Your Country Needs You

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

By Frederick Faust

"Home guard?" queried Peter Crittenden.

Peter Crittenden, Sr., stopped in his pacing to and fro through the big library to glance at the picture which hung on the wall above his head. It showed a white-haired old man in a colonel's uniform of the Civil War period, and as he looked at it Peter Crittenden, Sr., stiffened somewhat like a soldier preparing to salute a superior officer. His face darkened as he turned again toward his son and said:

"At least your heart is right, Peter."

Young Peter did not raise his head, but continued staring at the crack in the floor which had occupied his attention for most of the last hour.

"Home guard!" he repeated.

Peter Crittenden, Sr., cleared his throat and stretched himself to his full five feet four and a half inches.

"The home guard," he said, "is not a disgrace."

His son made no answer.

"And all Crittendens must find some way of serving their country, no matter in what capacity," went on the elder man.

"The home guard!" repeated Peter.

"What else is there you can do?" asked the father a little sharply.

"I was bantam-weight champion at college," said Peter vaguely.

"How tall are you?" asked Mr. Crittenden.

"I was coxswain to the crew for three years," went on Peter in the same dull voice.

"How tall are you?" insisted Mr. Crittenden.

"I subbed at quarter-back for two years and played ten minutes in the last big game," droned Peter.

"How tall are you?" asked Mr. Crittenden.

Peter raised his head and sighed deeply before he replied.

"Five feet three and three-quarters," he said.

Mr. Crittenden strode across the room to the library table and picked from it a little handbill covered with large typeprint.

"Your country needs you!" he read "You must have the will to serve your country, be at least five feet four inches high, weigh over one hundred and twenty pounds stripped; have good eyes, good teeth, good feet; between eighteen and forty-five years; have at least taken out your first papers. If you have any doubts, let the surgeon look you over. Be a man. Join now!"

"Five feet four inches!" sighed Peter miserably.

A little silence came on them again. Mr. Crittenden paced slowly up and down the room once more, with one arm folded across his chest, which was swelled not to its greatest capacity, while his other hand alternately tugged and twisted at his mustache.

"I am only a quarter of an inch under height," said Peter.

"A miss," stated Mr. Crittenden philosophically, "is as good as a mile."

"I am only two pounds under weight," went on Peter.

"When the country becomes hard pressed for men," said Mr. Crittenden, "you may be taken."

"Dad," broke in Peter, rising now from his chair and approaching his father with one hand extended in appeal, "you have lots of pull. You know lots of the authorities. Some of the men who fought with you through the Spanish-American war have big positions in the army now. Can't you do something for me?"

Mr. Crittenden turned his head slowly and observed his son with a critical eye.

"A bad precedent," he declared, shaking his head. "It will not do to deceive the country even in these small matters, Peter, my boy."

"Johnnie Stillson enlisted in the coast patrol yesterday," said Peter, returning to his chair and slumping into it as if the muscular frame of his lithe body had suddenly given way.

Mr. Crittenden coughed and turned his head away quickly.

"Johnnie roomed with you for three years at college, didn't he?" he asked.

"Harry Maxwell was accepted last week; he went today to join his unit," went on Peter, as if he had not heard the last remark.

"There is no disgrace attached to the home guard," insisted Mr. Crittenden.

Peter sprang to his feet.

"Damn the home guard!" he thundered in a voice that shook him from head to foot. "Do you think I'm a fossil or a baby or neurathenic, or a one-legged man or the father of a family or an applicant for an old ladies' home?"

His father found it necessary to cough again.

"I am going out now and do the rounds of the enlisting offices," stated Peter. "There's a ghost of a chance for me. A ghost of a chance, eh, dad; and my country needs me, that's what the poster says."

But his father turned his back and was staring once more up to the military figure whose picture hung on the wall above his head. Peter turned and walked quietly and rapidly from the room.

He tried his fortune first at the little dingy group of khaki tents which stand in the midst of Columbus Circle. His start went fast enough as he worked his way through the little crowd of men not ready to enlist but waiting to watch those who would with a vulgar emotion, half pity and half curiosity.

The preliminaries passed rapidly, and Peter went into a small enclosure with two other men and stripped to the skin. He worked slowly thinking hard as he undressed.

The other men were naked before him. He looked curiously from one to the other of them; to the straight, flabby lines of their upper arms, to the significant prominence of their elbows and knees.

