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SATURDAY MORNING, JULY 27, 1918.

NEW TORCHY STORIES

OLD HICKORY ELLINS

By SEWELL FORD—Copyright, 1918, By the McClure Newspaper Syndicate

ANYBODY WOULD MOST think I'd been with the Corrugated Trust long enough to know that Old Hickory Ellins generally gets what he wants, whether it's quick action from an office boy or a two-thirds majority vote from the board of directors. But once in a while I seem to forget, and shortly after that I'm wonderin' if it was a tank I went up against so solid, or if someone threw the bond safe at me.

What let me in wrong this last time was a snappy little remark I got shot my way right here in the general offices. I was just back from a three day's chase after a delayed shipment of bridge girders and steel wheelbarrows that was billed for France in a rush, and I'd got myself disliked by most of the traffic managers between here and Altoona, to say nothing of freight conductors, yard bosses and so on. But I'd untangled those nine cars and got 'em movin' toward the North river, and now I was steamin' through a lot of office detail that had piled up while I was gone. I'd lunched luxurious on an egg sandwich and a war doughnut that Vincent had brought up to me from the arcade automat, and I'd 'phoned Vee that I might not be out home until the 11.13, when in blows this potty party with the poison ivy leaves on his shoulder straps and demands to see Mr. Ellins at once. Course, it's me with my heels together doin' the zippy salute.

"Sorry, Major," says I, "but Mr. Ellins won't be in until 10.30."

"Hah!" says he, like bitin' off a piece of glass. "And who are you, Lieutenant?"

"Special detail from the Ordance Department, sir," says I.

"Oh, you are, eh?" he snorts. "Another bomb-proofer! Well, tell Mr. Ellins I shall be back at 11.15—if this sector hasn't been captured in the meantime," and as he double-quicks out he near runs down Mr. Piddie our rubber-stamp officer manager, who has towed him in.

As for me, I stands there swallowin' air bubbles until my red-headed disposition got below the boiling point once more. Then I turns to Piddie.

"You heard didn't you?" says I.

Piddie nods. "But I don't quite understand," says he. "What did he mean by—er—bomb-proofer?"

"Just rank flattery, Piddie," says I. "The rankest kind. It's his way of indicatin' that I'm a yellow dog hidin' under a roll-top desk for fear someone'll kick me out where a parlor Pomeranian will look cross at me. Excuse me if I don't seem to work up a blush. Fact is, though, I'm gettin' kind of used to it."

"Oh, I say, though!" protests Piddie, "Why, everyone knows that you——"

"That's where you're dead wrong, Piddie," I breaks in, "What everybody really knows is that while most of the young hicks who've been Plattburged into uniforms are already across Periscope Pond helpin' swat the Hun. I'm still floatin' around here with nothing worse than car dust on my tailor-built khaki. Why, even them bold liberty bond patriots who commute on the 8.03 are tired of asking me when I'm going to be sent over to tell Pershing how it ought to be done. But when it comes to an old crab of a swivel chair major chuckin' 'bomb-proofer' in my teeth—well, I guess that'll be about all. Here's where I get a revise or quit. Right here."

And it was sentiments like that only may be worded not quite so brash, that I passed out to Old Hickory a little later on. He listens about as sympathetic as a traffic cop hearin' why you tried to rush the stop signal.

"I think we have discussed all that before young man," says he. "The War Department has recognized that, as the head of an essential industry, I am entitled to a private secretary; also that you might prove more useful with a commission than without one. And I rather think you have. So there you are."

"Excuse me, Mr. Ellins," says I, "but I can't see it that way. I don't know whether I'm private seccing or getting ready for a masquerade ball. Any one-legged man could do what I'm doing. I'm ready to chuck the commission and enlist."

"Really!" says he. "Well, in the first place, my son, a war time commission is something one doesn't chuck back at the United States Government because of any personal whim. It isn't being done. And then again, you tried enlisting once, didn't you, and were turned down?"

