Horses for France

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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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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 trifle 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. I 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. range during rifle practice, when the miss to the firing line. My heart sank. Then he spoke, and I was carried height of expectation. His words: the horse gang. "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.

are confidential, so I will not go into my left. After a good look at him I 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 detalls immediately after happening. Be obey his instructions. Good luck."

clothes an old black suit, olive drab next minute he would plant a stiletto shirt, a pair of heavy army shoes and in my back. His name was Pinero. a woolen cap. I had let my beard grow His introduction to us was very brief: and certainly looked rough.

In passing through City Hall park, New York, one sees many derelicts of the human race sitting on the benches. I sat down between two of these wrecks of humanity and engaged them in conversation, trying to blend into their atmosphere. About ten minutes later a policeman came past and told the three of us to move on. I slouched away with the other two. Telling them that I was going out "panhandling," I took my leave, but not before one of them made an appealing and successful touch for a nickel. The method used by him in securing that nickel would have done country in putting through a deal in alry step out in front." Four others volving millions.

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, but it soon died out upon hearing her remark as I collided with her, "If you My turn came next." cannot look where you are going, 1 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 deep, trying to ship as horsemen for France.

It would be impossible to get a

I fell into this line and waited my turn. Upon arriving at the desk, in front of me sat a little fat, greas; Jew. To describe his manner of handling the men as being impolite would be a great exaggeration. The way he handled that line of human cattle would do the kaiser's heart good.

It came my turn, and this conversation ensued: "What do you know about horses?"

I answered: "Six years in the United States cavalry." The Agent: "What regiments?"

"Eleventh and Twelfth." "You're a liar. You never saw the

cavalry." I felt like punching him on the nese but did not do so. I wanted to ship as a horseman. I showed him my discharges. He said: "They're faked, 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 liar." I saw my chances of shipping 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

wonderful meal of corned beef hash, minus butter. This cost me fifteen

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 of the agency, we marched to the ferry and landed "somewhere in New

The ship, a huge three-stacker, was lying alongside. We were shoved into 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 through a third degree to find out if 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 eyebrows. His hand was resting on the rail of the ship. It looked like a The eventful day at last came, and ham, and inwardly I figured out what once more I was closeted with him. I would happen to me if that ham-like started to tell him my story. He fist ever came in contact with the interrupted me by waving his right point of my jaw. As we passed him hand to the right and left. It re- he showered us with a few compliminded me of the butts on a target | mentary remarks, such as "Of all the lousy scum I have seen, this bunch of His head went up against the iron man marking the target wigwags a lubbers is the worst, and this is what they give me to take thirteen hundred horses over to Bordeaux." Later on blood pouring from the cut in his head. from despondency to the greatest I found this individual was foreman of

We were ordered aft and sat on the after hatch. The fellow on my right was a huge, blue-gummed negro. He was continually scratching himself. I unconsciously eased away from him My instructions received from him and bumped into the fellow sitting on eased back again in the direction of the negro. I don't think that he had taken a bath since escaping from the cradle. Right then my uppermost thought was how I could duck this trip to France. The general conversation among the horse gang was: "When do we eat?"

We must have sat there about twenty minutes, when the second foreman came aft. I took fifteen guesses at his nationality, and at last came to the conclusion that he was a cross between

cautious in doing this. Upon landing a Chinaman and a Mexican. He was in France report to the prefecture of thin, about six feet tall, and wore a ponce, Bordeaux, and to the letter huge sombrero. His skin was tanned the color of leather. Every time he I went home and put on my oldest smiled I had the impression that the "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 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 cavman 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 oath, the second foreman said: "All right, you're not a straw boss; fall back." I got the cue immediately.

"Do you know what a straw boss

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

boss. I had not the least idea of what he was talking about, but made up rougher and more unkempt gathering down the line, picking out straw sleeves rolled up to the elbows, and of men. It looked as if some huge bosses. I asked one of the men in my in his right hand a coiled lariat. It and the survival of the fittest. I had in this stampede.

fully combed the gutters of New 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 careful check on the straw, hay, oats and bren. Having served in the cavalry, this job, as I figured, would be regular pie for me.

