The Battle of Washington Square

Richard Connell

He wore no collar. If he had, it would have been size 13½. He didn't, because collars cost twenty cents. Twenty cents paid his overhead expenses for a day: two meals of stew and coffee at Emil's Busy Bee Lunchery—music by the Elevated trains—and enough tobacco to make fifty cigarets.

His collarlessness did not worry him; he gave it no more thought than he gave to the art of poetry, the influence of Confucius on China, or his country's foreign policy, if any. How to get that daily twenty cents—that was what concerned him; that done, he let his brain rest, wrapped in a hazy blanket. Leaning against the wall of Hyde's Stable in West Houston Street, outside in summer, inside in winter, he accepted the universe. Blue smoke, seeping from time to time from his nostrils, was the only sign that he had not mummified.

His name was Joey Pell. He was nineteen years old. As a baby he had had rickets, and as a result he was bowlegged and undersized. His complexion was imperfect. Of the six children born to his parents, he was the last and the only one to survive the hazards of infancy in a two-room flat on Hudson Street. His mother sometimes said that this was enough to drive a person to drink. Her husband, a truckman chronically on strike, would remark, by way of repartee, that it was quite unnecessary to drive her to drink. She would reply, in part, that his own record as a teetotaler was not unimpeachable. At this point in the conflict little Joey knew it to be an act of prudence to slip out of the room that served as kitchen, living room and his bedroom. He was a timid, easily frightened child, and had apparently inherited none of his parents' bellicose corpuscles.

One day he went out and never came back, and his parents thereafter quarreled in peace, while he attached himself to the stable as an unofficial valet and general assistant.

He was afraid of horses, and he never conquered that fear entirely, but the stable was warm, and the men gave him dimes for helping with the harness, so he stayed there; his was not a soul for high adventure. They let him hang about the stable because he tried to be useful. There was only one sort of job he'd balk at—he would not go near mules. Of mules he stood in deathly fear, for when he was six he had seen a man trampled to death by an angry mule, and the look of fright that had come to Joey's face on that occasion had never entirely left it. His haddock-like, watery blue-gray eyes were still slightly apprehensive; his lips always seemed on the verge of a quiver. When he approached a person he sidled. He seemed to expect to be kicked, and not infrequently he was. When someone kicked him Joey Pell did not kick back. He just melted away from the vicinity of the kicker, with a look, hurt, and yet resigned, as if a certain amount of kicking were his lot in life.

He harbored no grudges and hated no one.

For one thing, his memory was not good enough for him to be a good hater; and, besides, it took venom and energy to hate, and he had neither. His lack of pugnacity barred him from the society of the other boys of that part of the city, for they all aspired to be pugilists or, failing that, competent members of the Hudson Dusters, the Whyo Boys, the Gophers, or other gangs; their evenings were full of fisticuffs. Joey would have liked to be one of them, but, since they did not appear to want him, he accepted the fact.

Joey Pell had learned to read much later than the other boys, and reading was still somewhat of a labor for him. He rarely got beyond the comic strips in the newspapers; these he pored over with knit and sober brow.

What went on in the world outside his stable mattered little to him. Kings might be hurled into the dust, the dogs of war might growl and gnaw their leashes, black calamity might threaten the land—it was all one to Joey Pell. His stew, his coffee, his tobacco, his sleep—these filled his brain; it was not a large one, and he had room for little else. It may have been that the rumbling of events in the world reached his ear, but they never penetrated into his head.

The men in the stable had been growing more and more excited about something—a war of some sort, Joey concluded. It was much too remote an affair to concern him, anyhow.

Then, one day, something exciting happened to Joey Pell. He received a letter. It was the first letter he had ever received in his life, and he stood in front of the stable, fingering it gingerly with dirty hands. He was a little alarmed. Why should anyone write to him? Probably it was a mistake. He stared at the address again:

Joseph Pell

☐ ☐ c/o Hyde's Stable

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ W. Houston St.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ New York City

Himself beyond question. He wondered what he had done. He tore open the envelope and pored over the printed letter inside. He wondered why he should be called upon to present himself at a certain place and time. The letter confused him. So he took it to Phil Hyde, who

owned the stable. Hyde glanced at it.

“Well, they got you,” Hyde said with a grin.

“Got me?”

“Yeah—you gotta fight.”

“Me fight? Fight who?”

“Say, stupid, don’t you know there’s a war on? This here means you’re drafted.”

