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Horses for France

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"First Call," Etc.

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Mr. Empey's Experiences During His Seventeen Months in the First Line Trenches of the British Army in France

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-2-It was 1914, and the great world war was on, and here was I in the United States and neutral. For thirteen years I had been soldiering but had never been under fire. In my imagination I could hear the guns booming on the western front. I admit I was a triffe afraid; nevertheless I had a great desire to get into the mixup. How could I get over? I planned out many ways, but none of them were practical.

One day while walking down Greenwich street, New York, I passed an employment agency. Staring me in the face was a great flaring sign, "Horses for France," Under this "Men Wanted." Here was my chance,

Upon returning to my office I immediately got in touch over the telephone with two prominent men in New York whom I knew to be distinctly pro-ally. After outlining my desire, an appointment was made for me to meet a certain gentleman at the Hotel Astor at four o'clock that afternoon, 1 met him. He introduced me to a Frenchman. At that time in my eyes a Frenchman was a hero, a man to be looked up to, a man fighting in the Great Cause. But now a Frenchman to me is more than a hero. After being introduced I went up into the Frenchman's room and talked over the matter of horses for France for about twenty minutes.

Upon leaving the Frenchman I was told to report to him three days later, at the same time and place. I left, bubbling over with enthusiasm and anticipation.

During this interval of three days I mapped out a story of my life to present to him upon our second interview. The eventful day at last came, and once more I was closeted with him. I started to tell him my story. He interrupted me by waving his right hand to the right and left. It reminded me of the butts on a target range during rifle practice, when the man marking the target wigwags a miss to the firing line. My heart sank. Then he spoke, and I was carried

What did you do, desert or were you kicked out?" I was getting sore and answered: 'Deserted the Twelfth; kicked out of the Eleventh.

"What's your name?" "Arthur Guy Empey." "You're a German." This was too much even for me,

and I answered: "You're a damned vanishing in smoke. The Jew grinned and rubbed his

hands and said: "You're all right. Go into that room and get a card made out, and come back at two o'clock."

I received a card and went to a beanery across the street and had a wonderful meal of corned beef hash, muddy coffee and huge slices of bread, minus butter. This cost me fifteen cents.

At two o'clock I reported back, and with seventy-two others was herded like cattle, and in a long, straggling line, flanked by three of the employees ferry and landed "somewhere in New Jersey.'

The ship, a huge three-stacker, was lying alongside. We were shoved into possibly could : single file, ready to go up the gangplank. Then our real examination took place. At the foot of the gangplank were a group of men around a long table. They certainly put us there was any German blood in us. Several men were turned down. Luckily, I got through and signed for the

voyage, and went on board. At the head of the gangplank stood the toughest specimen of humanity I have ever seen. He looked like a huge

gorilla, and had a big, crescent-shaped, livid scar running from his left ear under his chin up to his right eye. Every time he spoke the edges of the scar seemed to grow white. His nose was broken and he had huge, shaggy evebrows. His hand was resting on the rail of the ship. It looked like a ham, and inwardly I figured out what would happen to me if that ham-like fist ever came in contact with the point of my jaw. As we passed him he showered us with a few compli-I found this individual was foreman of the horse gang.

We were ordered aft and sat on the after hatch. The fellow on my right and bumped into the fellow sitting on my left. After a good look at him I eased back again in the direction of taken a bath since escaping from the He was looking back at the horse, at trip to France. The general conversation among the horse gang was: "When do we eat?"

