



THREE MEN TO A TIN

I tell a tale of hoarded food,
A tale with bitterness imbued,
But impotent to pin
The blame upon the small-souled man,
Whose sparrow-brain evolved the plan
Of three men to a tin.

The iron rations numbered three—
Canned Bully, Meat-loaf, M & V—
To buck the man within.
And countless cases lay about,
But twice a day they dished it out
Three soldiers to a tin.

In hidden caches, neatly stacked,
In spacious store-rooms tightly packed,
The Crown had gathered in
Canned food enough to last for years
And so the reckless Grenadiers
Let three men share a tin!

The island simply bulged with chuck—
But not for any lean Canuck,
On hillsides growing thin;
Our frantic pleading from the front
Was answered with the stubborn grunt;
"Three men must share a tin."

We had to beg, implore, beseech,
To get three hard-tack biscuits each
To exercise the chin;
By dint of some conjurer's trick,
A hungry Harry, Tom and Dick,
Dined on a single tin.

We didn't have enough to bear,
They added this to make us swear,
But none admits the sin
That kept our appetites on edge,
And drove us mad with Meat & Veg.,
Served three men to a tin.

Each harried, wild C.Q.M.S.
Made efforts to allay distress,
And o'er the battle's din,
They'd shout: "You boys have earned your salt,
So here it is. It's not my fault—
It's three men to a tin!"

Oh, Chiang, despite resistance stiff,
Please hurry, for I fear that if
We do not quickly win,
They'll plan each can for one man more,
And then draw lots among the four
To see who eats the tin!

This game began at Shamshuipo,
Where Chink cooks let a Foo Men Chew
A meatless, bovine shin;
Thin line of Grenadiers, I fear,
A thinner line would disappear,
With one more man per tin!

It takes a short division plan
To ration out a twelve ounce can,
But with a hungry grin,
We took a knife and grimly hacked,
With little skill but lots of tact,
And divvied up the tin!

One tin would nicely do for me,
"But only God can make it three",
Or split a vitamin.
'Twould baffle Christ, and put to shame
The "loaves and little fishes" game,
To ration out that tin!

Some good lads went to "Kingdom Come";
No blaring bugle, muffled drum
Or sobbing violin,
They rest in peace—Prepare to shed
Your tears for us, the living dead,
The "Three Men To a Tin!"

My superstitious strain is deep;
The type that you'd expect to keep
A rabbit's left hind fin.
So now I swear you'll never catch
Me going three men to a match,
Or three men to a tin!

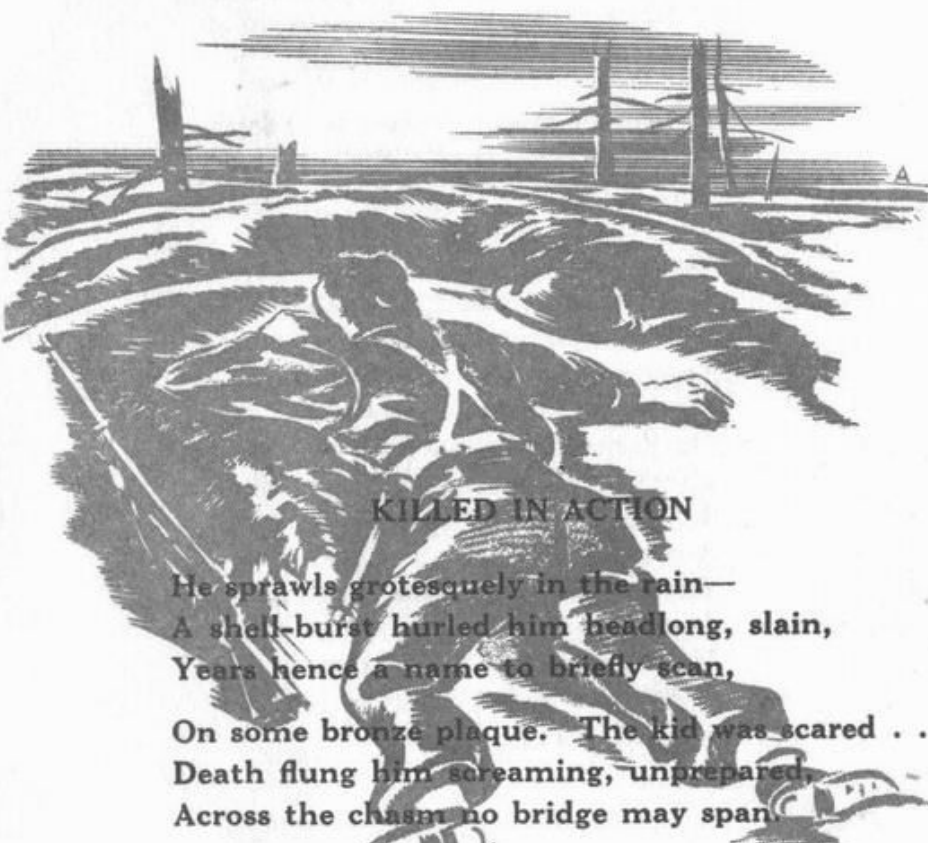
The army keeps one's courage up
By issuing a daily cup
Of whiskey, rum or gin;
Accuse us not of cowardice,
In eighteen days we got it twice,
And saw a double tin!

