

Hancock Harrie Irving

**Uncle Sam's Boys as
Lieutenants: or, Serving Old
Glory as Line Officers**



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H. Irving Hancock

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CHAPTER I

THE LETTER FROM THE WAR DEPARTMENT

"WHEW, but it's hot here!" grumbled Sergeant Noll Terry, of the United States Army.

"That's an odd complaint to hear from a young man who served so actively for two years in the tropics," laughed Mrs. Overton, a short, plump, middle-aged matron.

"Well, Mother, it is a hot day," put in Sergeant Hal Overton quietly.

"Yes, it is," agreed Hal's mother, "though you two, who came from the Philippines the very picture of health can't feel the weather to-day much. New Jersey isn't in the tropics."

Hal's mother said that with an air of finality. Her son and his chum had been through the most strenuous forms of active

army service in Uncle Sam's colonial possessions, the Philippine Islands. If they could endure the heat in that tropical belt, even that day's broiling weather at home must seem cool by comparison.

"I suppose you have an idea, Mother, that the nearer you go to the equator the hotter the weather gets."

"Well, isn't it so?" challenged Mrs. Overton.

"It may be, as far as actual degrees of heat are marked off on the thermometer," explained Sergeant Hal. "But I'll stick to it, Mother, that the average of weather that we struck in the Philippines was not nearly so disagreeable as the weather is here to-day."

"That's so," nodded youthful Sergeant Terry, with emphasis.

"I don't understand that," replied Mrs. Overton, looking a good deal puzzled.

"I don't pretend to understand it, either, Mother," Hal continued. "But it's a fact that there are very few spots in the actual tropics that seem so disagreeable as are New York City and some places in New Jersey in the heated terms of July and August."

"That astonishes me," declared Mrs. Overton. "I have always supposed that, the further south one goes in summer, the hotter one finds it. So New York City is hotter in summer than the tropics?"

"It seems hotter," Sergeant Hal affirmed.

The boys were more or less inclined to joke Mrs. Overton,

because, while there are many pleasant days in the tropics, particularly near the coast, the weather is for the most part undeniably hot and oppressive.

"Anyhow," remarked Noll, philosophically, "the hardest thing we have to do here is to walk a short distance down the street and buy another ice cream."

"I'd rather be working," retorted Hal quickly. "I'd rather be doing anything than lying idly around like this!"

"Henry!" cried his mother reproachfully. She was sure to be hurt or angry when she addressed him so formally. "Don't you care anything about being at home, after you've been away from us for more than three years?"

"Of course I care about being home, Mother," Sergeant Hal made haste to rejoin, as he rose, went over and kissed her. "But I don't believe you can gain a hundredth of an idea as to the suspense Noll and I are under at present. When we get our orders from the War Department we'll know – one way or the other."

"Oh, you're safe enough for your commission as second lieutenant, Hal," Noll broke in. "I only wish I felt half as safe for myself as I do for you."

"It doesn't seem fair that you shouldn't both get your commissions as second lieutenants," murmured Mrs. Overton. "You're both certain that you passed your final examinations at Fort Leavenworth."

"We'd both get our commissions, Mother, if there were vacancies enough. However, this year fifty-nine young soldiers

passed their final examinations, and there are only forty-two vacancies to be filled from the ranks. Consequently, seventeen of us – "

"It isn't fair," broke in Mrs. Overton, with all a mother's logic where her son is concerned. "All of you who passed ought to be appointed officers in the Army."

"Seventeen of us won't be," sighed Hal.

Ever since their first enlistment Hal and Noll had been imbued with the ambition to rise from the ranks, and become officers. This promotion from the ranks is not as simple a matter as young people might gain from reading the stories of some misinformed authors who know nothing of actual military service. The enlisted man who would rise from the ranks must first of all be sure that his military record is fine and clean, and that his reputation for coolness and bravery is firmly established. But this is only the beginning for the ambitious soldier in the ranks. He must study almost incessantly, for, when his turn comes to be promoted to a second lieutenancy, he must be fitted to take a stiff academic examination and pass it with credit. That examination, in Sergeant Noll's grim description, "is enough to make a college professor's hair turn gray." There is no easy way of rising from the ranks to become an officer.

Hal and Noll, following the method provided by law, had gone up for their preliminary examinations in the Philippines. Both had succeeded in passing, though Noll was much nearer the bottom of the list than his chum. Then, a good many months

later, both young sergeants had been ordered home from the Philippines, that they might undergo their final examination for commissions. As they were "up" for commissions in the infantry arm of the service, these two youthful soldiers were sent before a board of Army officers at Fort Leavenworth. In the interval between the examinations both young soldiers had studied harder than ever. They believed that they had passed these final examinations in July. They had then been ordered to their homes to await the action of the War Department. It was now well along in August.

"You haven't either one of you appeared on the street in your Army uniforms since you returned home," remarked Mrs. Overton, presently. "Noll, why don't you put on your uniform to-night and bring your mother over here? Then Hal can put on his uniform and you can both take your mothers out this evening. Don't you suppose that, when American women give their sons up to the Army, these same women like once in a while to be seen in public with their sons in uniform?"

"Why, yes, we can do that, of course, Mrs. Overton," Noll agreed readily. "But wouldn't you rather wait a few days and see if we don't obtain the right to wear *officers'* uniforms?"

"That won't happen in ages," declared Hal's mother warmly. "Every one over in Washington is sound asleep during these hot days. Mrs. Terry and I will have to wait until winter if we must wait to see you both put on lieutenants' uniforms."

"I'm horribly afraid that my mother will have to wait even

longer than that," sighed Noll.

Tr-r-r-r-rill! sounded a shrill whistle up the street.

"I wonder if he's coming here?" murmured Mrs. Overton nervously.

Tr-r-r-rill! "Overton!" sounded the postman's voice. "Oh – young Overton!"

Hal fairly bounded out of the little parlor, through the short hallway, and pulled the front door open.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Colton," was Hal's almost shaky greeting. Hal had known this postman ever since the young soldier had been a boy in his first trousers.

"Good afternoon, Hal," rejoined the postman. "One letter – for you. I'll be back to ask you about it to-morrow morning."

Hal stood in the doorway, almost dazed. It was a long, official-looking envelope that he held in his hand. Up in one corner he made out the words, "War Department – Official Business."

Then, still clutching the envelope, Hal walked unsteadily back into the little parlor.

"By George – he's *got* it!" almost shouted Noll. "What's – what's the real word, Hal?"

Noll was now standing on his feet, actually trembling.

Mrs. Overton fairly flew to her son.

"What is it, Hal? What's the answer?" she demanded, in a shaking voice that was but little above a whisper.

"It's – it's addressed, 'Lieutenant Henry Overton, U. S. A.,'" replied Hal, turning the envelope so that his mother might read.

But a sudden rush of mist to her eyes made the letters blur.

"Whoop!" let out Sergeant Noll. "Hal, you've won out!"

"Why don't you open the envelope?" asked Mrs. Overton tremulously.