We must have sat there about twenty would term him in the cavalry, an second foreman conclusion that he was a cross between | rected his barrage at the offender. a Chinaman and a Mexican. He was thin, about six feet tall, and wore a smiled I had the impression that the in my back. His name was Pinero. His introduction to us was very brief: "Get up off of that blankety blank hatch and line up against the rail." We did as ordered. Then he commanded: "All the niggers line up alongside of the port rail." I guess a lot of them did not know what he The horse jerked his head loose, reared meant by the "port rail" because they looked very much bewildered. With an oath he snapped out. "You blankety blank idiots. The port rail is that rail over there. Come on. Move or I'll soon move you." He looked well able to do this and the niggers promptly shuffled over to the place designated. He quickly divided us into squads of twelve men, then ordered; "All of you who are deserters from the army or who have seen service in the cavalry step out in front." Four others besides myself stepped out. The first man he came to he informed : "You're a straw boss. Do you know what a straw boss is?" This man meekly answered. "No, sir." With another

discharges. He said. "They're faked. to be in the last stages of consumption. I told the old fellow to cut out his argument and leave the other fellow alone. Upon hearing this he squirted too; blocking that run with your fool tricks,"

a well-directed stream of tobacco juice through his front teeth, which landed on my shoe. I inwardly admired and respected his accuracy. I saw my auman. thority waning and knew that I would have to answer this insult quickly. I took two or three quick steps forward liar." I saw my chances of shipping and swung on his jaw with my fist. His head went up against the iron the tide,"

bunk with a sickening sound and he crumpled up and fell on the deck, the blood pouring from the cut in his head. I felt sick and faint thinking that he had been killed, but it would not do to show these signs of weakness on my part, so without even moving toward him I ordered one of the men to look him over and see if he was all pound some obedience into you." right. He soon came around. From

that time on he was the most faithful man in the section and greatly respected me. The rest of the men growled and mumbled and I thought I was in of the agency, we marched to the for a terrible beating. Lying close at hand was an iron spike about eighteen inches long. Grasping this, I turned to the rest, trying to be as tough as 1

"If any of the rest of you bums think they are boss around here, start something, and I will sink this into his head." Although I was quailing underneath, still I got away with it, through a third degree to find out if and from that time on I was boss of my section.

Now every man was smoking or chewing tobacco. Pretty soon the hold became thick with smoke, and I was gasping for breath, when the voice of the foreman came down the companionway:

"Turn out on deck and give a hand loading the horses. Look alive or I'll come down there and rouse you out pretty -- --- quick.'

I have been in a cavalry regiment when hurry-up orders were received to entrain for the Mexican border and to tote corpses around." heiped to load eleven hundred horses on trains. The confusion on that dock was indescribable. The horses were loaded by three runways. My gang and I were detailed on the after runway. The foreman was leaning over mentary remarks, such as "Of all the the rall, glaring down upon us and lousy scum I have seen, this bunch of now and then giving instructions mixed lubbers is the worst, and this is what with horrible oaths. He had a huge they give me to take thirteen hundred marlinspike in his hand. On the dock horses over to Bordeaux." Later on was the second foreman, in his large sombrero, a red neckerchief around his neck, wearing a blue shirt with the sleeves rolled up to the elbows, and in his right hand a coiled lariat. It was a huge, blue-gummed negro. He did one's heart good to see him rope was continually scratching himself, the horses which broke loose. Upon I unconsciously eased away from him watching his first performance I knew I was correct when I figured him as having Mexican blood in his veins.

A bleary-eyed drunk was trying to the negro. I don't think that he had lead a horse by the halter up our run. cradle. Right then my uppermost the same time tugging and jerking on thought was how I could duck this the halter. You could see the white in the horse's eyes, and I knew right away, from my experience with horses, that this, was a bad one, or, as we

"What did I tell you? Didn't I tell don't want to hear any more. I'm off. The Irishman must have a you not to look at him? I knew you o' you for life, but remember what I it, because he let ant a valley of causes would get it, and a damned good job, tell you. Steer clear from the two o' in return. The French centries seen-

horseman stooping over the bleeding "Get 'im by the heels, you cross beween a corpse and mummy, and drag

got to get this ship loaded to catch The pale-faced man kept on with his examination without paying any attention to the foreman's instructions. The foreman got blue in the face and bubbled over with rage.