Then he glanced down oer his own body with a pardonable pride. He was not heavily built, but every muscle stood delicately defined under the pink skin as if it had been outlined at the edge with a faint blue pencil.

He stood lightly on one foot. The muscles along his shin leaped out hard and long. Many a long jog around the cinder path and across country had made his legs as hard as steel and as toughly pliable as tanned leather.

Above his knee the thigh muscles tensed to a thousand intertwisted cords, split deeply down the center. There was the driving power which had many times sent him into the football line so hard and so low that, despite his lack of weight, he had been able to writhe through for the needed yards.

He looked with deep contempt on the hollow inward curve of the chests of the other three; then he put his hands on his hips and drew a deep breath. His chest swelled like a pouter pigeon's and every bone of the ribs stood out.

He stretched his arms now and clinched his fists. The muscles on the back of the forearm bulged and quivered like a hundred whip-lashes tied together, and on the point of the shoulder appeared deeply carved lines. They had supplied the speed and the punching power which had made him feared even among the featherweights and lightweights of the boxing classes at college.

"James Maxwell!" called a voice.

One of the men rose from the stool on which he sat and stepped into the next room. Peter sat down to wait, tugging his summer overcoat around his body. In a few moments Maxwell returned.

"Get by?" queried one of the two who had appeared with Maxwell at the enlisting station.

"Sure," he answered, without enthusiasm. "The examination is a joke. All you got to do is to be measured and have your chest expansion taken, and then read off a card and do a few little things like that."

Peter started at the gaunt figure with a vague wonder.

"What was your chest expansion?" he asked.

"Two and a half inches," said the other, "that's half an inch more than requirements. I could have done another quarter of an inch if I'd tried hard. But I don't care whether they take me or not. I can go back to work any day for as much money as I get here."

"Peter Crittenden!" called a voice from the outer room.

Peter rose, cast off his overcoat and walked into the outer room.

A large man in his khaki shirt stood there with a tape in his hand and beckoned to Peter.

"Stand over here," he ordered.

Peter went obediently and stood on the little platform while the doctor drew the measuring apparatus down to his head. He looked at it narrowly.

"Step out from under," he commanded.

Peter obeyed.

"Now step on again and, mind you, stand straight."

Peter swelled out his chest, straightened his back and stepped on again.

"Five feet three and three-quarters," announced the doctor. "Afraid you won't do, my man!"

"Won't do? echoed Peter faintly.

"Quarter of an inch shy, that's all. Otherwise you look pretty fit," said the doctor. "John Lawrence! That's all for you—er—Crittenden!"

Peter turned and walked with head down. He had made up his mind that if one of the three in the other room asked if he had passed he would reply with his fists. But they paid no attention to him. They were busy rolling cigarettes and talking out of the side of their mouths.

Peter dressed slowly, and as he did so he was thinking hard and fast. He remembered the remark of the man Maxwell that he could have swelled his chest another quarter of of an inch if he had tried. Perhaps it was possible that he himself could rise a quarter of an inch in his toes, if he were to be measured again.

He tried a recruiting office in the far part of the city this time and went through the usual routine until he came in to be measured. Then he rose slightly and slowly on his toes the doctor was staring critically at the measuring stick.

"Five feet four and an eighth," he announced; "you just get inside the limit, young man."

The heart of Peter raced madly and a hot flush stained his face.

"Stand off the platform," said the doctor, "raise your arms."

Peter oebyed, and the tape was passed around his chest. He forced all the air out of his lugns and then drew a slow and mighty breath. He could feel the tape tugging lightly at his skin and slipping through the fingers of the doctor. It was a pleasant moment for Peter.

"Five and a half!" called the doctor to the man behind the desk who wrote down the data of each physical examination.

"Five and a half what?" cried the other man.

"Five and a half inches expansion!" said the doctor.

The clerk remained staring as if his writing hand had become paralyzed.

"That man?" he queried slowly.

"Regular pouter-pigeon," grinned the doctor. Are you an athlete?"

The doctor loosened the stethoscope from around his neck and listened to Peter's heart.

"Sound as a bell," he said. "Now hold up your feet. No, not that way, for I want to see the scles of your feet. That's it!"

Peter obeyed, and the doctor leaned and examined the right foot first and then the left.

"What's here?" he asked.

"Nothing wrong, I hope?" he asked.