Joey liked camp. For the first week he was in a daze; the officers who examined him seemed blurred and enormous. He was lanced by a fear that he must immediately shed blood, or have his own shed. It seemed a poor choice to Joey Pell. When he found that the day he must engage in actual combat was remote he began to enjoy the military life. Never before had he been so well fed, had he had such a clean, warm place to sleep, had he had such trim new clothes. He realized this, and he did what he was told to do, whole-heartedly; he was afraid that he might be put out of the Army.

The regular life suited him. It was pleasant to have someone else do all the thinking. He liked to do things by the numbers—one, two, three, four. He liked to march along, hep, hep, hep, hep, in step, shoulder to shoulder with the other soldiers. He belonged with them; they were his gang; it was a fine new feeling. They accepted him as one of them. He began to take trouble about his hair and finger nails, to take an interest in baths. His chest grew an inch, his biceps grew firmer.

Joey Pell learned many things at camp. One of them was bayonet fighting. At first it made him tremble and turn sick inside; but he got over that.

“Hey, you, with the pasty face!” the sergeant barked. “Put some life into it. It’ll make a man of you.”

Joey tried to do so. But he found it hard to be enthusiastic about stabbing even a dummy.

“Get mad!” roared the sergeant. “Hate ’em! Drive it into their guts! Curse ’em as you thrust. Give it to ’em—one, two, three!”

Joey was a good soldier; he was told to hate; he hated. He learned to drive the keen point of his bayonet into the straw intestines of the dummies; as he did so he gritted his teeth and

sharply cursed. He came to hate each of the dummies with a personal hate.

The other soldiers in his squad did not talk much about the war. Mostly they talked of girls, and baseball, and prize fighting, and the bartenders they knew, and of what the lieutenant said to them and their own daring retorts to him. Sometimes, in sentimental moments, they showed one another pictures of wives, sweethearts or babies. When they did talk of the war they cursed the men they were to fight against, and told stories of their savagery.

As Joey listened he felt inside very much as he had felt that day when he saw the mule trampling the life from a man. His fear bred hate. These people were devils; it was a virtue to hate them, a good deed to kill them.

Grim monsters peopled his dreams. They were in gray, and were twice the size of ordinary men, and fiendish of face. In his dreams he fought them. As they bore down on him he drove his bayonet into their throats. The sergeant had no occasion to criticize his bayonet drill now.

Joey Pell was a one-idea man. Once his mind had been filled to capacity with the problem of keeping alive; now that problem was happily solved for him; so he had space for another idea. That idea was to be a good soldier, and, it followed, a sincere hater of the enemy. This became Joey's obsession. He won an approving grunt from the sergeant by the ferocity of his attack in the bayonet drill.

Another fine new feeling came to Joey Pell on his first leave of absence in New York City. He realized that he was a hero. He saw that he was a person of importance. His had been a life without color, a humble life. Back in the stable he was less important than one of the horses; not the faintest beam of limelight had ever fallen on his small figure in that manure-scented obscurity. Men had treated him curtly; no woman had ever smiled at him. He had been unwanted. But now it was different. He was a soldier.

He had taken the three days' leave of absence because his turn had come, not because he wanted it; he'd no idea what use he could make of it.

He was trudging along Fifth Avenue, bound for his stable below Washington Square, when he heard a voice calling, "Oh, soldier boy! Oh, soldier boy!"

He looked about; there was no other soldier in sight; so the lady in the limousine must be calling to him. Her car had come quite close to the curb; it was a magnificent car, huge and glittering with polished nickel. Inside, it was heavily upholstered, and so was the richly dressed lady who sat there, and who had called to Joey. She was smiling. Joey eyed her suspiciously.

“Can’t I take you where you are going?” she asked.

“Ain’t goin’ nowhere,” he mumbled. He felt suddenly hot, awkward, conscious of his complexion.

“Ah, then let me take you to the Home Trench,” said the lady. Joey looked dubious; he wondered what her game was. “Don’t you know about the Home Trench?” she asked. Her voice partly reassured him. “It’s for soldier boys like you. It’s in my own house on Fifth Avenue. I’m Mrs. J. Goodhue Wilmerding, you know. Come, get in.”

She held open the limousine’s door invitingly. Joey stumbled in. He sat, uncomfortable, bolt upright on the edge of the fat seat. The roses in the silver vase overawed him; he associated flowers only with funerals. From the corner of his eye he watched the lady. Perhaps, he thought, she was a spy who would try by honeyed words to get important military information from him. He resolved to kick her roundly in the shins and leap from the car if she tried any funny business on him, Private Joseph Pell.