"But that was early in the game," says I, "when the recruiting officers werne't passing any but young Sandows. I could get by now. Have a heart, Mr. Ellins. Lemme make a try."

He chews his cigar a minute, drums thoughtful on the mahogany desk, and then seems to have a bright little idea.

"Very well, Torchy," says he, "we'll see what my friend Major Wellby, can do for you when he comes in."

"Him!" says I. "Why, he'd do anything for me that the law didn't stop him from."

And sure enough, when the major drifts in again them two was shut in the private office for more'n half an hour before I'm called in. I could guess just by the way the Major glares fond at me that if he could work it he'd get me a nice, easy job mowin' the grass in No Man's Land, or some snap like that.

"Huh!" says he, givin' be the night-court up and down. "Wants an active command, does he! And his training has been what? Four years as office boy, three as private secretary! It's no use, Ellins. We're not fighting this war with waste baskets or typewriters, you know."

"Oh, come, Major!" puts in Old Hickory. "Why be unreasonable about this? I will admit that you may be right, so far as it's being folly to send this young man to the front. But I do insist that as a lieutenant he is rather useful just where he is."

"Bah!" snorts the Major. "So is the farmer who's raising hogs and corn. He's useful. But we don't put shoulder straps on him, or send him to France in command of a company. For jobs like that we try to find youngsters who've been trained to handle men; who know how to get things done. What we don't want is—eh? Someone calling me on the 'phone? All right. Yes, this is Major Wellby. What? Oh, it can't be done today! Yes, yes! I understand all that. But see here, Captain, that transport is due to sail at—Hey, Central! I say, Central! Oh, what's the use?"

And as the Major hangs up the receiver his face looks like a strawb'ry shortcake just ready to serve. Somehow Mr. Ellins seems to be enjoyin' the Major's rush of temperament to the ears. Anyhow, there's a familiar flicker under them bushy eyebrows of his and I ain't at all surprised when he remarks soothin': "I gather, Major, that someone can't seem to get something done."

"Precisely," says the Major, moppin' a few pearly beads off his shiny dome. "And when a regular army captain makes up his mind that a thing can't be done—well, it's hopeless, that's all. In this instance, however, I fear he's right, worse luck!"

"Anyway," suggests Mr. Ellins, "he has made you think that the thing is impossible, eh?"

"Think!" growls the Major, glacin' suspicious at Old Hickory. "I say, Ellins, what are you getting at? Still harping on that red tape notion, are you? Perhaps you imagine this to be a case where, if you could only turn loose your wonderful organization, you could work a miracle?"

"No, Major," says Old Hickory. "We don't claim to deal in miracles; but when we decide that a thing out to be done at a certain time—we'll generally it gets done."

"Just like that, eh?" grins the Major sarcastic. "Really, Ellins, you big business men are too good to be true. But see here; why not tap your amazing efficiency for my benefit. This little job, for instance, which one of our poor misguided captains reports as impossible within the time limit. I suppose you would merely press a button and——"

"Not even that,' breaks in Mr. Ellins. "I would simply turn it over to Torchy here—and he'd do it."

The Major glances at me careless and shrugs his shoulders. "My dear Ellins," says he, "you probably don't realize it, but that's the sort of stuff which adds so much to the horrors of war. Here you haven't the vaguest idea as to what——"

"Perhaps," cuts in Old Hickory, "but I'll bet you a hundred to twenty-five."

"Taken," says the Major. Then he turns to me. "When can you start, Lieutenant?"

"As soon as I know where I'm starting for, sir,' says I.

"How convenient," says he. "Well, then, here is an order on the New York Telephone Co. for five spools of wire which you'll find stored somewhere on Central Park South. See if you can get 'em."

"Yes, sir," says I. "And suppose I can?"

"Report to me at the Plutoria before 5.30 this afternoon," says he. "I shall be having tea there. Ellins, you'd better be on hand, too, so that I can collect that hundred."

And that's all there was to it. I'm handed a slip of paper carrying the Quartermaster General's O. K., and while these two old sports are still chucklin' at each other I've grabbed my uniform cap off the roll-top and have caught an express elevator.

