



See Here, Private Hargrove!

by Marion Hargrove

(Continued from page 9)

through the nose from hay fever yet. Sneezing to glory."

The bus station on that morning in July was a pathetic picture. Four large groups of boys, reconciled to the grim and gruesome life ahead of them, were bade farewell by wailing mothers and nobly suffering girl friends who had come down to see their loved ones off in a blaze of pathos. It was pretty terrible. "Selective Service System—Mecklenburg County Board Number Three.

The buses swung out of the terminal, through midtown, and out toward the road to Fayetteville. The boys began to feel better, shouted farewells to startled girls on the street and finally broke into raucous song. Four flowers of the nation started a blackjack game on a suitcase in the back of the bus.

Brother Piel's spirits brightened a little. His smooth voice found its way through the hay fever and emerged in song. "It's a lovely day tomorrow," he sang. "Tomorrow is a lovely day."

"Look at me tomorrow," he said, breaking off suddenly. "Hay foot, Private Piel. Straw foot, Private Piel. Hay and straw and look at what I've got. Hay fever yet! Oy, what a life I'll lead!"

"Maybe what I'd better do when I get there, I'd better tell them I'd like to go north. They could use a good man in Alaska."

"The South Pole is your meat," I told him.

"That's it! The South Pole! Boy, I'm going to love the Army!"

The tumult and the shouting died about halfway to Fayetteville. The boys became quiet and thoughtful.

CHAPTER II

A soldier stuck his head through the door of our new dormitory and gave a sharp whistle. "Nine o'clock!" he yelled. "Lights out and no more noise! Go to sleep!"

"It has been, withal, a very busy day," I said to Piel, who was buried with his hay fever in the next bunk.

"It sure withal has," he said. "What a day! What a place! What

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mouth." "Yessir," said Piel, "the Army makes men."

The discussion was interrupted by the reappearance of the soldier. "If youse blankety-blanked little dash-dashes don't shut your cuss-cuss yaps and get the blankety-blank to sleep, I'm gonna come back up here and make yez scrub the whole blankety-blanked dash-dash cuss-cuss floor with a blankety-blank toothbrush. Now shaddap!"

So we quietly went to sleep. This morning we took the Oath. One of the boys was telling me later that when his brother was inducted in Alabama, there was a tough old sergeant who was having an awful time keeping the men quiet. "Gentlemen," he would beseech them, "Quiet, please! They were quiet during the administration of the Oath, after which they burst forth again.

The old sergeant, his face beaming sweetly, purred: "You are now members of the Army of the United States. Now, damn it, SHUT UP."

This morning—our first morning in the Recruit Reception Center—began when we finished breakfast and started cleaning up our squad-room. A gray-haired, fatherly old private, who swore that he had been demoted from master sergeant four times, lined us up in front of the barracks and took us to the dispensary.

If the line in front of the mess hall dwindled as rapidly as the one at the dispensary, life would have loveliness to sell above its private consumption stock. First you're fifteen feet from the door, then (whiff) you're inside. Then you're standing between two orderlies and the show is on.

The one on my left scratched my arm and applied the smallpox virus. The only thing that kept me from keeling over was the hypodermic needle loaded with typhoid germs, which propped up my right arm.

From the dispensary we went to a huge warehouse of a building by the railroad tracks. The place looked like Goldenberg's Basement on a busy day. A score of fitters measured necks, waists, inseams, heads, and feet.

My shoe size, the clerk yelled down the line, was ten and a half. "I beg your pardon," I prompted, "I wear a size nine."

"Forgive me," he said, a trifle weary, "the expression is 'I wore a size nine.' These shoes are to walk in, not to make you look like Cinderella. You say size nine; your foot says ten and a half."

We filed down a long counter, picking up our allotted khaki and denims, barrack bags and raincoats, mess kits and tent halves. Then we were led into a large room, where we laid aside the vestments of civil life and donned our new garments.

While I stood there, wondering what I was supposed to do next, an attendant caught me from the rear and strapped to my shoulders what felt like the Old Man of the Mountain after forty days.

"Straighten up, soldier," the attendant said, "and git off the floor. That's nothing but a full field pack, such as you will tote many miles before you leave his man's army. Now I want you to walk over to that ramp and over it. That's just to see if your shoes are comfort-

table." "With these Oregon boots and this burden of misery," I told him firmly, "I couldn't even walk over to the thing. As for climbing over it, not even an alpenstock, a burro train, and two St. Bernard dogs complete with brandy could get me over it."

There was something in his quiet, steady answering glance that reassured me. I went over the ramp in short order. On the double, I think the Army calls it.

From there we went to the theater, where we were given intelligence tests, and to the classification office, where we were interviewed by patient and considerate corporals.

"And what did you do in civil life?" my corporal asked me. "I was feature editor of the Charlotte News."

"And just what sort of work did you do, Private Hargrove? Just give me a brief idea."

Seven minutes later, I had finished answering that question. "Let's just put down here, 'Editorial worker.' He sighed compassionately. "And what did you do before all that?"

I told him. I brought in the publicity work, the soda-jerking, the theater ushering, and the printer's deviling.

"Private Hargrove," he said, "the army is just what you have needed to ease the burdens of your existence. Look no farther, Private Hargrove, you have found a home."

