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# SERVICE WEIGHT

By A. R. THURMAN

*Army Baseball and Big-League Baseball Are Horses of a Different Feather—and it Took Sergeant Nulty and ex-Bruin Hack Freeman Some Time to Learn They Could Run in Pairs!*

SERGEANT NULTY had things well in hand, including a baseball that was shuttling between himself and the catcher Private Bill Crane with pleasurable regularity. The pattern was interrupted only occasionally by a scratch hit or a fly ball to a dependable outfield. It looked as though the red-faced, perspiring sergeant might pitch himself a shutout

over the Company K team, because the end of the sixth was in sight.

Needing one more putout, the "Sarge" pulled his slider, the pitch that was supposed to get him drafted into the big leagues from the Association. However, he was drafted into the Army instead, early in the summer, and his big-league dreams had ended, though only temporarily.

The slider surprised the swinging Company K slugger for strike one. The Sarge came through with a low fast ball, which the hitter was fooled into taking for strike two. Next came a chest-high hard one, swung on and fouled.

Out came the slider again. The hitter lunged and missed to end the inning. A thousand uniformed partisans, huddled around the wire backstop and stretched along the foul lines, mixed cheers and jeers in a raucous chorus.

"That's the way we did it in the Association!" Sergeant Nulty bellowed, and hoed his sweaty brow with a curled finger. "An' now, you mugs, get me some runs, else I'll put you all in the ditches!"

The Company K pitcher, Earl Winston, was matching the sergeant's moundwork for the scoreboard. Company B was beating Winston's brains out, but the scoreboard showed two rows of six horse-collars each. Naturally, that didn't help Nulty's temper, and he proved it by pacing angrily before the small pine-board bench.

It wasn't fair for him to be pitching practically a no-hitter, and wind up with a Mexican stand-off like this. Anything could happen, and probably would, to rob him of fruits that were rightfully his.

Who had organized this baseball situation at Camp Streeter? Nulty had. Who had combed the companies, arranged for transfers, guarded talent and assembled a championship team? Nulty had. Who had practically shanghaied the drafted World Series hero, Hack Freeman, and landed him for right field on the Company E team? Sergeant Nulty had.

**L**ITTLE wonder, then, that his temper was near the bursting point. His dream of a regimental championship was about to burst. That regimental championship meant everything, including the right to play the big league teams that

would come barn- storming through the Carolinas within a couple of weeks.

Company B, Nulty was certain, could take a few of these big league teams, especially with his slider working so well and big Hack Freeman hitting with all the power he had used to pace the Chicago Bruins to a pennant.

"Come on, Ike!" he called to little Carney, the second sacker. "Get on, an' Freeman'll drive you in. An' if McIntosh gets on, they'll have to pitch to Freeman, Step on it, you bucks!"

Carney nodded, spat on his hands, swung on the first pitch and flied out.

"Get on!" Nulty commanded McIntosh, the tall first-sacker, much in the manner of ordering a right-dress. "Get on, an' they'll have to pitch to Freeman!"

That business of not pitching to Freeman was a large thorn deep in Nulty's hide, but to Company K it was a means of survival. The big Chicagoan unbalanced the entire lineup, because he could powder a baseball to kingdom come.

He had held the big-league home-run championship twice, finished second in driving runs across and third for the batting title. What else could a sand-lot pitcher do but pitch four balls?

Groans and yells mingled as McIntosh caught a low pitch on the seams and clotheslined it to right center for the longest single of the game. McIntosh could have made second, but Nulty ordered him to hold first.

"Now they got no excuse for walkin' Freeman!" he bellowed.

Young Winston understood, and settled down to the ordeal of facing dynamite in human form. Freeman was big, held his bat down on the end for distance.

A sharp hook broke high and splashed down across the big fellow's flanneled chest for strike one. Nulty dared him to try

a sucker trick like that again, even though both pitcher and hitter were right-handers. Freeman's weakness, if any, was not a hook.