Course, I expect a frame-up. All them army officers are hard boiled eggs when it comes to risking real money, and I knew the Major must think his twenty-five was as safe as if he'd invested it in Thrift Stamps. As for Old Hickory Ellins, he'd toss away a hundred any time on the chance of pulling a bluff. So I indulges in a shadowy little grin myself and beats it up town.

Simple enough to locate them spools of wire. Oh, yes! They're right in the middle of the block between Sixth and Broadway, tucked away inconspicuous among as choice a collection of contractor's junk as you can find anywhere in town, and that's sayin' a good deal. But maybe you've noticed what's been happenin' long there where Fifty-ninth street gets hib-toned? Looks like an earthquake had wandered by, but it's only that down below they're connectin' the new subway with another East river tunnel. And if there's anything in the way of old derricks, or scrap iron, or wooden beams, or construction sheds that ain't been left lying around on top it's because they didn't have it on hand to leave.

Cute little things, them spools are, too; about six feet high, three wide, and weighin' a ton or so each I should judge. And to make the job of movin' 'em all the merrier an old cement mixer has been at work right next to 'em and the surplus concrete has been thrown out until they've been bedded in as solid as so many bridge piers. I climbs around and takes a look.

"How cunnin'!" says I. "Why, they'd make the Rock of Ages look like a loose front tooth. And all I got at a time, Ha, ha! Likewise, tee-hee!"

It sized up like a bad case of bee bite with me at the wrong end of the stinger. Still, I was just muleish enough to stick around. I had nearly three hours left before I'd have to listen to the Major's mirthsome cackle, and I might as well spend part of it thinkin' up fool schemes. So I walks around that cluster of cement-set spools some more. I even climbs on top of one and gazes up and down the block.

They were still doing things to make it look less like a city street and more like the ruins of Louvain. Down near the Fifth avenue gates was the fenced-in mouth of a shaft that led somewhere into the bowels of Manhattan. And while I was lookin' out climbs a Dago, unrolls a dirty red flag, and holds up the traffic until a dull "Boom" announces that the offensive is all over for half an hour or so. Up towards Columbus Circle more industry was goin' on. A steam roller was smoothin' out a strip of pavement that had just been re-laid, and nearer by a gang was tearin' up more of the asphalt. I got kind of interested in the way they was doin' it, too. You know, they used to do this street wreckin' with picks and crowbars, but this crowd seemed to have more modern methods. They was usin' three of these pneumatic drills and they sure were ripping it up slick and speedy. About then I noticed that their compressor was chugging away nearly opposite me and that the lines of hose stretched out fifty feet or more.

"Say!" says I jerky and breathless, but to nobody in particular. I was just registerin' the fact that I'd had a sudden thought.

A few minutes before, too, I'd seen a squad of rookies wander past and into the park. I remembered noticin' what a husky, tanned lot they were and from their hat cords that they belonged to the artillery branch. Well, that was enough. In a flash I'd shinned over the stone wall and was headin' 'em off.

You know how these cantonment delegations wander around town aimless when they're dumped down here on leave waiting to be shunted off quiet onto some transport? No friends, mighty little money, and nothing to do but tramp the streets or hang around the Y. They actually looked kind of grateful when I stops 'em and returns their salute. As luck would have it there's a top sergeant in the bunch, so I don't have to make a reg'lar speech.

"It's this way, sergeant," says I. "I'm looking for a few volunteers."

"There's ten of us, sir," says he, "with not a thing on our hands but time."

"Then perhaps you'll help me put over something on a boss ditch digger,' says I. "It's nothing official, but it may help General Pershing a whole lot."

"We sure will," says the sergeant. "Now then, men. 'Shun! And forget those dope sticks for a minute. How'll you have 'em, Lieutenant—twos or fours?"

"Twos will look more impressive, I guess," says I. 'And just follow me."

"Fall in!' says the sergeant. "By twos. Right about! March!"

