

## The Company Feud.

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WHEN private Murphy of F company was backed by his followers to race with private Johnson of E company, no one dreamed of the complications that were to follow. For a long time Johnson had been the fleetest man in the garrison, and E company had gloried in his powers. They boasted about him; they smiled indulgently when a man of another company was spoken of as a runner. They said that E company was the best company in the regiment; and as there was some foundation for their claim, the boasts ruffled the spirits of the men of F company, because they also laid claims to superiority.

One day a recruit came to F company. He was a well-built fellow, and it soon leaked out that he was fleet of foot. F company took him out on the prairie, measured off a hundred yards, started him with a blank cartridge, and timed him with the best watch in the company. Then they danced back to barracks and laughed E company in the face. And E company jeered back at them, and sent F company a challenge,—the men to run for all the money the two companies would draw on their next pay day. This was more than F company had bargained for, but they had confidence in their man, and the challenge was accepted.

The garrison never forgot that race. Like unleashed hounds the two runners shot from the mark; not a breath was drawn by either E company or F company as the contestants tore down the track side by side. Then a mighty cheer went up from E company as, at the finish, their man forged ahead and won by a yard! How they screamed and hugged each other! And they carried private Johnson back to barracks; they thought too much of him to allow him to walk.

F company remained sober to a man on that pay day. Of course it was different in E company; their men marched out to

parade like an awkward squad of recruits; their guides could not see the guides in front, and therefore made no attempt to cover them; some of their men had fines ranging from fifty cents to five dollars. But these trifles were not balm to the drooping spirits and empty pockets of F company. As was remarked by an E company high private, who for much inebriety and unmilitary conduct in barracks had forfeited five soldier dollars back to the government that paid him, "It cuts no figure with me. A nice easy man in F company is paying me blind and giving me a trifling matter of eight dollars to boot."

The longer F company thought about it, the madder they got. They paid their bets like men, but they remembered their old score and lived in the hope of settling it, for company pride is not to be laid low without thought of the morrow. Day by day F company racked its brains to get ahead of E company, but E company was always on the alert. The spirit of rivalry soon spread upward and entered the hearts of the respective captains and first lieutenants of the two companies. So strong was it that it even made an impression on the self-satisfied second lieutenants, and finally entered into the portly forms of the battalion commanders, for the companies belonged to different battalions. In the officers' club, rye was never so sweet to the captain of E company as when fate, by cards or dice, decided that the check should be signed by the captain of F company. And down on Soap Sud Row, Mrs. Sergeant Junkler, a military attachment to F company, laughed until her fat sides ached when the wind blew down a fresh washing hung up by Mrs. Corporal Thomlins,—not because she disliked Mrs. Thomlins, but because Mrs. Thomlins's man belonged to E company.

The cinder track origin of the feud had been all but lost in a larger and more comprehensive rivalry, when one fine morning the colonel ordered the ambulance to meet the early P and T train. In it went the colonel and the colonel's wife, and an escort wagon trailed behind. An hour later, when the escort wagon pulled up in front of the colonel's quarters, it carried three large trunks, of an unmistakably feminine aspect, which immediately invested the accompanying ambulance with breathless and absorbing interest. With a due sense of the dramatic

value of the situation the colonel emerged first from the vehicle, hopping forth as spry as a yearling colt on branding day. After a moment of suspense he extended one martial arm and perfunctorily assisted Mrs. Colonel to alight, and then the old martinet, stretching out both arms and ignoring the ambulance steps, fairly lifted his pretty niece to the ground. For he was a true soldier, and the niece was so sweet that, twenty-four hours afterward, her heart, hand, and dainty smile were all violently besieged by the respective second lieutenants of companies E and F.

And then the company fight found a fresh inspiration, and was waged for all it was worth.

When the F company second lieutenant was allowed to take her sweetness to the first post hop following her arrival, the hearts of the men who slept on iron bunks in F company were full of rejoicing. They knew of their second lieutenant's good luck almost as soon as he did; for, of course, the colonel's second girl heard the matter discussed as she was doing her dusting, had promptly reported it to the cook, the cook in confidence had told the man who brought the commissaries, and he had told a friend in F company. When the army back door telegraph line has made its connections, nothing can equal its rapidity of service or its volume of reliable news.

When the second lieutenant of E company stood highest in favor, E company knew it at once through a similar channel, and proceeded in a body to the canteen as a consequence. When the second lieutenant of F company, in a happy inspiration at early morning drill, marched the company past the colonel's quarters nine times, giving loud commands at each passing, the men caught the idea, and even old Jerry Andrews, with twenty-four years of service in his stooped shoulders, braced so hard that he was sore for a week.

The colonel's orderly was daily chosen from either the E or the F company detail. No other men marching on guard stood the ghost of a chance in this competition, for each of the two companies sent out guard details that were dadyocked and heelbored until they made the adjutant blink as he inspected them. And it was a memorable day in the annals of E company when an E company man as orderly, spick and span and polished from head

to foot, held the prancing horse of his second lieutenant while the lieutenant, in uniform that was new from cap to boot, ran up the walk and porch steps to take Miss Wilckens out for an afternoon canter.

