



See Here, Private Hargrove!

by Marion Hargrove

CHAPTER VII

One of the nicest things about working in the kitchen in Battery C of the 13th Battalion has been the knowledge that its number-one chow hound, Buster Charney, would drop around after supper and the conversational fat. It's like a letter from home to listen to Buster's slow and mournful drawl, and his refreshing dry humor is a pick-me-up at the end of a long, hot afternoon.

Buster came prancing up the chow line, the other evening with a grin that started at the back of his head and enveloped his face from the nose down.

"What's eating you, Walter," I asked him, "besides that egg-sucking grin?"

"Leaving here, boy!" he sang. "You won't see me around for three months. And when you see me, son, you'll see stripes on my sleeves and a look of prosperity on my clean-cut T-heel face!"

The man behind him wanted to get to the mashed potatoes, so Buster had to move on down the line. I got the whole story from one of the kappes while I waited for him to make his evening call.

Of the 200-odd men in Battery C, two men had been selected for three months' training at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. At the end of their three months, they will come back as gunnery instructors, with a non-commissioned officers rating and a specialist's extra pay on top of that. Mrs. Walter Charney's little boy Buster was one of the two men selected.

I was chopping kindling for breakfast when Buster came around again, and I painted Fort Sill as a nest of pack rabbits, gophers, and rattlesnakes and assured him that Battery C was sending him to school to cut down the grocery bills. If we hadn't been insulting each other in a friendly fashion for years, I would have told him that I wasn't particularly astonished and that I was sure he'd make a good instructor and the kind of non-commissioned officer the boys borrow money from.

Battery C will miss Ole Buster while he's away. The cooks will miss him because he always re-

members to compliment them when he likes the meat loaf or the cherry cobbler. The mess sergeant will miss him because he livens the kitchen when it comes his turn to do kappes. The boys will miss him because he's one of the best-liked boys there.

One of the sergeants near here came back from a recent leave with one of the most glorious shiners that ever darkened the human eye.

"Run into a door?" I asked him. "Gave a guy the wrong answer," he replied simply, "or rather, the answer he didn't want."

I looked at his face; his teeth were all there and his jaw was still in one piece. I looked at his hands; the knuckles showed the marks of service.

"I was at a party," he went on, "when this fellow who lives next door to my folks wants to know 'how's the morale in the Army?' 'Excellent,' I tell him; 'excellent!' He looks me up and down sort of pitying-like and wants to know about how poor it is. Well, I tell him, 'I spend all my time with the boys and I believe what I see more than what I read.'"

"He goes on from there making cracks at the Army and the country and the suckers we are for giving our time for what's not worth fighting for in the first place. I listen politely for a while, because even though I'm not in uniform I don't want to look rowdy. I stand as much as I can and then I ask him to his feet. It isn't long before his three brothers join the fight. It was one of the brothers put his finger ring in my eye."

"Brother," I told him, "that ain't a black eye. That's a badge."

"I lost the fight," he said.

"You won the argument, though," I told him.

"I'd like to use the sergeant's name, but he made me promise not to."

"I told the Old Man," he said, "that I got the shiner playing baseball."

den you, stand still!" "Heavens to Betsy, Thomas," I complained, "you're getting to be the fussiest old maid in the outfit. I'm not squirming!"

"In the first place, my man," he said, "don't call me Thomas or try to get overly familiar with your elders and betters. In the second place, don't argue with me. In the third place, don't fidget in the first place. And in the fourth place, don't agitate me unnecessarily. I'm at the end of my patience with you and I ain't feeling in no holiday spirit anyway."

I buttoned the handsome winter blouse and he stepped back to inspect it with the eye of an artist. "Every time my wife gets mad at me, she has her picture taken to send to me. The picture I got today showed she's going to eat my heart out unmercifully when I can't put off my furlough any longer and I have to go home. And with domestic difficulties on my hands, I have to fit your winter uniforms."

He yanked at my coattail, straightened the collar and scratched his head. "Hargrove—37 long," he yelled to the boy at the desk.

