

THE OBSERVATION POST

VOL. 1, No. 31.

PALMERSTON NORTH, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 18, 1942.

PRICE 1d

The Luck of Roaring Camp

(Condensed by the Padre.)

THE CAMP.

Perhaps you know Bret Harte's yarn "The Luck of Roaring Camp." Here is part of it, very much condensed.

The population of this settlement during the "golden era" of California, consisted of wild characters who had been repelled from more civilized communities by the unwelcome attentions of certain gentlemen of the law. They were outcasts all, attracted to the rugged barrenness of the Camp by the promises of refuge, and of gold. The type of men they were can be judged by the fact that their town derived its name from the innocent pastimes in which its citizens indulged!

It was unwise for an outsider to attempt to take up residence in the Camp, usually in such cases a small section of land (about 7 feet by 3 feet) was set aside as the permanent home of the aspirant to citizenship, and the affairs of the Camp troubled him no more. The pioneers were jealous of their haven of refuge, and its gold!

ONE WELCOME STRANGER.

But one day a stranger did find welcome, and his privilege was won by his unique method of entry. Never before had a babe been born in Roaring Camp. A strange hush fell upon the assembled community as the first faint cry was heard. That quietness could not have been due to the passing of the Mother; death was too common there, to elicit sympathy. But the coming of the small new life spread its quietening influence and stilled the passions of the crowd.

All must see the little stranger, and by mutual consent a line was formed to file past the table on which the baby lay. The sight stirred something in the heart of the first spectator and awkwardly he pulled his hat from his head. The others followed his example. Thus was shown the first mark of respect for another, ever expressed in Roaring Camp!! As each man passed the candle box that formed the cradle some offering found its way into a hat nearby.

PROBLEM.

Outside once more, heated arguments arose as to what was to be done with the child. Opinions differed widely until someone remarked that he should be sent off to Red Dog, 40 miles away, where female attention could be procured. The suggestion met with fiercest opposition. No plan which entailed parting with the new acquisition would be entertained. Nor was the suggestion of a nurse favoured, because no "decent" woman would make her home in Roaring Camp—and "the other kind" wasn't good enough for the child! Finally it was settled that "Stumpy," who had been elected from the first as official guardian of the baby, should continue to supervise his welfare, with the assistance of Jenny, the ass, who provided the necessary nourishment.

By some strange working of kindly nature the experiment succeeded. Day by day the child grew, and day by day the roistering citizens of Roaring Camp bowed before the quiet and unassuming influence of a tiny babe.

NAMING THE CHILD.

Before many weeks it was apparent to all that a name must be found. He couldn't always be called "Stumpy's Boy," or "The Kid," or even "The Coyote" (an allusion to his vocal powers). So a christening was indicated. Such a ceremony presented endless possibilities. One ingenious satirist spent two days preparing a burlesque of the Church service. The "choir" was trained to render ribald parodies of hymns. The nock altar was built. On the day appointed the procession marched to the ceremony and the rough cradle was deposited before the altar. Then quietly Stumpy stepped forward, "It ain't my style to spoil the fun, boys, but it strikes me it ain't just on the square. It's playing a pretty low trick on the baby to ring in fun on him when he can't understand. But we're here for a christening. I proclaim you

Thomas Luck, according to the laws of the United States, and the State of California, so help me God." It was the first time that the name of the Diety had been uttered in Roaring Camp, other than as profanity. So a name was given to Tommy in a ceremony, perhaps ludicrous, but nevertheless as sincere as any performed under more enlightened circumstances.

INFLUENCE.

After that the change in camp was more rapid. The hut set aside for Tommy Luck, or "the Luck," as he was more commonly called, showed the first signs of improvement. First it was swept, then scrubbed!—Then the outside was repaired and little extras were added—entirely unnecessary trifles, which nevertheless made the hut more attractive to look at. Then it was whitewashed. Soon Stumpy sent to Red Dog for curtains—curtains in Roaring Camp!!

A rosewood cradle was packed 80 miles by mule, and when it arrived it, "sorter killed the rest of the furniture," so complete refurbishing and painting of the cabin became an urgent necessity. Men who had formed a habit of strolling along to see how the Luck was progressing seemed to like the change. In self defence and to attract once more the attention it was rapidly losing "Tuttle's grocery" bestored itself and imported a carpet and mirrors. Reflections in the latter seemed to indicate stricter habits of personal tidiness. Again, Stumpy imposed a type of quarantine on all who aspired to the honour of holding the Luck. Some had been in the habit of regarding clothing after the manner of the snake his skin—something more came off only through decay. But such was the influence of the Luck that soon it was noticed that several of the worst offenders against cleanliness were appearing regularly every afternoon in clean shirts and with faces still glowing from the vigour of their ablutions!