So when I rounds into the street again and bears down on this gang foreman I has him bug-eyed from the start. He don't seem to know whether he's being pinched or not.

"What's your name, my man?" says I, wavin' the Q. M.'s order threatenin'.

It's Mike something or other, as I could have guessed without him near chokin' to get it out.

"Very well, Mike," I goes on, as important as I knew how. "See those spools over there that you people have done your best to bury? Well, those have been requisitioned from the Telephone Company by the U. S. Army. Here's the order. Now I want you to get busy with your drill gang and cut 'em loose."

"But—but see here, boss,' sputters Mike, "'tis a private contract they're workin' on and I couldn't be after——"

"Couldn't, eh?" says I. "Lemme tell you something. That wire has to go on a transport that's due to sail the first thing in the morning. It's for the Signal Corps and they need it to stretch a Headquarter's line into Berlin."

"Sorry, boss," says Mike, "but I wouldnt dast to——"

"Sergeant," says I, "do you duty."

Uh-huh! That got Mike all right. And when we'd yanked him up off his knees and convinced him that he wouldn't be shot for an hour or so yet he's so thankful that he gets those drills to work in record time.

It was a first-class hunch, if I do have to admit it myself. You should have seen how neat them rapid fire machines begun unbuttonin' those big wooden spools, specially after a couple of our doughboy squad, who'd worked pneumatic riviters back home, took hold of the drills. Others fished some hand sledges and crow-bars out of a tool shed and helped the work along, while Mike encourages his gang with a fluent line of foreman repartee.

Course, I didn't have the whole thing doped out at the start, but gettin' away with this first stab only showed me how easy it was if you wasn't bashful about callin' for help. From them on I didn't let much assistance get away from me, either. Yankin' the spools out to the street level by hookin' on the steam roller was my next play, but commandeerin' a sand blast outfit that was at work half way down the block was all Mike's idea.

"They need smoothin' up a bit, boss," says he.

And inside of half an hour we had all five of them spools lookin' new and bright, like they'd just come from the mill.

"What next, sir?" asks the sergeant.

"Why,' says I, "the fussy old Major who's so hot for getting these things is waiting at the Plutoria about ten blocks down. Maybe he wants 'em there. I wonder if we could——"

"Sure!" says the sergeant. "This heavy gun bunch can move anything. Here! I'll show 'em how."

With that he runs a crowbar through the center of one of the spools, puts a man on either side to push, and rolls it along as easy as weelin' a baby carriage.

"Swell tactics, sergeant,' says I. "And just for that I'm goin' to provide your squad with a little music. Might as well do this in style, eh? Wait a minute."

And it wasn't long before I was back from another dash into the park towin' halt a drum corps that I'd borrowed from some Junior Naval Reserves that was drillin' over on the ballfield.

So it was some nifty little parade that I finally lines up to lead down Fifth avenue. First there's me, then the drum corps, then the sergeant and his men rollin' them spools of wire. We strings out for more'n a block.

You'd think New Yorkers were so used to parades by this time that you couldn't get 'em stretchin' their necks for anything less'n a regiment of hand-picked heroes. They've seen the French Blue Devils at close range, gawped at the Belgians, and chummed with the Anzacs. But, say, this speel-pushin' stunt was a new one on 'em. Folks just lined the curb and stared. Then some bird starts to cheer and it's taken up all down the line, just on faith

"Hey, pipe the new rollin' tanks!" shouts someone.

"Gwan!" sings out another wise guy. "Them's wooden bombs they're goin' to drop on Willie."

"It's the first time I've been counted in on any of this hooray stuff, and I cant say I hated it. At the same time I tried not to look too chesty. But when I wheeled the procession into the side street and got 'em bunched two deep in front of the Plutoria's carriage entrance I ain't sure but what I was wearin' kind of a satisfied grin.

Not for long, though. The six-foot taxi starter in the rear admiral's uniform jumps right in with the prompt protest. He wants to know what the blinkety-blink I think I'm doin' blockin' up his right of way in that fashion.

