

# SNARLS FROM AN OLD-TIMER

By H. B.—DEML

The first time I saw Lavon Zakarian I thought he must be a mirage, one of those non-existent sights that you think you see when you are crazy with the heat in a desert.

It was, indeed, a hot day, and several so-called companies of us were packed in close together, sitting on the ground, in the sun, ready for a sex hygiene lecture. One company hadn't arrived, and we were waiting for it.

Suddenly, trudging through the dust, and flickering like an early movie, in the heat waves across the field, there came into apparent view an apologetic-looking lot of soldiers, led by a Napoleonic figure who appeared to be under 5 feet 4 inches, and to weigh more than 200 pounds, although it turned out that those really were nature's specifications, in his case.

This swarthy person, as unmilitary a sight as you'd ever see on a drill field, was bellowing commands in the voice of the Bull of Bashan, and as a major, a captain and a flock of lieutenants looked on in amazement he somehow got his company into the right place and halted. Then it was seen that he was human, and a private.

That was my first glimpse of "Zack," a would-be novelist who, although a private without military experience except in the R.O.T.C., drilled his company and then was transferred to drill by company, until the companies were broken up through transfers and special assignments.

While in the ranks, drilling under Zack, I came closer to insubordination than at any time in the other war or this one. Somebody out front was not in step and he and Zack were having what sounded to me like an argument. Our platoon was confused about the cadence, it seemed to me, so on impulse I shouted, "Let's have a little less argument and a little more cadence."

Zack turned and said, "Shut up!" I said, "You shut up and drill us instead of arguing." Zack said, "That's mutiny. Shut up, or I'll report you to the lieutenant." I said "Bunk." Whereat Zack halted us

and walked over to the lieutenant. Nothing happened, though, except more drill, and at the end of it I told Zack that I knew I had no business calling out in ranks, and I was sorry. Later I told the lieutenant that I'd been a bad soldier, and he said, "Forget it."

I was the more ashamed of myself because I knew I was safe and would get no penalty. We old soldiers tend to grow spoiled because they go easy on us now, although I resist the coddling all I can. And we should set an example and be on the side of authority.

Zack and I are good friends, I hope. I like his persistence and good nature, his refusal to hold a grudge. Incidentally, he was captain of the University of Maine football team in 1929, playing center, and before joining the army he was a columnist and sports writer on the Armenian Mirror-Spectator, in New York. His ancestry is Armenian. He hails from Portland, Me., and now the army has set him down near Portland, Ore.

Young soldiers keep asking me about the other war, and whether the army has changed. Usually I sidestep on it, because I don't know. Army outfits vary so much that you can't generalize.

In the other war I belonged to an Ohio National Guard regiment of field artillery which had been developed from cavalry just back from training on the Mexican border. Officers and non-coms knew one another well. Morale was high. We were volunteers and eager to get into action.

When we had a dinner which still wasn't up to the prevailing standard nowadays we would shout in unison: "Oh, what a damn good meal!" And most of my comrades came from homes of refinement and of plenty.

But in this war I have not been part of any such cohesive outfit. I've been with men of every social station and from all sections of the country. Some volunteered, some were drafted. All of us have been standing guard and working

on irksome details while waiting to be placed in particular units.

So far this isn't "my war," in the sense that the other was. I'm 25 years older and I long for the old comrades. The young soldiers are kind and agreeable, but some of them call me "Pop" and more and more of them address me, with too much respect for age, as "Mr. B—." I look at them severely and say, "Private B" to you, sir."

Like every old fogey, I find youth less than perfect. Seems to me that the boys are too keen about getting ahead, not enough concerned with doing a job well. (But I think the western lads are better in this respect). Of course the young ones don't feel the terrible urgency of this war as I do. How could they? They are too young to know that "the war is the military phase of a world-wide revolt against civilization," to quote from a Harper's magazine article by Herbert Agar, one reprinted and distributed by Freedom House. They are too young to be aware, as thoughtful, older, people are, that civilization has been subtly disintegrating. As Agar wrote:

"Barbarism always ends in a belief in power for power's sake. It always, therefore, derides rules and promises—for if power is the end, and if power can be won by breaking rules and promises, why not break them?"

Now I have a notion that young people don't even know what Agar is talking about, because they have never experienced that more wholesome state of society which has passed, for the time. They haven't known the happier state of mind which did exist before "practical self-interest," rather than cooperation towards a common end, became the accepted way.

So your young soldier sees gold-bricking as something smart, instead of unsportsmanlike behavior in a community of comrades.

Soldiers who crave to be oriented, not psychologically, but geographically, should climb the partly bare hill to the west of the northern end of Camp Adair. When there is no haze on the horizon you have a fine view of the snowy peaks of Mount Hood, far to the northeast, and of Mount Jefferson, to the east and not so far away.

I climbed the hill, late one day, because I was lonesome for my wife. On the heights I always feel closed toher, not only because then I am closer to Heaven (Will New York papers please copy—she lives there), but also because we have climbed, together, many of the highest mountains in the East, as well as some in Europe.

Aside from the distant peaks you can see, from this high hill, the general layout of the camp, on a plain surrounded by hills that lead to mountain ridges. The view fits in with the observations of my minister, the renowned Dr. John Haynes Holmes, of the Community church, in New York.

Although he is a pacifist of the extreme type, and I, on the contrary, think that physical aggression always must be resisted with physical force, we are good friends, and I have been chairman of his Social Action committee. From Dr. Holmes I now have a letter in which he has this to say about Oregon:

"It is exciting to know that you are there. You will enjoy it. I remember Oregon as one of the most thrilling experiences of my life. The landscape seemed all built on a giant scale. In general character and appearance, Oregon reminded me of Maine. But the mountains were higher, the trees taller, the lakes bigger, the river wider,—even the ocean seemed grander. I felt in a way like Gulliver in Brobdignag.

"It certainly lifted the soul. I still like to think of how the early pioneers must have felt when they saw the mountains and forests of Oregon after their endless weeks on the prairies. Well, it will be a great

life for you, when you get your camp built and equipped.

"I am wondering how you get your war news in camp. Perhaps it is just as well if you don't, for the news is pretty terrible this summer. It weighs upon me day and night like a mill-stone, and bears me down in moods of dark depression. But the turn must and will come, for such preponderance of power as that represented by the United States must in due time have its effect. For us all, pacifists and non-pacifists alike, there must be the long-range view, and unconquerable faith in the future."

The difference between a dress-tie and a noose is that one is worn without a collar.

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