

I PROFITED



FROM WAR

By Josh M. Drake, Jr.

DURING every war, millions must suffer and sacrifice while a few profit. I am one American who has profited from war.

I know from bitter experience that war is terrible. During World War II, while serving as an infantry lieutenant, I was hit by an enemy shell and lost my left arm and two fingers from my right hand. For a short while I felt that I had made a great sacrifice, but after wearing a steel hook for nine years, I know now that I gained much more than I lost while serving my country.

Many who read the above statement will think that I am trying to be dramatic or that I am trying to hold the reader's interest by shocking him, but I have never made a more sincere statement.

In order to explain how I profited from war I must tell some things about my early life. I was the oldest son of middle-class Oklahoma parents of Anglo-Saxon descent. We were Protestants and belonged to the Democratic Party. All our close friends were middle-class, Protestants, and of Anglo-Saxon descent.

We felt that we were the only true Americans. People with long names that were hard to pronounce were labeled as foreigners by our crowd, even if they were native-born citizens and their parents, too, had been born in America.

Racial, religious, and class prejudices had been pounded into me from the time I was old enough to talk. A Spanish-speaking American was known as a "Peppergut" and was not to be trusted, because I had heard my grandfather say hundreds of times that a Mex would steal from his grandmother and would cut his grandfather's throat for a dime. All our relatives and friends agreed that a Jew loved a dollar more than he loved anything on earth and would lie, cheat, and steal to make a profit. We tolerated the Negroes who worked for us, and we were fond of them as we were fond of our pets. But all the folks we associated with agreed that a Nigger was a good worker only as long as you kept him in line and made him fear you. He would not give you a decent day's work if you treated him decently.

We all said the Indians were lazy and that the Redskins would all starve to death if the Government didn't take care of them. We all felt that the Catholics were trying to rule the world and that they were more loyal to Rome than they were to America. We actually feared that if the Catholics ever took over the country, people belonging to Protestant churches would be thrown in prison or even put to death.

We regarded the very poor with contempt, even if they had names that were easy to spell. They were lazy, shiftless Poor White Trash who were a disgrace to their race. We hated the very rich because we were convinced that they were trying to crowd out our great middle class. While growing up, I heard countless statements similar to this: "Those filthy millionaires will never be satisfied until there are only two classes, the very rich and the very poor."

We called Americans of German descent Squareheads or Krauteaters. They were not to be trusted, because everybody knew that they were still loyal to Kaiser Bill and hoped for the day he would regain his power and conquer the world. All Swedes, Chinks, Wops, Bohemians and Frogs had come to America for the sole purpose of making a pile of money and then going back to the old country to spend it.

By the time I was old enough to vote I was a full-fledged member of the snobbiest bunch of snobs in the state of Oklahoma.

WHEN the war came along, I enlisted to defend my country, and was surprised to find that Catholics, Chinks, Jews, Squareheads, Wops, Pepperguts, Negroes, Poor White Trash, Damyankees, and Republicans were also enlisting for the same purpose. And I was even more surprised to find that they appeared to be just as fiercely loyal as myself. It made me angry to hear them speak of America as "our country," as if it belonged as much to them as it did to me.

Thinking that I would get away from the riff-raff, I applied for Officer Candidate School. However, in O.C.S. there were Negroes, Jews, Catholics, Wops and Squareheads. Racial prejudice was not tolerated in O.C.S.; so I hid my true feelings to keep from being busted out.

After a few weeks I found that guys with names like Leapensburger, Silverstein, Ignowski and Padula were just as intelligent as I. In fact, most of those foreigners made better grades than I did. I also found that they could do thirty miles a day — and do it with a full field pack — and fire expertly on the rifle range. Physically and mentally, those fellows were just as good as I was, and better in most cases.

I was forced to respect those foreigners and found myself wanting to like them, but a lifetime of prejudice kept holding me back.

After graduating from Officer Candidate School, I was sent to the South Pacific as a replacement. The

regiment to which I was assigned was resting after one campaign and getting ready for another; so I had several months to get acquainted with my platoon. I was disappointed with the platoon assigned to me. I had a hard time pronouncing many of the names. Such a bunch of characters! Klowitter, Inancsi, Papacostis, Flores, Poletto, Polence, and several others. Just by the names I knew they were a bunch of foreigners and radicals. There were hillbillies who could not read. The aid man was a Mex from southern Texas. The platoon runner was a Cherokee Indian. One rifle man was an educated Jew with a Ph.D. One sergeant was a big Squarehead from Wisconsin. Another was a Wop from New Jersey; another was a big Greek from New York. The platoon was made up of soldiers from all parts of America, from every walk of life, from almost every race and creed. The Army required that I treat every man alike; so I decided to do the best I could to win the war with the bunch of riff-raff that had fallen into my hands.

