

The Too-Good Corporal

Everybody in old F Company, now part of B Company, knew Eddie Greenberg. And everybody liked him. He was that good. He was so good that it actually hurt--him.

Maybe it was the contrast between ^{him} and the "G.I." tough top-kick who took over after the coordination of the two companies that made us appreciate him more than ever recently. Maybe it was the story of what he did for the two lonely, unhappy jeeps last week. Maybe it was because he was being "Rangooned," but we came to really appreciate him lately.

Eddie was literally the company landmark. He was at least half again as large as I, and I'm over two and a quarter. He's broad from the crotch to the neck, round and barrel-shaped in between. There is only one thing wrong with Eddie: He has a speech impediment that makes him swell up, choke, and get red as hell after about every ten words. After he spits a couple of times, he gets out the word and goes along smoothly until the next choke.

All the jeeps learn about him almost as soon as they get in. He's always around, always helpful.

I needed help yesterday, and, much to my surprise, he walked in just as I needed him. It was very simple, but everybody is so afraid of the top-kick that nothing is simple. I had walked into the orderly room and asked to be sent to have my shoes fixed. The holes in the shoes were so capacious my feet hurt from the hardened mud that caked between the soles.

The ^{corporal} ~~corporation~~ who was charge-of-quarters hesitated. He either didn't know what to do or feared "Duke," the top-kick, might not

like it. As he stalled around, Eddie finally said, "Give me that pad. I'll take care of it. You just--" and here he choked on it.

But he did take care of it. I left with a "buck slip" addressed to "Warehouse 26" and returned an hour later with a nice set of rubber soles.

This morning I bumped into him again in the Service Club cafeteria. While we were gabbing, a doleful little jeep came up and said, "Remember me, corporal? I just wanted to thank you. Mom, too."

Eddie didn't remember him.

"I'm the guy with the Canadian mother," the jeep explained.

"Oh, yes," Eddie said, patting him on the back. "Glad to, soldier, anytime."

As the jeep walked off, Eddie turned to me and said, "I don't have the slightest idea who he is or--," choking and spitting, "--what I did for him."

Without being immodest--not if you knew him or his marvelous works--he said, smiling contentedly, "You know, I do so much for these kids I can't remember for whom I did what."

He was like that. He did everything consciously. He really understood the plight of these kids, the shock of the abrupt change from civilian life and its individualism to army life and its complete subordination of individualism--everybody's except his own.

Like last Monday I sent a kid of about 18 to him. The kid asked me how to go about getting a haircut---did he need it---when he was always on detail at the hours the barber was open.

I asked the kid what company he was in, and he said Company B.

"Know Corporal Greenberg?" I asked.

The kid said he didn't think so.

I described Eddie's bulk, his speech impediment, but the kid didn't know him.

"Well, soldier," I advised, "he's one guy you ought to know. He's a helluva decent noncom. He'll help you all he can."

"Oh, I know who you mean," the jeep exclaimed, his face really all shines. "You mean the guy who tucks the guys in at night!"

I couldn't believe that. I knew Eddie was as decent as he was broad. But not tucking the jeeps in bed.

"Honest to God," the kid maintained. "I've seen it. He goes around every night and sees that all the boys are covered."

I was astounded. This was too good, even for the so-good Eddie Greenberg.

"Jesus, I should have thought of him," the jeep said. "He's the guy who got up about 2 o'clock that cold night and put his own blanket on the fellow with the bad cold. I'll go see him," and with that, the kid was off like a bat out of hell.

When I spoke to him this morning, I asked Eddie if he could get me a pass for tomorrow so I could go up to New York, go to the Theater Wing Canteen and have some fun. He said to look him up tomorrow and he'd see what he could do.

He really does things with passes.

Last week he really did something for those two jeeps who had been here in the reception center for almost two months without getting paid or shipped to an assignment where they could go out and have some fun at night.

He got them and himself a three-day pass. He took them to New York, checked in at the Astor, found three gorgeous girls, and they had a wonderful time. The hotel bill alone was \$105.

Money, of course, was nothing to him. He had lots of it. I never knew from where, but I imagine his dad was wealthy. Eddie had spent eight years in college and had studied abroad.

Now he used his French to denounce his superiors and get away with it.

Now I'm sorry I asked him for a pass because he is unhappy. He's being shipped to "Rangoon," what "Rangoon" he doesn't know. He doesn't know why, either. Some of the boys think the sergeant doesn't like him. One of the noncoms said he thinks it's because it's too hard for Eddie to give orders because of his trouble.

But that doesn't make sense. He'll have that trouble wherever he goes. He knows it, too. I think that's why he's unhappy. Here he has a spot where he can do some good, at least for the morale of those who will soon be our army.

There's not much chance of that any place else, and Eddie certainly never will make a warrior.

No, none of these make sense. I think the jeep who sat down and had coffee with me after Eddie left had it right.

"You know why they're Rangooning Eddie?" he asked. "Because he can't punish us.

"He's too good."