“It is just wonderful,” he heard her say, “of you boys to do what you are doing.”

“Yes’m,” said Joey Pell.

“Ah, if I were only a man”—she expelled a sigh—“but, since I’m not, I’m doing my bit as best I can. Last week at the Home Trench we entertained seven hundred and sixty-one soldier boys.”

“Yes’m,” said Joey Pell.

“I hope you’ll like the Home Trench,” she went on. “All the waitresses there are Junior League girls. They dance with the boys.” Then she added, “With all the boys. Isn’t it wonderful how this terrible war has brought us all closer together?”

“Yes’m,” said Joey Pell.

“I wonder,” she said, “if you know my son at your camp—Major Sears Wilmerding, on the general’s staff?”

“No’m,” said Joey Pell.

“You must introduce yourself to him when you go back.”

“Yes’m,” said Joey Pell, with mental reservations.

“You see, I consider all soldier boys my sons,” she said. “Ah, here we are—at the Home Trench.”

The motor car purred up to the curb before an opulent brownstone house on lower Fifth Avenue. Over the door was a sign, decorated with flags:

The Home Trench

All Soldiers Welcome

Joey followed Mrs. Wilmerding into the house. Inside, a pretty girl pounced on Joey, asked his name, and pinned a tag on his coat bearing the words “I am Private Pell.”

Blinking, he stepped from the hallway into the large front room. It was filled with soldiers and girls. In one corner a phonograph was grinding out brassily “Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag, and Smile, Smile, Smile.” Some of the girls and soldiers were dancing—the soldiers for the most part stiff and self-conscious, the girls bright-eyed and putting much spirit into the task of making the soldiers enjoy themselves.

A little bobbed-haired girl captured Joey.

“I’m Peggy Sturgis,” she announced, taking his hand, which hung limply by his side, and shaking it violently. “You’re Private Pell, aren’t you?”

Joey gulped, and nodded.

“I know some Pells at Tuxedo Park,” she said. “Are you one of them?”

“No’m,” said Joey.

“Shall we dance?”

He was too overwhelmed by this entirely novel experience to refuse. She towed and hauled and steered him about the crowded room, while the phonograph did its best with “Over There.”

“I think,” she said, “it’s just wonderful of you boys to do what you are doing.” Joey flushed. “I wish,” she said wistfully, “that I were a man. I’d be in the cavalry. Don’t you just adore

horses, Mr. Pell?”

Joey licked dry lips and nodded. He hated horses, as a matter of fact; but she had called him Mister, and that was another new and stimulating experience.

Other girls danced with Joey Pell that day. They told him, every one of them, how brave a thing he was doing. He drank a great deal of not very sweet lemonade, and only when the Home Trench closed for the day, at six o’clock, did he leave.

He was almost as much intoxicated as if the lemonade had been champagne, as he strode up the avenue, chin out, eyes narrowed sternly.

He wished earnestly that he might meet one of the enemy face to face at that moment. He felt capable of laying him low, barehanded. He saluted all officers with a sharp precise salute; he even saluted a passing letter carrier. His heart beat with unwonted vigor; he was a soldier; a somebody.

He surveyed suspiciously each passerby in the hope that he might discover a spy. He found no spy, but he did find an elderly gentleman who gave him a theater ticket, and a blessing. Joey took the ticket without embarrassment; he was getting used to gifts.

As he marched along he saw a sign:

Free Chow for the Lads in Khaki

He entered the big brick building and was greeted by an aroma of disinfectant, liniment and athletes, and by a plump enthusiastic man, who slapped Joey on the shoulder and cried jovially, “Howdy, buddy! Greetings! Come right in and get your chow. Afterwards we’re going to have a get-together and sing. You’ll stay, of course.” He patted Joey’s shoulder with a big-brother gesture. “You sure are lucky to be in the Army,” said the plump man. “It’s mighty fine, the spirit you boys are showing. I wish I could be in khaki, but these darn flat feet of mine——”

He waved an apologetic pink hand toward his feet.

In the dining-room Joey ate copiously of beans, cocoa and pie. He stayed a while for the singing, and even added a cracked and unpractised tenor to the chorus, which, led by the plump man with the unfortunate feet, sang “Onward, Christian Soldiers,” “K-K-Katy,” and

“Hail, Hail, the Gang’s All Here.”

