

**'Ever Talk to Back of a Helmet? I Did Once'**

By CARL RITT

Of The Evansville Press  
NEW GUINEA (By Air Mail)—

Did you ever carry on a conversation with the back of a helmet?

I did, once, coming back from a road block.

There were a half dozen of us and I was third from the front. Directly in front of me was the rear of a helmet. It was the head of a young lad named Collins, from Missouri. He had been at the road block as an artillery spotter.

Our way led along the Numa Numa Trail—a fascinating name, isn't it?

WE STARTED back in a hurry, attempting to beat the inevitable afternoon rain. Our way led back and forth across the Laruma River, a swift flowing stream with a bed of slippery rocks.

I had met young Collins at the roadblock and chiseled a cup of coffee from him.

Our talk for a while was mostly Army chitchat—cussing brass, rain, food. He asked me if I had any kids. I said yes, one.

"I always wanted one," the back of the helmet said. And after a while: "In '20, I always wanted to have a kid when I was '20, then I could sort of grow up with him." We climbed a slippery ridge... "But now I'm '20 already, and I haven't even got a girl—any-more."

There was nothing I could say to that. He didn't elaborate on the "anymore."

BUT a little later, the back of the helmet, now streaming water onto his pack, said: "I sure miss my buddy. We were together for almost a year in the army. We were on a little island once. We had a radio and used to listen to it.

"We used to listen to somebody singing some songs. My buddy was married. And he'd just sit there and look at her picture."

"We'd listen for a long time. And then it was just like he couldn't stand it any more. He'd say 'Let's walk.' And we'd go out and walk around this island and we wouldn't say anything. Sometimes we'd just walk for a couple of hours. Not saying a thing."

THAT'S the way we went, too, for quite a while. The jungle growth was thick and he saved his breath for squirming through it. After we had struggled across the river for the 'steeneth time, he said: "I wonder what it's like?"

"What is what like?" I asked. "Being in love," the helmet said, moving slowly side to side in a puzzled fashion. "I just wonder what it really like."

"That can't be explained," I said. In what I considered my most fatherly manner. "Some-

times you think you are and you aren't, and then again you'll go a long time thinking you aren't and you are. If you get what I mean."

THE HELMET kept wagging from side to side, making the stream of rain pour first on one shoulder then the other.

I thought it best to change the subject.

"Ought to be pretty close to the outpost now, shouldn't we?" I asked.

"Just over the next hill," he laughed. "That's the way a guide used to answer us when we were training in the Fijis. We used to go on long marches and we'd ask him how far we were going and he'd say 'Just over the next hill!'

For some reason, that tickled Collins.

We climbed up a hill and down the other side.

"See?" the helmet said. "I told you. Just on the other side of the hill."

AHEAD was the last river crossing—and the outpost. We slipped and slid out of the river, into trucks, rode back to our lines and said goodby.

I never saw Collins again. He's probably in some dugout, wondering about love, and wishing he had a kid, and thoughtfully considering the problems of living off the fat of the land.

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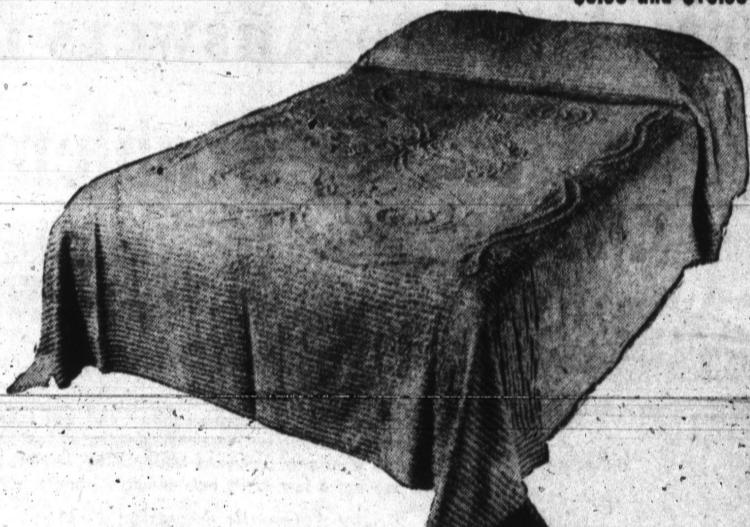
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