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To You and You and You In Uniform

WILSON R. DUMBLE

One wet Sunday evening not so many weeks ago, I sat at my favorite spot in a near-by campus tea room, finishing my dessert and drinking some black coffee. I had been well fed; I was at ease with the world; I was letting my mind get the full aroma of that complete relaxation that follows a perfectly satisfying dinner. Suddenly the door to the room opened and in came three people: obviously a father and mother with a fine-looking son in uniform.

Since the hostess seated them at a vacant table within ear-shot of mine, and since the gentleman was wearing a head contraption to aid him in hearing, I had no difficulty in sitting in on their conversation. Mother, wearing her best dress and sporting what was probably a new squirrel coat, was fatuously proud. Father, looking like the usual business man was so pleased with himself that he swelled with righteous pride. Son's uniform was brand new, and for the most part, fitted him quite well, considering it was Government Issue and no doubt had been tossed in his direction, probably that very day.

The three made a comfortable looking group as they ordered soups and steaks and all the items that go with them. Then, with pride that was more pardonable than any pride I had ever seen, they settled back and looked at each other. When sonny boy spoke first, I could not help but hear. Everyone in the dining room heard, because everyone like myself was listening in.

"Well, how do you think it fits?" he blurted out, tucking the waist in here and gathering the folds on the shoulder there.

"Fine . . . fine . . . fine!" said Dad, with a firmness of voice that re-echoed his pride.

"Perfect fit, it is!" said Mother. Mother's voice began to waver just enough to give to those near their table, the idea that she might be breaking. Then, I saw her reach for her handbag, quickly pull out a handkerchief, and with equal speed dab her nose. There was such a faint change in her voice that I doubt any of the other diners noticed it. In thirty seconds by the clock, Mother had righted herself and was once again back in fighting trim.

"Good Lord," said Dad, "don't I remember how that uniform of mine fit when I put it on, back in Eighteen. It was the damnedest looking thing as I recall." With this remark the three laughed heartily, and I laughed too.



WILSON R. DUMBLE

Yes, I laughed, for I recalled only too well how my uniform looked on that cold rainy April day back in 1918. I had been routed out of my slumbers at the unheard-of hour of four in the morning. I had eaten a fine breakfast; I had been run through test after test; I had been shot and re-shot and shot again; I had been badgered into holding a cumbersome seventy-pound bag of grain on my shoulder so that the corporal could see how my foot spread under weight equal to that of a pack; I had been questioned and re-questioned and questioned thrice; and then, at long last, I had passed down an endless counter with hundreds of others, each in his birthday suit, to have pieces of clothing thrown out at us, the very clothing that we would wear on a trek to besieged France several months later.

After the ordeal of dressing and adjusting roll puttees and yanking the blouse down in front and hiking it up in the rear, I must have been a sorry looking sight.

The guy next to me—I never saw him before, and to my knowledge, never since—looked my

way, and with that queer expression of awe in his face, he gave one grunt:

"Jez, you look funny!" he said.

"Hell, you ought to see yourself," I roared back at him.

From that time on, I was in the Army, just as definitely a part of Uncle Sam's fighting organization as any soldier who had ever won a D. S. C.

After supper that evening, I stood in a rather extended queue at the long distance telephone booths at the Y. M. C. A. hut, to put in a call for home. Somehow I don't know just why, it seemed the natural thing to do. At the end of considerable delay, I finally arrived at the booth, and within a few minutes, my call home was connected. My father answered the telephone.

"Hello, Dad!" I recall, I said. "Your son is in uniform."

"Good," my Dad answered. "Is it a fine fit?"

Then, after a few more exchanges of greetings and answers to how I was getting along, Mother came to the telephone.

"In uniform?" mother greeted me; "I bet it is a perfect fit. We surely wish we were there to see you."

It was then, I noticed a slight pause, and just why, I could not understand. But, within its long expanse of, say, thirty seconds, Dad took the receiver again.

"So glad you called, son; do it frequently if you get the change. Mother and I will be down to see you one of these days."

As I look back on that incident now, over a span of more than twenty years, I remember that I left the telephone booth swelling with pride.

My pride and my hopes and my expectations on that rainy night in April, 1918, were just as high and inflated and inexhaustable as were those of the young soldier who sat the other evening at table with his parents. Adventure was before me; adventure is before him. The prayers of parents guided me on my way; the prayers of parents will guide him on his way. I was to fight a battle; he too will be fighting a battle. Besides, my parents, likewise, were fighting a battle; his parents will be fighting a battle.

And, to you and you and you in uniform, I want to say this word:

Your pride in uniform dwarfs beside our pride in you. You can have little idea of the dignified, bursting satisfaction that your parents have in knowing that you are with the Armed Forces; the satisfaction that your instructors feel in realizing that on the tomorrow you will be wearing the badge of Service, you who sit in our classrooms today, or you who sat here yesterday. As friendly advisers to you over a period of time, your instructors loudly join in the voice of your parents:

"Chin up, by God; and God bless you!"