, the official translated the folk songs of his country. They went something like this:

“I have two pair—Queens and Jacks.”

“Well, I have three Aces. Let’s keep on raising.”

—LOWELL THOMAS IN *Pageant of Life* (WILFRED FUNK)

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