On that same day F company resolved that if their second lieutenant proved the winner, the wedding present would cost the company a month's pay, even if the pay day after the wedding should find them all sober as an awful consequence. But this idea incidentally recalled a former pay day that had been also sober, and thereupon they said unpleasant things about E company. When a soldier says unpleasant things it is best not to repeat them, at least not on the page that contains a young girl's name.

But this is not a story of the loves of two second lieutenants. Absorbing as was the competition into which these officers of E and F companies respectively had entered, and ardent as was the passion that inspired it, neither have more than an incidental interest in this tale. That these particular second lieutenants, with the impetuosity of their grade, had, from private motives of whatever dignity and value, accidentally entered into the post fight upon opposite sides is alone important.

One October morning, the sentinel in rear of officers' line saw flames bursting from the roof of the colonel's quarters.

"Fire, number three!" he yelled, at the same time firing his rifle.

The stillness of the autumnal morning was gone. Bugles blew, the reveille gun was fired, soldiers tumbled out of barracks, officers dropped their cards or their babies. The deserted parade was at once alive with men and littered fire buckets, with hose carts and with ladders.

The second lieutenants of companies E and F rushed out of the colonel's house together. Between them was Miss Wilckens, but which one carried her, or whether neither or both of them enjoyed this privilege, not even the colonel's cook could tell. They left her reluctantly on the sidewalk, and each, with a parting look of undying love, fairly flew across the parade to conduct his own command to the scene of danger. The first sergeants met them half way with the hastily formed companies, and back

again they madly raced to the burning house, easily beating all competitors in a dead heat for first place.

In every well-conducted garrison each company is assigned a fire duty. Some bring the ladders, others the hose, and others, still, fire buckets. For the latter duty were detailed companies E and F; but finding no water for their buckets, they were ordered into the quarters to carry out the colonel's belongings. With F company rushed its second lieutenant. A moment later he hurried forth bearing a divan pillow under each arm, and his eyes caught the second lieutenant of E company not only calmly standing on the sidewalk with Miss Wilckens, but actually wrapping his cape around her. A moment later the girl's pretty shoulders were covered with another second lieutenant's cape, and from that time on companies E and F worked without their junior officers.

The colonel's quarters were old, and the puny streams of water that were thrown upon the blaze seemed but to double the anger of the flames. The little tongue of fire on the roof grew in spite of all effort to subdue it, until the attics were a seething mass. Black clouds of smoke poured from the second-story windows, and a regiment of men stood by, anxious, willing, yet powerless — company E and company F close to the building, each longing for a first chance at anything.

Among Miss Wilckens's possessions was a maid, and just as the second lieutenants of companies E and F simultaneously asked to be allowed to do something — anything — in her behalf, Miss Wilckens suddenly exclaimed: —

“Oh, where's Baker? Where's Baker?”

“Miss Wilckens's maid!” chorused the second lieutenants.

That was enough for F company, and more than enough for E company. With just a second's start E company rushed again into the burning building, up the stairway, through a rain of water from the hose that could attain no greater height, to grope through smoke and flame for the missing maid. Having started ahead of F company, they blocked the doorway and packed the stairway so that not a man of that hated body, except little Dorgan, the recruit, could get into the house.

If there were a chance for advancement E company wanted it

all to themselves. The leading men stumbled through the rooms in mad search, while the others stood on the stairway ready to lower the maid's unconscious form with due gentleness down from her fiery danger.

The smoke was suffocating, and E company gasped for breath, but manfully held to its task. Flames darted out from all parts of the second floor, but E company gave no thought to its singed hairs and blackened faces. But where was the girl? Was all their search to be in vain?

"Where is she? Which is her room?"

And as the flames raged with an ever-increasing ferocity, the waiting crowd of soldiers felt the premonition of death in their hearts.

Suddenly a cheer broke from some one in the burning building. They had found her! The hoarse, smoke-choked cheer ran through the men on the stairway, swelling louder and louder, until the outsiders caught it and sent it back to the rescuers — a roar of applause for their bravery.

Ever so gently the sweaty arms on the stairway stretched out to receive the unconscious form, thoughtfully wrapped in woolen blankets; carefully, yet quickly, they passed her down.

Was she burned? Where was the doctor? Give her air. Get her away from that building.

And another cheer was given, a cheer for E company. And to their lasting credit be it said that F company started the cheer.

As the six bearers with their unconscious burden reached the sidewalk, Miss Wilkens glanced away from the fire up along the line of officers' quarters. Then she gave a little shriek: "There's Baker! She wasn't in the fire at all!" and promptly fainted in the arms of both second lieutenants.

At the same moment there was a lively scrambling in the woolen blankets. A second later, little Dorgan, the F company recruit, was sprinting across the parade as though the legions of Satan were after him.

"Much obliged to E company!" he yelled as he ran. "I knew she wasn't in the fire! I knew it all the time! But much obliged to E company for carrying an F company man so nice!"

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Little Dorgan got six months in the guard house, but he is F company's hero. A week after the fire, a tall "cit" came out from the East. He did not know the difference between "fours right" and "fours left," but he knew how to put a solitaire ring on the proper finger of Miss Wilckens's pretty left hand. The second lieutenants of companies E and F simultaneously applied for leaves of absence.

A laugh is better than all else, so to be laughed at is worse than all else; therefore F company came out of the company feud with flying colors.

