

FIRST LIGHT

"Gentlemen, your opportunity is at hand, the period of preparation has long since passed; for tomorrow our troop has been ordered to move forward in defense of 'Last Chance Saloon' on the Plains of Salisbury." This was the purpose for our being assembled together at a most unexpected time by our troop officer, Lt. M. O. Lane.

Silence prevailed and we all looked at one another with amazement although this event was expected by us for some time. The detailed plans having been concluded, we were dismissed and hustled to No. 2 Hut. As we prepared our kits, cleaned our rifles, and provided extra provisions of food and clothing, the air was filled with many and varied questions: When will we arrive at Last Chance? What will it be like? How long will we be there? etc.

The following morning, the beginning of a bright summer day, we left camp. Our troop was divided into three sections of ten men each and we marched in single line formation. The day became very warm and we had gone many miles. In mid-afternoon according to our map, we found ourselves nearing our final goal. With great fatigue, although revived somewhat by a light lunch and a cup of cold tea, we pushed on towards the sandy and poison ivy Plains of Salisbury. The last light of day found us making final preparations. Our "O" group, of which I was a member, was called together and future plans were discussed. Our troop officer united us into one section with himself as section commander. With a short review of fundamental tactics and precautions, the route we were to follow, and special assignments designated to some of our men, we moved on in the stillness of the night. The sand beneath our feet was still warm from the heat of the day and in the distance we could see the sandy hills silhouetted against the clear and starry sky.

About two hours after midnight, the order was given to dig in and take up a defensive position. With each man to a particular task, we soon found ourselves well protected in case of necessity by six-foot slit trenches. It was at this point that we witnessed the first heart-throbbing experience of warfare. A lighted flare exploded above our heads and slowly fluttered down behind a single row of

evergreen trees. Thus we were enabled to put into real practice the first element of our training program. We had been warned so emphatically by our instructors concerning the procedure to follow in the event of being spotted by the enemy, that it seemed of little importance.

About one hour of intense waiting and nervous tension had passed when word was passed silently from trench to trench that we were to put in an attack at "first light" on our enemy who were about seven hundred yards away. This, we all realized, was the crucial moment and "now or never" was written on the lips of everyone.

When the light of day seemed to push aside the shroud of night, our patrol was called in, we buckled our helmets, picked up our rifles and proceeded in extended line of advance. Each one making sure that his rifle magazine was filled, we slowly and silently approached an open field which lay between us and the enemy. In view of a surprise attack we put our smoke bombs to use by making a smoke screen which rolled across the field in a favourable direction. As "first light" could be well defined, our section moved slowly and carefully through the cloud of smoke retaining the same formation. At any moment we knew that when our deceptive device was no longer hiding us, we would be face to face with our enemy. Seconds were like minutes and minutes like hours but finally we broke the camouflage of protection. The stillness in the wake of day was broken by loud shouts and battle cries. The great din of combat was re-echoed by rifle bullets, the automatic firing of "Bren" guns and the smell of powder filled the air. We all felt, as I did, that we must carry it through; we must stay in there and fight to the bitter end. The morale of our men was high and with victory in sight, we concentrated our line of fire on the enemy flanks. After fifteen minutes of bitter effort our task was accomplished. The battle-scarred outpost of Last Chance Saloon was evacuated and the greatest strong-hold on Salisbury plains was won.

—FLOYD McGAUGH '53.

His corn and cattle were his only care,
And his supreme delight, a country fair.

—Dryden