Joey slipped away and went to the theater. A war play was being given—a moving piece with blank cartridge battles and air raids offstage, and a whole corps of villains in the persons of enemy officers, cold sneering devils with spiked mustachios and evil habits.

Joey hissed them loudly. He was so carried away indeed, that at one critical juncture in the play he contemplated swarming over the footlights and doing violence to the chief villain, a fiend in human form if ever there was one.

He was diverted from this by an opportunity closer at hand. Between acts a speaker urged the audience to buy bonds to support the war. The speaker was eloquent, and he pointed dramatically at Joey, who sat in the fifth row.

“Boys like him,” said the speaker, “are giving their lives for you. Will you not give your dollars?”

Joey blushed with a happy pride; the eyes of the house were on him. Pretty girls passed subscription blanks. The man in front of Joey did not take one. He was a stumpy man with a round bristly head; Joey had had his suspicions of him.

“Don’t be a slacker,” the girl with the blanks said.

“I em nod a slecker,” returned the man.

His voice was guttural; the enemy officers on the stage talked in that same tone, Joey had observed.

To Joey his duty was plain.

He leaned forward and hissed into the man’s ear, “You buy one of dem, see.”

The man looked around; his face was purplish and obstinate. He glared at Joey.

“I vill nod,” he said.

Again Joey saw his simple duty; he punched the man squarely on his bulb of nose. The man punched back, but a dozen fists descended on him from all sides and he was hustled up the aisle by the ushers. As he passed, members of the audience took kicks at him. Joey was left in possession of the field. He glowed. On the way out, several men, strangers, shook hands with him; one man gave him a box of cigarets.

Joey Pell returned to camp in high spirits. The wandering, furtive, foggy look of his stable days was gone from his face; the droop was gone from his spine. He had found himself; he was a soldier, a person to be admired, respected, and even feared a little. In his dreams he, single-handed, held the breach against a prodigious number of the enemy. They charged upon him, but he, though bleeding from a dozen wounds, did not retreat. He held them back; with rifle, bombs, bayonet, even fists, he hurled them back until he was ringed round by piles of the slain. The enemy fell back at last before his fury. Then came the general, who pinned a large medal on Joey's chest.

"You are a man," said the general, "and a soldier. Give me your hand."

Joey saluted, then fainted. In some dreams he never recovered; he was given a military funeral of considerable pomp. He even saw his tombstone, with the words carved on it:

PRIVATE JOSEPH PELL

He Died for His Flag

He saw Mrs. J. Goodhue Wilmerding, in black, sobbing. He saw Peggy Sturgis, inconsolable. He saw the pretty girls at the Home Trench in tears. He even saw the plump man with the traitorous feet turn his head away to hide his emotion.

In most of his dreams, however, he permitted himself to survive; badly wounded, of course. He saw himself nursed back to health by Peggy Sturgis, under the solicitous maternal eye of Mrs. Wilmerding. He saw himself given a good job by a grateful Government—something with a large salary and not much work.

He contrived to go to New York often. He invented sick sisters, dying mothers, important business of a private nature. He would step out into the rattling rush of the city with the tread of a conquerer. He liked the friendly, approving glances that were cast on him. His appetite for deference grew keen. It was an enormously fine feeling to swing with military step and carriage up Fifth Avenue on a crisp day, uniform pressed, shoes shined, and with campaign hat rakishly shading eyes that managed to look grim, warlike and noble all at the same time, and yet did not miss a single sign of interest or sympathy in a single passing face. It was a never-ending source of delight to Joey Pell that he could step to the curb and signal any of the handsome motor cars that were passing, and have the car stop for him, and be treated as an honored guest by the occupant and be driven wherever he wished to go. It was pleasant to know that he could not walk two blocks without having some well-dressed

person stop his motor car and invite Joey to have a ride. He spent whole days being taken up Fifth Avenue and then back again. He got so that he accepted offers only from the most expensive cars.

Always he found a ready welcome at the Home Trench. Mrs. Wilmerding was so gracious, and Peggy Sturgis so interested and so eager that he should feel at home. And there were many other places that opened their doors to him—clubs and rest rooms and private homes. He was called "buddy," and told many times how proud everyone was of him; he was, indeed, not a little proud of himself.

He was attacked by an urgent desire to live up to what was expected of him, to be a hero in reality, to win medals, to do violence to the enemy; his hate, daily more bitter, demanded an outlet.