NO MATTER how complete your early training has been to dislike and distrust a man because of the color of his skin, his religion, or his background, there comes a time when you begin to have a few doubts about this super-race bunk, especially after you have lived, worked, and fought with a bunch of guys for a few months.

I was surprised to find that all Wops and Jews were not yellow. I also found that all Swedes and Squareheads were not dumb. Also, I found that all Redskins were not shiftless and lazy. Little by little, I learned to respect and like those men, and suddenly one morning I realized that I loved every one of the forty men in that platoon like a son. And it was evident that they liked me. I was only twenty-seven years old at the time and many of them were older than I. But everyone called me the Old Man. They trusted me and believed that I was fair and just, free from anything so silly and petty as prejudice. They would go out of their way to make me look good when prowling high brass happened around. Often I would lie in my foxhole at night and tell myself that I did not deserve the respect and loyalty of such a wonderful bunch of boys. I would often wonder what they would have thought if they had known that only a short time before I had been one of the snobbiest of all the snobs in America.

There was a little Jewish boy in my platoon who was a regular clown. He was the kind of fellow who kept up the spirits of the whole outfit. When the going was tough and it seemed that everybody was too tired to go another mile, he would come up with some witty remark and we would all feel better after a hearty laugh. And when the chips were down, he could fight as well as

he could clown. He volunteered for every patrol, and on one occasion held off a whole Jap platoon with an automatic rifle while we evacuated some wounded men.

We had another fellow in the platoon who had never been to school. He was definitely Poor White Trash, but I learned to respect and love him. He would fight like a tiger when he was in combat and was a natural born leader. Every time he went into combat he was promoted to sergeant; and every time we took a rest he would go A.W.O.L. and would get busted.

After I was wounded and evacuated a hundred miles up the Island of Luzon from our outfit, this boy from the other side of the tracks came to see me. The boy found me in a tent hospital. I had been hit in twenty-two places; my arm had been amputated; and it looked as if I was about done for. He stood there fighting back the tears.

"I just wanted to see how you was getting along," he said. "I just wanted to tell you that I appreciate your being so square with me. I used to figure that the whole world was against me till I got in your outfit. You are looking right well. Reckon you'll be taking off for the States in no time at all. The Doc told me not to stay but a minute, so thanks again for everything. Be seeing you."

I HAVE been wearing a steel hook for nine years but I don't feel that I am handicapped. I make a

fairly decent living for my wife and daughter. I'll admit that it takes me longer to tie my shoes or type a letter than it once did. However, I am not nearly as handicapped as I was before I enlisted in the Army and had the good fortune to serve with and really get to know fellows from all over this wonderful country.

The war was terrible, but one good thing came out of the war. Millions of men learned to like and respect their fellow Americans regardless of race, religion, and social background. It has taught us to work together for the benefit of all Americans, the rights of everyone. It has taught me to judge a man for what he is and not who he is.

After the war, we banded together in veterans' organizations to help whip these silly prejudices. Because of what we learned in the service we are helping to make America a better place in which to live and rear our children.

Again I say that I am one of the few who profited from war, not in dollars and cents but in ways too priceless to be bought with money. Certainly I would rather wear this steel hook for the rest of my life and have love in my heart for my fellow man than to have drifted on through life being a snob, disliking and distrusting everyone who didn't fit in my own little group, and later teaching my children to be just as narrow-minded, wicked and snobbish.

Yes, I learned a lot from that platoon of "riff-raff."



Forbidden Sin Fascinates Youth

SO FATHER TAUGHT US TO DRINK — CORRECTLY

By Lydia Coleman

MY FATHER believes, for which I am thankful, that the best way to cope with the temptations of youth is to meet them openly in a well-lighted living room, among friends. There may be holes in this kind of philosophy, but you'll never be able to convince him, or me.

Among the temptations, often called "sins of youth," that Father brought out into the open were pre-marital sex, narcotics, drinking, and smoking. We learned all about each of these as we grew to the age where we began to wonder, and, left to our own devices, would have experimented. Because Father discussed each subject so honestly and so openly with not only just us but our curious friends as well, we came to consider him an authority on subjects that most children would hesitate even mentioning to their parents.

Just how wide was Father's fame as a counselor I never realized until the day I answered the doorbell to find a small neighbor boy. "My mother," he piped, "sent me over to have Mr. Coleman tell me how our cat had kittens."

Even today, Father's frank discussions might be called too progressive, but not unrealistic. Gradually, parents are coming around to the understanding that they can't shelter their children from life forever.

While Father frankly admitted that he did not approve of our drinking, he also admitted that it was something that every boy and girl would encounter sooner or later, and it was best to be prepared with the facts. It is very important, Father told us, that everyone, and every girl in particular, know the effect alcohol has upon the human