So I'll confess a heinous crime;
Its horror haunts me all the time,
Would God I could atone—
This vile, unpatriotic thief
Purloined a tin of bully beef . . .
And ate it all ALONE!

RECOMPENSE

*(In memory of "A" Company's gallant charge,
led by Major Gresham, in the vicinity of
Mt. Butler, Dec. 19th, 1941.)*

Machine-Guns sow the slope with death
In angry bursts that spell defeat;
And blasted by that hateful breath,
They fall as hail cuts down the wheat.
Yet stubbornly they press the strife,
For well they know the cause is just;
They fight for things more dear than life—
The rights of men are in their trust!
Up, inch by bitter inch, they toil,
For die they may, but win they must . . .
Now from the steel their foes recoil—
Butt-Stroke . . . Parry . . . Thrust . . .
And now it's uncontested ground,
The earth is theirs beneath their feet
And glory has no hollow sound—
They find their little vict'ry sweet,
A transient triumph, bravely found,
In all that chaos of defeat.



KILLED IN ACTION

He sprawls grotesquely in the rain—
A shell-burst hurled him headlong, slain,
Years hence a name to briefly scan,
On some bronze plaque. The kid was scared . . .
Death flung him screaming, unprepared,
Across the chasm no bridge may span.
These are the shards of bitter strife—
A broken body hurled from life
That once pursued a peaceful plan.
And but for War, that monstrous cheat,
He might have lived and found life sweet,
And laughed and loved . . . and been a man!

I SURRENDER, DEAR!

(From the song by the same name.)

For eighteen days we held Hong Kong,
We did damn' well to last that long;
MacKenzie King, you done us wrong,
We surrender, dear!

I hesitate to spill the beans—
But where in Hell's our war machines?
They beached 'em in the Phillipines!
We surrender, dear.

What aim was Britain pursuing,
Playing this Far Eastern game?
She doesn't know what she's doing—
But she gets there just the same!

So we're prepared to take the rap,
Imprisonment won't be a snap;
To you, you flat-faced, slant-eyed Jap,
We surrender, dear!



RHAPSODY IN RICE

You may talk of steaks and chops,
 When there's lots of butcher shops,
 And half a block will take you to a diner;
 But when captured by the Japs,
 (Those polite and clever chaps)
 We got rice, yea, twice a day, in Hong Kong, China.

Think of rice without a taste,
 Think of rice like bloody paste,
 (Boiled quite sloppy is the manner most expedient)
 Without benefit of salt,
 Sugar, raisins, milk or malt—
 Simply rice . . . and not another damned ingredient!

You will not get very fat
 Twice a day for weeks on that,
 And the Limies who were there will all confirm us . . .
 We could write our names in scales
 On our skin with fingernails,
 When the starch came oozing through our epidermis!

At the old barb-wire fence,
 Guys with dollars, guys with cents,
 Side by side with officers we once saluted,
 Stood, while Chinoes sold us back
 (Through the fence: five bucks a crack)
 Our own rations that the yellow devils looted!

And the little Chinoes holler:
 "Hello! Sooga, Hey, one dolla!"
 (We'd pay any price for any appetizer.)
 So you pass five bucks for buns,
 But he grabs your dough and runs,
 And you're five bucks poorer, but you're five bucks wiser!