This was a lovely morning. We began at daybreak and devoted all the time until noon to enjoy the beauties of nature. We had a drill sergeant to point them out to us. We marched a full twenty miles without leaving the drill field. Lunch, needless to say, was delicious.

We fell into bed, after lunch, determined to spend the afternoon in dreamland. Two minutes later, that infernal whistle blew. Melvin Piel, guardhouse lawyer for Company A, explained it all on the way downstairs. We were going to be assigned to our permanent stations.

I fell in and a corporal led us off down the street. I could feel the California palm trees fanning my face. We stopped at Barracks 17 and the corporal led us inside.

"Do we go to California, corporal?" I asked. "Naah," he said.

"Where do we go?" I asked him, a little disappointed. "To the garbage rack," he said. "Double quick." He thumbed Johnny Lisk and me to the back of the barracks.

At the garbage rack we found three extremely fragrant garbage cans. Outside, we found more. Lisk and I, citizen-soldiers, stared at them. The overcheerful private to whom we were assigned told us, "When you finish cleaning those, I want to be able to see my face in them!"

"There's no accounting for tastes," Lisk whispered. Nevertheless, we cleaned them and polished them and left them spick and span. "Now take 'em outside and paint 'em," said the private. "White. Git the black paint and paint 'HQCORR' on both sides of all of them." "This is summer," I suggested. "Wouldn't something pastel look better?"

The sun was affecting the private. "I think you're right," he said. So we painted them cream and lettered them in brilliant orange.

All afternoon, in a blistering sun, we painted garbage cans. The other Charlotte boys waved to us as they passed on their way to the ball park. Happy voices floated to us from the post exchange. The supper hour neared.

The straw-hoss private woke up, yawned and went away, telling us what would happen if we did likewise. He returned soon in a truck. He motioned peremptorily to us and we loaded the cans into the truck. Away we went to headquarters company—and painted more garbage cans. It was definitely supertime by now.

"Now can we go home, Private Dooley, sir?" asked Lisk. I looked at Lisk every time the blindness left me, and I could see the boy was tired.

The private sighed wearily. "Git in the truck," he said. Away we went back to our street. We stopped in front of our barracks and Private Dooley dismounted. "The truck driver," he said, "would appreciate it if you boys would go and help him wash the truck."

We sat in the back of the truck and watched the mess hall fade away behind us. Two, three, four miles we left it behind us. We had to wait ten minutes before we could get the wash-pit. It took us fifteen minutes to wash the truck. By the time we got back to the mess hall we were too tired to eat. But we ate.

On the way to our barracks we met Yardbird Fred McPhail, neat and cool, on his way to the recreation hall. "Good news, soldiers," said Yardbird McPhail. "We don't have to drill tomorrow."

We halted and sighed blissfully. "No, sir," said McPhail. "They can't lay a hand on us from sunup until sundown. The whole barracks is on kitchen duty all day."

It was through no fault of mine that I was a kitchen policeman on my sixth day. The whole barracks got the grind. And it was duty, not punishment.

It was all very simple, this KP business. All you have to do is to get up an hour earlier, serve the

food, and keep the mess hall clean.

After we served breakfast, I found a very easy job in the dining hall, where life is much pinker than it is in the kitchen. A quartet was formed and we were singing "Home on the Range." A corporal passed by just as I hit a sour note. He put the broom into my left hand, the mop into my right . . .

"There was a citizen-soldier from Kannapolis to help me clean the cooks' barracks. For a time it was awful. We tried to concentrate on the floor while a news broadcaster almost tore up the radio trying to decide whether we were to be in the Army ten years or twenty.

We finished the job in an extremely short time to impress the corporal. This, we found later, is a serious tactical blunder and a discredit to the ethics of goldbricking. The sooner you finish a job the sooner you start in on the next.

The corporal liked our work, unfortunately. Kannapolis was allowed to sort garbage and I was promoted to the pot-and-pan polishing section. I was Themis Kokenes's assistant. We washed and I dried. Later we formed a goldbricking entente. We both washed and made Conrad Wilson dry.

Pollyanna the glad girl would have found something silver-lined about the hot sink. So did I. "At least," I told Kokenes, "this will give my back a chance to recover from that mop."

When I said "mop," the mess sergeant handed me one. He wanted to be able to see his face in the kitchen floor. After lunch he wanted the back porch polished.

We left the Reception Center mess hall a better place to eat in, at any rate. But KP is like a woman's work—never really done. Conrad Wilson marked one caldron and at the end of the day we found that we had washed it twenty-two times.

Jack Mulligan helped me up the last ten steps to the squadroom. I finally got to the side of my bunk. "Gentlemen," I said to the group which gathered around to scoop me off the floor, "I don't ever want to see another kitchen!"

The next morning we were clas-

sified and assigned to the Field Artillery Replacement Center. Gene Shumate and I were classified as cooks. I am a semi-skilled cook, they say, although the only egg I ever tried to fry was later used as a tire patch. The other cooks include postal clerks, tractor salesmen, railroad engineers, riveters, bricklayers and one blacksmith.

But we'll learn. Already I've learned to make beds, sweep, mop, wash windows and sew a fine seam. When Congress lets me go home, will I make some woman a good wife!

(To be continued)

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