"I'm afraid I'm almost too dizzy to think of anything," answered Hal in a strained voice.

For answer his eager mother snatched the envelope from his hands, caught up her sewing scissors from a table, and held the envelope up to the light.

"Now, take out your letter, Hal, as quickly as you can, and let us know what it says," commanded Mrs. Overton.

Hal withdrew the letter from the envelope. It was from the adjutant general of the Army, stating that Hal had passed the examinations and that the President had just appointed him, *ad interim*, a second lieutenant of infantry in the United States Army.

"Now, what's the meaning of that awful '*ad interim*'?" demanded Mrs. Overton.

"Why, you see, Mother, Congress isn't in session just now – "

"I don't see what that has to do with – "

"Why, Mother, officers are appointed by the President, and – "

"And it's none of Congress's business!"

"All appointments to commissions in the Army and Navy, Mother, are made by the President, subject to the approval of the Senate – "

"I just knew there was some string to it all," cried Mrs. Overton.

"As a matter of form the Senate has to approve. But the Senate rarely ever refuses to confirm the President's full list of appointments for the Army and Navy."

"Tell me this, Hal: Is there a bootblack at the Capitol in Washington?"

"I – I think it very likely that there is at least one, Mother."

"Then we'll find out that the bootblack has to be consulted, too, my boy, before we're at all sure that you're really an Army officer."

"Oh, no, Mother," laughed Hal. "I feel just as sure, at this moment, that I'm a second lieutenant in the Army as I shall ever feel."

"I – I hope so," sighed his mother. "But I – well, I'm afraid I don't trust any one in Washington any too thoroughly."

Hal laughed heartily. He had got over the first electric shock of the news, and was happy enough now to laugh at anything.

"Noll, I hope you – " began Mrs. Overton, overflowing with generosity. "Why – where is – what has become of that boy? He was here a moment ago!"

It was certain enough now that Noll Terry was nowhere about.

"Mother," said Hal wisely, "you needn't look for Noll. He's beating a nine-second sprint to his own house."

"He didn't need – "

"Don't you understand? Noll is traveling hot-foot to his own

roof to see if the postman on that route has left a long envelope for *him*."

"Poor boy! I hope he has won his commission, too," sighed Mrs. Overton, wistfully.

"Oh, I think he has."

"He's a nice boy."

"Mother, he's one of the very best fellows in the world."

"I suppose Mr. Ad Interim will have a lot to say about Noll's commission, too," said Hal's mother.

"*Ad interim* is Latin, Mother. It means 'in the time between,' or something like that."

"Oh," smiled Mrs. Overton. "I didn't know but Ad was the bootblack at the Capitol."

"I feel like running right after Noll," murmured Hal.

"Don't you dare do it, my son. Don't you feel that I've any right to my boy's company in the first moments that such good news has come to him? Hal, I'm thinking how you'll look in your new uniforms —*ad interim*. Will you order a uniform at once?"

"No; I rather think I won't."

"Why!" demanded Mrs. Overton, eagerly.

"Mother, you may think me reckless, and over-confident. But the fact is, I've already been measured for my new uniforms."

"When? And when will they be here?"

"Do you remember the big mahogany chest that I brought with me from the Philippines, Mother?"

"Yes."

"Well, the whole outfit of uniforms is packed in that chest."

"Henry Overton – you take me right upstairs and unlock that chest – this instant!"

"Come on, Mother!" Hal called back, gayly, as he darted out of the parlor and up the front stairs.

"And they've been here all this time," panted the mother, as her officer-son brought out his key-ring and fumbled at the lock of the mahogany chest. "And you – you – you told me the chest held clothes of yours."

"Well, that wasn't a lie was it, Mother?" Hal threw up the lid and lifted out a tray. "Now, wade into 'em. Look 'em over to your heart's content. Here's the dress sword. Isn't it a beauty?"

Gripping the scabbard with his left hand, Hal drew out the handsome blade with a flourish.

"Ugh! I don't like it, except to look at," shuddered his mother. "I hope my son will never have any need to cut up a fellow-being with that sword."

"Hardly likely," chuckled Hal. "An officer carries only a cane or a stick of some sort just in order that he may point out the location of the enemy, or to indicate some tree on the other side that he thinks has a sharp-shooter up among the foliage, and, of course, he wears his heavy service revolver."

"And an officer never leads a charge, flourishing his sword?"

"Hardly. The officer would be in too much danger from the bullets of his own men if he got in front of them."

"Then an officer isn't in so very much danger, after all,"

guessed Mrs. Overton, speaking in a tone of relief. "Some one in front of him will stop the bullets."

"No one man can stop a bullet that's going under full steam, Mother. At two or three hundred yards' range, to-day, a bullet will pass through six or eight men in succession, if there are that many men in its path."

"I – I guess I don't want to hear any more of that kind of stuff," shivered the little woman. "It all sounds – awfully dangerous!"

But Hal's mother was not idle. With the deft fingers of a woman she was lifting and laying out the handsome uniforms one by one.

"Here's the one I want you to wear when you go out with your father and me this evening," she said, holding up the full-dress uniform.

Hal laid down the sword he had been examining, stepped over and placed an arm around his mother's waist.

"Mother, dear, I'm afraid you don't understand. An officer, when away from troops and duty, rarely wears his uniform in public. It would be looked upon as a foolish piece of vanity on his part."

"But you wore your sergeant's uniform when you first came home."

"All I can say, Mother, is that the two cases are different. One of these days you'll understand just why an enlisted man goes off post in uniform, and an officer, when away from his duties, ordinarily wears citizen's dress. But here's one uniform, Mother,

that I can wear at home in hot weather."

He lifted two garments from near the bottom of the box.

"Why, that's only a set of tennis flannels," objected his mother.

"It's part of an officer's prescribed uniform, just the same," Hal assured her.

"But there's no gold lace, no braid, no shoulder-straps – nothing." Mrs. Overton's voice quivered with disappointment.

"Here's the red sash that goes with the trousers," smiled Hal, bringing to light the article he had named. "That gives the suit quite a gay and military appearance, as you'll soon see."

"It doesn't look like much more than any clerk might wear," remarked Mrs. Overton, doubtfully.

"It isn't meant to. This flannel undress is intended for an officer to wear when he doesn't want to look conspicuous among civilians. I'll go to my room and put it on presently, and then I think you'll like it a whole lot better."

"Maybe," said Mrs. Overton doubtfully.

"All this time," pursued Lieutenant Hal, "I'm wondering whether Noll had found a letter waiting for him at his home, and whether his news was as fine as mine."

"You up there, Hal?" called a voice from below – Noll's.

"Charge!" yelled back the young lieutenant.

Up the stairs very sedately came Noll Terry. His appearance proclaimed the story. He was wearing the tennis flannel undress, red sash and all.

CHAPTER II

BUNNY HEPBURN UP TO OLD TRICKS

"CONGRATULATIONS, old chum!" cried Hal Overton, striding across the room and holding out his hand.