Peter glanced down at his left foot with concern.

"Pretty flat," said the doctor gravely. "Ever have an accident?"

Then Peter remembered with a great fall of the heart. He had indeed had an accident. When he was playing quarterback on the second eleven in a practice game the fall before, a great, blue-shirted guard had plunged through the line, and when Peter dove at him in the mix-up the heel of the guard's foot had crushed down into his instep. After that he had had to wear a tape around the instep for three weeks, but since that time the foot had never bothered him.

"A slight accident," he murmured; "nothing to amount to anything."

"Well," said the doctor, "I'm sorry to say that it amounts to something in the army. You've got a flat foot, my friend."

Peter stared at him with dull eyes.

"Doctor," he pleaded, "I swear that that foot has never bothered me in the slightest after it was first hurt."

"That's an old story around here," said the doctor, not unkindly, "but I'm afraid I can't pass you with a foot like that. I tmight hold up for a long time and then give way on you during a forced march. You're refused, Crittenden. Next!"

Peter turned away and walked from the room to put on his clothes again. It was noon and he found his way to a restaurant. But he had no heart for food.

He finally pushed his plate away and sat with a grim face testing his coffee at long intervals. He was remembering his last glimpse of his father with his back turned toward him and his face raised to the picture of the military ancestor hanging on the wall.

A long and glorious military career rested on the shoulders of the successive crittendens, beginning, with the first Peter Crittenden, who had helped to stain the snow with his bare feet at Valley Forge, and who had lost a leg under Morgan in the South. And another, Peter Crittenden had filled a place as first officer on the second Wasp in the war of 1812. He had gone down with that glorious and ill-fated sloop when she disappeared from port and never came back to carry his story from the sea.

And still a third Crittenden marched under old Taylor when he made the name of the United States terrible through Northern Mexico in the famous year 1847. Through the Indian war, through the War of the Rebellion, through the Spanish-American War, there had always been a peter Crittenden to shoulder a gun for his country's flag. These memories came back to Peter now with a redcubled bitterness.

For he had now bore that fated name of Peter Crittenden, and he would make the first gap in the glorious annals of his country. As he thought and pondered, a glimmering of a new thought came to Peter.

He tensed his arms hard in their sleeves, and his jaw thrust out a significant fraction, and his head sank lower between his shoulders. That fighting face had not been his least asset when he fought in the roped circle.

He became aware that his coffee was cold, rose from his seat and found the street again. But he decided to make one more trial in the accepted and ordinary manner.

This enlisting depot was running more men through, and running them through more rapidly, than the others he had visited. The rapidity with which one name after another was called out gave great heart to Peter. The very face of the physician who did the examining was an encouragement; a square-jawed man, with a touch of Scotch burr in his voice and a glimmer of Scotch color dyeing his cheeks.

As he stood on the platform to be measured, Peter raised again slowly on his toes. The physician looked at him with a half-smile and hesitated. Peter could have sworn that he was discovered, but the doctor said nothing.

"Five feet four and a quarter," he called, and started measuring Peter's chest. Again the result astonished the registration clerk.

When he came to look at the feet, Peter's heart misgave him again, but the doctor merely passed his hand slowly over the bottom of his foot a few times and went on with his examination. There was an infinite tapping of the chest and listening with the stethoscope while Peter obediently coughed and breathed, and coughed short and hard again.

"Sound lungs," said the doctor; "great little chest you have here, my lad, and not so small, either. Get on the scales over there."

Peter strode gaily to the scales and stood while the weights were slid along the bar.

"One hundred and nineteen and a half," said the physician, and hesitated.

"Half a pound light?" asked the clerk.

"Half a pound light," said the doctor and sighed.

"Otherwise you've found me all right, doctor?" said Peter.

"Right as a trivet," said the doctor, cordially.

"Doctor," said Peter, "I am very eager to join the colors. I'll gain that half pound in two days if you'll give me a chance."

The doctor hesitated. Peter felt that heaven and hell rested on the result. But the big physician finally shook his head.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but I'm not authorized to make exceptions."

Peter thought back sadly to the lunch which he had neglected to eat.

"Next!" called the doctor, and Peter went back to the dressing room.

His step was light and his manner strange, as he walked down the street. And his face once more twisted into its fighting expression.

And it chanced by the merest quirk of fate that when he had walked blindly some half-dozen blocks he raised his head and saw the sign of a fourth recruiting office.

