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the Indianapolis Times
Daily News, Inc.

Hoosier Vagabond

By Ernie Pyle

Editor's Note: This, the 35th of the Ernie Pyle war dispatches we are reprinting while Ernie takes a rest, was written while he was recuperating from an illness in an army tent hospital.

SOMEWHERE IN SICILY, August, 1943.—It was flabbergasting to lie among a tangle of wounded soldiers recently and hear them cuss and beg to be sent tight back into the fight.

Of course not all of them do. It depends on the severity of their wounds, and on their individual personalities. Just as it would in peacetime. But I will say that at least a third of the moderately wounded men ask if they can't be returned to duty immediately.

When I took sick I was with the 45th division, made up largely of men from Oklahoma and west Texas. You don't realize how different certain parts of our country are from others until you see their men set off in a frame, as it were, in some strange faraway place like this.

The men of Oklahoma are drawing and soft-spoken. They are not smart-alecks. Something of the purity of the soil seems to be in them. Even their cussing is simpler and more profound than the torrential obscenities of Eastern city men. An Oklahoman of the plains is straight and direct. He is slow to criticize and hard to anger, but once he is convinced of the wrong of something, brother, watch out.

These wounded men of Oklahoma have got madder about the war than anybody I have seen on this side of the ocean. They weren't so mad before they got into action, but now they are.

And these quiet men of the 45th, the newest division over here, have already fought so well they have drawn the high praise of the commanding general of the corps of which the division is a part.

She Missed Again
IT WAS these men from the farms, ranches and small towns of Oklahoma who poured through my tent with their wounds. I lay there and listened to what each one would say first.

One fellow, seeing a friend, called out, "I think I'm gonna make her." Meaning he was going to pull through.

Another said, "Have they got beds in the hospital? Lord how I want to go to bed."

Another said, "I'm hungry, but I can't eat anything. I keep getting sick at my stomach."

Another said, as he winced from his probing for a deeply buried piece of shrapnel in his leg, "Go ahead, you're the doc. I can stand it."

Another said, "I'll have to write the old lady tonight and tell her she missed out on that \$10,000 again."

Another, who was put down beside me, said, "Hi, Pop, how you getting along? I call you Pop because you're gray-headed. You don't mind, do you?"

I told him I didn't care what he called me. He was friendly, but you could tell from his forward attitude that he was not from Oklahoma. It turned out he was from New Jersey.

Awful Aloneness
DYING MEN were brought into our tent, men whose death rattle silenced the conversation and made all the rest of us grave.

When a man was almost gone the surgeons would put a piece of gauze over his face. He could breathe through it but we couldn't see his face well.

Twice within five minutes chaplains came running. One of these occasions haunted me for hours.

The man was still semi-conscious. The chaplain knelt down beside him and two ward boys squatted alongside. The chaplain said:

"John, I'm going to say a prayer for you."

Somehow this stark announcement hit me like a hammer. He didn't say, "I'm going to pray for you to get well," he just said he was going to say a prayer, and it was obvious he meant the final prayer. It was as though he had said, "Brother, you may not know it, but your goose is cooked."

He said a short prayer, and the weak, gasping man tried in vain to repeat the words after him.

The dying man was left utterly alone, just lying there on his litter on the ground, lying in an aisle, because the tent was full. Of course, it couldn't be otherwise, but the awful aloneness of that man as he went through the last few minutes of his life was what tormented me. I felt like going over and at least holding his hand while he died, but it would have been out of order and I didn't do it. I wish now I had.

How to Make Money
WE MADE THE not-to-be-smeered-at sum of 12 cents by our recent remark that "for 2 cents" we'd print the answer to a radio quiz question—the length of a fathom? Besides J. G. Moffitt, whose 2-cent worth we mentioned yesterday, pennies showered down on us from Morris E. Ferguson, Al Trinkle, an anonymous gent who sent four pennies, and another whose letter we seem to have mislaid. This is all a bit out of date, though, since we're told a woman correctly answered the question over the radio Saturday. From now on, we're going to try to keep out of trouble in this column. . . . Harry Kennedy, 1518 Tabor st., read about the folks who had trouble getting a sealer for tin cans in which to send Hoosier fried chicken to service men overseas. So he called us to say tin cans aren't necessary. He and Mrs. Kennedy have been packing chicken in regular fruit jars, filling the jars with shortening, turning them upside down until the shortening congeals, and then shipping them overseas to their son, Pvt. Harry Kennedy. They get there in fine shape, too. The Kennedys pack the fruit jars in cotton. They got the idea from reading Ernie Pyle's story about a group of Kentuckians in Italy getting chicken that way regularly.

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