

The SQUAD ORGANIST by Oney Fred Sweet

The Corporal Was Going to Censor the Music But He Changed His Mind.

"HERE," explained the corporal, "is where you fill your tick with straw."

The corporal was brisk as he made the explanation. Not many weeks in the cantonment himself, he seemed to the new men a veteran, and their newness made him feel like a veteran. The manner in which the youth of America suddenly turned into a new type of fighting men—not only the equal but the superior of those of any other nation—has furnished one of history's marvels.

The drafted man, complying with his corporal's order in providing himself a mattress, was not yet in khaki, and from the looks of his civilian clothes one might say he was a youth who had never before known the experience of sleeping away from the home roof. He was from a far, quiet corner of the district, one could be sure of that—from the woods, perhaps, or from the lonesome stretches of wheat fields. What the folks had said when he left home, what the incidents of his farewell had been, one could but conjecture. He would have little to say for a few days, and then he would talk only in the terms of the new life.

"O, you haven't put in enough straw," criticized the corporal. "You don't have to put more in just because I say so. You're the one who has got to sleep on it, you know. What did you say your name was?"

"Dumont—Albert Dumont."
"Here, Dumont, you dropped something out of your pocket when you stooped over." The corporal picked a small, glistening thing from the straw. "A mouth organ!" he chuckled. "Say, I haven't seen one of those things for years. I'll bet you bought it through a mail order catalogue, and I'll bet when it came you made 'em think around your part of the country that you was a regular feller."

The brand new man pocketed the instrument and continued pawing straw into the gap in the tick.

The pair started back to the barrack. The other members of the squad were a bit curious when they arrived. Misek squinted at them over the top of a cigaret in the making. Misek was a huge fellow from the city. No doubt about it, he was accustomed to holding his own with other men who worked hard with their hands all day and spent their leisure in saloons. Misek had been in camp three days, and he was as yet sizing up the army proposition and especially his corporal. He was wondering whether his corporal was as hard as he was. He had an idea that he wasn't.

The corporal showed Dumont where to place the tick and turned toward the big fellow. "What's this I hear, Misek," he complained, "about your having a mixup with somebody out washing your mess kit to-night?"

"There ain't no bird going to push me out of line," assured Misek, completing the cigaret by moving it across his lips and deftly twisting one end. "I'll say there ain't, even if they send me to Leavensworth."

The big fellow referred to "Leavensworth" those first days. He insisted on putting an "s" in the significant word. "I think I'll stroll down to the exchange if there ain't no law against it," he finished.

The other members of the squad grinned, all except Dumont. The newest man was looking about the barrack, taking everything in, and yet seeing plainest the home scenes he had so recently left. It was becoming shadowy in the barrack. After a time Dumont dug into his coat pocket and removed the mouth organ. He rubbed it across his sleeve, lifted it to his lips.

It was a weird selection that he played. He played it with his shoulders weaving back and forth, one foot beating time, a distant look in his mild eyes.

A soldier in the far corner of the barrack yelled, "Eize a ball!" From another corner came a greening chorus. The corporal smiled. The youth played on.

"Better put it away," advised the corporal. "You ain't back home now. The bunch is kidding you. Here comes Misek back. Better put it away before he gets here."

But Misek had heard the mouth organ's closing strains. He approached; his eyes narrowed.

"Stick it back in your coat," whispered the corporal. "Misek's hard. He'll kid you to death."

Misek neared. "Say," he inquired of Dumont, "wasn't that piece you just played 'My Darling Clementine'? I thought it was. I ain't heard it since Eddie Kizwaski and I made that trip out west. You'd ought to have heard Eddie play one of those."

The newest man lifted the instrument again to his lips and repeated the chorus. Misek, from the opposite cot, leaned over and in plaintive monotone supplied the words:

"O, my darling, O, my darling,
O, my darling Clementine.
You are lost and gone forever,
Gone forever, Clementine."

There were more verses. During one of them a member of the squad started conversation.

certain that Misek had driven a coal wagon in Chicago or that Dumont had spent most of his life in lonely places. The big military machine had taken them as it had taken the millions, and it had developed and toned body and soul until the result was an army of a new sort of Americans.

