



See Here, Private Hargrove!

by Marion Hargrove

CHAPTER X

There was one Sunday evening when Sher started a letter to his family and found, after a couple of paragraphs, that there was nothing to write about. "Here, Junior," he said. "Write a letter for your old daddy. Give them the old European schmaltz."

Since Junior was in a devilish mood, he sat down and wrote a long and inspired letter to the Shers of Columbus, Ohio—telling them how their little Maurice was falling behind in his class by goldbricking and hanging out late at the Service Club, entreating them to return him to his true career, the Army. I finished the letters; you should know where to send the cookies. Forget that bum Maury."

Several days later—after I had scribbled a skillet for a typewriter and had moved to Headquarters Battery—I came by Battery A to see if I had any mail from my non-comrades in Charlotte. There weren't any letters, but there was a package which looked about the size of a steamer trunk. There were enough cookies inside to feed a small regiment for three days.

The card inside read: "Dear Hargrove—We think your idea about the cookies is superb. Give Maury one or two; he's a good boy when he wants to be. Why don't you come up to Columbus on your furlough?"

It seemed that all this beautiful friendship—with all its fragrant memories, its happy hours and hollering, its beautiful cigarettes, cookies, and Samaritan relatives—was destined to end with the closing of the basic training cycle here. I had already left Battery A for

another residential section a half mile away. We managed to get together three or four times a week for a movie, a trip to Fayetteville, or a pleasant evening of bull-shooting at the Service Club. But even this was to pass.

Sher's own thirteen weeks were drawing to a close and he was slated to be assigned to a permanent station as a cook. With sinking hearts, we watched group after group leave for camps in Louisiana, Georgia, Missouri, New York and Michigan.

And then pleasant news came over the grapevine telegraph. Private Maurice Sher, by reason of skill, application, and neatness, had been assigned as a cook for the Center Headquarters officers' mess. It's only latrine gossip, but if it comes through it means that Private Sher will be transferred to Headquarters Battery and the team of Hargrove and Sher will ride again.

The old gang, which has lived and worked and played together for over three months and has grown into a close and sympathetic brotherhood, is dissolving now. The training cycle is being finished and already the old ties are loosening.

The student cooks whom I grew to know and feel a fondness for during those months are not so fortunate as some of the other soldiers. The Charlotte boys who were inducted with me and who went through their antitank training together will go together to Fort Knox and will continue to be with each other for at least a while longer. On the other hand, these student cooks of Battery A will not go out together. No Fort is going to be sent a whole battery of cooks. One cook will be needed here, another there, and the old third platoon will be scattered from hell to breakfast.

An old thirty-year man, with five or six hash marks on his sleeve, will tell you that no matter how long you stay in the Army, you'll never find a battery that quite stacks up to the first battery in which you served, no group of buddies quite like the old gang you knew first.

There's a reason for it. In your first organization, you learn for the first time all the regulations and the customs and the traditions of the Army. When you first face them, they're tough or they're uninteresting, and when you finally get to understand and agree with them, they're identified in your memory with the battery where you learned them.

With the men who serve with you there, you grow closer through hardship and privation than you can possibly grow to any other group. After you get out into a line organization—a real tactical unit, such as these boys are entering—any hardship or misery is just

a part of the routine. The sufferers are men rather than boys.

But in the first training cycle, this rookie stage, you haven't hardened. You and the new soldiers about you are sensitive, delicate boys, newly yanked from home or school, accustomed to an easy-going and usually painless life. You share each other's illness, fatigue, despair. When Happy Menza grows homesick for Buffalo and McLaughlin starts a wistful reminiscing about the lakes and forests of Minnesota, you are homesick for them rather than for yourself. You are companions tested in misery.

Friday night was probably the last evening the boys of my old crowd would be together. At least, it was the last evening they were sure of being together. The following day they were to go home for a week's furlough. On their return, next Monday, they will be assigned to their permanent stations to enter the field as soldiers. So they arranged to hold a party Friday night on the river beyond Fayetteville.

When we rode to the river in our chartered bus, we rang the welkin with the old songs—the faintly fragrant songs you pick up through the years and the "Caisson Song" and "Old King Cole" that you learn in the Army. They were boisterous, those songs, but a melancholy strain ran under all of them.

At the party we ate barbecue and we drank beer and we recalled the best anecdotes of the training cycle. We sang and we shouted. Two or three of the boys dipped a little too deep into the keg and became slightly sentimental. And although the food and the beer were the best, the songs were the songs we loved and the anecdotes were the cream of the season, it was empty joy. It had a dull undertone of sorrow.

It was the sort of feeling that you know in the last hour before the New Year's bells, the feeling that reaches its fullest when "Auld Lang Syne" is heard.

Since we left our homes last July we've learned a lot. Drills and rifles, pup tents and gas masks, all of that.

This, though—the scattering of our first fraternity—is another thing we have learned, now and for the first time. It is our first lesson in a new kind of homesickness, bred only in the Army.

"Private Hargrove," I said to myself, "you have been doing quite too much gallivanting lately. There have been too many movies, too many bull sessions, too many hours spent at the Service Club and too much time spent flirting with that cute little waitress at the delicatessen in Fayetteville. Tonight, Private Hargrove, you will take this interesting and improving book, read it until Lights Out and go to bed promptly at nine o'clock."

There was a little back talk, a little argument, a little entreaty. However, the forces of Truth and Progress prevailed. Immediately after supper I adjourned to the squadroom, arranged myself comfortably on my bunk and dug into the interesting book. Peace and quiet held sway about me.

As luck would have it, this same sudden decision to turn a Quiet evening at Home struck several fellow members of the squadroom at the same time. Six or seven near-by bunks sported occupants who usually disdained the comforts of home until at least nine o'clock. Books were brought out from the foot lockers, pens and papers made their appearance, and one ambitious and energetic flower of the nation even got out his shoe polish and went to work.