He began to ask the sergeants, "When do we go across?"

They did not know, so they looked mysterious. He began to be worried; he had a fear that the war might be over before he could get into it. He even ventured to ask the captain when the regiment would sail. The captain, who did not know, looked mysterious. Joey's worry increased. His dreams became haunted by visions of an early peace or by the specter of himself being left behind when his regiment did, at last, sail. Why didn't it sail? Surely he was ready.

The day toward which all Joey Pell's thoughts had turned did come. The sergeants looked more mysterious than usual; the officers whispered together and looked very wise. At retreat the captain announced the news with a suitable gravity; Joey quivered from the peak of his campaign hat to the nail-studded soles of his army shoes.

"The regiment sails from Hoboken May fifth."

In all his life Joey Pell had never heard more exciting, more gratifying words. May fifth was but six days distant.

Joey cajoled a one-day pass to New York from the top sergeant. It was one of the brightest days he had ever known. Everyone was so kind to him. At the Home Trench they were especially nice to him; Mrs. Wilmerding had him to dinner in her own dining-room, and they had turkey. To Joey for anyone to have turkey at any time but Christmas was unheard-of luxury; it made him surer than ever that he was a personage. They all wrung his hand when at last, reluctantly, he left, bearing a load of wristlets, sweaters, trench mirrors, candy and cigarets.

The night before he was to sail Joey Pell did not sleep at all. He lay watching his equipment;

now and then he examined it to see if it was all there and in perfect order; he did not want to take the most minute chance or to risk in any way being left behind.

He was in M Company, which was to go aboard the transport last. He sat on the chilly pier, chafing. He wanted to get under way; he could not be sure he was actually going until the Statue of Liberty faded from view.

He heard a sergeant's staccato order: "Detail—Privates Leary, Kochanski, Pell——"

He sprang up and stood at attention with the others.

"Go aboard," the sergeant ordered, "and feed the mules."

Joey held back when he reached the hold where the artillery mules were; they were restless and were scuffling and biting in the half darkness. He decided that he had done his duty in bringing the pails of water that far; others could give them to the mules. But a watchful corporal spied him.

"Here, you!" shouted the corporal. "Water them mules."

But still Joey held back.

"Say, you ain't afraid of them, are you?" demanded the corporal scornfully.

"Naw," said Joey, "not exactly, but——"

"Don't be yella!" shot out the corporal. "Are you a soldier or ain't you?"

Joey picked up the pails resolutely; decidedly he was a soldier. He shouldered his way in among the mules; they seemed gigantic, grotesque in the dimness. He set down one of the pails. It was then that a mule lashed out with its steel-shod hoof. It hit Joey Pell squarely in the back of the head. Sharply a swift blackness fell on his brain.

At the military hospital in a deserted department store on lower Sixth Avenue, to which they rushed Joey Pell, the doctors said that his skull was crushed and that part of it was pressing on his brain. His regiment sailed without him; but Joey Pell never knew it.

His was a curious case, the doctors said. They were able to relieve some of the pressure on his brain, but not all of it. He continued to exist. But he existed as a vegetable does. The part of his brain that gave him memory did not work at all. He had no past, no yesterdays. Each day when he woke, it was as if he were freshly born. Certain habits remained—eating, dressing, simple motion. But he was quite unsensitive to impressions. Each day they told

him his name, and a moment later he forgot it. He never asked how he happened to be there; he never asked about anything; he simply sat in the corner of the private room they had given him, quiet, apathetic.

For two years the brain of Private Joseph Pell lay fallow. His mind simply closed up shop and went on a vacation. So, while he sat there, impervious to anything, in a perfect vacuum, his regiment fought, the Armistice was signed, his regiment returned, there was a triumphal march up Fifth Avenue, the regiment was demobilized, and the great city swallowed it once more. The soldiers who had been clerks returned to their counters, the soldiers who had been truckmen returned to their trucks.

It was May fifth, two years after Joey Pell's accident. The attendant on duty near Joey's room had gone to the floor below to play cards with another attendant. Joey Pell in his chair grew sleepy in the drowsy spring morning air. His head nodded forward on the bosom of his hospital nightshirt. He fell asleep. A fire engine bellowing past in the street below screamed with its siren under his window. The impact of the sound startled him awake. It jerked him upright in his chair; the sudden movement tipped the chair over and Joey Pell pitched backward to the floor; his head struck violently a sharp corner of his iron bed.