RADICAL CHANGES.

Nor were social and moral laws neglected. The Luck must sleep—woe betide any who indulged in the yelling and shouting that had earned the camp its name. Profanity and tactily given up within sound of the sacred precincts of the hut, and throughout the Camp the popular form of expletive "Damn the luck," or "Curse the luck," was abandoned as having too much personal significance.

When summer came Tommy was carried to the diggings and deposited on a soft bed of pine boughs, to sleep and to play while the men were at work. Soon it became the habit to decorate this rude bower with flowers and shrubs. Clusters of wild honeysuckle and azalia would appear, and realisation dawned that there was beauty in these trifles which previously had passed unnoticed and had been trampled underfoot. Then, while the men worked, they began to seek strangely marked pebbles and fragments of variegated quartz that would "do for Tommy to play with."

So the transformation of men, and of Roaring Camp went on until the expressman, the only link with the outside world would say in Red Dog, "They've got a street in Roaring Camp that would lay over any street in Red Dog. They've got vines and flowers round their houses—and they wash themselves twice a day!!"

Through the influence of a babe common decency came to a camp where men had lived in degradation.

OUR ROARING CAMP.

The Luck of Roaring Camp is just a story, but at Christmas time we are reminded of another Babe. It is a true story this time. He came into a Roaring Camp—this world of ours and through the years His influence is at work subduing the wild passions of mankind, and ennobling the human race. Not long ago my attention was drawn to the following quotation taken originally from the "Detroit Young Man."

"Here is a man who was born in an

Whereabouts of Past Officers

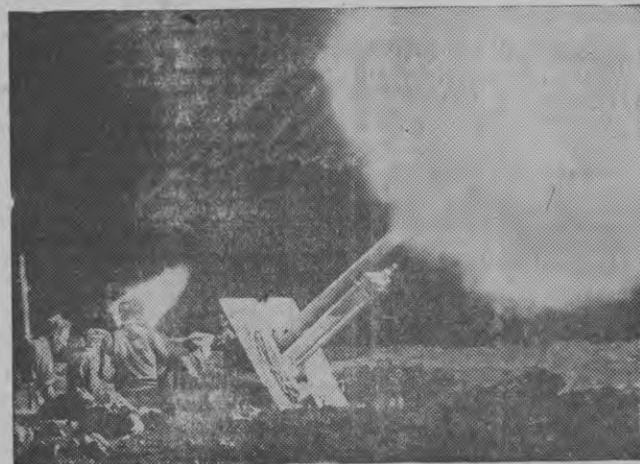
We had news the other day of Lt. Fred De Vere, who was B. Troop Commander, 5th Battery in 1940 and part 1941. He spent some time at Papa-kura in N.Z.E.F. Reinforcements before he was posted to the Army Tank Brigade. Lt. De Vere has had fourteen months at Waiouru and feels that it is about time that he shook the dust off his feet.

They say, once a gunner, always a gunner, well Lt. De Vere feels that he would like to have a shot at tanks with 6-pounders. Older members will remember the De Vere saying: "Don't call me 'Fwed', that's what you sew your 'trousers' with." We all wish Lt. De Vere, good luck when he moves on.

We have also heard from Capt. Fowke, our late Adjutant. He is now dwelling under tropical skies with the temperature always around the 100deg. mark.

Grunners at home have little to worry about compared with the conditions where Capt. Fowke is. The roads are in name only and mostly they degenerate into mountain tracks with scarcely room to move a vehicle. Cars and trucks are worn out at 20,000 miles.

Beer does not exist in the country, and one does not realise what thirst really is until you cannot quench it. The only liquid available is small quantities of chlorinated water. They



A striking battle picture showing British artillerymen fighting through the hours of darkness. Salvoes from a 25-pounder battery shatter the desert night.

obsure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another village. He worked in a carpenter's shop until he was 30, and then for three years he was an itinerant preacher. He never owned a home. He never feared a family. He never went to college. He never travelled two hundred miles from the place where he was born. He never did one of the things that usually accompanies greatness. He had no credentials but himself.