"Do you hear what I tell you? Get 'im out of the way. This ship has got to be loaded or Fll go down there and

The man still paid no attention. The foreman was speechless. In a few seconds the stooping man straightened up, and looking the foreman straight in the eye, calmly replied: "He's dead." This did not seem to fease the foreman in the least and he bellowed out : "How do you know he is dead?" The man answered simply: "I'm a doctor." Then the foreman once again exploded: "A doctor! Blawst my deadlights, a doctor! Well, if you're a doctor,

what in h-1 are you doing on a horse ship? You ought to be rolling pills for the highbrows." The doctor never took his plercing

look from the eye of the foreman. The foreman was now like an enraged bull. Spitting all over himself, he blustered ut: "Well, if he's dead, there is no doctor that can do him any good. A ouple o' you black skunks over there (addressing two negroes who were almost blanched to a bluish white and who were trembling near by), get ahold of him and drag 'im out of the way." One of the negroes, with a lecering grin, replied: "I shipped on this here ship to handle hosses, and I don't allow nohow that it's my work

Just then the second foreman rushed over, gave the negro a push out of the way, and, grabbing the heels of the dead man, pulled him away from the run. I turned away, sickened with disgust. The foreman then took an empty oat sack and spread it over the loody head.

Just then the clanging bell of an ambulance was heard and a white-clothed doctor, followed by two men with a stretcher, pushed their way through e crowd of horses and horsemen. They were accompanied by a policeman. The bedy was put into the ambulance and taken away, while the police-officer went on board the ship.

The pasty-faced doctor was holding onto the rail of the runway and coughing. I thought each gasp would be his last. The second foreman was talking to him. The doctor paid no attention. Going up behind the doctor, the foreman coolly measured his distance and swung on the point of his jaw. The doctor crumpled up and fell on the dock. At this cowardly and dastardly act, I saw red and made a leap at the foreman. An onrushing light flashed in front of me and a huge locomotive, going 60 miles an hour, hit me between the eyes; then blackness. When I came to, I was lying in my bunk in the hold. I had an awful headache. Then everything came back to me with a flash. I could hear the gurgling of water on the ship's side and knew we were under way. Bight then and there I decided never again, especially while aboard ship, to interfere with the foreman. Among that gang of human wrecks and cutthroats it was every man for himself, and the survival of the fittest. I had two beautiful black eyes, and my nose felt like a football.

us, sabe?"

Then he noticed the pasty-faced all right, because he vouchsafed no the prisoners' remarks. This, at the answer. My heart warmed to "Doc" Casey and I slipped away unobserved, able sense of fairness, and later on, me up with court plaster and I was front, I found out that the Frenchhim out of the way. We've bloody well installed as assistant veterinarian at man in all his dealings is fair and \$30 for the trip.

Five days out we ran into a squall and our work was cut out for us. We burst over the gunwales.

Several of the wooden stalls gave fro. Huge Turcos, black as the ace deck. With every lurch of the ship couple of horses would fall, and, kicking and snorting, would slide down the inclined deck, hitting against winches and the hatchway, scraping their hides off. It was worth a man's life to get into that mess,

Then I had more or less respect for the foreman and second foreman. Into the midst of that struggling and



Staggered to the Upper Deck With His Face Blanched Almost White.

kicking bunch of horses they went, assisted by Doc Casey. Four of the horses received broken legs, and Pinero, instead of shooting them, cut their throats with a sharp dagger he carried.

One of the negroes from the lower hold staggered to the upper deck with his face blanched almost white, and his eyes popping out of his head. Eetween gasps he informed us that a whole section of stalls, 24 in all, had been carried away between decks, and that the horses were loose. He said three negroes in his gang were caught n this stampede.

The foreman mustered most of the men, and dividing them into three groups, in charge of himself, the second foreman and Doc Casey, they went below. I followed. An awful sight met my eyes.

ed to enjoy this barrage of insults and I guess the second foreman "sabled" did not in any way attempt to curtail time, struck me as depicting a remark-The next morning the doctor fixed during my service on the western just.

Pretty soon the prisoners faded out of sight and we came alongside the even had horses on the decks in dock at Bordeaux. I was all eagerness wooden stalls. The ship was lurching and strained my eyes so as not to miss and pitching, and huge seas would the least thing. The dock was full of French cavalrymen, hurrying to and

way and the horses were loose on the of spades, with white turbans on their heads, were majestically striding about.

