

LITERARY PAGE

Essay on Chow

(Private Randall was a sophomore in journalism at Oregon last year, and is now at Fort Lewis, Washington. These are his private sentiments on chow. —Ed.)

By Private Vernon R. Randall
COME, fellows, it is several minutes past the hour. Time for us to adjourn for our meal, in the best Etonian manner, is not the way one becomes informed of meal time in the army. More likely, it is: "Jesus Christ, the line will be backed up to the attic!" Then begins a scramble that would make the five o'clock rush look like a corset-bound minuet. I know. The first few times I acted as the gangplank from the squad room to the mess hall.

After the mess hall door, which no one ever reaches as there are always a hundred men ahead, one stands patiently waiting for the Great Door to open.

This waiting is a chummy affair. I have made some interesting acquaintances from it. It usually begins by looking down at the place where your feet are supposed to be and finding various and sundry sorts of shoes, with legs in them, hiding your own tootsies from the sun. Then you gradually carry your gaze up, speculating all the way as to what you will meet at the top of the torso. If the trip is short, you can usually prepare to curl a lip and mutter: "Crowdin' a little, ain't yoh, bud?" On the other hand, if you find yourself gradually twisting your neck to peer into higher climes, then prepare a well-phrased statement to the effect: Do you mind? In some cases it is best to remain silent, adding, if you like, a slight curl of the lip and a furrowed brow. These seldom penetrate.

Then comes the great moment! The Great Door swings open. Artists have, for centuries, tried to catch emotional impact behind such occasions. Tchaikowsky's "Sixth Symphony," the rich hues employed in the paintings of Rembrandt Van Rijn, and even a little of Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata," trickle in to partially convey the spirit. Yes, the Great Door is opened. After that, this seething mass becomes a whole, like a hopped-up jelly-fish, covering everything as it moves. I do not know what my individual reactions are for those brief few seconds. In the army one loses his identity, they say, but never

quite so completely as during the Charge of the Mess hall brigade.

Somewhat, you find yourself sitting at a long, spotless, wooden table. It doesn't remain spotless very long. Usually it is the sugar first, then someone becomes a little too anxious with the large, metal pitcher of coffee. From then on, the spots begin to merge.

If you are meek-mannered, or even plainly "mannered," the veneer soon wears off after a few sessions at the table. It is a "survival of the fittest," and something inside says in the most resolute manner: Go to it; you, too, can be a chow-hound. A few distraught stomach muscles can do much to disturb the placid theories of Emily Post.

MAINLY, one must develop a technique. In the mess hall it is "King's X" on "by the numbers." The "Fork-mid-air-thrust" works for many men. It requires alertness. As the platter skims by, one must be prepared to give his all and bring his work from a raised position into the center of the platter, twist it, and withdraw as quickly as possible with whatever he has managed to harpoon.

Some of the fellows declare it is quite a simple procedure when using the "open - palm - thumb - lock." This has its advantages in that the palm is held at the same level as the container being passed. As it streaks across the Individual's palms, the thumb must act as a brake, clasping itself over the edge in such a manner as to halt the container's passage. However, during the course of a meal, the thumb becomes overly abused, developing a lobster-red from its constant frying, boiling and steaming in the various containers that are passed.

Having gotten at least a few morsels of food on your plate, you settle down to the anticipated event of eating. I may add here that it is best to ignore the gravy when it is passed. Butter on your potatoes serves just as well, and is considerably more palatable. Of course you learn to sprinkle salt on everything in your plate before starting to eat, even on the dessert, which you have tucked around the outskirts of the main meal in your plate. There is nothing you can do about the coffee. The boys in '17 could do nothing about it, and this generation seems destined for the same quagmire. Just drink it

and keep your mind occupied with other things. My own personal formula for dispelling the "G.I." taste of coffee is to evolve schemes by which I would dispose of the German paper-hanger and his East-side crowd. Some of the men simply hum "Home Sweet Home."

THE conversation at the table is varied in subject, seldom the entire table discussing the relative merits of one particular issue. Somebody is usually concerned about their own sex life. Another is leading a tirade against the "sarge." Others may be entwined in last year's discussion of "For Whom the Bell Tolls," or whether the Garand rifle is much of an improvement over the Springfield. Usually the meal ends with the man who is discussing this sex life still holding forth, and a few novice "learners-of-facts" trying to look indifferent, though their wrinkly red ears belie the fact.

Before the meal is over, however, one is afforded the opportunity of observing men, their appetites and what they do with them. Too, you notice, peculiar eating habits and customs.

Men from southern states always seem to glow like an overwattened electric light bulb when corn on the cob is served. They will eat perhaps a half-dozen ears, and then begin their main meal, more corn ears. Their method of attack is quite plain. They bite, withdraw, munch and bite again. I have never caught them swallowing their food. At times, under close surveillance, I have wondered if they have pockets in their cheeks.