"You can't do it! Take 'em away!" says he.

"Ah, keep the lid on, old Goulash," says I. "Sergeant, if he gets messy, roll one of those spools on him. I'll be back shortly."

With that I blows into the Plutoria and hunts up the tea room. The Major's there, all right, and Mr. Ellins, also a couple of ladies. They're just bein' served with Oolong and caviar sandwiches.

"Ah!" says the Major, as he spots me. "Our gallant young office lieutenant, eh? Well, sir, anything to report?"

"The spools are outside, sir," says I.

"Wh—a—at!" he gasps.

"Where'll you have 'em put, sir?" says I.

About then, though, in trails the taxi starter, the manager and a brace of house detectives.

"Thats him!" says the started, pointin' me out. "He's the one that's blockin' traffic."

I will say this for the Major, though, he's a good sport. He comes right to the front and takes all the blame.

I'm responsible," he tells the manager. "It's perfectly all right, too. Military necessity, sir. Well, perhaps you don't like it, but I'll have you understand, sir, I could block off your whole street if I wished. So clear out, all of you."

"Why, Horace!" puts in one of the ladies, grabbin' him by the arm.

"Yes, yes, my dear," says the Major. "I know. No scene. Certainly not. Only these hotel persons must be put in their place. And if you will excuse me for a moment I'll see what can be done. Come, Lieutenant. I want to get a look at those spools myself."

Well, he did. "But—but I understood," says he, "that they were stuck in concrete or something of the kind."

"Yes sir," says I. "We had to unstick 'em. Pneumatic drills and a steam roller. Very simple."

"Great Scott!" says he. "Why didn't that fool Captain think of—— But, see here, I don't want 'em here. Now, if we could only get them to Pier 14——"

"That would be a long way to roll 'em, sir," says I, "but it could be done. Loadin' 'em on a couple of army trucks would be easier, though. There's a Quartermaster's depot at the foot of Fifty-seventh street, you know."

"So there is," says he. "I'll call them up. Come in, will you, Lieutenant and—and join us at tea? You've earned it, I think."

Three minutes more and the Major announces that the trucks are on the way.

"Which means, Ellins," he adds, "that you win your twenty-five. Here you are."

"If you don't mind," says Old Hickory, "I'll keep this and pass on my hundred to Torchy here. He might like to entertain his volunteer squad with it."

Did I? Say, when I got through showin' that bunch of far west artillery husks how to put in a real pleasant evening along Broadway there wasn't enough change left to buy a sportin' extra. But they'd had chow in the giddiest lobster palace under the white lights, they'd occupied two boxes at the zippiest girl show in town.

And next mornin', when Old Hickory comes paddin' into the general offices he stops to put me friendly on the shoulder.

"I think we have succeeded in revising the Major's opinion," he remarks, "as to the general utility of bombproofers in certain instances."

I grins up at him. "Then," says I, "do I get a recommend for active duty within jabbin' distance of the Huns?"

"We did, consider that," says Old Hickory, "but the decision was just as I suspected from the first. The Major says it would be a shame to waste you on anything less than a divisional command, and there aren't enough of those to go around. Chiefly, though, he thinks that anyone who is able to get things done in New York in the wizard-like way that you can should be kept within call of Governor's Island. So I fear, Torchy, that you and President Wilson and I will have to go on serving our country right here."

"All right, Mr. Ellins," says I. "I expect you win—as per usual."

MONCTON EXPERIMENT ATTRACTS ATTENTION

Train Telephone Test Described in United States Publications — Representative of United States Government Interested in Invention and It Appears To Be Success—Was Tried a Year Ago—Interesting Problem Opened Up.