> After we warped into the dock and made fast, our work was over. We had nothing to do with the unloading of the horses. The French cavalrymen came aboard with a bunch of cavalry halters hanging over their arms. It was a marvel to see with what ease and efficiency that ship was unloaded. The condition of the horses was pitiful. They could hardly bend their legs from stiffness. They would hobble down the gangplank and stand trembling on the dock. In about a minute or so they would stretch their necks way up into the air and seem to be taking long breaths of the pure air. Then they started to whinny. They were calling backward and forward to each other. Even though I did not understand horse language, I knew exactly what they were saying. They were thanking the good Lord for their deliverance from that hell ship, and were looking forward to green pastures and a good roll in the dirt. Pretty soon you could see them bend their forelegs and lie down on the dock; then try to roll over. It was pitiful; some of them did not have the strength to turn over and they feebly kicked. Pretty soon the whole dock was a mass of rolling horses, the Frenchmen jumping around, gesticulating and jabbering.

After getting the horses up, they were divided into classes according to their height and weight. Then each horse was led into a ring chalked out on the dock and the army inspectors examined it. Very few were rejected. From this ring of chalk they were led into a portable stall and branded. You could hear the singsong voice of the brander shouting out what sounded like "Battry Loo." As he yelled this, a French private would come over, get the horse which had been branded, and lead it away. I got in conversation with an interpreter and he informed me that the average life of these horses in the French army was three days, so these poor horses had only left that hell ship to go into a worse hell of bursting shells and cracking bullets.

I, after passing a rigid examination as to my nationality, and being issued a cattleman's passport, inquired my way to the prefecture of police. I eliverd to him a sealed enve which I had received in New York, Upon opening it. he was very gracious to me and I went into a rear room, where the interpreter put me through a grilling examination. From there I was taken to a hotel, and the next morning in the company of a sergeant and a private, got into a little matchbox compartment on the funniest looking train I ever saw. The track seemed to be about three feet wide; the wheels of the cars looked like huge cogwheels on an engine minus the cogs. After bumping, stopping, and sometimes sliding backwards, in 20 hours we reached a little town. Supaccount of injuries. Besides the 17 plies were piled up as high as houses. The Officers and enlisted men were hurrying to and fro, and I could see long trains

from despondency to the greates height of expectation. His words: "Pardon me, monsieur, I already know your life," and in an amazingly short time he told me more than I knew about myself. I had been carefully investigated.

My instructions received from him are confidential, so I will not go into them. Anyway, he handed me an envelope and told me to follow out carefully all details as contained therein.

I immediately went back to my office, opened the envelope and on a typewritten sheet I read: "Report at Goldsmith's Employment agency. No. Greenwich street. Ship as an ordinary horseman and during voyage carefully follow the verbal instructions received by you during our interview, making careful note of all details immediately after happening. Be cautious in doing this. Upon landing In France report to the prefecture of police, Bordeaux, and to the letter obey his instructions. Good luck."

I went home and put on my oldest clothes-an old black suit, olive drab shirt, a pair of heavy army shoes and a woolen cap. I had let my beard grow and certainly looked rough.

Going down Greenwich street, slouching along, looking at the ground, I ran plump into a young lady of my acquaintance. I had a feeling of affection for this particular young lady, oath, the second foreman said: "All but it soon died out upon hearing her remark as I collided with her, "If you back." I got the cue immediately. cannot look where you are going, I My turn came next. will have you arrested." Of course, she did not recognize me and I took no pains to argue the matter with her.

I was glad enough to slink by.

When I came to the agency there was a long line of bums, two and three France.

of men. It looked as if some huge giant had taken a fine comb and carefully combed the gutters of New York.

I fell into this line and waited my turn. Upon arriving at the desk, in front of me sat a little fat, greasy Jew. To describe his manner of hanbe a great exaggeration. The way he handled that line of human cattle would do the kniser's heart good.

