

## SHIPMENT

GEORGE MORIMITSU

THE band plays one march after another and the visitors to the reception center crowd on the lawn and on the walk for a last glimpse of their men before they are shipped to another camp.

The recruits are lined up, a double column in khaki, brown barracks bags resting on the street. Each carries a rolled white towel and a canteen cup for use on the train. Their uniforms have the sheen and ill fit that mark the new soldier. They wear their field caps straight across their foreheads instead of at the cocky angle of older men in the service. They have no individuality; each looks exactly like the other.

Yet I see something more. I work in the classification section where recruits are interviewed after they have shed civilian clothes and have been uniformed. Here we see their qualification cards—their life history: date of birth, nationality background or race, schooling, occupation in civilian life, how much they were earning, their I.Q., their hobbies, even their talents for furnishing entertainment. There are lawyers and clerks and laborers and mechanics, teachers and porters and farmers. There are Mexicans and Czechs and Negroes, Germans and Italians and Anglo-Saxons. On one roster of incoming men there may be Riojas, Pearson, Winiecki, Kasperek, McGee, Groshenny, Goldesberry. They are bewildered and backward during the processing stages; they “Sir” the privates and non-coms who tell them what to do. In time they will regain their confidence in the new sur-

roundings and gripe and swear and call the sergeants by last names.

Only today they are new to the Army.

Now they wait on the street, over a hundred men, their brief stay at the reception center ended, their destination a replacement camp in a distant state. They smoke and chat or just hunch over on their barracks bags and wait. Some have already made friends; others are alone and lonely. But each has something in common with the others. They are all leaving their homes, perhaps to return, perhaps never to return.

The band plays a march or rollicks into swing.

Suddenly the sergeant in charge yells, “On your feet!”

The men in khaki come to life. They sling their bags over their shoulders and stand in two columns. The sergeant gives directions, calling off names, telling the men to start at his signal and head for the leading truck of the convoy on the main road.

A young girl has been holding hands with her husband in the ranks. He takes her by the shoulders and kisses her lightly. Then he releases her and she walks back to the lawn and stands there, never taking her eyes off him.

The sergeant blows his whistle. “All right, let’s go!”

The first batch of men, bent under full barracks bags, marches off across the street toward the first truck. They load. The sergeant calls off the next batch and herds them toward the second truck.

## COMMON GROUND

Group after group of sweltering recruits, they are marched away and loaded with precision, the cries of the non-coms rising above the music of the band.

Three old women talk excitedly among themselves. One has her eyes fixed on the lines of men still waiting on the street. But one of her friends points toward the head of the convoy where the men are already loaded, and the woman about-faces bewilderedly, and stares toward the trucks. Her friend tugs at her arm and they hurry off across the street with jerky little steps. It occurs to me suddenly how strangely like my mother the woman seemed, her face a mixture of fear and expectation, joyful over the meeting yet with a dulling dread of the parting.

"Hemsley, Cerny, Martinez, Escobedo—" the sergeant cries.

"Here!" "Here!" Barracks bags on shoulders, they scurry for the trucks, some grinning, some expressionless, sweat streaming down their faces and coming out on their shirts in dark spots. The double column gradually diminishes.

A Mexican family stares helplessly toward the trucks. The eyes of the woman and her three girls are filled with tears. Perhaps the son worked as a day laborer so they might have a home and food and clothing. Maybe he played with the little sisters and bought them sweets and toys.

But the country needs him now, and he is going away, far from the home that he has known. He is going like the other

thousands and millions—where, he does not know, to fight in a war his country finds itself in, how and why he does not know. But he is going. He will shoot and kill and scream and perhaps be killed. Though at home he was only a "Greaser," he is now an American soldier like all the "Spiks" and "Dagoes" and "Bohunks" and the men with Anglo-Saxon names. Maybe he doesn't ask questions about the America that calls him a "Greaser." Maybe all he hopes for is that some day he will return and his wages will be good and there will be food and clothing and security for the ones he loves.

The last group is loaded. The convoy begins moving, a truck at a time, till the road to the highway is a stream of rolling trucks. The band stops playing as the last one roars away, and the bandsmen fall out and by ones and twos head for their barracks. Only the visitors and a few loitering soldiers remain on the lawn and on the walk. The Mexican family stares after the vanishing trucks. The father's weathered face is sad and his eyes look far away. . . .

Tomorrow there will be two shipments.

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*Private George Morimitsu is a Nisei soldier at the Reception Center, Fort Sam Houston, Texas, concerned with doing his bit "to help along our side—America."*

## TWO WORLDS

EDWARD URBAN

IN OUR home, in common with most immigrants' homes of twenty years ago, there was little enough money for necessities, let alone books. But there was the Carnegie Branch Library nearby. Most second-generation children of school age hate to have anything to do with their parents' tongue or anything associated with it. Whatever is of "Hunky," "Dutch," or "Polack" derivation is a thing of scorn. Here in the Library were stories of boys who went to Scout meetings and on summer vacations, and instead of Moms and Pops had Mothers and Dads who gave them spending money, were their pals, and spoke "American."

On cold winter evenings when all our household, including boarders, sat in the kitchen warmed by the fire of the cookstove and played pinochle and checkers, or played polkas on the victrola, I always managed, by right of early entry, to gain possession of the rocking chair nearest the stove. Absorbed by *The Daly Twins at Riverside Prep*, I would sit oblivious of everything that went on around me—including my father's scoldings, I was dimly aware that his irritation with my incessant reading was gradually growing more vehement, but secure in my secret inner knowledge of the proper manner of American living and of his ignorance of it, I paid little heed.

"Have I come to this great, free country," he shouted, "only to raise a son who forever keeps his nose buried in such books? Little do I know of the English language, yet enough do I see of what

goes on to know that these books are bad—bad enough to make you ashamed of your mother and father because they are Polish! Well, let me tell you I am more ashamed of you! Nothing we have is good enough for you; not even do you play with other Polish boys but with those Irish roughnecks from the next parish. And what is your shame doing for you? Only making you more unmannerly and stupid than ever! You neither see nor hear anything that goes on around you; you are even beginning to look stupid. . . . And another thing—why do you always pretend you do not understand when we speak Polish to you before your friends—hah?" But his contempt was too great to wait for any reply. He went on, "Don't let me see you with another one of these books in this house!"

For the next few weeks I read only school books. But the Daly Twins had just entered college, there was a book for their every year there, and I was burning with eagerness to find out their freshman adventures. How to get them into the house? Sienkiewicz! . . . I had often heard my father mention Sienkiewicz as his favorite writer, in tones so reverent I was sure that if I brought in one of his books together with *The Daly Twins Freshman Year*, I would somehow get away with it.

I planned to display *With Fire and Sword* prominently and make a pretense of reading it, waiting only for an opportunity to substitute *The Daly Twins*. But the plan proved unsuccessful. My father, seeing me reading again, immediately