"Man that is born of woman," I comforted him, "is of many days and full of trouble."

"Git off the platform and into this overcoat," he sighed. He held the coat while I got into it and he slapped my hand for fidgeting again. "Sometimes I wonder why I got to so much trouble keeping you boys dressed right. Here I spend the whole afternoon wiping sweat out of my eyebrows, just to see that your clothes fit you and you won't look like a bunch of bums—which you are."

"Do you know what some ungrateful kitchen termite said the other day? He started putting it around that the Army could double itself in half an hour by filling up the extra space in its trousers. Do your trousers fit you bum? He straightened the pleats in the back of the overcoat and gave the tail an unnecessarily vicious yank.

"Did I say they didn't?" I groaned, raising my arms despairingly. "Just because somebody else says you stretch the coat in the back so the man will think it fits right in the front, you have to go

picking on me!"

"Me pick on you?" he screamed. "It's a wonder my nerves ain't completely shot! Do I come around and put signs on the door saying, 'Walk Up One Flight and Save Five Dollars?' Do I throw gunny sacks on your bed and ask you to take up the cuffs two inches?"

"With my thankless job, it's a wonder I haven't collapsed before this. I wish I was a permanent kitchen police instead of a supply sergeant. Hargrove—37 long! NEXT!"

"This batter is my baby," Corporal Henry Ussery said, loosening his belt for a real bull session. I've watched it grow from thirty-one men to what it is now. It was hard work building up this battery to what it is now, but it's worth it when you look around and see what you've done."

The assembly sighed en masse and decided to loosen its belts. Ussery was wound up again. "When I got here, there wasn't anybody else but the instructors. We spent four weeks eating dust and running rabbits. There I was—I'd spent thirteen months learning the old drill and tactics to where I reckon I had it down better than any man in the whole Army. Then they started this 'minute Army,' with a bunch of green ignorant Yankees—and I had to teach them what they had to know!"

The bull session nodded wisely and Corporal Ussery went on. "Now this young Corporal Joe Gantt, for instance. Now, this Corporal Gantt when he first came in, was one of the greenest rookies in the bunch. But he snapped out of it and made corporal in four months."

"Was that soldiering," a voice broke in, "or handshaking—as the Latins used to say, mittus floppus?"

"Much as I can't stand Gantt, I'll have to admit it is soldiering. That's the way it is. You sweat your head off hammering the drills and the iasthenics and the military courtesy and guard duty and the physical hygiene and the manual of arms into them. They're all clumsy and awkward as a bear in an egg crate at first, but then you can see them, after a while, snapping into it and getting better and better. By the time we've had them thirteen weeks, and they're ready to be assigned to their posts, they're as keen and alert as a bunch of West Point cadets. They're extra good cooks and better soldiers."

"Isn't a good soldier a specialist at griping and growling?" somebody asked him.

"When a soldier can gripe," the corporal announced in a pontifical manner, "he's happy as a pig in the sunshine. When he doesn't gripe there's something wrong with him. That's another thing you learn.

When you first come here, you didn't know the first principles of griping. You griped about the clothes; you griped about the beds; you griped especially about having to go to bed at nine o'clock."

"Griping is an art, just like goldbricking is an art. Before you leave here, you learn that you don't enjoy griping a bit when you spread your energy all over everywhere, griping about everything. You learn to choose one thing and specialize in griping about that."

"If you want to be a specialist at griping, you have to get on your toes. You get to where your clothes are comfortable. Where you used to think the food was terrible, now you pretend that you don't get enough of it. You like the beds and by nine o'clock you're sleepy. So you have to find something special to gripe about. If you haven't got any originality at all, pick you out one special non-com and gripe about him."

"Now, you take Private Hargrove, for instance. First came here, he griped about me telling him he was carrying his rifle wrong. Now he gripes when I tell him he's carrying it right. He still carries it like it was a 75-millimeter gun. He's getting so shiftless, even at griping, that he can't find anything to gripe about except not getting any mail. I'm going to write all his creditors, so he won't even be able to gripe about the mail."