When you're knocked upon your "two-spot"
 Just massage your black-and-blue spot;
 Don't be bitter when some slant-eyed monkey hits you.
 When some playful, yellow runt
 Pulls a painful little stunt,
 He is merely brushing up on his Jui-Jitsu!

As the pocket-books get cleaner,
 All our frames get lean and leaner,
 And the grass grows greener in the grave-yard area;
 Still with spirits unabating,
 We will wait, while flies are mating,
 For the dysentery, cholera and malaria.

Oh, the rumors make me scoff,
That the Japs are buzzing off,
For I fear we're here 'til hell has frozen over—
Then they'll write upon the ice:
"Won't you have a little rice?"
While the vultures look us over as they hover.

We've had worm-infested rice . . .
But a change to meat is nice!
So we thanked our lucky stars, and gladly ate 'em.
But some day the worm will turn,
When to whom it may concern,
We will hand this stern and vicious ultimatum . . .

"No more rice" is our advice,
Don't say it twice; let that suffice;
Put the subject on the ice; don't slice it finer.
Don't suggest that rice is nice,
You'll be mangled in a trice.
Rice is nice If all the rice remains in China!!!!

THE GALLOPING GRENADIERS

(Hong Kong version!)

We are the Winnipeg Grenadiers
You hear no more about;
But we'll contrive to keep alive
While rice and greens hold out!
We're gunners deft, but when we left,
Bereft of our M.G.
We're Vickers men—They gave us Bren
And the rest is History!

We got the shot in Hong Kong . . .
Unless, perhaps, the Japs collapse this year;
This won't be a long song—
The Galloping Grenadiers will disappear!

IF

(Kipling wouldn't like it!)

If you can sell your bread when those around you
Are eating theirs, and having got your fag,
Restrain yourself when these same bums surround you
And have the guts to mooch you for a drag.
If you can still maintain a sense of humor,
Despite mosquitoes, bedbugs, lice and flies;
If you can swallow each succeeding rumor,
And hear New York's been bombed without surprise.
If you can listen to a Sweeny number,
And think of home with no nostalgic ache;
If you can slumber on your bed of lumber,
(Or read this kind of stuff and stay awake!)
If you enjoy parades, and Keenan's bellow,
If you can relish snake, and squid and such;
If you can eat those duck eggs, ripe and mellow;
If you believe the cooks aren't eating much.
If you can stand the taste of "Coronation",
(A local smoke composed of mouldy hay.)
If this existence fills you with elation
Because you're piling up a lot of pay.
IF you would fain defer your homeward journey,
If you can gaily wash, deprived of soap;
You'll qualify as Nippon's prize internee,
And, furthermore, you'll be a corpse, I hope!

GRIMACE AND BEAR IT

I don't attempt to give you boys the shot:
"Smile, brother, smile; it's good for your morale!"
I call this study "Johnny's on the Spot"
Or "Empty Saddles in the Old Corral!"

Smile as you scratch your bed-bug bites; don't curse!
Smile at "Green Horror"; chortle in your tea!
Smile your belief that things can't get much worse,
The way things ARE is grim enough for me!

Smile at the thread by which existence hangs;
Smile, and conceal the quaking soul beneath!
(And I might be constrained to flash my fangs,
If I possessed a decent set of teeth!)

My stomach waits without; I wait within!
I may wait years, but I'll go all the way.
Bear it I must, but do I have to grin?
I'll howl like hell, all day and every day!

SPRING COMES TO NORTH POINT

My restless blood is racing, full of old, familiar thrills
A riotous and verdant Spring is calling from the hills.
To lie beneath the trees again,
And feel a hill-top breeze again,
A hamper lunch to please again, and beer to quench my thirst;
I long for all of these again, until my heart must burst!

Hills, dormant in the daytime; hills awake when day is done,
Hills blazing, set afire by the torch of setting sun;
The things for which my spirit grieves
Are swallows soaring 'round the eaves,
The changing sheen of rippled leaves in shadow and in light;
Spring's ache is bitter-sweet by day, and exquisite by night!

And always, when I feels like this, I simply ups and goes;
Can I say no to Nature, when I'm writhing in her throes?
I must be adamant, I fear,
The Japanese interned me here,
The fence is highly charged (a fact I'd rather not confirm!)
I'll get no farther than Kai Tak for quite a lengthy term!