Private Wesley Sager, late of Amsterdam, New York, grew weary of the quiet. Yawning widely, he rolled over in bed and with a sudden swoop yanked the pillow from beneath the head of Private Melvin Hart. "Yippee," screamed Private Sager, tossing the pillow across the squadroom to a willing accomplice. "Yippee," screamed the willing accomplice, tossing the pillow back to Private Sager.

Private Hart rose and retrieved his pillow with dignity and formality. He placed it on his bunk, smoothed it and laid his head upon it. Three privates sighed in resignation. The incorrigibles were at it again.

Private Sager lay quiet for a while. Then he broke into a loud, regular, but unconvincing snore. The three sighing privates did not return to their occupations, but lay in philosophic expectation. Once the boys in that corner got started, nothing but physical exhaustion could stop them.

Private Sager turned as if tossing in his sleep. Private Hart noted the move and held his book ready to strike if a hand came toward his pillow. Private Sager turned again, facing away from Private Hart, and Private Hart relaxed his vigil. When he did, the hand shot out once more and the pillow sailed across the room and into waiting arms.

Again Private Hart retrieved the

pillow and again he lay down. "Why," he asked, "must you behave like a two-year-old infant? Can't you act like a normal adult?"

"Sure I can," Private Sager replied. "Kindly step outside with me and put up your fists."

Private Hart gave vent to a quiet and gentlemanly oath. "Please do me the honor to shut your mouth," he requests. "I should like to read without the clamor of your big yap roaring in my ears."

This is but the opening gun. Almost daily it marks the beginning of a half-hour session of blusters, threats, extravagantly insulting remarks, and repeated invitations from each side for the other to step outside and settle it. Nothing ever comes of it and soon the contending parties tire of the play.

Silence reigns again, but its throne is shaky. Private Hart tires of his book and turns to Private Sager. "Were you at the dance last night when the redhead got started telling what she thought of Jim Carney's dancing?"

Private Carney picks up the bait. "Anything Hart says about me or about what anybody else says about me is entirely fictitious, and any resemblance to persons living or dead is coincidental and not intended."

Private Sager sits up suddenly in bed. "Don't talk like that about Hart," he says in a quiet, serious, and menacing voice. "Anything you say about Hart is a personal insult to me. If you're inclined to insult me, kindly take off your stripe and step outside with me."

"Don't you go talking like that to the ranking first-class private of this section," raps Private Hart. "I don't like your manner at all. Kindly step outside with me while I beat your brains out."

If you want peace and quiet on these stay-at-home nights, the best solution is to go to the second barracks down the line. There's nobody down there except fifty-eight members of the band, who are always rehearsing at this time of night.

Slang runs wild in the Army. It's like a disease or the liquor habit. Among the boys who sit around on the back steps after Lights Out and bat the breeze far into the night, no simple and understandable English word is used where a weird and outlandish concoction can be substituted.

Water is GI lemonade. Salt is sand or Lot's wife; pepper is

specks; sugar is sweetening compound. Milk is cat beer; butter, dogfat, Ketchup is blood. In the untiring imagination of the soldier, green peas become China berries; hominy grits are glamorized into Georgia ice cream; rice is swamp seed. Potatoes become Irish grapes; prunes change to strawberries; hot cakes become blankets. Bread is punk and creamed beef on toast is punk salve. Meat loaf and hash are kennel rations.

It is strictly against the code of the Army to say a complimentary word about the food or the cook, no matter how good the food is or how hard the cook labors to make it so. Oscar of the Waldorf in the Army, would still be either a slum-burner or a belly-robbor.

Back at the News, the boys in the composing room and the mailing department used to send greenberns searching all over the building for erasing ink, striped or dotted ink, paper stretchers, and other non-existent items. Here, a new and gullible man is sent for the cannon report, or for the biscuit gun, the flagpole key, or the rubber flag which is used on rainy days.

Here are some of the most popular figures of speech:

Army Bible — the Articles of War; regulations.

Barrage — a party, especially where the Demon Rum rears its ugly head.

Blanket drill — sleep.

Butcher'shop — a dispensary or hospital.

By the numbers — like clockwork; with precision and efficiency.

Chili bowl — regulation haircut.

Chest hardware — medals.

Didie pins — the gold stars of a second lieutenant.

Dog robber — an orderly.

The eagle — money. On payday, the eagle flies.

Front and center — come forward.

Flying time — sleep.

Gashouse — a beer joint.

Glue — honey.

Goof off—to make a mistake.

Handshaking — playing up to superiors.

Higher brass—the higher ranks of officers.

Hollywood corporal — an acting corporal.

Holy Joe—the chaplain.

Honey wagon — the garbage truck.

Housewife — a soldier's sewing kit.

Jubilee—reveille, which is too

often pronounced "revelee."

Mother Machree — a sob-story alibi.

Pocket lettuce—paper money.

Pontoon checks—canteen checks, good for credit at the post exchange.

Ride the sickbook—to goldbrick the easy way by pretending to be ill.

Shoulder hardware—the shoulder insignia of a commissioned officer.

(To be continued)

NOTICE OF SUMMONS

In the Superior Court of North Carolina, Haywood County, Gordon Bryson vs. Margie Bryson

The defendant in the above entitled action will take notice that an action as above has been commenced in the Superior Court of Haywood County, North Carolina, for the purpose of securing an absolute divorce from the defendant upon statutory grounds.

And said defendant will further take notice that he is required to appear before the Clerk of the Court of said County at the Court House in Waynesville, North Carolina, on the 15th day of November, 1943, and answer or demur to the complaint, filed in said cause or the plaintiff will apply to the Court for the relief demanded in said complaint.

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