Winston wound up tight and threw a dipsy-doodle that seemed to pause in mid-air, take a breath and float over the plate with all the force of thistledown blown by the wind. Hack Freeman paused, gripped, swung, stopped the swing, started again and lunged,

He connected all right, but only slightly. The ball dribbled across the spotty infield to the shortstop, who made quick work of getting it to second. The second-sacker made quicker work of getting it over to first for a most welcome double play. Nulty groaned.

"You lummo!" he muttered, hoping that Freeman would hear him.

Freeman heard all right, but only laughed.

"You take this too seriously, Sarge," he replied, starting out toward right field. "You can't press your luck. We haven't lost yet!"

"Thanks to you, we haven't won, either!" Nulty roared back.

**T**HE big outfielder was too far away for further insults, and the sergeant trudged to the mound, wondering if his good right arm would stand the gaff of nine more putouts. After all, he had been pitching shutout ball. No arm can stand that for very long.

It was the opposite of Winston, who hadn't been bearing down too much. He had something left now for a finish. Nulty wasn't sure he would be able to shave tomorrow. He had used that much of his arm.

As he set himself to pitch, he began to worry about whether or not this carefully-selected ball club was playing for him or not. Surely, they had enough pride and

company respect to give their all. Yet Freeman was loping around like a kangaroo at a picnic, and putting nothing into his play.

The Sarge lost his temper. He regretted it when the batter pumped a single into right. Freeman butter-fingered it, and the batter raced to second. Nulty was in a hole. He served up only bad pitches and passed the man. He cursed Hack Freeman as he heaved low ones and forced the next batter to hit into the grass. There was no double play, but a force at third.

He ordered the infield back, still hoping for the twin-killing. The Sarge never lacked for nerve, and his effrontery paid handsome dividends when Whitey Lewis, the left fielder, charged in on a law drive, made a sizzling shoestring catch and whipped the ball to second to double-up the doubting runner.

He filled the air once more with a plea for runs, and the busy Company B's set about obeying the command. They plastered the wearying Winston, but somehow not completely. Luck was against the Sarge when he stepped on a ball hit by Schwartz, the lead-off batter for the third out. His remarks were bluer than the Carolina skies above.

But the temper served to make him forget that his arm was practically lifeless from the elbow down. He was hit hard in the second half of the eighth, but managed to escape the scar of a score through perfect defense behind him.

Things looked rosier when Ike Carney opened the ninth with a stinging single, and Winston grew nervous enough to lose McIntosh at the 3—2 count.

"Reach for one of those wide ones an' bunt," the Sarge ordered in a hoarse whisper. "We'll score at least on a fly."

Big Hack Freeman nodded, and a faint smile played about his swarthy, sunburned features. But it was the first half of the

ninth, not the latter. Three runs were that much better than one, and besides—

Winston either slipped or was too smart for his own good. He tried to sneak a pitch across the inside of the plate, low. Hack stepped into the bucket, golfed his swing and got his first full cut at a pitch.

Silence shrouded the field as the speck of black soared far away in the sky, quite beyond reach of a panting Company K pursuer. Everybody ran, and everybody made it. The ball wasn't even back to the infield when Freeman stabbed the rubber plate with his spikes.

But Sergeant Nulty didn't like it and said so with more than words. He stood at the plate, glaring like a startled goldfish.

"I get it!" he bellowed. "You tried to bunt in third innin', didn't you? But with a chance to end the game, you don't believe in buntin'. A drive makes you look better."

"Those three runs make us all look better, Sarge," Freeman said, smiling. "And maybe we'll get some more."

"Okay, wise guy," Nulty muttered. "But this is on'y the beginnin'. You got some explainin' t'do."

**M**ORE baseball at the plate and on the bases drew Nulty's attention, but not for long. Company K wasn't licked, and Winston got three of the next four batters to complete the inning. There followed a chant for Nulty's scalp as the Sarge trudged to the box, fighting the rising rage that threatened to engulf what little mental equilibrium remained.

Company K hit him harder than at any time in the game, but the old Sarge had his wits about him. He teased 'em with the slider and what they thought was the slider and pitched his shutout.

But he was rankled, and informed Captain Hicks, who had umpired from behind the mound, that he was going to have it out with the regimental

commander, Colonel Stanton.