The two friends joined hands in a fervent clasp.

"Yes; I got my letter, and the news was satisfactory," said Noll, in a queer, half-choking voice.

"A letter from Mr. Ad Interim?" asked Mrs. Overton, making a little face.

"Why, that's the only sort of an appointment that a fellow can get in summer, when there's no Senate in session, Mrs. Overton," Noll replied. "But it's all right. The Senate never heard of either of us, and so the Senators won't have anything against us. We'll get our commissions, all right, soon after the next Congress convenes. Our commissions are safe enough."

"Quite," agreed Hal. "That's what I've been trying to tell Mother."

"A new second lieutenant is only a shave-tail, at best," smiled Noll.

"What does that mean?" demanded Mrs. Overton quickly.

"I don't know," Noll replied. "It's just an Army term of derision for a very new young officer, I guess."

"And a second lieutenant soon becomes a 'goat,'" Hal added.

"That isn't a nice word," retorted Mrs. Overton. "It's slang!"

"It's worse than slang in the Army," laughed Hal. "The army 'goat' is the very new officer who has a lot of extra duties thrust upon him that the older officers don't want. Those duties of the 'goat' are generally both very trifling and very annoying."

"Then it isn't right," declared Hal's mother, with an air of conviction. "No one ought to annoy a young man who has been smart enough to make an officer of himself. What are a second lieutenant's duties?"

"Well," replied Noll quizzically, "for one thing he must see that every one of his colonel's eight pairs of boots are kept polished."

"Oliver Terry!" remonstrated Mrs. Overton.

"And see to it that the grass is kept mowed on the colonel's lawn," added Hal.

"A new second lieutenant is expected to relieve the colonel's wife's nurse-girl in taking care of headquarters' kids on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons –" continued Noll.

"Also groom the colonel's horses," added Hal.

"I don't believe a word of that," declared Mrs. Overton, whereat both very new young officers laughed heartily.

"And you're starting in badly, too," continued Hal's mother accusingly. "I happen to know this much – that an officer must have too much honor to stoop to telling lies. And that he's court-martialed and driven out of the service if he does. So be careful."

Hal soon excused himself, going to his own room, leaving Noll to entertain his mother. When Lieutenant Overton came back he was in his flannel undress, red sash and all.

"That doesn't look so very bad, after all," declared Mrs. Overton, viewing her erect, stalwart young son with an approval which she made no effort to hide.

Then they talked on until at last Lieutenant Noll glanced at his watch.

"I must be going," he said, rising. "I've overstayed my leave. Mother allowed me to leave her only long enough to run over and tell Hal the news. I've violated my parole already."

"What time is it?" inquired Mrs. Overton.

"A quarter to six!"

"And, good gracious!" cried the little woman, jumping up from her chair. "Hal, in a few minutes more your father will be home, and not a blessed move has been made toward supper. There's no time to get anything ready now. Hal, I shall have to send you around the corner to the delicatessen shop, although I hate such ready-made meals."

"Mother," demanded Hal, with a pretense at mild astonishment, "would you think of sending a commissioned officer in the United States Army around on errands, with packages to bring home?"

"I - I guess that wouldn't be just right, would it?" agreed Mrs. Overton. "Never mind, my boy. I'll run right around myself. It will take me some time to get used to all the dignity that goes

with your new position."

"You needn't bother to go, Mother," laughed Hal. "An officer who would let his mother run errands to save his own dignity would be sure to come to a bad end in the Army. I was only joking, of course. This is a day to celebrate, so I propose to ask you and father to dine out this evening. There are several good places in town."

"Which one do you prefer?" broke in Lieutenant Noll quickly.

"Ralston's," Hal replied. "There's music there, and the food and service are fine."

"Then I'll hurry home now and bring my folks up there, too, if I can," proposed Noll.

"Good!" agreed Hal.

"What hour, Mrs. Overton?" asked Noll, turning to that good woman.

"Ask Hal."

"In the Army it is customary to ask the ladies, Mother," Hal explained.

"Seven o'clock, then," said Mrs. Overton.

"Seven it shall be," nodded Noll. "That is, if I don't fail in coaxing Father and Mother out to dine."

"You won't fail," Mrs. Overton assured him. "They'll be proud enough to go out with you to-night."

Hal's father came home soon after. For years a clerk in one of the local stores, Mr. Overton had lately been promoted to be manager of the store. He was a quiet, thoughtful, studious man,

and would probably have gone much higher in the world had not years of ill health interfered with his ambitions.

"I don't need to tell you how glad I am, young man," said the elder Overton quietly, when he had heard the afternoon's news. "Nor am I going to offer you any parental advice. Your record in the Army, so far, makes me feel sure that you will go on in the way you have begun, and that your record, at any point, will have been an honorable one. And now I must leave you and go upstairs to put on my best clothes in honor of the distinction that has come upon my son."

Just before seven the Overtons were seated at a table in Ralston's locally famous restaurant. Noll and his parents arrived at about the same moment. But the news had flown ahead of the young men. Just as the party was seating itself the orchestra crashed out into the strains of "See, the conquering hero comes!"

"I suppose that's meant for a joke on us," grinned Lieutenant Noll, in an undertone.

"Then try to look unconscious," returned Hal, in an equally low voice, and immediately engaged Noll's father and mother in conversation.

There was some whispering between waiters and patrons of the place, and presently a light sound of applause rippled out. It soon became a steady salvo.

Still the two young lieutenants went on with their chatting. But the leader of the orchestra had a further surprise. Giving his men only a moment for rest, he once more waved his violin bow, and

the musicians started in with "The Star-Spangled Banner."

No soldier may ignore that splendid air; no citizen has a right to.

As the strain died out the young soldiers and their party re-seated themselves, going on with their chat again.

A waiter dropped two menu cards on the table, then stood waiting for the order.

"Won't the ladies select the dinner?" asked Hal.

"We'd prefer that our sons do that," smiled Mrs. Terry.

"You do it, then, Hal," directed Noll Terry. "I left my spectacles at home."

"What about officers and their duty to tell the truth?" chided Mrs. Terry, whose heart was full of joy and pride to-night.

"I'll amend my statement," replied Noll meekly. "I didn't bring my spectacles with me. But Hal ought to do the ordering, anyway. He always did. He was my ranking sergeant, and now he's my ranking lieutenant."

"We don't know that yet," objected Hal quickly. "We don't yet know anything about the order in which we passed."

"In the meantime," hinted Mr. Overton, "the cook's fire is running low."

So Hal turned his attention to the menu card, ordering with a free hand.

"Gracious! How many do you think there are at this table, young man?" demanded his mother.

"There are six of us," Hal answered. "But we can take hours

in which to finish the meal, if we want to. Ralston's doesn't close until midnight."

The waiter, having received the order in silence, shuffled off without a word.

"Nothing very magnetic about that waiter," thought Hal, his glance following the waiter for an instant. "Somehow, his face looks familiar, too, but I've been away from home during the very few years when every boy turns into a young man. If I ever knew the chap I've forgotten him."