In about an hour and a half's time Pinero had selected his straw bosses and divided the men into gangs, and away, from my experience with horses, assigned us to our quarters on the ship. These quarters were between decks and very much crowded; the stench was awful. Iron bunks, three deep, with filthy and lousy mattresses on them, were set into the sides of the ship. The atmosphere in that dirty hole turned my stomach and I was longing for the fresh air of the deck. A dirty bum, with tobacco running out of the corner of his mouth, turned to me and asked: "Do the graybacks bother you much, matey?" A shudder ran through me as I auswered: "Not much." But I figured out that as soon as I got them, which I knew would occur in a very short time, they certainly would bother me, but I had to keep a stiff upper lip if I wanted to retain their respect and my authority as a straw boss.

One old fellow in my gang was a about forty years old and looked as hard as nails. He was having an argument with a pasty-faced looking specimen of humanity, about twenty-six years old. To me this man appeared to be in the last stages of consumption. beanery across the street and had a I told the old fellow to cut out his argument and leave the other fellow muddy coffee and huge slices of bread, alone. Upon hearing this he squirted 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 authority waning and knew that I would have to answer this insult quickly. I took two or three quick steps forward



Swung on His Jaw With My Fist.

and swung on his jaw with my fist. bunk with a sickening sound and he crumpled up and fell on the deck, the I felt sick and faint thinking that he to show these signs of weakness on right. He soon came around. From man in the section and greatly respect- for the highbrows." ed me. The rest of the men growled possibly could:

"If any of the rest of you bums something, and I will sink this into his head." Although I was quailing underneath, still I got away with it. 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."

We needed no second invitation and the rail. On the dock were hundreds the New Jersey stockyards. A lot of lice-officer went on board the ship. the men who had shipped as horsemen had never led a horse in their life, and it was pitiful to see their fear.

cided to accept the lesser evil and take a chance with the horses.

Then the work of loading com-

mence 1. I have been in a cavalry regiment entrain for the Mexican border and heined to load eleven hundred horses was indescribable. The horses were loaded by three runways. My gang and I were detailed on the after runway. The foreman was leaning over the rail, glaring down upon us and now and then giving instructions mixed with horrible oaths. He had a huge marlinspike in his hand. On the dock was the second foreman, in his large my mind that it would not take me sombrero, a red neckerchief around long to find out. Then he passed his neck, wearing a blue shirt with the

giant had taken a fine comb and care gang what were the duties of a straw did one's heart good to see him rope the horses which broke loose. Upon 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 lead a horse by the halter up our run. He was looking back at the horse, at the same time tugging and jerking on the halter. You could see the white in the horse's eyes, and I knew right that this was a bad one, or, as we would term him in the cavalry, an "outlaw." The drunk was cursing and swearing and kicking up at the horse's head. The foreman saw this and directed his barrage at the offender.

"How in h-l do you expect to lead a horse while looking at him? Turn your back to him, you lousy bum. You are blocking the whole run. Turn your back to him, I say. You can't 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 bewildered 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. The horse jerked his head loose, reared up, turned around and made a break for the deck. The man on the gangway trouble maker. He must have been tried to scramble out of the way. The horse, in wheeling, let fly with both heels and caught him below the right ear with his near hind foot. With a piercing shriek the drunk clasped both hands to his head, fell over backward and rolled down to the foot of the gang- it." plank, and lay there in a crumpled heap, the blood pouring from his nose, mouth and the wound below his ear.

Upon hearing this shrick several of the men leading their horses, in their fright turned them loose, and there was a mad stampede on the deck.

The pasty-faced horseman, whom I had helped out a little while before in the argument about his bunk was standing near the runway, holding on to a horse. He turned his horse loose and rushed to the bloody mass, which was twitching with convulsive shudders. The foreman, on seeing this accident, snapped out a long string of curses, which almost froze my heart.

"What did I tell you? Didn't I tell you not to look at him? I knew you would get it, and a damned good job, too; blocking that run with your fool tricks."

Then he noticed the pasty-faced horseman stooping over the bleeding

"Get 'im by the heels, you cross between a corpse and mummy, and drag him out of the way. We've bloody well got to get this ship loaded to catch the tide.'