"While still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against him. He was turned over to his enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed upon a cross between two thieves. His executors gambled for the only piece of property he had on earth while he was dying, and that was his coat. When he was dead he was taken down and laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

"Nineteen wide centuries have come and gone and to-day He is the centre-piece of the human race and the leader in the column of progress.

"I am very far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that ever were built, and all the Parliaments that ever sat, and all the Kings that ever reigned, put together have not affected the life of man upon this earth, as has that One Solitary Life!"

Congratulations L/Bdr. and Mrs. Flower — A Son (25-pdr.)

The fluctuating emotions fitting across the face of Bdr. Ron Flower indicated something worth celebrating. It is understood that with a big pay (and a big heart) our Ron is shouting everyone he meets because he has been promoted to the rank of Father. His chest has expanded a further nine inches because he has a son who weighed 9st. 8ozs. (or was it lbs Ron?) when born last Saturday.—Congratulations Ron, we hope he will be a chip off the old block!!

Birthdays

Very many happy returns of the day to—

S/M. Clapp, 14th.
Sgt. Tanner, 14th.
Sgt. Buchanan, 6th.

find mosquito swotting over the odds, 24 hours a day.

Capt. Fowke sends his regards to all his friends in the Regiment and we wish him a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year in his new surroundings. Our regards also to Major Bryden and Major Lovelock, who are with Capt. Fowke.

Six Inch Men

(By Gnr. Parker.)

(Continued from last week.)

STARVED TO DEATH.

Bert leaned closer and with a confidential aspect said softly, "Did I ever tell you about the time I was starved to death?" He stood back slightly then, to observe the effect of his words and by the incredulous expression on the face of Tony perceived that for a while, he would be able to bathe himself in a small area of limelight.

"Go on," said Tony, with the mental thought that for a man starved to death Bert looked remarkably well fed, why the only place where his battledress fitted at all was a paunch that would have made the lacing of his boots a most difficult if not hazardous performance.

"Arl a minute," said Bert and with a rapid motion elevated his handle, swallowed twice and planted it on the bar with its gaping mouth crying eloquently for more. Tony likewise tossed his tot and blinked a little dizzily while the bartender did his stuff. Bert planted his foot on the rail, his elbow on the bar and placing his handle within easy reach, spoke thusly.

"Back in '39, the Army was a grouse show, and being at Foxton was a darn sight 'grouser,' what with leave from five to ten every night, plenty of beer, an' steak an' eggs, an' the old gang, all as keen as mustard. I remember the time," he said, "when me an' old Lobo went out on the scout, an' drank ourselves silly. We got tossed out at seven o'clock and wandered off across country, quite slap happy we was, and singing fit to raise the dead. Lobo had a damn silly idea that he wanted a rooster to take back to the cooks, and as I was just as silly I said, what about two. She's right gunner, he said, and sniffed the air, he could smell chooks miles away. After we had wandered around for a while and bust through a few hedges and fences, we ran slap bang into a fowl run."

Bert took a long thoughtful pull at his beer, his eyes a bit brighter than before, as though kindling with the sparks of reminiscence.

"Anyhow, we opened the door and sneaked in," Lobo winked slyly. "Ever seen this one he said." He picked up a short stick, an' I followed him, as he oiled into the fowl house. The place was warm and rank with a foul smell."

He! He! Get the joke!—fowl smell. Tony opened his eyes and gave a sickly grin.

"Well after we got used ter th' dark," Bert went on, "Lobo goes up to a cackler, all fluffed up and snoozing on its perch and holds the stick in front of it, just near its legs, and then started to move the stick slowly forward, until he was touching the blooming hen, and strike me pink if the darn thing didn't climb on to the piece of tree! Sorta walked in its sleep it did, and carried on with its shuteye as calm as you like. Lobo gives a chuckle and started moving out, with the cackler on its new perch in front of him, and rocking slow like. We got into the yard again, an' Lobo has to step into a bucket. It was just like a battery opening fire. There was crashes and squawks and cackles an' the air was thick with feathers, then a darn dawg starts barking and Lobo rushes clean through the wire netting with me after him, an' off we go again larrupping across country. Lobo gives a yell and vanishes, an' I pulls up on the edge of a blinking ditch and judging from the smell, it must have been a sewer. Lobo crawled out the other side, and boy did he talk long and loud and when he saw me cackling at him he fairly blew up."

(To Be Continued Next Week.)

LOST.

ONE CAP P.S., in Shower Room, on Sunday. Finder please return to Gnr. JACKSON, C/o The Ration Store. REWARD.