"You heard me tell him to bunt, didn't you, ump?" Nulty asked.

Captain Hicks nodded.

"An' he didn't even try," the Sarge muttered. "If it's either me or him in this baseball situation, I'd like to know right now, an' I'm goin' to!"

An orderly conducted Hack Freeman to Colonel Stanton, a grizzled little man who had earned his eagles by fighting. It was after mess, but the commanding officer didn't look any gentler from the food. He scowled at the sight of Freeman's bulk.

"Sergeant Nulty has complained about your conduct on the ball field," he began.

"The home run, sir?"

"Naturally not—disobedience of his orders. Now, Freeman, I know your background. I know you sacrificed a great salary to come here for fifty a month. But these are the times for sacrifices, not for personal aggrandizement.

"Sergeant Nutty has created a fine situation out of nothing. He has earned the right to play a half-dozen ball games with big league teams. Exhibition games, but the situation has been a boon to the sadly neglected recreational facilities here in camp.

"Now, I want you to assure me that there will be no further demonstrations of disobedience on the ball field. Will you, Freeman?"

Hack Freeman licked his lips and stared at the officer.

"Let me put it into military terms, sir," he said. "If I happen to have a squad or a platoon on patrol with orders to proceed along specified lines, and if I learn that the enemy has been apprised of my orders and plans, you want me to proceed according to plan and march the squad or platoon into certain death?"

"Good heavens, man!" the colonel

gasped. "Of course not. Your manual will explain that."

"We have no manual of procedure in baseball," Freeman said, smiling. "But we do know that only a sucker will bunt when he knows the other team has caught the bunt sign and is ready!"

THE colonel covered his seamy features with a weather-beaten hand, but Hack saw the smile anyway.

"Sergeant Nulty failed to tell me that," he murmured. He leaned forward. "How did you know they knew you were supposed to bunt?"

"Sergeant Nulty whispered it so loud that I'm surprised you didn't hear it back here, sir. Both the third and first basemen charged in with the wind-up. A bunt would've been a sure double play. Believe me, it would, sir."

"Very well, Freeman," the officer said with a wave of dismissal. "But I want no more complaints or reports of disobedience."

The situation was one he disliked. He had spent enough time fighting back an antipathy toward the army. He was human, and he had felt a wave of bitterness engulf his feelings when his number had come up in the draft. It didn't seem fair after his back-breaking struggle to reach the top of the baseball heap and haul down \$22,500 for playing the outfield in Chicago.

Yet, he had struggled to regard the drafting in the same light that he had come to regard line drives. He had formulated a policy of not worrying about something over which he had no control. Since he had no control over the military fate of Herbert G. Freeman, he went with his chin up and actually looked forward to getting his hands on that fifty bucks a month.

He had acquired a new regard for dollars. He had developed a new respect for the human body. Within a week, he

realized that baseball players are in condition for baseball and a bit of hunting, but for little else in the way of strenuous exercise.

Army life, food and routine had done things to his keen reflexes, heretofore sharpened only for fly balls and hitting. Manual labor had opened up new avenues of energy in his back. Military discipline had opened up cobwebby brain cells when he settled down to the task of memorizing paragraphs of behavior and procedure.

After a few months, he was all army, willing to cooperate in every way, liking practically everybody and actually developing indifference as to whether or not he ever played baseball again. This last was a defense mechanism against the possibility of losing so much in the army that he wouldn't be able to hold his own in big-league ball again.

The indifference didn't last long. It never does, because the baseball bug bites for keeps. Naturally, he wasn't filled with the old college try. But he was in there doing his best at all times, a fact which Sergeant Nulty and a few less voluble souls and heels failed to appreciate.

He learned that much on reaching barracks. Crane, the catcher, and Eddie Mehr, the shortstop, sent a few digs in his direction as he lay on his cot.

"All right, so I got it in the neck," Hack sighed, holding up his hands in a plea to be let alone. "The colonel threatened me with KP and the guardhouse if I ever disobeyed again."

"Sarge might have some better ideas," Crane suggested.

"All involvin' a rope or a knife," Mehr added.

