

OUR FIGHTING MEN

Here's a swell letter from Ed. J. Nowak, MM 2/C, of Old Raritan Road, which we thought was "exclusive" to The Scotch Plainsman until we saw it published in tonight's Courier-News with Ed's name by-lined. He will be remembered musically as a member of SPHS, Class of '35. His present address is CBMU 517, c/o FPO, San Francisco, Calif., and here's his letter:

"Be it ever so humble there's no place like home. Home, where You Are My Sunshine is not the national anthem and pianos, oddities. I've been Seebeking the Pacific for the past 18 months and along with other adventure have observed the effect of music, or the lack of it, on both the servicemen and the many varieties of natives.

The SeaBee powers-that-be evidently realize that music hath charms to soothe the savage breast and since soothed breasts are not conducive to grim fighting spirit they've provided only in the minutest degree for musical recreation or comfort. Two or three sweet-potato-flutes, the inevitable bugle, a you-wind-it phonograph and a uke and guitar which even a hock shop wouldn't take a chance on, constitute my particular outfit's musical welfare equipment. Hence music for us is where we find it.

Wandering through one semi-civilized village our ears perked up hearing the out-of-tune jangle of a piano emanating from an upper-crust native shack. In we went and there was a cute dark-skinned lassie of about nine summers struggling through "Oh Johnny". Her English speaking mother, educated in New Zealand, had done a fine job teaching her. Immediately we became the honored guests with our questionable renditions of the tunes America was humming before we left for the wars.

The majority of SeaBee outfits are pianoless and musicianless. Very difficult organizing a band. But there are individualistic hill-billy guitar strummers who always command attention with Ball of Yarn and such, making it more evident that the majority of people still prefer "corn".

However on one tiny isle the Marines had the only piano, a new spinet that somebody swindled the Navy on -- sounded more like a banjo than a piano. The queer tones added unusual color to our small conscientious choir -- lads trying to retain some of their fast dwindling stateside habits. Of all the islands our GI shod feet have trod, the one and only Red Cross Canteen we found was in the Solomons -- coffee, doughnuts, a half-dozen very commendable Red Cross gals -- and a honey of a Steinway spinet. Must have been a shortage of piano men there cause I found myself spending many hours playing tunes new and old for the dogfaces, sailors and leathernecks. Just like working a cocktail bar only coffee graced the piano instead of the frosted glass. Even had a vocalist who sang every number that was put up during one five hour session. Lovely girl!

Some of the transports we spent many weeks aboard while enroute to new islands had decrepit pianos of gay 90s vintage hidden away in the

officers' quarters that also helped pass away the monotonous days.

The natives of these islands make with a falsetto chant and rythm is their business. Give them a five gallon can or a potato crate and they're as happy as Gene Krupa.

As of now we're in the Philippines, struggling through mud, where at long last our recreational appetites are being satisfied with more than the nightly third-rate movie. There sits a banged-up piano in the ohow hall which another outfit had the foresight to bring when they recently left the "old country" and nightly I hold forth at the pianoforte playing requests that make the lads wax sentimental.

Vocalists who could never excite encores back home have a place in the sun here. Requests range anywhere between the long-haired opuses to minor key take-offs on Three Blind Mice. Even have our own HIT PARADE. I'll Walk Alone still holds first place, Sweet Lorraine, second, Siboney, third and Tea for Two, Ave Maria, and an original, a Concerto in the Russian motif on Loch Lomond bringing up the rear. But the natives still prefer their beloved You Are My Sunshine.

Musical enthusiasm runs high even to the extent where a good deal of my free time is spent giving lessons. And for the first time since we've been out, we're being treated to programs given by the Fleet Band and



USO Camp Shows. Hellzapoppin and more recently This Is the Army played here and be it knee-deep mud, high winds and pounding rain the show goes on and the open air theater is jammed with entertainment-hungry and appreciative servicemen.

Having a seat four or five coconut logs from the stage is indeed a highly prized possession.

SeaBeeistically, Edward J. Nowak".

(Music is right down Ed's alley. A pianist in civilian life, he is a member of the Plainfield Musicians Local 756 and played in several night spots around Plainfield before joining the Seabees in 1943.)

Pfc. Joseph A. Krempa (32603337) is stationed somewhere in the Pacific with the 14th Airdrome Sqdn., APO 717, c/o P.M., San Francisco, Calif. His letter goes:

"Dear Hometown People:

Received the January hometown paper today and was sure glad to get it. I'm in the best of health and doing all right at the present time.

I looked over the list of those from whom you received letters and from that list I got Joe V. Long's address. I know where he is very well. My brother, Stanley, is stationed at the same place so I wrote Joe a V-mail letter and told him to

look up my brother. If they do meet up, I know they will have a nice talk about good old Scotch Plains.

I liked the picture of the Police force. I had to look twice to see who that was between Harold Hill and Frank Barone -- and it sure was John Andrusky. Give my regards to the police force.

Sorry to hear about John Barich. He sure was a swell fellow.

Will close now for it's time to go to work again. May God bless all of you.

Just One of the Boys from Home, Joseph A. Krempa."

If this letter from Pfc. Fred L. Stoecker who is with the First Army in Germany Co. B., 273d Inf., 69th Div., A.P.O. 417 c/o PM, NY) doesn't start an argument, I miss my guess.

"I have a little time to write and says thanks for that marvelous paper The Scotch Plainsman. I may only get it once a month but I do read it once a day. Each time I read it, it gets better and all the fellows in our squad read and enjoy it too.

"We have one of the finest fighting squads in our Company. Our Company is the best in the Battalion and our Battalion is the best in the Regiment and our regiment is the best in the Army.

"I do hope you can make this out for I am writing in a foxhole and it is not too quiet.

"Have been in the army thirteen months; eight months in the States which I loved, and four months overseas which I hated. I have been only in combat one month but that is one month too long.

"Please keep sending that paper. I look for it every time we get mail. Well, I have to leave now."

Corp. Howard Van Duyn (12078158) is with the H Q Btry., 802d FA Bn., APO 758, c/o P.M., New York, and from Somewhere in Germany, he writes:

"Received another copy of the paper last night and read it from cover to cover. I know very few people in town but I'm beginning to know them through the paper. I've been intending to write before this but at times I was so busy I just couldn't get around to it. In this month's issue I noticed you'd like a copy of Stars and Stripes and I'm sending one along. It's a little beat up as it has to be passed around and this is what's left of it.

I can say that I'm somewhere in Germany and before coming here was in Luxembourg and Belgium. Have been at one place I know you well heard of -- Bastogne in Belgium. Also received a citation at Colmar in southern France. In December I was the first one in my battery to get a pass to Paris and it sure was good to see lights again and sleep in a nice soft bed. As nice as it was, it couldn't compare to anything in Jersey.

There's one Scotch Plainsman I'm anxiously wanting to meet and that's my brother-in-law Wesley Yourth. We have been writing to each other but have never had the chance to meet as when I married he was in the Navy and shortly after I went into the Army.

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