There are extravagant eaters, thrifty eaters, neat eaters, clumsy eaters and slovenly eaters. The extravagant eater can be noted by the amount of butter he places on the edge of his plate. The thrifty eater eats moderately, which does necessarily mean delicately, and leaves the table with half of the cake or cookies in his pocket for future reference. The neat eater allots a certain amount of space on his plate for each kind of food that is served, and looks like a divinity student throughout the meal, praying that each kind of food remains in its separate domain, and not gradually mix together. The clumsy eater is the man who knocks your half-pint of milk to the floor with his elbow, hands you the coffee, asks for the toast, and feeds his lower lip a spoonful of Wheaties at the same time. The slovenly eater is a composite of the aforementioned varieties, and is successful in each of the spheres.

There is one other variety of eater, considered far below any

Crooked Holler Bridget

Bridget says the moon is just
 A piece of pumpkin rind, a Crooked
 Holler man once chucked into the sky.
 A'course she never saw the man,
 But once when she
 Was just a little gal, she saw
 The stump that he was sittin' on
 The time he slung the rind across
 A row of pines,
 As high, as high most
 Any tree can grow.
 But Pa says Bridget's got a pixy
 In her brain, and can't
 Be trusted for her talk.
 But he don't know—
 He ain't from Crooked Holler.
 And Bridget says
 All folk from Crooked Holler
 Got the pixies in their souls,
 'Cause all the wondrous things
 Have wit'ed them there,
 Until they just can't leave.
 But Bridget left
 And came and wedded up
 With brother Jake, but she
 Aint like us,
 'Cause the pixy whispers
 To her all the time
 Of Crooked Holler folk.
 That's what she said to me
 One day
 When we had gone
 To hunt for mushrooms,
 But we didn't find them,
 'Cause she got to crying,
 And ran away and cried
 Until my brother Jake
 Went out and found her.
 But she's alright;
 I like to hear her talk of all
 The folk in Crooked Holler,
 That she used to know.
 But best of all
 I like it when she gets her fiddle,
 That her pa made out
 Of resin wood,
 And plays
 The Crooked Holler tunes.

—Peggy Overland.

of the preceding. He is the "cincheater," the little man who never replenishes the empty bowl. If most of the members at the table are buck-privates, this individual may often be identified by stripes worn on the sleeve. If the assembly is composed of more variety, this individual may go unnoticed for several meals, or until each member at the table has served a few rounds between kitchen and mess hall. At this point, nerves become tense. A cold meal does something to one's frame of mind, particularly when it was a hot meal when you placed it in your plate. Everyone becomes suspicious of the other man. Come to think of it, didn't he hand me a plate that was almost empty at the last meal, each will think. Finally, each man begins to pin plans of settlement on this man and that, and when you do corner that "other man," he will say: "Why not let me get more potatoes? I believe I did take the next to the last one." And so you bellow: "Aw, no, I can get it all right," waiting for

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him to insist. He doesn't. I often think of the refrain, "Oh, la, la, lord, fill the flowing bowl . . .", and wonder if there were ever such a person.

The meal wears itself to a slow death. Men wander out, carrying their plate and utensils with them to the kitchen. Each man scrapes out that portion of his meal that rags up "No Sale" with his appetite into a large garbage can. The dishes are stacked and each man lazily tosses his eating utensils into a separate tray filled with water. He turns to adjourn to his bunk. A delayed splash of water jumps across his neck. He indifferently saunters on. His stomach follows him faithfully.

. . . Of what inexorable cause makes Time so vicious in his reaping.—E. A. Robinson.

Russian Warfare By Caldwell

ALL NIGHT LONG by Erskine Caldwell, Duell, Sloan, and Pierce. \$2.50.

"All Night Long," Erskine Caldwell's latest, is a striking example of a good writer gone very wrong indeed.

Mr. Caldwell had a lot of excellent material on Russia. He spent some time on the Russian front and doubtless encountered many of the "Partisan" guerillas about which he writes so melodramatically. He wrote an eyewitness factual account of his experiences in Russia, called "All-Out on the Road to Smolensk." Filled with the heroism of Russians, with the bloody holocausts, the brutality of the Nazis, he plunged head first into a novel which was intended to give the

Russians the full share of credit due to them.

The idea was fine. But Caldwell used a "Tobacco Road" technique of omitting no act of bestiality in its full horror; blood and gore flow in copious streams throughout the book; murder upon murder and horror upon horror are piled to the point of the ridiculous. Understatement rather than overstatement would have been much more effective. The best expression of the Russian sentiment towards the Germans is given in one of the mildest passages of the book. Two Nazi soldiers are talking: One says:

"I don't like the looks of things. Did you ever notice how these Russian peasants look at us? Ev-

eryone I've ever seen acts as though all he thinks about is how many bullets it's going to take to kill you. Even the children that are no taller than your thumb have that same kind of strange look in their faces."

But the rest of the book is a rather confused tale full of passages such as this:

"The throat had been cut in a straight line above the Adam's apple . . . their bodies, bored with steel-tipped bullets . . . fluttered to the ground like insects."

"When he was jerked to his feet, there was a crimson stain on the ground and blood ran from his ear and soaked his jacket."

"Then she came leaping over the body in the doorway and fell into his arms."—C. G.

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 Richard Denning
"SEVEN MILES FROM ALCATRAZ"
 James Craig
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