Peter paused in the street, threw back his head and laughed. He entered the outer recruiting office. Two clerks sat there.

"I want to see the examining physician," said Peter gently.

"Want to be examined?" asked one of the clerks. "You don't look hardly big enough to get by; but go into that room and take off your clothes. The doctor'll see you in a minute."

"There is nothing farther from my thoughts than to be examined," said Peter in the same quiet voice, "but may I see the doctor?"

"Oh, sure," said the clerk, "if it's just a personal matter."

"It is," said Peter; "strictly personal."

"Then you'll find him in that room through that door there; he's not busy now."

"Thank you," said Peter, and stepped to the door and into the next room.

There were only two men in the room, the registering clerk, who sat behind a little table, and the doctor himself, who stood with his stethoscope hanging around his neck. He was a heavy built man, square-jawed, bull-necked and quick moving.

"Well, lad," said he, "what can I do for you?"

"Better get undressed before you see the doctor," broke in the clerk officiously.

"The dressing room is there," said the doctor.

"But I'm here," said Peter Crittenden.

He walked calmly enough across the room, and his eyes never moved from the big doctor's face.

"Well," said the doctor, rather puzzled by his strange visitor's actions, "what's the main idea?"

"This!" said Peter, and planted his right fist on the point of the doctor's square chin.

Now, if a boxing critic had witnessed that punch, he could not but have admired. Not the famous Griffo himself ever delivered a blow more cleanly, or with more machine-like precision. It was a right cross.

Peter stepped in as he drove his fist forward. As he stepped in and to the left with his left foot, his right foot rose to the toe and his right hand snapped in across, the fist twisting as it landed.

But if it take a long time to describe a perfect right cross, it took Peter the least fraction of a second to deliver the punch. And it took the heavy doctor hardly longer to hit the floor. Peter took long enough to note that the doctor had fallen on his back. Evidently he had not scored a knockout. He would try to do better later on.

In the meanwhile his attention was called in another direction The clerk had risen from behind his table and shouted "Murder!" with a vigor that was in itself a sufficient lung test Peter reached him in a leap and as he was coming around the table.

He landed with a long left drive at the end of his leap. The punch struck, in Homeric phrase, "where the neck joins the shoulder."

The clerk gagged and fell back against the wall. Peter rose to his toes as he followed the punch with a clean right upper-cut.

The clerk gagged again and crumpled to the floor. Peter noted with infinite satisfaction that he had fallen upon his face.

But he was too busy to think during the next few minutes. The door swung open and the two orderlies from the outside rushed in. Peter heaved the clerk's chair from behind the table and checked the rush with it.

It landed against the first orderly's chest and he fell back; he outweighed Peter some fifty pounds.

I would have gone hard with Peter if he had not landed that first punch. But now the dazing effects of it counted heavily in his favor. Furthermore, he was fighting cooly, while the doctor rushed in like a blind bull.

His temper was not improved by a double-handed play of fists that stung his face and sent quick shocks down his spine. And when he broke through the volley of Peter's long-range punches, he was met at close range with the tearing jabe to the body and a smashing shower of uppercuts to the face.

But the doctor fought well. Once he cornered Peter and landed an overhand right which opened a big gash over Peter's eye. Again he whipped in a nasty left jolt to the chin which sent Peter's head bobbing like a pendulum. But there were incidents in the fight. The general comment had to do with nothing save the continual thudding of Peter's fists against every available part of the doctor's anatomy. It had to do also with a certain silent intensity with which Peter followed up his advantages. That reminded one of the voiceless fury of a panther in a cage.

The doctor began to pant heavily. He was grunting once for every one of the punches which he failed to land, and twice for the jolts and jabs and swings and hooks and uppercuts Peter dealt to him—the short, hard right jabs to the body and lashing lefts to the head.

Then the end came to the doctor. A short right over the heart drew his guard down to his belt line. Peter observed, and shifting with cat-like speed of his feet he drove again with his right, and this time landed on the point of the doctor's chin.

He dropped in a heap; he collapsed like a punctured baloon, and Peter found it hard to tell whether he had fallen on his back or his face.

At the same time he heard another roar behind him. He whirled like a top in the midst of a spin, but too late to protect himself. The first orderly had recovered his thoughts and his wind.