A successful test of telephone communication between a train-despatcher's office and a moving train has recently been made by the Canadian Government. This has been accomplished before, but the present device embodies some features that are said to make it usable in a practical way. The track is used as the conductor, and the electrical current reaches the moving train through its wheels. The test, as described in Railway and Locomotive Engineering (New York), was made between Moncton and Humphrey's station, on the Canadian Government Railways. The apparatus was devised by a New York firm and a representative of the United States Government was present. Communication was set up not only between the dispatcher and the train, several miles away, but between the conductor and the engineer of the same train, and it is declared feasible to make a moving train a rgular station on the lines of a city telephone exchange. Says the authority named above:

'During the test, which was very complete, the conversations were carried on between the moving train and the dispatcher's office in a clear and distinct manner.

"The engine was cut off from the car and proceeded a mile down the track by orders telephoned from the conductor to the engineer.

"The engine was then stopped by telephone orders from the conductor, who was on the car, and instructed to come back and couple up again. Then an order was given by the conductor to back up the train and take on the flagman, who had gone back to flag.

"Before backing up, a telephone message was sent to the dispatcher's office, asking if it was safe to back up, and the answer by telephone from the dispatcher was that this would be all right.

"After backing up to the flagman, the order was received from the dispatcher's office to go ahead to Humphrey's, and cross over to the other track and come back to Moncton. Before reaching Humphrey's a second telephone message was received from the dispatcher countermanding the previous order to cross over, but to return to Moncton on the same track, as the train was protected from the rear.

"All these instructions were transmitted by telephone from the dispatcher's office to the conductor on the car and by him transmitted to the engineer by telephone, while the car was running, showing that it is perfectly feasible to control a moving train by telephone from the dispatcher's office at a distent point.

"Communication was also established between the moving train and the city telephone service. The Canadian Government Railway officials express themseives as thoroughly satisfied with the practicability of the whole test, the equipment used, and the highly important work which was then, and can always be done by this means, of reaching a train which is usually, under such circumstances, completely out of the range of control and entirely beyond help.

"oNt only is the startling statement made, but it has been verified that communication is possible to establish between a moving train and the telephone-service, which makes it possible for one to talk directly through the telephone in one's hotel-room to some one on a train one hundred miles away running sixty miles an hour."

The material used in installing the railway telephone is declared not to be at all costly, but to consist of standard goods found in any well-equipped electrical supply-house throughout the country and to be easily applicable. We read further:

"Telephone wires are attached to the front and rear trucks of any form of cars now in use on the various railroads The wires are attached to the engine and to the tender. The voice-transmission takes place through the wheels and down to the rails, where it runs along and is picked up by the engineer, conductor or dispatcher, which ever party the signal indicates the message is for.

"Just here a most interesting and exceedingly useful feature of the whole scheme of telephoning to a train by means of track circuit and wheels, axles, and train-wires should be mentioned. It is this: The block signal system divides the track into sections, and each section can be reached separately. In this country an accident might destroy a section or a 'block,' but the block on each side of the mutilated one could be reached bby telephone, and a train in front or behind the wreck could be spoken to as if nothing had happened. This feature, excellent as it is for us, might be of priceless value in France, where the United States Government has miles of railway behind the Allied line.

"Here, mistake, inadvertence, or accident may destroy a sectional block of track, and we would find the telephone with this feature of the highest utility. Not so, in degrees of convenience only, in France. There the enemy of liberty, free thought, and strong development constantly endeavors to break the continuity of the line. If evil fortune permits him, with some high explosive, to destroy a 'block' of track, he but hampers a bit of the line because the telephone can reach trains on either side or the damaged portion. Thus are those who have enslaved science and made her work for ignoble ends, and prostituted the knowledge God has given us as a reward for hard labor and conscientious thought—these men are beaten at their own game by applied science, and it is from this country that the new thought and impulse come.

"It is not for us to prescribe a course of action to the Government or to say that this or that remedy is infallible. We offer this suggestion, however, that the Government look into this whole matter of telephone connection to a moving train and the adjunct that goes with it of reaching trains separated by an impassable area or trains in distress, or those that as they proceed may pick up information priceless to the Army.

"If not used here at present, the telephone will some day be so used, but its utility for military lines, looks to us to be of the highest value today, when freedom stands with its back against the wall fighting for the right."

BRINGING UP FATHER BY McMANUS