"The Bruins got into the World Series," Hack said, yawning, "with less argument all year than we had from Sarge today. A ball club can win by fighting, but never with itself!"

**A**FTER morning drills the next day, Camp Streeter became wholly conscious of its baseball importance, thanks to the appearance of a batch of hand-painted signs that read—

### BEAT THE BRUINS!

Hack Freeman must have stood before one of these notices fully five minutes before realizing what had happened. Even then he had to verify it by questioning Corporal Ike Carney.

“Does this mean that the Chicago Bruins—”

“First on the schedule,” Carney replied with a nod. “Say, you sure are hep to what’s goin’ on around here in a baseball way. Why do you think we’ve been playin’ our heads off?”

Hack shrugged his massive shoulders.

“I didn’t know teams like the Bruins were that close.”

“The Sox follow the Bruins three days later,” Carney confided. “A week after that we go into town for the Tigers. I forget the order of the others, but every one’ll draw, an’ the regiment won’t do so bad financially. The Colonel says we’ll be rewarded before reachin’ heaven. Get it?”

Hack nodded. He stared at the sign again, unable to realize that he’d be playing against players who had meant so much to him for so long.

“I guess you’ll get a bang outa pinnin’ their ears back, hey?” Carney asked. Then he studied Hack’s blank features. “Or won’t you?”

“I don’t know.” Hack sighed. “There’s more to it than just beating their brains out. After all, those are the guys who made me what I am today.”

“Uncle Sam did that, big boy!” Carney corrected. “An’ don’t go around tellin’ yourself any different.”

Sergeant Nulty skipped a day and then began heavy preparation for the big-league opposition with a heart-to-heart talk.

“We’ll play all games in town,” he announced. “The park seats eight thousan’, an’ the diamond is in good shape.” He looked at Freeman. “An’ nobody has t’worry about it not bein’ in big-league condition, or gettin’ hurt.”

“The whole regiment can’t attend, but that can’t stop you guys from comin’ to town an’ makin’ a holiday of it. An’ y’might as well save your dough for admissions, because nobody gets in free. The big league clubs ain’t down here for their health.”

“If they’re not here for their health,” Hack Freeman interrupted, “why do they take spring training trips?”

“They don’t know it,” the Sarge countered, “but they’re down here to take a shellackin’ from Camp Streeter.”

After that the Sarge got down to perfecting infield maneuvers, checking hit and run signs and going over the alleged batting weaknesses of the Bruins. For this information he depended upon Hack Freeman, and the slugger came through with every fact he could summon from his memory.

“Great stuff,” Sergeant Nulty exclaimed; “providin’ it’s right. I mean,” he added quickly, “hitters can correct weaknesses. That’s what coaches are for, an’ if the weaknesses ain’t corrected, they use hearses. Okay, fellas, let’s be serious.”

**E**ACH day brought a strenuous workout after camp chores had been completed. Spring maneuvers were more than a month away, and the commanding officers welcomed the rising hysteria over baseball as a safety valve. They talked it with the noncoms, and the latter talked it with the buck privates. Within three days

the entire camp was seething with desire to beat the Bruins!

Hack Freeman, watched this rising tide and wondered where it would end. He didn't like it. You can't talk a team into victory through hysteria. A grandstand cheer can't help an infielder outthink a ground ball, nor a hitter outsmart a big-league fast ball.

It's not like college football, wherein grandstand cheering will infuse an undergraduate ball-carrier with that extra verve necessary to crash a line or outspeed a safety man. Why didn't somebody tell Sergeant Nulty that?

Since no one else seemed to realize it, Hack Freeman took the trouble to enlighten the Sergeant on the matter.

"Why couldn't we contact a newspaper man in Florida," Freeman suggested, "and get a line on Chicago pitching?"

"How do we know who's goin' to start?"

"Get it on all of 'em," Hack replied. "After all, we ought to know what they're throwing, especially if what I hear is true."

"What's that?"

"The boys around camp. Some of 'em, I hear, plan to do a little wagering in town, but on us!"

Sergeant Nulty's face turned a beet-red, and he hit a new high in dudgeons.