Take, for instance, Eddie Kizwaski, the friend with whom Misek had taken the western trip "on the rods." Did Eddie's name in the casualty list seem to have a foreign ring? Well, if you had known Eddie, if you had seen him in his uniform, had heard his slang, had seen the alert expression on his face, you would have noticed that "U. S. A." was written all over him. For Eddie had breathed the air of America,

Only once did he attempt to produce airs on it himself, and in consequence he had handed the thing back to Dumont, more of a hero worshiper than ever. Misek asked for nothing modern in his concerts, nothing classical. He wanted those melodies—conceived in time back by who knows who?—melodies of many verses that took for their themes railroad wrecks and steamship accidents, and burning hotels on wintry nights, and wandering boys.

And Dumont played them, his eyes half closed, his shoulders weaving, one foot keeping time. And Misek listened, his head tilted to one side, his lips parted, his eyes with wonder filled.

And then the time came—well, the newspapers have told about it, and the history of the world of men will give it a shining page—when the troops ignored by the



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"Keep still, can't ya?" roared Misek. "Ain't ya got no manners? This boy can play, that's what I mean. Eddie Kizwaski tried to teach me. Let me see it just a minute, will ya, bo? No, it's different than Eddie's was. Some of the keys on his wouldn't blow. Do you know 'For I'm a Young Cowboy and I Know I've Done Wrong'?"

A groan came from a corner of the barrack again and Misek lifted his huge bulk from the cot and scowled in its direction. The groan died.

"Go on, bo," soothed Misek, turning back to the musician. "If any of them rough-necks butt in again I'll throw 'em out the window."

And Dumont played on. He played on until "taps." At times Misek permitted the instrument to serve as an accompaniment for his plaintive monotone, but more often he sat and listened, his head tilted to one side, his lips parted, his eyes with wonder filled.

"It only goes to show," the corporal admitted to himself as he rolled himself in his blanket for the night, "that you never can tell how a squad's going to turn out. Dumont—I was just beginning to figure on getting rid of that mouth organ. And Misek—one of the hardest men to handle in the whole regiment. But with the combination, say, there's going to be nothing to it."

There were nights and nights when Dumont did not play. Those days, following out the rigid routine, were busy ones. And after the uniforms were given out and a few weeks of setting-up exercises and drilling had passed, you would not have been so

and when he went back to the soil from which his ancestors had so recently come he went back with a something that his ancestors had not brought across the ocean with them. The something he took back was something that the kaiser and his supposedly clever crew had not reckoned with. It was the something that turned the tide of the world war.

But as to Misek and Dumont. There are queer combinations in the way of pals in the army. Misek, with his arms that had heaved coal, could fight as well as he loved to fight, but he could not wring tunes out of a mouth organ. Dumont, though mild of eye and soft of voice, could play "Clementine" and "Lost on the Lady Elgin."

Together the two stuck in the same squad—throughout the cantonment days, across the country to the Atlantic port, on the transport, in the trenches in France.

There were wild tales that Misek occasionally told Dumont when the hours were dark and quiet and leisurely—tales of how he had outwitted policemen and helped beat up neighboring gangs. Dumont tried to follow the narratives. There were a good many of his pal's phrases that he didn't understand, but he never questioned the prowess which his comrade claimed. And at the close of the reminiscences of the life that he had left so far behind Misek always demanded the mouth organ.

kaiser's advisers suddenly upset the German scheme for world domination. The old world plotters had not reckoned with Yank freshness and dash and enthusiasm and daring and pep.

It meant casualties, saving Paris and throwing the onrushing Hun hordes back on the defensive. And in the casualties the towns of a dozen different sections of Yankee-land, with a dozen different climates and dialects, were represented in a single list. But the boys who had charged the machine gun nests had all been alike. They had worn the same uniform, plunged ahead with the same feeling in their breasts, been inspired by the same flag. Yazoo City, Miss., and Ypsilanti, Mich., and Savannah, Ga., and Fresno, Cal., would never seem so far away from each other again.

There were two names on one of those casualty lists that meant nothing more than names to most folks who scanned it—Albert Dumont, Moose Bend, Wis., and John F. Misek, Chicago.

Dumont's name came first. He probably went first. And Misek, in trying to get as many as he could to pay for the one who had suddenly left his side—well, fight was Misek's middle name.

And as for the mouth organ. There may be those who might say it was left behind there in a trench in Flanders. But they would be mistaken. For Dumont must have played it as he passed through the Gates of Paradise, with Misek close behind, his head tilted to one side, his lips parted, his eyes with wonder filled.