There was a rustling of silken skirts, then a resolute and very important-looking woman paused at the table. Just behind her waited a short, thin, rather negative-looking man.

The woman was red-faced, despite the liberal amount of powder with which she had striven to conceal the fact. She was richly dressed, and wore a few jewels, though not really enough of them to violate good taste. Hal recognized her as a Mrs. Redding, who, thanks largely to her husband's inherited wealth, had succeeded in making herself one of the leaders of local society. Mr. Redding was known principally as "Mrs. Redding's husband."

"Just a moment, my dear Mrs. Overton," cried Mrs. Redding cordially. "And you, too, my dear Mrs. Terry! I am pausing only a moment to congratulate you on the splendid news. I can well imagine how proud you are of your sons. And I must congratulate these two very distinguished sons, also."

Hal and Noll had risen promptly, though gravely and without

haste. They bowed their acknowledgment of the congratulations.

"And how long are you going to be with us?" asked Mrs. Redding, allowing her gaze to wander from the face of one young officer to the other's.

"We don't know, madam," Hal replied courteously. "We are still in ignorance as to our orders."

"I shall hope to see much of you both, and of your families," Mrs. Redding beamed graciously. "To-morrow afternoon Mr. Redding and I, with some of our friends, are going to motor down the river in our new cruising boat, dining at the club-house. We should be delighted if you would accompany us. You won't disappoint us, will you?"

Hal glanced at his mother, who offered no reply, but glanced back at her son.

"We are very grateful for your invitation, Mrs. Redding," Lieutenant Hal continued. "Terry and I feel that we are not in the least certain about being able to keep any engagements that we might make, since we are both awaiting orders from the War Department. Besides all my engagements are in the charge and keeping of my mother."

"Then you will accept for yourself and friends, won't you, my dear Mrs. Overton?" asked Mrs. Redding, again turning to Hal's mother.

"I – I am very much afraid that we can't go to-morrow afternoon," replied Mrs. Overton slowly.

"Oh, well, then, we will make a later appointment," smiled

Mrs. Redding affably. "There will be plenty of time, I am sure. So glad to have seen you this evening."

Still smiling, Mrs. Redding swept on through the restaurant with Mr. Redding in her wake. Somehow, one instinctively felt sorry for Mr. Redding; he looked very much like a small boat towing astern of a larger craft.

"I am wondering very much," smiled Hal's mother. "Although we have gone to the same church for the last fifteen years, Mrs. Redding has never before seemed to know who I am. She is suddenly very cordial."

"That is because you now have a son who is an officer in the Army," interposed Noll's father. "An Army officer is supposed to be a man of some social consequence."

"But that doesn't give me any more social consequence. I'm just the same woman that I always was," objected Mrs. Overton sensibly.

"But at least, my dear," suggested Hal's father, "you will be visiting your son at his post one of these days, and he may also urge you to bring some of your women friends."

"I certainly shall," Hal agreed.

"And Mrs. Redding may feel that she would like to be one of the invited," continued the elder Overton. "So, my dear, you see that you will become of social consequence. Others than Mrs. Redding, who have never even bowed to you before, will now be calling on you."

"I don't want new friends of that sort," remarked Hal's mother

quietly.

"My dear, you'll have to be very agile if you expect to dodge all such new friends," laughed Hal's father.

Since Hal had given the order the orchestra had played several numbers. All of the little dining party were now becoming rather impatient for dinner.

"I guess our waiter doesn't like us very well," half-grumbled Lieutenant Hal.

"Very likely," nodded his father. "Of course you recognized the waiter."

"I can't say, sir, that I did."

"The waiter is Bunny Hepburn, more than three years older than when you last saw him," replied Mr. Overton.

"Bunny Hepburn? The son of that anarchist who spouts about man's rights in beer-gardens?" questioned Hal. "Hepburn the man who is always trying to start strikes and labor riots?"

"That's the man, and Bunny is a half-worthy son of the sire, I hear," replied Mr. Overton.

"Here comes Bunny now," announced Mr. Terry.

Bunny appeared, setting bread and butter on the table, distributing knives, forks and spoons at the places and filling the water glasses.

"Will you bring the first course of our dinner right along now, waiter?" Hal asked pleasantly.

"When I can," came the half surly reply. "You'll have to wait your turn with the other customers."

"We expect to do that," Hal agreed, without resentment. "But we've been waiting about forty minutes now, and many others have been served who came in since we did."

"You needn't think you're running this restaurant," sneered the waiter.

"By no means," Hal agreed. "But we are at least paying for our food, for attendance and civility."

"You'll get all the attendance you're entitled to," grumbled the waiter. "Don't think you own the earth. Soldiers are no good."

"A lot of people entertain that opinion," Hal answered quietly, turning his back on the impudent waiter.

All might still have gone well, had Bunny been content to drop it there. But, as readers of the first volume in this series, "Uncle Sam's Boys in the Ranks," are aware, Bunny had been bred in contempt of the military and of everything connected with it.

"You soldiers are nothing but just a lot of cheap skates," Bunny muttered on bitterly. "You wear a uniform that is nothing but the cheap livery of slavery to the wealthy, and march under a flag that stands for nothing but tyranny to the poor and down-trodden of humanity."

This was almost word for word a copy from the anarchistic speeches of Bunny's father.

Lieutenant Hal's face went white as he wheeled once more in his chair and rose quickly.

Mrs. Overton had a momentary notion that her son was going to knock Bunny down, and she wouldn't have blamed him if he

had. But Bunny quailed somewhat before the blazing light in the young Army officer's eyes.

"Stand back, waiter," ordered Hal quietly. Then, looking very tall and dignified, Lieutenant Hal stepped across the restaurant, going over to the desk, where the proprietor stood chatting with the cashier.

"Are you being properly served?" inquired Mr. Ralston, who had learned who this young guest was.

"Not especially. I have no personal complaint to make against the waiter, but I shall feel greatly obliged if you can send us a different man to wait on us."

"With pleasure," replied Mr. Ralston promptly. "But you will be doing me a genuine service, Mr. Overton, if you will tell me in what way the present waiter has offended you."

"He didn't offend me personally," Hal replied quietly, "but he spoke disrespectfully of the Flag I serve, and the uniform I am proud to wear."

"Thank you very much. Will you tell me what the waiter said?"

Hal repeated the words accurately.

"I will send you another waiter, Mr. Overton, and will see to it personally that you are not again annoyed. I thank you for having reported the matter to me."

Hal returned to his seat. Bunny had already vanished behind the swinging doors at the rear. Mr. Ralston followed him out into the cook's domain.

"Peterson, I want you to wait on Mr. Overton's party," called

Mr. Ralston, whereat Bunny started slightly. "And, Peterson, I want you to serve and attend to their wants in your best style."

"Yes, sir," replied Peterson, an older waiter.

"Chef," continued the proprietor, "you will see to it that the delayed dinner for the Overton party is served ahead of anything else, and in your best style. Hepburn, come here!"