"Freeman, you are either the biggest dope of the ages, else you are takin' me for a ride. Personally, I think you're a dope."

"Well, I never got a diploma."

"You could use some diplomacy," Nulty retorted. "Now get this— I've put everything I have into buildin' this baseball situation for a very vital reason. What happened with your contract when you signed up with the army?"

"I had a talk with the owner of the Bruins, and we worked out an agreement, when, as and if I returned. Why?"

"They retained the reserve clause. You belong to the Bruins?"

"Yes. Aren't you on reserve?"

"No!" the Sarge bellowed. "They dropped me like a hot stove. Figured a year would wash me up. They gambled. I can break my neck, an' what do I get from baseball? Maybe a sympathy card from the league president. I'm a free agent!"

"But that's like a due bill in the middle of the desert."

"Not the way I've got things lined up," Nulty laughed. "An' the way happens to pave the way for me to hit the big leagues where I was supposed to go last fall. Suppose you're a big-league manager, Freeman, an' you see a soldier-pitcher beat five of six, big league team in a row. Would you take him on?"

"Of course, Sarge, but what makes you think we can beat all those big leaguers?"

Sergeant Nulty patted his right shoulder.

"Well, I happen to know that the Bruins had a couple of young pitchers coming up," Hack confided. "If you should hook up with one of them, or Babe Bright, for instance."

"I'm ready!" Nulty replied, and there was a slight swelling of his shirt. "An' all I want to see is some baseball from the rest of you birds."

"You'd better have your eyes examined," Hack finished.

**B**UT he didn't like Nulty's long-range plan. It was too much for Hack Freeman, even though he might help with a long hit now and then.

The weight of the problem increased when he returned to barracks and listened to the talk of betting. A couple of emissaries had already been to town and returned with news of odds like 7 to 4 and as high as 5 to 2 against the soldiers.

"Wow!" a buck private roared. "We

can take 'em like the North took Grant after the War."

News of the wagering situation spread like a blaze in a stand of spruce. Caches came out from hiding-places. Boodle-bags were opened. Touches were effected. Markers against pay day were made. Wrist watches, gadgets and apparel were sold.

Some, less endowed with worldly goods, sold precious addresses. Everybody interested in the ball game shot the works, but practically all of it went into town where it was placed against "big-league" money at varying odds, but odds always against the soldiers.

By the time the Chicago Bruins, tanned and readied by a full month in the Florida sunshine, reached the scene of the crime, the city of Norcross, N. C., was seething with impatience and rivalry. Camp Streeter had emptied itself of all but a handful of guards and errant soldiers on KP or orderly duty.

Nutty and Everett were the pitchers, according to the cry on every pair of lips. And that was what Hack Freeman had feared. Babe Bright, winner of two Series games, would have been better, because he wouldn't be putting everything on every pitch. Curly Everett was young, up for a make-it-or-break trial after two years in the minors. Desperation would be behind his every heave toward the plate.

Photographers were busy snapping pictures of Colonel Stanton, the two umpires, Captain Hicks and a big-leaguer named Barren, but they finally concentrated on Hack Freeman and Curley Everett, posing them until word began to spread. It reached the inquisitive ears of Sergeant Nulty who, gathering the truth, beat a path to his prize slugger.

"Is this true about Everett?" he demanded. "That he's a relation?"

"Yes."

"By marriage?" the Sarge asked hopefully.

"Sort of," the slugger replied dryly. "He's my half-brother. I don't remember my father. Died when I was just a few months old. My mother married again. Curly is five years younger than I. He was south with the Bruins two years ago. They farmed him out."

"Well, what's he got?" Nulty demanded. "What's he throw?"

"I don't know. I haven't seen the kid in two years. He worked for an oil company in the West for two winters."

SERGEANT Nulty's face took on the general color of cold ashes. For many weeks he had suspected his prize slugger of lack of interest. But how in the name of holy cow could a big-league ball player work up any spirit against his old team, especially with his step-brother doing the pitching?