He lay for a moment where he had fallen; then slowly he pulled himself to his feet and stared, puzzled, about him. What was he, Private Joseph Pell, doing in this room on the day his regiment was to sail for the Front? Then he remembered; they had made him go among the mules; one of the mules must have kicked him and stunned him; certainly his head still buzzed; the fools had carted him to this hospital, thinking he was badly hurt; as if a kick in the head could hurt a soldier! Decisively Joey Pell tore the nightshirt from his body. His regiment was going to sail that day at noon, and he was going to sail with it.

He saw that he must act swiftly, but with caution. In the next ward soldiers were drowsing. Their uniforms hung on pegs by their beds. Joey commandeered the first uniform he came to; its owner was asleep. He was a very much bigger man than Joey, and the uniform was half a dozen sizes too large, so that it draped around Joey's meager frame in great folds. The purloined shoes were elevens, and Joey customarily wore fives. The hat came down over his ears; no matter; once aboard the transport, Joey knew he could get a new outfit. He hunted feverishly for his pack and his rifle. He could find no pack, but in a storeroom he did find a rifle. It was not his, for it was rusty and dusty, and his own was always clean and well cared for. He took it anyhow.

He had seen a clock, and saw that it was ten. He had two hours to get to Hoboken. He had no idea where he was and his knowledge of geography was limited, so he was not at all certain where Hoboken was; in Jersey, somewhere, he fancied. He slipped out of the hospital; his idea was to find the Hudson River and get a ferry. He saw from the street signs that he was at Sixth Avenue and Eighteenth Street; he breathed a sigh of relief. His problem

was simple; he had only to hail a passing motor car and ask its driver to take him to one of the downtown ferries. He turned toward Fifth Avenue.

A man was coming along the street toward Joey. He was a well-dressed man, and he was escorting an appreciable paunch. Joey smiled at him; the man scowled and increased his pace.

Joey reached Fifth Avenue. People were hurrying along. They did not smile at Joey Pell; they hardly glanced at him; when they did, it was with scant interest and no friendliness. He wondered about it.

A big motor car cruised slowly past; there was a lady in white summer furs in the back seat, and there were orchids in the silver vase. Joey held up his hand as a signal for the car to stop. The lady looked at him obliquely.

“Give us a lift,” called Joey Pell.

The lady leaned forward and said something to the chauffeur; the car jumped ahead and sailed at a swifter rate of speed down the Avenue. Joey looked after it; he scratched his head.

He signaled another car; it did not stop. He signaled another; it did not stop. He signaled others; none of them paid the least heed to him. He stood, perplexed, on the corner. Something hard prodded him in the ribs; it was the night stick of a policeman.

“Move along there, Jack,” ordered the policeman. “I been watchin’ you. If you wanna panhandle, go over on Broadway; Fifth Avenue is closed, see?”

“But——” sputtered Joey.

“Don’t give me no argument,” said the policeman sternly. “Beat it.”

He gave Joey another prod with his club. Joey moved down Fifth Avenue; he was a little giddy. He wished he had time to show that big stiff of a cop that he could not talk to a soldier that way, but time was going fast, and his regiment sailed at noon.

Joey Pell hurried along. He had no time to speculate about why no one smiled at him. He had an idea, and that was to go to the Home Trench, which was near Eleventh Street; Mrs. Wilmerding always had a car or two on hand; a word to her, and he’d be driven to Hoboken at top speed.

He ran up the steps of her stately house. Someone had taken down the Home Trench sign,

he noticed. He tried to open the door, but it was locked. That was odd, he thought; it had always been open from eight till six. It must be stuck, he thought. So he pressed the bell. A jowlish man with side bars came to the door and surveyed Joey in his tentlike uniform coldly.

“Well?” inquired the man.

Joey started to enter, but the man barred the way.

“Where are you going?” he demanded.

“Goin’ in,” said Joey. “Wanna see Mrs. Wilmerding.”

“You’ll have to be announced,” the man stated. “What are your name and business?”

“Why—er”—Joey stammered—“just tell her it’s Joey Pell—Private Pell. She knows me.”

“Wait here,” said the man, and he closed the door.

Joey Pell waited. It was all very strange, he thought. He could look in through the window and see the long front room; usually it was crowded with soldiers; this day it was empty; not quite empty, however. At a desk sat a well-nourished lady—Mrs. Wilmerding, unquestionably. Joey Pell felt greatly relieved.