He came to Peter now in true rootball fashinon, and before the latter could get up his hands his arms were pinned to his sides in a mighty circle of strong arms, and he was driven back against the wall. At the same moment the second orderly gathered him by the legs.

Peter slid down the wall to the floor. One of the guards sat upon his head. The other reposed upon his stomach.

The capture of Peter Crittenden was complete. ....

"Now, you young fool," roared the first guard, "what the devil are you trying to do? Are you crazy?"

The second guard had employed the moment of rest to caress his injured stomach again.

"He can't answer you," he remarked; "you're sitting on his face."

The first guard shifted his position. At the same time the doctor raised his battered face from the floor and stared uncomprehendingly at the tangled group across the room.

"Are you crazy or just plain nutty, or a German spy?" yelled the first guard again.

"Gentleman," wheezed Peter Crittenden the Fifth, "I have merely been trying to prove that I am man enough to serve my country."

"He's just a nut, Bill," said the second guard. Better telephone the police or send up a patrol for him."

"He's a funny nut, anyway," said the other guard. "Go on and talk, you!"

"I've tried to enlist in four recruiting stations today," breathed Peter, for the guard still sat upon his chest. "The first place they turned me down because I was too short. The second place found I had bad feet. The third found me too light.

"Am I too short?"

"You're ten feet tall!" said the first orderly.

"Am I too light?" continued Peter.

"You weigh a ton," said the second orderly.

"Are my feet bad?" wheezed Peter.

"My God!" cried the clerk, who was just rising from behind the table where he had fallen. "What hit me?"

The doctor had drawn himself to a sitting posture against the wall.

"Young fellow," he mumbled through his bloody lips, "I'm pretty badly out of training, but I think you're man enought to pass the examination.

"Your country needs you!"

SMART BLOUSES

Silk printed in the most primitive designs and colors appears in many of the smartest blouses. Sometimes in making a handsome blouse these printed figures are given added color by being outlined in an embroidery stitch. One model is of silk showing the adaptation of the flora of the Balkans, in peasant colors, printed on an ivory background.

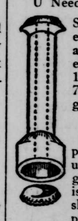
The waist is finished with a weighted girdle made of strands of artificial silk drawn through slot-like buttonholes. Similar effects are used for banding spring hats and also for making headdresses. On very dressy costumes these girdles are sometimes made of the front of ostrich feathers knotted into long strings, with multiple strands massed to form the girdle.

Blouses often take the vest form with side lapping front. These have big buttons and buttonholes and either false or real pockets. A typical model has a woven pattern showing little dancing figures forming stripes or bands. All edges of the bolero are bound with satin cire ribbon. The round neck and the short sleeves are finished with double frills of knife pleated linen.

Among the lace dresses black is the favorite color. These have tiers of flounces for waistline to hem on either side of the skirt, and front and back remaining perfectly plain. No trimming is placed on the bodice. There is usually, however, a bit of very bright color introduced into these black dresses through some trimming at the waistline. One has a cluster of green grapes hanging from the belt. Another has a wreath of scarlet flowers going over the shoulder and girdling the waist, while a third is sashed with wide black ribbon embroidered in red flowers.

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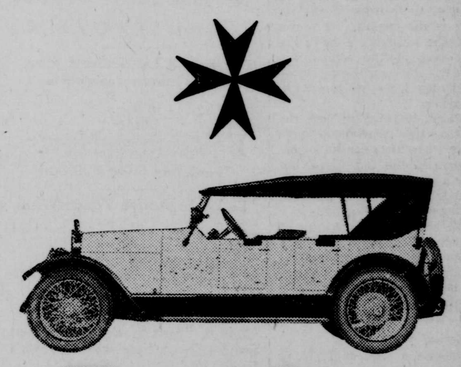
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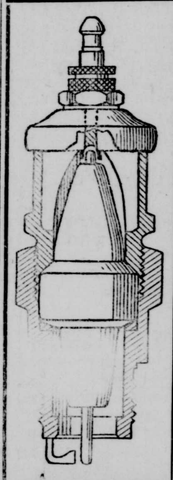
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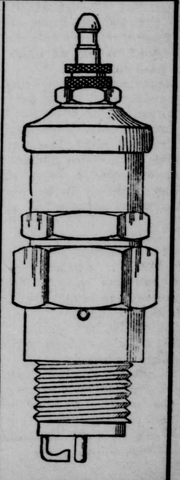
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