TRADER HORN

• (To the tune of "The Umbrella Man")

Any belts or braces,
Clogs or compass cases
For sale to-day?
He works Hut 11,
It's a trader's heaven,
He makes it pay.
Buttons, boots and bags
To precious fags
Are quickly turned.
If your price is four,
Then four decks more
Is honestly earned.
Hammers, saws or hatchets,
Axes, knives or matchetes,
It's all the same;
When it takes a slicker
For a shady dicker,
He knows the game.
He proves once a minute that Barnum was right;
While he's taking you for everything you've got,
He delights in giving you the shot—
"I don't make a thing on this", oh, what a shame!
He's never dull, he racks his skull
For ways and means to buy the beans
That will see him through—
He takes it from you!
His type of gall takes purse and all
He's pretty slick, he'll fleece you quick,
Then trade off your purse,
While you stand and curse!

When some stupid Jasper's
Dying for a "gasper",
He'll buy his chuck.
When he's on the hustle,
He strains every muscle
For your last buck.
He's got the few pennies you earned at Kai Tak
He is just a little lower than a snake;
He will snaffle every sen you make;
Why don't you get wise some day and take it back?



HAPPY FEET

Of all the countless curses
That thrive 'neath China's sun,
These few pathetic verses
Will deal with only one;
An ailment, strange and nameless,
That has the doctors beat;
With humor, warped and shameless
We called it "Happy feet."

Strange that we can take
Agony unending;
Fighting not to break,
While we go on bending;
Sherman states that "War is hell"
Sherman phrased it far too mildly,
Sherman wasn't talking wildly,
Sherman rang the bell!

The vitamins departed,
We used our few reserves;
And malnutrition started
To gnaw away our nerves;
Our puppies jump and shiver;
A palpitating mass—
Two raw, red chunks of liver
Filled up with splintered glass!

No relief is found;
What's the use of yapping?
No one makes a sound,
Nerves at point of snapping.
Thoughts of sleep tonight are vain;
'Round the earth the sun is creeping,
Bringing day, but not for sleeping,
No release from pain!

Fifty pain-racked wretches
Beneath a single roof;
Fifty skinny sketches
Of horror on the hoof!
We paced, but pain would follow;
Dragged fags of "shag" 'til dawn,
We named it "Sleepless Hollow",
And grimly carried on!

Always had this cane;
Seems I've always shuffled—
Always had this pain—
Always kept it muffled.
Watching other sleepless ghosts—
Through a mist of pain I see them,
Pacing until peace shall free them
From their yellow hosts.

ODE TO A WHALE

(To the tune of "Home on the Range.")

Internees, all hail the delectable whale,
Luscious hamburger steak of the sea;
When hunger is rife you're the staff of my life
And you're more than a mammal to me.

(CHORUS)

Whale! None can prevail
On me with my 'burger to part
Little patty of whale, you are never for sale
You are dearer than smokes to my heart!

We don't get enough of this wonderful stuff,
But in sweet epicurean glow
Let us dream of the day when we draw our back pay
Here's the way we'll dispose of our dough—

Kale! Buy a whole whale,
Stuff the creature with rice to the snout;
Leave a small space to spare for a table and chair,
And then crawl in and eat your way out!

SID VARCOE

EPITAPH

A North Point cement-mixing faker
With buns sent this lad to his Maker;
He died of the shock
Of digesting pure rock,
But he's waiting in hell for the baker!



THE ROAD TO OLD KAI TAK

(To the tune of "The Road to Mandalay.")

By the hazy hills of Hong Kong,
Looking down upon our guilt,
We are working on an airport
That the British should have built!
For the wind is in the air-sock,
And the bombs are in the rack—
Come you back, you British soldiers,
Come and take old Kai Tak back!

On the road to old Kai Tak,
Fags are fifteen sen per pack,
And the pay is ten sen daily, 'cause the Japs
are short of jack!
On the road to old Kai Tak,
We will scrounge and loaf and slack,
'Til the Yanks come up like thunder out of
China, out in back!

Now, you must include "Green Horror"
In the horrors of the war—
It's a stew of Kai Tak grasses
That we cut the day before!
Only rice and greens sustain us,
And the vitamins we lack
Are displayed in each shop window
On the road to old Kai Tak.