The door opened a trifle. The side-barred man was there. “Mrs. Wilmerding is not at home,” he said.

Joey decided that the man was joking; that this was a new system of entertainment.

“Say, kid,” he said, “you ain’t looked very hard. I can see her right in there.”

“She’s not at home,” said the man; his voice was frigid.

“Say, cut the kiddin’,” said Joey. “My reg’ment sails at noon and I gotta get to Hoboken.” The butler appeared to be closing the door.

“Hey, Mrs. Wilmerding! Mrs. Wilmerding!” Joey called loudly.

She came out from her drawing room; her face was unsmiling.

“Jeffords,” she said to the butler, “what does he want?”

“I told him you were not at home, madam,” the butler said.

“Mrs. Wilmerding,” broke in Joey, “I gotta get to Hoboken—quick—see?—and I thought you could help me.”

“I advise you to apply to the Veteran’s Charity Bureau, in Madison Avenue,” she said, and shut the door.

Joey stood on the steps for two precious minutes. He wondered what he had done to offend her. But he knew he had no time to puzzle it out. He again started down the Avenue. And again he noticed that the faces of those who passed him were uninterested, without friendliness.

Out of the sea of faces swam a familiar one—Peggy Sturgis.

He saluted her and said, “Hello, Miss Sturgis. Well, I’m off.”

She did not return his salutation; she looked at him queerly, as if there were something curious about him.

“I beg your pardon?” she said.

“Say—you ain’t forgot me already?” blurted Joey Pell.

“I’m sorry,” she said coolly, “but I’m afraid I have. One met so many soldiers you know. I hope things are going well with you. Goodby.”

She was gone before he could catch his breath. What terrible thing had he done, he wondered. But he had no room in his mind for much wondering; his immediate problem was to get to Hoboken by noon. He pushed on toward Washington Square.

As he progressed along, at a half run, he overtook two men who were also going toward the square. Joey saw that they, too, were in uniform—but it was not khaki; it was a garish uniform, strange to him. He stopped short. But it was not the uniforms of the men that stopped him; it was their talk. They were talking in the language of the enemy. Joey Pell had learned to recognize it. Joey knew at once that they must be spies. He slackened his pace and followed close behind them. Fear hit him. If he captured the men he’d miss the transport. But it was his duty, he saw that, to capture them; he would do his duty.

Across the broad square he followed the two men. They headed for a crowd assembled in the southeast corner of the square. Joey did not take his eyes off them till they neared the crowd. Then he looked up, and his heart turned a somersault. His fingers closed tight on his

rifle. The crowd was forming in a military formation, and they all wore the same strange garish uniforms as the two spies; and furthermore, they were speaking the same language. Joey stopped and stared.

The uniformed men carried a banner; it bore words in a foreign language. The truth came to Joey Pell in a sickening flash: the enemy had captured New York! How or when, he did not know. But there they were; they held Washington Square. He watched them, petrified with horror and hate. He tried to decipher their flag, but it meant nothing to him. He could not read its inscription:

Young Men's Uniformed

Gymnastic and Singing

Society of the Reformed

Lutheran Church

He could not tell from their speech that they were assembling to march to the funeral of a deceased member. One thought filled his brain: the enemy had captured New York. Now he understood why the people had ignored him; they were afraid to do otherwise.

His hands tightened on his rifle; there was no question what his duty was; they were two hundred to one; but he was a soldier.

He fumbled at his belt for cartridges, then groaned as he realized he had none. Crouching behind a tree he drew from its scabbard the bayonet; his teeth bit into each other as he fixed the bayonet in its socket.

Then he jumped from behind his tree. His voice, high and shrill, sounded through the square.

"I'll show you, you devils; I'll show you!"

The surprised members of the uniformed gymnastic and singing society saw his fantastic figure come running toward them. At first they thought he was joking. Then, when they saw the leveled bayonet, they thought him crazy. Straight into the midst of them charged Private Joseph Pell. His big hat came down over his eyes, so the lunge he made with his bayonet at

the chest of the leader of the society missed its mark and the point became entangled in the sleeve of that astonished young gymnast and singer. The men were sure he was a madman now. They knocked him down on the granite pavement; Private Joseph Pell's head hit one of the blocks.

So ended the Battle of Washington Square, the briefest battle in history, and yet the only one where the American Army's casualties were 100 per cent.