



STRIKEBREAKERS

RALPH MORGAN

After three years of R. O. T. C. in high school three friends and I enlisted in Headquarters Company, 151st Infantry, Indiana National Guard. Ehle, the two Croucher brothers, and myself after a year of service had all been made corporals; and we were very proud of our stripes. It is no wonder that at the veteran age of seventeen (the minimum age for enlistment was eighteen) we were all anxious to go on strike duty to show those radicals in Terre Haute what we could do.

I was shopping down town when I heard the newsboys shouting that the Guard had been called for strike duty. Immediately there came to my mind the words of the basic field manual on riot

duty, "A well trained company should be able to march, fully equipped, from its armory an hour after receiving notice that it has been called for riot duty." The awful thought arose that perhaps my company would leave without me, and that I would miss all the excitement; so I practically ran the full distance to the Armory.

I arrived at the Armory panting. The clock said eleven thirty, and I found that besides the Captain I was the only member of my Company there. The Old Man set me to work calling the men on the roster and gradually they began to drift in. As a man came in he was given his pack to roll and the rest of his equipment — including a large, unfamiliar .45 caliber revolver which

he had probably never shot. By eight o'clock that night my outfit was ready to leave — twenty-five men out of a possible sixty four.

Ehle, the Croucher boys, and I managed to get in the same truck with Sergeant Wilkerson, our favorite three striper, and two or three other men. It was a beautiful moonlight July night and when the convoy had left the lights of Indianapolis far behind we stood to poke our heads outside the canvas cover to see the long line of army trucks stretching before and after us on the road.

When we reached Terre Haute we found that it was a dirty town with dark silent streets. The convoy arrived at the Armory, and we were ordered to dismount and to form ranks. We were then marched into the armory to receive some of the worst army grub I have ever tasted before or since, and some ammunition. At this time we were carefully instructed to place only five shells in our guns, leaving an empty cylinder under the firing pin since these pieces did not have any safety lock. We were also ordered not to fire under any but the most extreme circumstances unless ordered to do so by an officer. We were then remounted in trucks and began a slow journey to the stamping mill which was the center of the strike.

As the convoy neared its destination we could hear faint shouts and confused sounds. Bricks were hurled from dark alleys. Strong-lunged women shouted, "strikebreakers", "scabs", "tin-soldiers", and less printable names.

Ehle and the Croucher boys were sitting across from me and beneath the rims of their steel helmets in the fitting light of rare street lamps I could see the perspiration on their too-white foreheads. My own lips were dry and I must have looked as white as they.

Our truck suddenly turned a corner,

and much too close an unseen mob of angry men and women set up a howl of hate that ran chills up and down our backs. Ehle was whiter than any of us and spoke for all of us when he said, "I wish I hadn't come."

Missiles began to shower off of the canvas covers of the trucks, and close by we heard a series of pops that in our excitement passed for shots. We had not dismounted yet, and out of the back of the truck we could see the mob rushing madly away from the direction in which we were going. Our truck stopped, and the sergeant ordered us to dismount. We jumped out, grouped ourselves in the riot formation of the flying wedge, and stood orienting ourselves and awaiting orders from the lieutenant. He appeared on the run with a weapon resembling a sub-machine gun but which really fired only tear gas shells. He ordered us to double time and we followed him to the front of the factory where about ten blue-shirted police were firing tear gas into a mob of about five hundred weeping and cursing people. Since we were equipped with pistols that could easily be lost in hand to hand combat we were ordered to halt while the rifle outfits, their shining bayonets fixed, trotted grimly toward the mob. A few rocks were thrown, but, already bewildered and frightened by the tear gas, the mob broke and ran. We did not pursue very far because it was obvious that the violence of the mob had been replaced by fear. A deadline was established a few hundred yards from the factory, sentinels set up to guard it, and for us the war was over. Only routine policing was necessary for the next few days before the civil authorities were able to take the situation into their own hands.

Really very little happened to me or my friends during this incident. It was little more than a pleasant ride to and from Terre Haute, but yet, every Guardsman

who was there will remember it, not for the violence or the excitement, but for that scarcely describable spirit of utter fear, hatred, and contempt that came from the souls of those workers in the howl they gave on seeing us.

We broke the strike. "Loyal workers"

were escorted to and from the factory by police and Guardsmen. At the time, I remember, I was very proud of my part in this modern drama; but now, as I look back, I think I understand who was really right and every once in a while the scream of a lost cause comes faintly to my ears.

PRETTY IMPORTANT

BETTY GORDON

Haze from sputtering exhaust pipes drifted odorously to the nostrils of the little girl sitting on a low stoop. She peered near-sightedly at the cars rushing by her dilapidated house, scuffling the toe of her oxford in the grayed dust. Her prematurely wizened face was screwed up in an attitude faintly reminiscent of a white cat with sore eyes. Complacently she waited.

An attractive playmate bounced up to her side. "Hello, Eileen," she said hesitantly. "Can you play with me now?"

"Not now," answered the other. Importantly, she said, "My mother and father are getting a divorce."

Her friend regarded her skeptically. "I don't believe you," she said.

"Yes, they are," said Eileen, wrinkling her nose disdainfully. "Just because your parents can't get one — you're jealous, that's what." She smiled, thinking of the new status a divorce would give her.

"They could too, if they wanted to. Don't you really think they could?" she asked anxiously.

"No," said Eileen. A quarrel seemed to be imminent, but the girls' attention was distracted by the approach of a slovenly looking, uncorseted woman. The hard lines of the woman's mouth tightened as she saw the two.

"Did you get it? Did you get it?" screamed the child ecstatically, tugging at her mother's dress.

"Yeah," she said raucously. Irritably she pushed away the girl's hand. "Yeah. I got rid of that lousy father of yours. And he better not try to skin out of paying that six bucks support money, neither, that's all I got to say."

The mother looked as if she would like to slap her, even lacking express provocation. Eileen sensed her hostility. "I been good, Mom. I just been settin' here waitin'," she said.

The woman stalked into the house, her pudgy posterior wobbling ominously.

Eileen sighed, blissfully unaware of her companion. Her friend watched her with mingled awe and disbelief. "They really did get it," she murmured incredulously.

"Yes, they really and truly did. Now you just wait 'n see the things they get me." Eileen had half-awakened from her trance.

"Let's go tell the other kids," shouted her friend. "Won't they wish their folks would get one too?"

Eileen preened herself contentedly, anticipating her potential importance to the rest of the human young.

"There's the little girl whose mother and father got a divorce," she heard them, her neighbors, say enviously.

Her face composed itself into a modest smirk, the lines of her body settling into a correspondingly smug contour. In anticipatory delight, she scuffed the toe of her oxford in the grayed dust.