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 your underwear away." 'im out of the way. This ship has got pound some obedience into you,"

The man still paid no attention. The foreman was speechless. In a few sec- nutely followed his instructions. onds the stooping man straightened up, and looking the foreman straight in This did not seem to fease the foreman in the least and he bellowed out: had been killed, but it would not do "How do you know he is dead?" The man answered simply: "I'm a doctor." my part, so without even moving to- Then the foreman once again explodward him I ordered one of the mer to ed: "A doctor! Blawst my deadlights, I was satisfied. So was Doc. look him over and see if he was all a doctor! Well, if you're a doctor, what in h-l are you doing on a horse that time on he was the most faithful ship? You ought to be rolling pills

The doctor never took his piercing and pitching, and huge seas would and mumbled and I thought I was in look from the eye of the foreman. The for a terrible beating. Hying close at foreman was now like an enraged bull. hand was an iron spike about eighteen Spitting all over himself, he blustered inches long. Grasping this, I turned to out: "Well, if he's dead, there is no the rest, trying to be as tough as I dector that can do him any good. A ouple o' you black skunks over there (addressing two negroes who were althink they are boss around here, start most blanched to a bluish white and who were trembling near by), get ahold of him and drag 'im out of the of the negroes, with a way."

leeering grin, replied: "I shipped on this here ship to handle hosses, and to tote corpses around."

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

Just then the clanging bell of an ambulance was heard and a white-clothed lined up on the deck. I looked over doctor, followed by two men with a stretcher, pushed their way through of the sorriest looking specimens of the crowd of horses and horsemen. horse flesh I have ever laid eyes on. They were accompanied by a police-These horses were in groups of ten man. The body was put into the amor twelve, being held by horsemen from bulance and taken away, while the po-

The pasty-faced doctor was holding onto the rail of the runway and coughing. I thought each gasp would be his The foreman let out a volley of oaths last. The second foreman was talking for them to move quickly, and they de- 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 dastardwhen hurry-up orders were received to ly act, I saw red and made a leap at the foreman. An onrushing light flashed in front of me and a huge loon trains. The confusion on that dock comotive, 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. Right then and there I decided never again, especially while aboard ship, to interfere with the foreman. Among that gang of human wrecks and cut- that the horses were loose. He said throats it was every man for himself, three negroes in his gang were caught

two beautiful black eyes, and my nose feit like a football.

I went up on deck. The moon and stars were out and the twinkling lights of New York harbor were gradually fading into the distance. Leaning over the rail were the foreman and the veterinarian. "Doc" Casey, by name, The foreman was talking. Snatches of his conversation reached my ears:

"Load 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 Why, there's not one o' the blighters knows which end of a horse and horses. The ship rode through eats hay. I tell you, Doc, your work the squall, and when it became calm is cut out for you. If, in a few days, you don't have a couple of hundred cases of colic on your hands, then I'm a bloomin' liar."

"Doc," Casey answered: "Well, I'll tell you, Mr. Goorty, this is my third trip over and I have seen some 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. He seemed to know how to handle horses. What do you say if I give him the job of assistant veterinarian? He's lower hold burst. In this hold there had six years' cavalry experience."

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

came aft. The horse doctor turned to streams of cold salt water from three him and said: "Look here, Pinero, pairs of hose into the hold, thus try-I've seen lots of dirty work in my life, but that exhibition of yours on the dock is about the filthiest I've seen in a long time. Now, just take a tip on is working for me, and you lay your hands off of him. If I find you meddling with him, I'll push that silly grin of yours down your throat until it chokes you. Now, that's all I got to say, lay off of him. Do you understand?

Pinero started to mumble excuses, but the doctor shut him up with, "I don't want to hear any more. I'm off, o' you for life, but remember what I tell you. Steer clear from the two o' us, sabe?"

I guess the second foreman "sabled" all right, because he vouchsafed no answer. My heart warmed to "Doc" Casey and I slipped away unobserved.

The next morning the doctor fixed me up with court plaster and I was installed as assistant veterinarian at \$30 for the trip. I was to sleep in "Doc" Casey's stateroom, where he had his medicine stock, but before entering the room "Doc" told me, "Take this bucket of water; put a few drops of creosote in it, and go aft on the hatch and take a good bath, and throw

I asked him what for. He answered: to be loaded or I'll go down there and "When you take your shirt off, take a a good look at it and you'll see why." I began to feel itchy all over but mi-

Upon taking my shirt off, one look was enough. It was alive, and over the eye, calmly replied: "He's dead." the rail it went. Doc loaned me a white suit and took charge of my outer clothing. What he did with them I don't know, but that afternoon he returned them to me. They were shrunk a size smaller, but were clean.