On the road to old Kai Tak,
Clever loafing is a knack;
It's a job you may get socked on,
But you'll never get the sack!
On the road to old Kai Tak,
How we dread the marching back
To a "John" the Chinks have plundered
And a bed-bug ridden shack!

Cutting grass and mixing concrete
Is the fate of slow Canucks
Who get trampled in the stampede
For a job on gravel trucks!
When the casualties are counted,
The remainder grimly hack
At the grass that grows profusely
On the field of old Kai Tak!

On the road to old Kai Tak,
By the time the Yanks attack,
We can add a finished airport to the winning
British stack!
On the road to old Kai Tak,
Though the outlook may be black,
On the Don the Square-heads blundered, and
the Nips are bound to crack!



THE YANKS CAME OVER HONG KONG

The Yanks came over Hong Kong,
And pulled a nuisance raid;
They made no hits, said Nippon,
But what a hit they made!

Ten months of slow starvation,
And none knew how we fared;
We had no indication
That anybody cared!

One blue October morning,
The Ack-ack sounded off;
The strident air raid warning
Evoked a sceptic scoff.

In droning, mad crescendo,
We heard a bomber dive—
A string of detonations,
And then we came alive!

The Yanks were over Hong Kong,
The compound shook with cheers;
And smiles lit up the faces
Of dying Grenadiers!

The Yanks flew off from Hong Kong,
And left us empty skies;
Their home-ward flight was followed
By many wistful eyes.

The Yanks came over Hong Kong,
And gave the Japs a fright,
And we, the weak and helpless,
Are victims of their spite.

They've gone from bad to rotten;
We take it with a grin—
We know we're not forgotten,
We know which side will win.

The Yanks came over Hong Kong,
The damage done was slight,
But still it seems a symbol
Of growing Yankee might.

The Yanks came over Hong Kong,
Their visit cheers us still;
They flailed our failing courage,
And flogged our flagging will.

The Yanks came over Hong Kong,
And now each moon-lit night,
We watch for their returning
To take another sight.



THE BED-BUG BARRAGE

The bed-bug season's here again,
Hence hear this mournful sound;
Bugs, Bed, Mk. 1, terrific scent,
A Chinese bed-bug's normal bent
Is fraught with murderous intent;
They do not give up meat for Lent,
They eat meat all year 'round!

They multiply alarmingly,
Their breeding speed is crass;
God knows why God wrought any—
Their love-life (if they've got any!)
Is simply grim monotony;
Asexual, like botany,
They reproduce en masse!

All night, knee-deep in bed-bug juice,
I write atrocious verse;
Oh, well, I've nothing else to do
But to inflict this stuff on you,
You get the verse and bed-bugs, too!
The double curse of Shamshuipo,
And God knows which is worse!

Now, God and Time are on our side,
To help win this dispute;
Add bugs to this, then tell me, please,
Why we were sent across the seas;
A bunch of bugs as tough as these
Could chew up all the Japanese,
And Wang Ching-wei to boot!

I'm single-handed, weaponless,
Outnumbered, and alarmed;
Compared to this, the war was fun;
The Japs were only ten to one—
And hell! I even had a gun.
The battle scars I'll show my son
Were won in bed, unarmed!

The minute lights go out they break
Their non-aggression pact—
A paratroop from rafters falls . . .
The Infantry comes down the walls . . .
Across the floor the Tank Corps crawls;
They infiltrate your overalls,
And, brother, you're attacked!

The front is quiet through the day,
But during this respite,
The Labor Corps, with pick and spade,
Consolidate the gains they've made;
They clear their corpses off parade;
They pull the odd sporadic raid,
And then resume the fight!

And if in action I should fall,
My last request is slight;
Just tell my ma her boy died brave;
Place this inscription o'er my grave—
"In hopeless fray, his life he gave.
A swarming bed-bug tidal wave
Engulfed him in the night!"

I'll muzzle one, and take it home;
It ought to last for years.
I'll chain it in the yard all day,
A painted warning I'll display . . .
"Beware the bed-bug" it will say.
That ought to keep the bums away
Fair warning, Grenadiers!

THE FOECAL PARADE

(To the tune of "The Easter Parade.")

Litre after litre,
We're hauling out excreta,
There's no aroma sweeter
Than the foecal parade!

