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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Column Refers To Old Soldier

By NEIL A. MATHESON

THIS WILL BE an unusual column because it's written about an old soldier who was telling his grandson how he, Granddad, personally won the war.

The youngster gave him the opening by asking: "Granddad, were you ever in a war?"

The old man replied in a loud voice: "Was I ever in a war? Boy, I WON THE WAR."

Noting the presence of Hippies at the present time – the old man didn't like hippies – he told his grandson, "When your Granddad was a young man, we had our hippies too, and this is a story about a hippie in a country far away". Continuing, Grandpa said:

"Now this hippie had a beard though he kept it trimmed, and to keep his moustache out of his soup he put wax on it and twisted it round until it looked like two spikes sticking out each side of his nose.

Goose Step Recalled

"THIS HIPPIE did not dance like they do today, he put his right knee up to his chin, then kicked his foot out as far as he could before placing it on the ground, then he took his left knee up to his chin, kicked out his foot and placed it on the ground, by putting his right knee up, then the left, he pranced around until he became pretty good at it."

Before I go any farther, I think the older readers will recognize the Hippie about whom the late Fred A. Driscoll was writing, for he's the man who wrote it. But for younger readers, Fred was talking of the First Great War and the 'Hippie' he writes about was Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany who led Germany in that war from August 1914 until November 11, 1918.

The high stepping he talks about was the famous German "Goose-step", so called, though I have never been able to figure why this name was given to it. I never did see a goose walk like that.

For reasons of space I am leaving out some of Fred Driscoll's fantasies. He has one character "Teddy" whom I do not recognize but he comes through loud and clear as he recalls that a friend "King George", (that would be King George Fifth) had sent for Grandpa because the King had heard Grandpa was famous for digging holes.

I may be wrong but I gather the reference may be to Teddy Roosevelt, a colorful character who was once president of the United States. But this Roosevelt's time was before the time of 1914-18.

Vermin And Mud

FOR YOUNGER readers the reference to holes is clearly "The trenches", which stretched for miles across the war's terrain and were often full of mud, sometimes water, and always vermin of various kinds, according to the stories told by "old sweats" who survived and came back home.

Ottawa told the soldiers “we will feed you, so they gave us cheese, hard-tack, bully beef and jam. They also gave a stick that went Boom-Boom.”

Continuing the story to the grandson, the old man said, “When your granddad got to King George’s country, the King said I will still feed you, and will also give you a drink called “Harf and Harf” to go with it.” Veterans will doubtless recognize this mixture, but I take it that is a sort of Ale.

But, Granddad continued, “they also gave me a shovel, but with this shovel the handle came out and you put the shovel part in your hip pocket, and the handle shoved down the pant leg.

“They also gave me a helmet made of iron. This helmet sat on the head like a cap. Maybe they thought the face should also be washed in it once in a while.

King George also said “Your Boom-Boom stick is no good, you can have mine.”

Ross Rifle Recalled

AND THIS, apparently, is a reference to the Ross Rifle that Canadians were equipped with in the First Great War. The rifles heated up in continuous action, and became useless. So the Canadians were equipped with the rifles the British used.

When your Granddad got to the country that needed help, he asked “Where is this hippie?” When told he was behind that pile of dirt in another field, but you can’t walk over to see him for he will throw dirt at you, your granddad told them he did not come over to do that, he came over to dig the hippie out.

So Granddad took the shovel out of the trouser leg, and putting the handle into the shovel he started to dig a hole.

“These holes were called trenches, so your granddad dug trenches, and the hippie, he dug trenches too.

“We dug those trenches right across the country, sometimes the hippie would throw dirt, your granddad would throw dirt back at him.

“When we got to the end of the country, we started to dig trenches the other way, sometimes your granddad would throw dirt at the hippie and he would throw dirt back, until one day your Granddad got thirsty and wanted a drink.

Here, there’s a rather humorous, and apparently exaggerated comment on the qualities of the “harf and harf” drink, but it gave Granddad the chance to tell his grandson of a personal encounter with the “Hippie” as he called the German soldier.

The Hippie began to throw a lot of dirt and finally he reached over and hit your granddad on the helmet with his shovel. That made your Granddad mad, so he chased the Hippie and running hard, caught him and gave him a terrible spanking.

Had Hippie Saw Wood

NOW, HE ASKS the youngster: “What was your Granddad going to do with this Hippie? Looking up he saw a great big pile of wood in a neighbor’s yard, and looking into another yard, he saw a buck saw and a saw horse, so he told the Hippie to pick up the buck-saw, and the saw horse, and go over to the pile of wood and start sawing, and so the Hippie sawed wood for the rest of his life.

“Your granddad got back to Ottawa and they gave him a long row of medals across his chest and sent him home, so that’s how your Granddad won the war.”

“Then your granddad met your grandma, but, Grandson, that is the beginning of another story.”

And that’s the rather whimsical bit of something close to fantasy that Fred A. Driscoll wrote. It has come to my attention since Mr. Driscoll’s death.

Congratulations Summerside

WARMEST CONGRATULATIONS go to the Summerside people who are responsible for the Sports Celebrity Dinner. The organization, and arrangements left little to be desired, the spacious auditorium of the George R. Pearkes, VC branch of the Canadian Legion was completely filled.

And I never did see a more appreciative audience. Standing ovations were the order of the night. The applause was most generous and the response was always kind and warm.

I was glad to see the dinner executive honor my friend John McNeill, who this year observes his 25th anniversary as a sports columnist. It couldn’t happen to a nicer guy.