Bunny approached, a defiant scowl on his sulky face.

"Hepburn, I am told that you grossly insulted the Flag and the Army uniform."

"I didn't," retorted Bunny, "but I won't allow any of them tin-soldier dudes to put it over me."

"Your present language sufficiently justifies the charge made against you," replied Mr. Ralston quietly. "This restaurant is intended as a resort for ladies and gentlemen, and all right-minded persons respect our Army and Navy and those who serve their country."

"I'll tell you, right now, I hain't got any respect for them tin-soldiers," retorted Bunny defiantly.

"That will be all, Hepburn. Get out of here!"

With that the proprietor turned on his heel, leaving the cook's domain. Bunny was white with wrath. He tried to talk to some of the other employes present, but none of them paid any attention to him.

No effort did young Hepburn make to get his street clothes until the head waiter brought him back an envelope containing his wages.

"I'll remain here until I see you get out," remarked the head waiter coldly.

"You may wait a long time," sneered Bunny.

"No, I won't. If you're not out of here in a hurry I'll help you through the back door."

Not until then did Bunny Hepburn realize that he was actually discharged.

"Get out now," ordered the head waiter, looking as if he would be glad of an opportunity to help the discharged one through the back door.

"Oh, all right. I'll git," snarled Bunny Hepburn, thrusting on his hat and slouching out through the door. "But I'll get even with that cheap Army officer in short order!"

Like some other inconsequential fellows of his class, Bunny was usually a man of his word in matters of revenge.

CHAPTER III

ROWDY VERSUS REGULAR

AFTER a pleasant evening Hal and Noll escorted their parents homeward at somewhere around half-past ten o'clock.

Both young soldiers, however, were still so full of the day's news and so wide awake that neither felt at all like turning in for sleep as yet. So they met immediately afterward for a slow stroll through the streets on this warm summer evening.

"Where shall we go?" asked Hal, as the chums met.

"I don't care," Noll answered. "One set of streets will do as well as another."

"We'll take pains, anyway, to keep on the well-lighted streets," Hal proposed smilingly. "It wouldn't do for two poor, lonely soldiers to go into any of the darker quarters where danger may lurk."

"Tell you what we'll do then," offered Noll.

"We'll get a policeman to walk around with us and protect us from harm."

"Now let us have done with fooling for a little while, Noll. I remember something that Prescott was telling me once."

"*Lieutenant Prescott*," Terry interrupted quietly.

"Guess again, chum. You forget that we have been lieutenants since – well, since four o'clock this afternoon. So I am within my

rights in simply calling him by his last name."

"True," admitted Noll. "I've been in the ranks so long that, somehow, it seems hard to realize that I am suddenly an officer, and the equal of any other second lieutenant in the Army."

"Prescott was telling me," went on Hal, "of a great friend he and Holmes had at West Point. He was a young Virginian, Anstey by name. Now Prescott and Holmes both feel as though they'd gladly give their left hands for a chance to grip Anstey's paw; yet since leaving West Point Prescott and Holmes have not laid eyes on Anstey – which brings me up to the question: How are we going to feel if you and I are constantly serving on different sides of the earth from each other?"

Lieutenant Noll Terry looked almost startled.

"By Jove, I hadn't thought of that," he muttered.

"I've been thinking of it," Hal rejoined. "Now, Noll, what is the matter with you and me drawing up a request, both signing it, asking that, in accordance with military interests, we be assigned to the same regiment and battalion?"

"To whom should such a request go?"

"To the adjutant general of the Army, I imagine, since neither of us as yet belongs to any regiment or department."

"Won't the adjutant general put us down as the two original, very cheeky shave-tails?" wondered Noll.

"That's a chance we'll have to take. Though if we make what seems a perfectly proper request, and in a wholly respectful manner, I don't see how the adjutant general can find fault with

two inexperienced young officers, even if our request be a rather unusual one."

"If you get up the paper I'll sign it with you," agreed Noll, without a moment's further hesitation.

"I'll prepare that paper the first thing in the morning," promised Hal. "Whew, but I wish we had even an inkling of what our first duty is to be."

"Anywhere in 'God's country'" (in Army parlance, 'God's country' means the United States), replied Noll. "I don't want to see the Philippines again inside of a year."

For longer than they realized the two chums strolled the streets, now grown very quiet as the hour was late for a small city. Indeed, the two new lieutenants paid little heed to their course. So, after a while, they reached the rougher parts of the town.

Bunny Hepburn, having gone away from the restaurant with his heart full of hate, had fallen in with a group of companions of his own sort. These young men had visited beer-gardens and other places of low repute. Bunny's companions were the human fruits of his father's peculiar teachings. For the most part these young fellows were "professional labor men" of the lowest type. None of them ever worked long or steadily at anything, except with their tongues. They were a gross libel on the real workingmen of the country – the steady, sober, industrious toilers who are the real backbone of the country.

Bunny's companions, instead, were of a sort who hang upon the words of such speakers and agitators as the elder Hepburn.

While disliking industrial work, and resorting to it only when there was no other choice as against starvation, these young fellows were always on hand in times of strike or riot, ready for any violence and seldom hesitating at extortion or pillage when the chance presented itself.

"I tell you, fellows," Bunny proclaimed hoarsely, "I'm going to get square with that tin-soldier dude, Overton. I hear he's been made an officer in the Army to-day. He feels bigger than all outdoors! He made a kick that cost me the best job I ever had."

"Imagine Bunny working!" jeered one of the crowd.

"That was the beauty of the job," snarled Bunny. "It wasn't real work. It was more like belonging to a club. I had to stand around a little, and pass things, and so forth. But I got fifteen a month, my meals, and three or four dollars a day in tips."

"I don't blame you, then, for being sore at losing the job," remarked another young "labor" man of Bunny's own stripe. "That kind of job was a good deal like easy graft."

"That's just what it was," rejoined Bunny feelingly. "And I lost it all on account of that —*Say, fellows!*"

This last appeal Bunny whispered hoarsely. Then he pointed ahead down the street.

"Here comes that soldier-loafer, Overton, now. And his friend with him."

"Now's your chance to take it out, Bunny!" prodded one of the gang.

"Fellows," declared Bunny earnestly, "it's the chance for all of

us to take it out of that pair! Think how often the regulars have fired into honest, hard-working men!"

By that designation Bunny referred to rioters.

"There's two of them, and they hain't got no guns or bayonets this time," Bunny Hepburn continued hoarsely. "How many are there of us?"

"Twelve," replied another, "not counting Skinny Carroll."

"Skinny can work at his old game of lookout," muttered Bunny. "Get busy, Skinny."

Skinny was an undersized, weazened little fellow, with a large, badly-shaped head and an extremely bright pair of keen, fox-like eyes. Many a time had he been lookout against the coming of the police, while stronger, harder-handed companions carried out some piece of violence against law and order.

With a chuckle Skinny promptly turned and fled to the next corner, where he could watch four ways at once.