"That reminds me," I said. "Did I tell you boys what Sergeant Taylor told me about Ussery today?"

"Nine o'clock!" Ussery shouted. "Lights out! Break it up!"

Somewhere on the wild coast of South Carolina, the battalion in which I cook is being treated to a weekend to combine business with pleasure. We can romp in the Atlantic while we get a "taste of the field." With the wind blowing the sand into kitchens and pup tents alike, it will be nice to get back to Fort Bragg for a taste of the food we eat. A vexed soldier here don't grate his teeth. He crunches them.

We made the trip here in lorries, which are the mechanical age's nearest approach in appearance to covered wagons. You've probably seen them rolling noisily but smoothly through town—large canvas-topped trucks with a folding bench down each side inside. You'd expect to be hauled out of one of them, beaten to death, at the end of a 130-mile trip. They give a tolerably bumpy ride, just tolerably.

When we started pitching camp, about a quarter of a mile back from the beach, we found the place al-

ready inhabited — by cannibals. These creatures, which masquerade as harmless flies and even camouflage by the harmless sounding name of sand flies, must have vampire blood back in the line somewhere.

I don't hear and grudges against the easygoing, good-natured house fly—in fact, I feel rather cruel when I squash one for tickling me—but it arouses my pioneer fighting spirit to see a stunted horsefly light on my bare leg, make himself sassily comfortable and start draining off my life's blood. But what can you do? Slapping one only serves to make him mad at you.

At night we sleep, or at least we simulate sleep, in pup tents made by our own hands with loving care, blood, sweat, tears, two pieces of waterproof cloth, two lengths of rope, and a handful of turned lumber.

I share my little duplex with Private Warren, the new student cook who told me the story about the man at the boarding house. When I stumbled home last night, primed to the gills with a blend of sand and salt water, I discovered that we had an overnight guest! The chief cook on our shift, in the task of packing the field kitchen, had neglected to put his own field pack (tent half, blankets, etc.) on the truck, so he decided to drop over and have us put him up for the night.

A pup tent, as you probably don't need to be told, will accommodate two men, provided neither of them walks in his sleep. If three men are to sleep in one tent,

at least two of them must be mid-gets or babes in arms. Cooks should never sleep two to a tent, because of their tendency toward plumpness.

We arranged ourselves in the tent by wrapping knees around the tent poles, putting all feet outside for the night and raising one side of the tent high enough to make a rustic sleeping porch of the whole affair.

The guest proved to be one of those loathsome creatures who pull all the covers to their side of the bed. We had quite a lot of trouble with him, since he slept in the middle and rolled up in both our blankets. We remedied this by waiting until he started snoring, then recovered our blankets, rolling ourselves in them and throwing a raincoat over him.

The three-man arrangement was very uncomfortable for a while. When I finished opening my eyes by scooping the sand from them, I found that I had rolled through the open side of the tent and spent the night under a myrtle bush ten yards down the slope.

During my first off hour, I succeeded in getting a tan which must have darkened the very marrow of my bones. My chest, back, and legs looked the color of a faded danger flag and smelled like the roast pork that the cook forgot to watch. After that, the surf and the sun went their ways and I went mine.

(To be continued)

READ THE WANT ADS

You get more cups of good coffee in every pound!

JFG

SPECIAL COFFEE

The Best Part of the Meal

A Frank Message TO YOU

We have been more fortunate than many Laundries. We are in no wise seeking to boast when we say that we have met the situation with results considerably above the average, so far. We ascribe this record largely to loyal help.

There is no denying that our work has been slowed down by war conditions.

We have had to ask you to bear with us more than once.

You require your Laundry to be 100% in the quality of its work. You are entitled to do so. But, no matter how hard we try, we sometimes fall short of our own ideals — in these trying days.

Whenever you feel that an article

PLEASE BRING A HANGER!



SYLVA LAUNDRY and DRY CLEANERS

Across Track, Opposite Railroad Station

Phone 25