Straightaway the sergeant began to worry. He saw a long line of broken and embittered soldiers walking back to Camp Streeter with every penny lost and many more pledged against losses in town. He went to the mound with the heaviest heart in Christendom, and he envisioned his own future as darker than coal in a mine.

New uniforms, good equipment, a sleek ball field and the best lineup a man could want—these were behind the Sarge as he looked around for a checkup when the umpire called play. Camp Streeter wasn't licked and couldn't be until twenty-seven putouts later.

On that slim thread of hope, the Sarge began to heave his stuff across the plate. He wanted no shutout, nor a no-hitter. He didn't care if they beat his ears off, so long as the Streeters did worse to this Curly Everett and the Bruins.

Nulty opened with a variety of stuff and controlled it well. The Bruins not only



had to supply their own power, but get a piece of the ball to send it anywhere. They did neither well, preferring to wait for the "high hard one," which the Sarge failed to throw in the first and second innings.

With Curly Everett, it was different. He was fast, as a big kid is always fast, and the fast ball hopped crazily at the plate, or so the first three Streeters—Schwartz, Carney and McIntosh, reported.

Sergeant Nulty watched Hack Freeman face his own flesh and blood, hoping for a variety of results. He didn't like the way Hack waited out the kid, nibbled at the close ones, and worked himself to a three-and-two count.

Sure enough, the kid put over a knee-high hook, which Freeman took and which the beefy big-league umpire called a strike. The soldiers roared disapproval, and the townspeople who occupied at least half the seats roared otherwise. Nulty roared at Freeman, and the latter merely shrugged.

But Lewis and Crane went down swinging at an elusive ball that either hopped or sailed when it reached the plate. The Sarge produced his fast ball for the first time against the last third of the lineup, and the Chicago trio were fooled by the sudden change, though Nulty wasn't bearing down.

When he trekked to the plate with two out in his own half of the third, he understood why the soldiers were blinking and missing as the young right-hander's hard one sailed by. You could scarcely see it.

That is, ordinary hitters couldn't. An experienced slugger like Hack Freeman should be murdering the thing. Sergeant Nulty began eating his heart out as he hurled the fourth inning.

Looking at his stuff for the second time, the Bruins simply shortened their bats and chopped it, hither and yon. By the

time the Sarge caught on to what was happening, a pair of Chicagoans had caught on to the bases with only one out.

**H**E BEGAN to argue with himself. "This is the same as if I'd been drafted the other way," he said silently. "I'm in the big leagues, facin' the pennant winners. But all they got is a bat. I got a slider."

He threw the slider, but it didn't slide for reasons that the Sarge couldn't grasp at the moment. His head was turned, watching big Hack Freeman chase the wallop. Freeman wasn't going fast enough, the Sarge muttered.

Maybe deliberately—well, it made no difference. The ball had cleared the bleachers and pandemonium broke out among the citizens. A rash of silence broke out among the soldiers.

Hack Freeman felt sorry for the guy, as he always felt for people who build their hopes too high. The slider had slipped and sailed instead of dropping. The pitcher was choking up, and perhaps this would be his finish.

But the Sarge needed no diet of violin strings. He had considerable of the old fortitude behind his belt buckle and cut loose with his high hard one, much to the surprise and temporary annoyance of the next two batters. But the score was 3-0, and things were pretty droopy in the soldiers' dugout.

Things remained that way as they nibbled on Curly Everett's speedy deliveries. Ike Carney managed to mar his day with the first hit, a clean single, but Joe McIntosh was an out, putting him on second.

Before Hack Freeman could wait out his half-brother, the kid had him in a 2-and-1 hole.

Fearing a repetition of the low pitch, Hack went for the next delivery and skied

to the infield.

"Can't you suggest anything?" the Sarge demanded. "Ain't there some way we can hog-tie the snip?"

"If I knew anything, Sarge, I'd do it myself. The kid handcuffs me before I can get anywhere."

Fine talk! The Sarge trudged to the mound for the fifth, loaded with despondency. Yet he poured baffling material over the plate which, if the Camp Streeter team hadn't been behind, would have brought every soldier up off his seat. But it was just so much wasted motion as the Bruins played out the string.