Bunny's companions found themselves committed to a new deed before they quite realized it.

"My pop has often told you fellows all about the soldiers," went on Bunny quickly. "Now, we've got a chance to settle one score for labor. We'll sail into that pair like a ton of brick. Use 'em up! Don't be gentle, or turn faint-hearted! Remember, there's enough of us to swear to a good 'frame-up' if this thing gets into court. Don't be chicken-hearted or white-livered! Line up, the bunch of you!"

Hal and Noll, as they strolled along the side street, saw the

little group ahead. It was an unimportant street, devoted to business in the day-time. Neither of the Army boys distinguished Bunny, who kept himself well concealed behind the other idlers until Hal and Noll had reached the gang. Then Bunny threw himself forward.

"Yah! yah!" he snarled. "Get me thrown out of me job, will you, you soldier-loafer!"

"Hullo, it's Bunny!" cried Hal, recognizing the speaker.

"Yep! It's me – Bunny Hepburn!" jeered the ex-waiter. "But you won't know what your name is when I get through with you!"

"Bosh!" rejoined Hal, rather impatiently. "Step aside. Don't block the sidewalk. It's broad enough for us all!"

"You don't sneak out of it that easy!" jeered Bunny.

"Behave yourself, and let me by," requested Hal Overton sternly.

He tried to push the noisy fellow out of his path. Bunny, with the strength of the gang behind him, swung a hard blow at the Army boy's face.

In self-defense Hal Overton was obliged to fend off the blow. But Bunny came back at him again.

"Sail into the soldier-loafers!" called Bunny.

Wolf-like, the gang attacked in a pack, and on all sides at once. It didn't take Noll Terry an instant to see that this was serious business. Without a word Noll sprang back to back with Hal, and thus they met the onslaught.

In the crowd there were some hard-hitters, and the odds were

tremendous.

On the other hand, Hal and Noll were no mean boxers. They had gained their skill with their fists in many a brisk garrison bout with the gloves. Moreover, both Army boys possessed the advantage of soldierly courage and discipline.

So, for a few moments, though they took some blows, yet they managed to keep off the wolf-pack fairly well.

Hal Overton's blood was up now, and he was dangerous. Watching his chance he let fly a blow that caught Bunny forcefully on the nose.

"Wow-ow-ow! O-o-oh!" wailed Bunny, trying to find shelter behind one of his companions. "The soldier-loafer is trying to kill me. Wade into him, fellers! Get him down and – "

At that moment Hal, with Noll at his back, worked through the line and caught Bunny over his left eye with a force that sent the noisy one down to the sidewalk.

"Get up, you cur!" ordered Hal.

For a moment the members of the gang on Overton's side of the fight seemed paralyzed.

Gripping Bunny Hepburn by the collar, Hal dragged the fellow to his feet and instantly planted a blow that closed the other eye.

"Now, you'll stay put," panted Hal breathlessly. "Come on, the rest of you hyenas, and we'll walk through the whole crowd of you!"

With a yell of defiance the gang closed in. While the mix-up was at its hottest, a low, trilling whistle sounded from Skinny

Carroll's lips. Only two of the gang heard it in the excitement; that pair took to their heels at once.

Down the street came a pair of flying feet.

"Cop! cop!" yelled Skinny Carroll. "Duck and run!"

Three more of the gang heard and took to their heels at once. One of the fugitives ran squarely into the policeman's arms. The blue-coat stopped another by drawing his revolver and commanding a halt. When the policeman came along with his two prisoners Noll had a third to add to the collection. Hal had Bunny and another of the late fighting crew.

"What's this trouble about?" demanded the policeman gruffly.

"It's an outrage, and high time you got here," wailed Bunny.

"Officer, just look at me!"

"You seem to look just right to me," grinned the policeman.

"Officer, I demand that you arrest these two fellows!" insisted Bunny, in a shaking voice. "They'd have killed me if you hadn't got here just when you did."

"Hold your tongue," commanded the policeman. Then, turning to Hal, he asked:

"What's the rights of this affair?"

"Don't you listen to what they say!" screamed Bunny. "They'll lie like a house afire. I was going along, minding my own business, when this pair jumped on me. You see what they did to me."

"Officer, what's the meaning of this?" demanded a man who had just come on the scene. It was Bunny's father, the agitator

and anarchistic lecturer.

"If you'll keep quiet long enough I'll soon find out," retorted the policeman.

"Officer," demanded the elder Hepburn, "do you know who I am?"

"Yes; that's why I want you to keep quiet," retorted the policeman, with no great show of awe or respect.

"But – "

"Get back and keep quiet until I've had time to look into this thing!" blazed the policeman ominously.

"Minion of the hireling law," began the elder Hepburn, running his fingers through his hair and striking an attitude.

"Hepburn, in the name of the Commonwealth, I demand your assistance in taking care of the prisoners," retorted the policeman grimly. "Disobey at your peril. Here, take charge of this prisoner," indicating Bunny. "If you let him escape you'll go to jail for it!"

Thus summoned in the name of the Commonwealth the elder Hepburn, though he loathed his task, had to play the part of a police officer or take the consequences. Hepburn, like his son, was noisy but not brave; he had no desire to serve his state in jail, so he served it on the street.

However, the arresting party and prisoners had gone only as far as the next corner when they encountered Chief of Police Blake, an official who was not afraid of any one or anything.

"What's this?" asked the chief.

Hal and Noll were asked to explain the affair, while the two Hepburns and Bunny's companions were forced, much against their will, to keep still.

"We don't care about pressing any charge, chief," Hal added. "This crowd got punished enough as it was."

"One of them certainly did," grinned Chief Blake, taking in the extent of damage done to Bunny's countenance.

"Chief, I insist that you arrest these two soldier-loafers!" cried Bunny hoarsely.

"And I back up that demand!" added the elder Hepburn, with what he considered impressive dignity.

"Bosh!" retorted Chief Blake. "I'd take the word of these two Army officers against a whole slumful of rowdies like these young fellows. And so would any judge in his right mind. I refuse to arrest either of these young Army officers, for I'm convinced that they acted only in their own defense."

"Officer," broke in the elder Hepburn dramatically, "you have no right to take the word of hireling soldiers against honest young working – "

"Go on! Chase yourselves! A quick vanish or a long night behind the hard iron bars!" cried Chief Blake, dropping into the language that Bunny and his companions could best understand. "Another piece of jaw, and to the green-lighted doorway you all go!"

Then, nodding to Hal and Noll to stroll along with him, Chief Blake left the discomfited trouble-makers.

"Another proof that the law exists only for the benefit of the favored few!" hissed Bunny's father. "But this latest outrage shall not go unnoticed. There are ways of getting justice, even under such a miserable government as ours, and we shall have recourse to those ways. Come with me, gentlemen, and I shall show you what can be done!"

There are always ways of making trouble when one is bound to do it. Moreover, Mr. Hepburn was an expert at trouble-making, and on this night he worked overtime.