It came my turn, and this conversaflon ensued:

"What do you know about horses?" . I answered : "Six years in the United States cavairy."

The Agent: "What regiments?" "Eleventh and Twelfth."

"You're a liar. You never saw the cavalry."

I felt like punching him on the nose a horsoman. I showed him my years old. To me this man appeared curses, which almost froze my heart. but the doctor shut him up with, "I and they yelled something in German. with us.

right, you're not a straw boss; fall

"Do you know what a straw boss 187"

I said: "Sure."

He said: "All right, you're a straw boss."

I had not the least idea of what deep, trying to ship as horsemen for he was talking about, but made up my mind that it would not take me It would be impossible to get a long to find out. Then he passed rougher and more unkempt gathering down the line, picking out straw bosses. I asked one of the men in my gang what were the duties of a straw

boss. He had been over with horses before, and told me that a straw boss meant to be in charge of the gang to feed the horses and to draw and keep hands to his head, fell over backward

and bran. Having served in the cav- plank, and lay there in a crumpled dling the men as being impolite would airy, this job, as I figured, would be regular pie for me. In about an hour and a half's time

assigned us to our quarters on the a mad stampede on the deck. ship. These quarters were between decks and very much crowded; the stench was awful.

ment with a pasty-faced looking speci- ders. The foreman, on seeing this ac- stand?" but did not do so. I wanted to ship men of humanity, about twenty six cident, snapped out a long string of

outlaw. The drunk was cursing and came aft. I took fifteen guesses at his swearing and kicking up at the horse's nationality, and at last came to the head. The foreman saw this and di-

"How in h-1 do you expect to lead a horse while looking at him? Turn huge sombrero. His skin was tanned your back to him, you lousy bum. You the color of leather. Every time he are blocking the whole run. Turn your back to him, I say. You can't next minute he would plant a stiletto lead him that way. If I come down there to you. I'll soon show you how to get him aboard."

The bleary-eyed one became hewildered and in his excitement lost his footing on the slippery runway and fell underneath the horse, at the same time loosening his hold on the halter chain. up, turned around and made a break stars were out and the twinkling lights for the deck. The man on the gangway tried to scramble out of the way. The fading into the distance. Leaning over left. They were a pitiful sight. horse, in wheeling, let fly with both the rail were the foreman and the heels and caught him below the right veterinarian, "Doc" Casey, by name, ear with his near hind foot. With a The foreman was talking. Snatches piercing shriek the drunk clasped both



Swung on His Jaw With My Fist.

careful check on the straw, hay, oats and rolled down to the foot of the gangheap, the blood pouring from his nose, mouth and the wound below his ear. Upon hearing this shrick several of Pinero had selected his straw bosses the men leading their horses, in their but that exhibition of yours on the

The pasty-faced horseman, whom I had helped out a little while before in on is working for me, and you lay your the argument about his bunk was hands off of him. If I find you medtrouble maker. He must have been to a horse. He turned his horse loose

I went up on deck. The moon and of New York harbor were gradually of his conversation reached my ears:

"Lond horses? Why, that bunch of scum they wished on me couldn't load lump sugar, one lump at a time. How Brown expects me to deliver 1,300 horses into Bordeaux with this scurvy outfit, I don't know. We're lucky, I'm thinkin', if five hundred o' them don't lie, Why, there's not one o' the blighters knows which end of a horse is cut out for you. If, in a few days, you don't have a couple of hundred a bloomin' liar."

"Doc," Casey answered:

"Well, I'll tell you, Mr. Goorty, this is my third trip over and I have seen ome tough bunches, but this one is the limit, and I sure have a job on my hands. It's too bad that Pinero let out on that young fellow, because, in my mind, that was a pretty cowardly blow. horses. What do you say if I give him | tations. the job of assistant veterinarian? He's had six years' cavalry experience." The foreman answered:

"Throw him over the side, if you ant-I don't care. But I guess you'll need someone to help you out, so go to

I was overjoyed. Just then Pinero came aft. The horse doctor turned to I've seen lots of dirty work in my life, a long time. Now, just take a tip the tails buttoned back, pattern of from me. That young fellow from now 1871. of yours down your throat until it

The ship was lurching in a horrible manner. All I could see was, one minute a pile of kicking horses, smashed-up planks and the three negroes piled up in one corner of the compartment, and then, with a lurch of the ship, they would slide into the other. Nothing could be done by us. It was madness to attempt anything. The three negroes were dead.