From the way the soldiers marched up and back, you'd have thought they were playing out the string against Curly Everett. There was a hit by Eddie Mehr in the sixth with one out, and Sergeant Nulty sacrificed, but Schwartz, the lead-off man, couldn't get the ball out of the infield. It was one more goose-egg for Camp Streeter.

"How can you be so calm about it?" Sergeant Nulty demanded of Hack at the close of this dismal try. "What kind of a man are you? What kind of soldier are you?"

"Yeah," Mehr chimed in. "Or are you still a Bruin?"

A couple of players pleaded for caution, but still others asked variations of the same question. Captain Hicks broke it up, but the fuse was lit by that one outburst.

**T**HE team of soldiers began to fight themselves as well as the ball. Sergeant Nulty was in trouble from start to finish of the seventh and escaped a score only by some clever plate-blocking on the part of Crane, the catcher.

Then the soldiers in the grandstand began to heckle Hack Freeman. The bleachers took it up, and his ears rang

from the blame for impending defeat. The players continued as he reached the dugout, his face aflame.

"Fine soldiers!" he muttered. "Run up the flag, boys, but be sure it's white."

"That's enough. Freeman!" the sergeant bellowed, "if you want to leave this park in one piece." To Carney he said, "Wait him out this time. I think he's weakenin'."

Hack jumped up and whirled Carney around.

"Do just the opposite!" he exclaimed. "Hit the first pitch!"

"I'm in command here!" the Sarge reminded. "Carney—"

"You hit the first pitch, or I'll stand there and take three," Hack warned. "You've tabbed me with the crowd. Okay, I'll prove that you're right—unless Carney and McIntosh hit the first pitch."

There was a strange pause, with Carney and McIntosh looking from Nulty to Freeman. Finally the Sarge spoke.

"What am I goin' to do with a dirty mug like that? Hit the first one, Ike."

Carney saluted and rushed to the plate. He dug in, watched the delivery, swung and singled cleanly to left field. Joe McIntosh followed in a bedlam of military indecorum. Batting right-handed, he slashed late at the pitch and sliced a drive down the right-field foul line. A place-hitter couldn't have hit behind the runner better. Carney galloped to third in a fresh outburst of vocal noise.

With runners on first and third, it was a great spot for a homer, but Hack Freeman came nowhere near any of the pitches, nor did the pitches come anywhere near him. He got four and walked to fill the bases.

The Bruins began warming up a pair of pitchers, one of which was the veteran, Bright. Hack Freeman knew that would happen, but too late to do any good. The kid would have to pitch to at least two

more batters.

Whitey Lewis, a lefty, had passed up the first pitch, a hook, for a strike. The next was in there—and out of there just as fast as Whitey swung, connected and laced the thing on a line between center and right.

He had signaled his intentions and all three runners had a start. All three crossed the plate, and the play was at third in a cloud of dust, but Captain Hicks called White safe.

The honor of a long fly fell to Bill Crane, and, though each pitch was near his knees, he found one with his bat, skied it to deep center, and Whitey scored standing up.

“Now, Sarge,” Hack gasped, for the run to the plate was still burning his throat, “there’s your ball game. When you reach the big leagues again, you’ll learn that kid pitchers always throw everything they have, especially in the Spring. That brother of mine had no more right shutting us out with two hits than he had of flying.”

“I—I knew that,” the Sarge muttered, and sprayed the crated floor with tobacco juice. “I saw him weakenin’.”

“But a weakening pitcher,” Hack reminded, “can always powder one through there on a three-and-two pitch. He won’t powder the first one through. Remember that. Also remember that you’ve got to hit fast before a manager realizes what’s happening. We did all this on just a few pitches.”

The Sarge rose as Eddie Mehr, second man to face the relief pitcher, Bright, fouled out to end the inning.

“Now, can you hold ‘em, Sarge?” Hack asked, slapping the sweaty soldier. “I could pitch an inning—”

“You bet your leave I’ll hold ‘em,” the Sarge muttered. He looked at Hack and managed a grin. “Maybe—maybe the next four or five games’ll go a little better—with you runnin’ things, hey?”