If they scrap our bucket,
And get a Ford to truck it,
Well, that would "come-unstuck-it"
For the foecal parade!

Not a spud is safe,
When we're on the strafe;
And we get a working ration,
So thank God that you're
Merely spreading manure!

I could write a ditty,
To make the job sound pretty,
But all of us are witty
On the foecal parade!



BLESS 'EM ALL

(With apologies to the author of the famous original!)

They say there's a slave ship just leaving Hong Kong,
Bound for old Nippon's shore;
Packed with poor coolies to slave in Japan,
Processing Oeyama ore.
Well, we're hard cases now, and we'll finish our time,
Too hard for hell to appall;
Our mail's in Osaka,
We're pushed for tobacco,
But cheer up, my lads, bless 'em all!

Bless 'em all, bless 'em all, bless 'em all,
Bunsocho and gunso and all.
Bless all the sentries who strut through the huts;
Bless the mad dive for their discarded butts!
Though they force us to "karai" and crawl,
We'll soon have 'em pinned to the wall;
Their guts we'll entangle,
Their tonsils we'll mangle,
The "jangle" is good, bless 'em all!

Bless 'em all, bless 'em all, bless 'em all,
Interpreters, civvies and all;
Sneaking our food home to saffron-skinned sluts;
They get the beef, but we've still got the guts.
On the last act the curtain will fall,
And over a beer in the Mall,
We'll re-tell the drama
Of hell-hole Oeyama,
So cheer up, my lads, bless 'em all!

Bless 'em all, bless 'em all, bless 'em all,
The mine and the fact'ry and all;
Shovelling coal on a diet like this,
Burns down the rice 'til it's just hit or miss!
It's amazing the coal that we haul
On rations so wretchedly small;
But we'll make up the shortage
With pork-chops on Portage,
And chicken at Child's, bless 'em all!

Bless 'em all, bless 'em all, bless 'em all,..
The chow-fans and lugows and all;
Bless the small bowl of rice, barley and beans;
Bless the two pitiful, shriveled sardines!
Vainly fishing the soup depths, we trawl;
Our spoon only raises a squall!
The supper soup's thinner
Than breakfast or dinner,
And we're thinner still, bless 'em all!

Bless 'em all, bless 'em all, bless 'em all,
The cold and the hunger and all;
Bless pushing coal-cars in rain, snow and sleet;
Wet jigutabis and frost-bitten feet!
This is slavery, bitter as gall;
It dwarfs all your fiction so tall;
The cold has us mastered—
These huts should be plastered,
And we need it, too, bless 'em all!

Bless 'em all, bless 'em all, bless 'em all,
The picks and the shovels and all;
Bless the Jap labor mill, grinding up men;
We like it tough, and so—bless 'em again!
Spoken once in a soft, Southern drawl,
This wise-crack I clearly recall—
"We'll take it like clover
'Til hell freezes over
Then write on the ice—"Bless 'em all'!"

Bless 'em all, bless 'em all, bless 'em all,
Nichocus, and hanchos and all;
Bless the whole staff of assorted Jap tramps,
Vultures who fatten in starvation camps.
When we gorge at our annual brawl,
We'll wallow in good alcohol,
And we'll discard this fiction
Of sweet benediction,
And sing what we mean BLESS 'EM ALL!!!!



VALEDICTORY

They'll turn us out to pasture now
We've earned our bit of clover;
To fact'ry, office, farm and plow—
● The bloody war is over!

We shared the hellish China trip,
We've borne a lot together;
The most enduring fellowship
Is formed in stormy weather.

Perhaps, when discharge sets you free
You'll roam to distant places,
But still you'll see, in memory,
Our hunger-haunted faces.

But most of us will meet, I think,
With every year that passes;
At least it's an excuse to drink
A few too many glasses.

We gave our country duty, pure,
No vain bravado flaunting—
We leave her service, proudly sure
She has not found us wanting.

And if again the call goes forth,
Again you'll find us riding—
Yea, riding to the frozen North
To find a place of hiding!

They issue all their other Stores
In such begrudging fashion,
The Scale of Issue for their wars
Should be a single ration!

So we'll ignore the call to war,
Recruiting Sergeants yelping;
The brainless bore who asks for more
DESERVES a second helping!

SID VARCOE