There was trouble ahead, as the two Army boys discovered on awakening in the morning.

CHAPTER IV

A COURT OF INQUIRY ORDERED

THERE were two morning newspapers published in the town; or, as some people put it, "one and a quarter."

The *Tribune* appealed to the more orderly element in the community. In the *Tribune* was an account of the police version of the night before, to the effect that Bunny Hepburn and a gang had set upon Lieutenants Overton and Terry, of the Regular Army, and that the two young officers had given an excellent account of themselves in the encounter, afterwards declining to prosecute the gangsters.

The *Sphere*, the other morning sheet, made its appeal to the rougher element of the city. It was through this sheet that Orator Hepburn had been able to acquire much of his local notoriety. Hepburn and Sayles, the latter the proprietor of the *Sphere*, had been cronies for five years. To Sayles the older Hepburn had gone, taking along with him his "witnesses."

As was to be expected, the *Sphere* attacked the two young officers, giving wholly the Hepburn version of the affair.

"But this will not be the last of the matter," the *Sphere* proclaimed dramatically. "There are reliefs to be had from such outrages. Mr. Hepburn has already taken the matter up with a strong hand. Through the night two of our ablest local attorneys

toiled at preparing the papers in the case. A formal complaint has been drawn up, backed by the testimony of the witnesses under oath, and all the papers in the case are now on their way to Washington. The residents of this city will soon be in a position to know whether such outrages may be safely committed by officers of our Regular Army, a body of men organized supposedly for the protection of the citizens of the country!"

"Well, wouldn't that blow your hat off?" demanded Lieutenant Noll, as he and his chum went over the account published by the *Sphere*.

"It's evidently aimed with a view to blowing our heads off," muttered Hal Overton.

"What talented liars there are in this world!" uttered Noll Terry, in high disgust.

"They wouldn't do so much harm, though, if it weren't for the fact that sometimes liars, under oath, manage to get themselves believed," returned Hal.

"Is anybody going to believe this rot?" insisted Noll.

"Some one in the War Department might, not knowing the local reputation of the Hepburns."

"Well, the War Department will know, if it takes any action on these trumped-up, lying charges," declared Lieutenant Noll hotly.

"Of course we won't lie down and tamely submit to such false charges," agreed Lieutenant Overton.

"Going out for a walk this morning?" Noll wanted to know.

"I feel much more inclined to sit here and think this whole thing over," Hal answered, pointing to the lying sheet.

"Hal, if we stay indoors to-day the *Sphere* will have it to-morrow that we are overwhelmed with shame and fear, and have kept in hiding."

"And, if we go out around the town," laughed Hal, "the *Sphere* will proclaim to-morrow that we are brazenly showing ourselves and trying to cheek down the charges against us."

"Then we'll take our choice and do as we please," remarked young Terry. "Come along out."

Hal got his hat, and the chums went forth, again in their tennis flannel undress.

The news had not been slow in spreading. They had gone hardly a block when they were stopped by friends, and congratulated on having taught Bunny such an effective lesson.

Others there were, however, who whispered behind the backs of the young officers. Hal and Noll were not slow to catch some of those whispers.

"We're a whole lot more important than we were three years ago," grinned Noll. "Now, at last, we seem to have the town divided into two camps concerning us."

"Three," corrected Hal.

"How do you make that out?"

"One crowd believes the charges against us, and another doesn't. The third crowd isn't sure, or doesn't care."

"One fellow I'm after, anyway," muttered Noll grimly.

"Who's that?"

"Sayles."

"Who's he?"

"Don't you know?"

"I'm afraid I can't recall a party named Sayles," Hal answered thoughtfully.

"Why, he's the pen-hoister who gets out the *Sphere*!"

"Oh, well, what are you going to do to him, Noll?"

"I'm going to make him prove all he printed in his lying sheet."

"He can – with the aid of the kind of witnesses that he has back of him," Hal reminded his chum.

"Well, we shall have to see if the testimony of such witnesses will 'go' in court," Noll contended grimly.

"Are you going to prosecute the fellow?"

"I'm going to sue Sayles for libel," Noll retorted.

"Is the fellow worth the trouble?" Hal inquired doubtfully.

"No, but our reputations are," rejoined Noll bluntly. "Hal, we are commissioned officers in the United States Army. If that means anything, it means that the United States government certifies us to the world to be gentlemen as well as officers. You know the legal phrase, 'officer and gentleman.' If we lie down tamely, and submit to such libelous attacks as the *Sphere* made on us this morning, then we do a wrong to the whole body of officers and gentlemen in the Army. The officers of our service have always had to stand a lot of abuse from a certain kind of so-called newspapers. It's time to stop it by hitting any nail that

shows its head. We owe it to our brother officers."

"Noll, I'm inclined to think you're right."

"I know I am. Come along, down this street."

"Where now?"

"I'm headed for the office of Lawyer Kimball. He's the best man in town to handle our case."

To the lawyer's office, therefore, the two Army boys went. Lawyer Kimball listened, nodded, accepted their case to do what he could with it, and offered them some advice.

Late that evening each Army boy received a telegram from the War Department, to the effect that a complaint had been lodged against them. They were ordered to remain in town, close to their home addresses, for the receipt of further orders.

Next morning the *Sphere* had much more to say, and said it jubilantly. It informed its readers that the War Department had taken up the matter and had promised to give satisfaction. There was a further bitter attack on Lieutenants Overton and Terry.

That afternoon Hal escorted his mother to one of the department stores, as Mrs. Overton had some purchases to make. They came face to face with Mrs. Redding. The latter woman started slightly and looked embarrassed. She would have gone by without bowing, but it was impossible for Mrs. Redding to pretend that she had not seen Mrs. Overton and her son.

"Good afternoon," said Mrs. Redding, in a low voice.

Hal lifted his hat gravely as the society woman hastened on.

"She wasn't as cordial as she was the other evening," remarked

Mrs. Overton dryly.

"No, Mother; I'm afraid that Mrs. Redding doesn't care to risk going any further with our acquaintance until she knows whether I'm to continue in the Army."

"It won't be necessary for her to go any further," remarked Mrs. Overton coolly. "I don't wish to know her. I am satisfied with my present circle of friends."

"Old friends are always believed to be the best," murmured Hal.

The day after that meeting Hal and Noll each received word from the War Department, containing copies of the complaint, and stating that a court of inquiry would be ordered forthwith, and that the young officers would be informed of the time and place of the meeting of the court.

An officer, when placed formally under charges, is tried before a court-martial, whose members are officers of higher rank than the accused. A court of inquiry, on the other hand, may hear charges in the first instance, and on the finding of this preliminary court the War Department decides whether a court-martial shall be convened.

"You see, Noll, the Hepburns are going right through with their 'case,'" observed Lieutenant Overton.

"So are we," retorted Noll, pursing his lips. "And the best crowd will win."

"Or else the crowd whose witnesses won't hesitate to perjure themselves," Hal muttered.