That night and the following day was a perfect hell on the ship for men and horses. The ship rode through the squall, and when it became calm we all got busy. Out of the 24 horses between decks we had to shoot 17 on 3 had died from broken necks. 4 remaining horses were still alive but hardly had a square foot of hide of supply wagons and artillery limbers

The next day the three negroes were buried at sea without a word of prayer.

with the rest of the trip, because the stench was awful, there being about twelve dead horses that we could not get out.

Just outside of the entrance of the iver leading to Bordeaux, a small, France, came alongside. We have to and up the gangplank came three eats hay. I tell you, Doc, your work French officers. They were closeted with the captain of the ship and our foreman, and after about twenty mincases of colic on your hands, then I'm utes, left and we continued on our course.

Going up the river in some places the banks were only about twenty feet away. We could see the French women tilling their fields. As we went by these workers stopped and waved their hands in the air to us, and we waved back. It was my first sight of France, and I was not in any way He seemed to know how to handle disappointed. It lived up to my expec-

A little farther up the river we came to a large dock where ships were loading and unloading cargoes, and a thrill passed through me as I saw my first batch of German prisoners at work, These were immense fellows, nearly every one being six feet or over. They were guarded by little French soldiers, averaging about five feet five inches, him and said: "Look here, Pinero, with a long rifle, bayonet fixed. This rifle, in comparison with the Frenchman, looked like a telegraph pole. The and divided the men into gangs, and fright turned them loose, and there was dock is about the filthiest Eve seen in soldiers had on the old blue overcoats.

As we passed the German prisoners they scowled at us, and we, feeling One old fellow in my gang was a standing near the runway, nolding on dling with him, Fil push that silly grin quite safe on the deck, yelled back insults at them. One big Irishman, about forty years old and looked as and rushed to the bloody mass, which chokes you. Now, that's all I got to right near me, took great glee in jumphard as nails. He was having an argu- was twitching with convulsive shud. say, lay off of him. Do you under- ing up and down on the hatchway and running his finger across his throat.

Pinero started to mumble excuses, This seemed to enrage the prisoners know he did not make the passage

always moving in the same direction. I was ushered into the presence of a French officer, who, I later found out, was a brigadier general of the quar-I was heartily sick and disgusted termaster corps. I could hear a distant booming, and upon inquiring found out that it was the guns of France, striving to hold back the German invaders. I trembled all over with excitement, and a feeling that 1 cannot describe rushed over me. I was rakish boat, flying the tri-color of listening to my first sound of the guns on the western front.

Two days afterward I again reached Bordeaux, and shipped to New York on the French liner Rochambeaux. Upon arriving in New York I reported to the Frenchman who had sent me over. He was very courteous, and as I reached out to shake hands with him, he placed both hands on my shoulders and kissed me on the right and left cheek. I was dumfounded, blushed all over, and after receiving the pay that was due me, I left.

I think I could have borne another trip across with horses, but that being kissed upon my return completely got my goat.

I went back to the routine of my office, but everything had lost color and appeared monotonous. I believe I had left my heart in France, and I felt mean and small, eating three square meals a day and sleeping on a soft bed, when the armies on the other side were making the world's history.

Sometimes when sleeping I would have a horrible nightmare; I could see those horses being boiled alive in steam.

Several times later I passed that sign on Greenwich street, "Horses for France, Men Wanted," and the picture of the second foreman dropping the pasty-faced doctor would loom before my eyes. I do not know to this day what became of that nervy wreck of humanity, who had the temerity to tell our foreman where he got off at. I