Five days out we ran into a squall and our work was cut out for us. We even had horses on the decks in wooden stalls. The ship was lurching burst over the gunwales.

Several of the wooden stalls gave way and the horses were loose on the deck. With every lurch of the ship a 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. I don't allow nohow that it's my work | Into the midst of that struggling and kicking bunch of horses they went, assisted of Doc Casey. Four of the horses received broken legs, and Pinero, instead of shooting them, cut dead man, pulled him away from the their throats with a sharp dagger he

> One of the negroes from the lower hold staggered to the upper deck with



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

his face blanched almost white, and his eyes popping out of his head. Between gasps he informed us that a whole section of stalls, 24 in all, had been carried away between decks, and

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. The ship was lurching in a horrible manner. All I could see was, one minute a pile of kicking horse-, 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 we all got busy. Out of the 24 horses between decks we had to shoot 17 on account of injuries. Besides the 17 3 had died from broken necks. The 4 remaining horses were still alive but hardly had a square foot of hide

left. They were a pitiful sight. The next day the three negroes were buried at sea without a word of

prayer. For the next couple of days noth-

ing of importance happened About four days out of Bordeaux one of the large steam pipes in the were 64 horses. The engineer of the ship tried to repair the break, but it was almost worth a man's life to go down there in that hissing and scalding steam. The cries of the horses went straight to my I was overjoyed. Just then Pinero heart. All we could do was to turn ing to keep the heat down and save

as many horses as possible. Why the engineer did not shut off the steam I don't know. I noted this from me. That young fellow from now fact in my report. After about four hours the steam was shut off and the two foremen, Doc Casey and myself, followed by twelve other men, went into the hold. I will never forget the sight as long as I live. Nearly every one of the horses was dead, and those which still remained alive had to be shot. Some of them were practically boiled alive. The weather was hot, and it was not long before the rotting bodies of the horses made the stench on board unbearable. We had to get these bodies out. Long tackles were rigged up, a chain around the neck of a dead horse, and I worked the winch. The bodies were snaked along the passageways in the hold and up to the hatch. Some of the bodies would not hold together, and it was a common sight to see a dead horse suspended in the air by his hind leg drop suddenly into the hold below, leaving his

leg hanging to the tackle. Every horse sent to France is branded with a different brand. They have a system of indexing them. As each dead horse was snaked to the upper deck, Doc had to stoop over and make a note of the brand before

the horse was thrown overboard. As the dead horses were dropped over the side, a resounding splash could be heard and the water was churned into a foamy white as the body momentarily sank from view. Then the bloated body of the horse would reappear and disappear in the wake of the ship, the seagulls hover-

ing and screaming around it. The grub on that ship was awful, and a day out of Bordeaux the gang of horsemen refused to work. The foreman mustered them on the main deck, and standing on the bridge let out about twenty minutes of religion and advice in their direction. The whole gang immediately got religious

and returned to their duties. I was heartily sick and disgusted 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 river leading to Bordeaux, a small, rakish boat, flying the tri-color of France, came alongside. We hove to and up the gangplank came three French officers. They were closeted with the captain of the ship and our foreman, and after about twenty minutes, 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 disappointed. It lived up to my expectations.

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, with a long rifle, bayonet fixed. This rifle, in comparison with the Frenchman, looked like a telegraph pole. The soldiers had on the old blue overcoats, the tails buttoned back, pattern of 1871.

As we passed the German prisoners they scowled at us, and we, feeling quite safe on the deck, yelled back insults at them. One big Irishman, right near me, took great glee in jumping up and down on the hatchway and running his finger across his throat. This seemed to enrage the prisoners and they yelled something in German. The Irishman must have understood it, because he let out a volley of curses in return. The French sentries seemed to enjoy this barrage of insults and did not in any way attempt to curtail the prisoners' remarks. This, at the time, struck me as depicting a remark-

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