As the Army boys had just been appointed officers, the immediate present was the best time for getting them out of the service if they were not worthy of places in it. So the War Department acts with unusual speed in such matters. Within a week from the time of receiving the complaint the court of inquiry, composed of three officers sent over from Army Headquarters in New York, was on the scene.

The mayor offered the court the use of one of the council chambers at the city hall, and the offer was accepted.

"We shall soon know," remarked the *Sphere*, "what the national government's idea of justice is. The culprits face their ordeal to-day!"

At nine o'clock that morning, in fact, Major Elbert, president of the court, rapped for order.

CHAPTER V

THE WAR DEPARTMENT SAYS ITS SAY

FOR witnesses Bunny had rounded up all of his gang of that notable night, with the one exception of Skinny Carroll. It would never do to have Carroll go on the stand and admit that he had been posted as a lookout.

Bunny and all his friends, under the coaching of a local lawyer, had proved themselves expert perjurers.

Even Major Elbert, president of the court, before that body had been in session for an hour, looked as though he believed the case a dark one against the young officers.

The elder Hepburn was on hand. He tried hard to palm off one of his pet orations on the court, but Major Elbert shut him off sternly.

Not one of Bunny's crew told the truth. That wasn't what they were there for.

Hal and Noll attended court, as required, in dress uniform. It was the first time that they had worn these handsome service garments officially, and it seemed a pity that they should have to wear them under such circumstances.

At last Hal was sworn. He told the truth, briefly, clearly, accurately. Then a shady lawyer engaged by the Hepburns

undertook to cross-examine the young lieutenant. Hal's testimony was not to be shaken in the slightest detail. The lawyer resorted to abuse, but Hal kept his temper. Major Elbert took a hand, warning the lawyer that he must keep his speech within the limits of gentlemanly use.

Noll went on the stand and told his story. It did not differ from Hal's in any detail, nor was young Terry to be shaken by cross-examination.

Still it was the testimony of two witnesses against that of a dozen witnesses.

Then the policeman who had interfered was called to the stand. He had not witnessed the affray, and so could give no testimony as to whether Lieutenant Overton or Bunny Hepburn had started the affair.

Chief Blake followed.

"Do you know anything of the affray itself?" questioned Major Elbert.

"Nothing," admitted the chief.

The Hepburn lawyer settled back in his chair with a dark look of satisfaction.

"In what way, Chief," queried the major, "do you feel that you can aid this court in arriving at a proper decision?"

"I am here, sir, to testify, if desired, to the characters borne by the complainants and by the defendants."

Chief Blake then went on to state that he had known Lieutenants Overton and Terry for many years, with the

exception of the time that they had been absent serving in the Regular Army. The chief stated that the character of each young man was above reproach.

"What do you know regarding any of the complaining witnesses?" inquired Major Elbert.

"I object!" shouted the Hepburn lawyer, rising.

"To what do you object?" inquired the major mildly, glancing at the lawyer. "To having the characters of the complaining witnesses stated?"

"We object, may it please the court, on the ground that the chief of police is not qualified to express a competent opinion."

"We will hear what Chief Blake has to say," decided the president of the court, "and we will pass on the value of his evidence later on."

"Bject!" snapped the lawyer.

"Be good enough, sir, to sit down!"

Chief Blake began his statement by explaining that the elder Hepburn had been for years a notorious local character —

"Bject!" shouted the lawyer.

"Sit down, sir" – from the president of the court.

Chief Blake continued his testimony, producing copies of official records to show that the elder Hepburn had been four times arrested for inciting disorder and on similar complaints.

"Bject!"

"Orderly," called Major Elbert. A sergeant who had accompanied the officers of the court stepped forward.

"Orderly," continued the major, mildly, "if this attorney makes any further disturbance, put him out of the room. You should understand, Counsellor, that this is a military court, and that you, as a civilian attorney, are admitted here as a matter of courtesy. The chief of police will now go on with his testimony, and if there be anything in it, Counsellor, to which you wish to take exception, at the proper time you will be afforded an opportunity. But we cannot have the court's time wasted by boisterous conduct on the part of any one present."

Major Elbert's manner was not that of the bully, or of one abusing brief authority. His voice was mild and soft, but he meant business.

Chief Blake continued, testifying that not one of the young fellows in Bunny's crew was a valuable or reliable member of the community. Four of them had been arrested on minor charges in the past, and all of them, Bunny included, had given the police of the town many kinds of trouble and annoyance in the past.

"Chief," inquired the major softly, "what do you feel at liberty to say regarding the truthfulness of any of the complaining witnesses?"

"I wouldn't believe one of 'em, sir, under any oath that could be imposed on 'em," replied Chief Blake bluntly. "In the past my policemen and I have known every one of that outfit to lie repeatedly when accused of different kinds of disorderly conduct."

"Then you believe, Chief, that the complaining witnesses

are members of a definite gang, and that they are all wholly untruthful and undependable?"

"To that question, sir, I have no hesitation whatever in saying 'yes.'"

"Have you any more evidence to offer, Chief?"

"I have two witnesses outside, sir, whom I think you would like to hear."

"Will you send for them?"

Bunny and his crew, during the testimony of Chief Blake, which had not been expected by them, had felt partly dazed. They sat either scowling or grinning sheepishly while the new witnesses were being awaited. The elder Hepburn sat behind the younger men, running the fingers of his right hand through his glossy black hair.

When the two witnesses entered, the gangsters started and exchanged glances. One was a middle-aged man, the other Skinny Carroll.

"This gentleman," announced Chief Blake, "is Mr. Robert Enwright. Mr. Enwright's store is at the corner below the scene of the affray now being investigated. Mr. Enwright sometimes sleeps over his store. He did during the night of the fight. He was awakened by hearing this other witness, Carroll, shout a warning that the police were coming. Mr. Enwright looked out of the window and recognized Carroll. So Mr. Enwright notified me, the next day, and I gathered Carroll in. Carroll finally admitted that he had belonged to the Hepburn gang, and that he had

shouted a warning to his mates."

Mr. Enwright was then sworn, and substantiated Chief Blake's remarks. Next Skinny Carroll, nervously avoiding the black looks of Bunny and his crew, came forward and was sworn. He told the truth, now, as glibly as Bunny's friends had lied.

"Then, on that night, and at the time of the fight, you did act as lookout for young Hepburn and his friends?" asked Major Elbert.

"Sure," agreed Skinny readily.

"Who told you to act as lookout?"

"Bun Hepburn himself!"

"Bject!" shouted the Hepburn lawyer.

The sergeant moved over and laid a hand on the attorney's shoulder.

"At what period in the affair," inquired the major, "were you so instructed to run up to the corner to act as a lookout against the coming of the police?"

"Just before de gang closed in," declared Skinny.

"Closed in – for what?"

"T' soak Overton and Terry."

"Then the gang did deliberately combine to waylay and attack Lieutenant Overton and Terry?"

"Surest pipe you ever lit," affirmed Skinny Carroll, in the only style of speech of which he was master.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

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