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SOUVENIR

If you've been reading the newspapers at all the last three months, you've no doubt heard of Louie Hlozek; yeah, he's the one they call the Battling Bohunk, or maybe you know him as the Charging Czech. I guess ~~there~~ isn't a soul in the whole darned country who hasn't heard of him since he pulled that one man army stunt against a Jap platoon on Guadalcanal; what he didn't do isn't worth talking about. Sergeant York may have been a pretty fair country fighter in the last World War, but Louie made him look like a piker, they say.

The reason I'm talking about Louie is because he's from my home town in Colorado. I moved out here to Los Angeles a couple of years ago to work at Douglas, but I used to know Louie pretty well. When you live in a town as small as Spencer, you get to know pretty near ~~everybody~~, but I remember Louie especially because he was about the best athlete the town ever produced, and he was a pretty bright kid too. He was always quiet and gentle-like when he was a kid, but I can remember the time a bunch of village toughs led by Jed Stuart thought Louie would be ~~xxxxx~~ easy pickings. It took that kid pretty long to get riled up, but when he did, he just waded in, polished Jed and a couple of others off, and made the rest run. They found out a thing or two about how gentle Louie really was when riled, just like the Japs did down in Guadalcanal. But Louie made

friends with Jed and his gang after their fight, and I doubt if the Japs feel very friendly toward Louie after their encounter. Well, Louie just naturally became the leader of Jed's bunch and did a pretty good job of reforming them.

Everybody knows who Louie Hlozek is now, but how many knew him three years ago when he was the best back in the Tri-County football conference, the best short-stop in the baseball league, and the state low-hurdling champion? He played a pretty good brand of basketball too, but only made second-string all conference. Not many people knew about Louie then because he was only written up in the county weeklies and semi-weeklies, but even then, a lot of college coaches came around and made him some good offers. But Louie had always had his mind set on going to Muir College. Yeah, I guess you haven't heard of it; it's a small college near Spencer; hasn't got a big-name football team, but it has a pretty good forestry school, and Louie thought he'd like to do some conservation work.

Jed Stuart, who'd gone through grammar school and high school with Louie took an athletic scholarship at one of the larger universities, and this made Louie feel pretty bad because he and Jed had gotten to be pretty close buddies. Jed was Louie's keystone partner on the Spencer high baseball team and made second string all-league; the way those two clicked on double plays was about the most beautiful thing ever seen around there, but Jed couldn't hit very well or else he'd've ~~been~~ made the first team all-league. He was about the best end Spencer ever had too and in track he pushed Louie to a new state record in the low sticks. It's too bad, but about half a year ago,

Jed was killed when he cracked up a navy trainer; it was just a couple of weeks before he would've gotten his wings too.

But getting back to Louie, he went to college to study, not to become an athletic bum. He did find time to go out for track and football. He was just about the best back the conference had ever seen and was the fastest thing in the league over the lows even as a freshman, but of course he was ineligible for the varsity in the 1940 football season and the 1941 track season being only a freshman. Well, just about the time the '41 football season was over with Louie a unanimous All-State half-back, the athletic committee decided to break down and send Louie off to the IC4A track meet in the spring; they figured that Louie's times as a freshman were good enough to rank him pretty high in big-time competition. The Spencer paper had the news in headlines. Louie was plenty tickled and wrote to Jed about it; Jed was glad to get the news and wrote back that this time he was going to make Louie eat his dust.

Before the year was out, though, we got into the war, and, when the semester ended, Louie joined the army; he took his training down in Texas someplace and was made a sergeant before being shipped off to Australia and then into the thick of things at Guadalcanal.

Yup, Louie's quite a lad.

Got a light, mister? Thanks; won't you have one yourself?

Well, as I was saying, Louie's quite a lad. He came back to the States the other day, and I ran up to San Francisco

to see him when he got in. He was bigger and brawnier than ever and he'd sort of lost that boyish look, but he was as unspoiled as ever. He was tickled pink to see me again. He had on a whole string of ribbons, and I told him he looked like a regular Christmas tree. He sort of blushed; looking over at a newspaper cameraman, he said, "He made me put 'em on."

I took him out to dinner, and, afterward, he came up to my hotel room for news from home; I'd been getting the county paper and had been writing to friends back home pretty regularly; so I was able to tell him about the folks at home. I tried to get him to tell me something about himself, but he didn't open up much.

"Gee, Unk," he said (all the kids in Spencer used to call me Unk), everybody's trying to make a hero out of me, but everyone out there's a hero, and there are plenty of them right here, too; only we shouldn't start talking about it until after the war's won."

That's all he'd say; so finally I said, "Kid, you've been through hell and high water since I last saw you; you've had lots of experiences that most people wouldn't care to go through even though they envy you for them. Each one of those medals you've got represents something; if it's not getting too personal, would you mind telling me which one means to most to you because of its association with something you've done?"

Well, sir, he looked at me for quite a while. The he said very quietly, "Unk, the medal that's meant more to me than anything else is something I got last summer in Texas just before I was shipped across." I thought he meant a marksmanship medal for learning how to shoot accurately, but he unbuttoned his

blouse and fumbled in the breast pocket of his shirt. He pulled out a crumpled envelope and said, "I've carried it here ever since I got it."

He handed the envelope to me and, wonderingly, I opened it. As I pulled the letter out, something fell onto the rug; I picked it up absently and read the letter. As nearly as I can remember, it said:

"Dear Louie,

I'm sorry as heck, bud, that I couldn't do better; Smith of Pacific U. edged me out, but I know darned well that you could've beaten the pants off both of us. You deserve this more than I do; so I'm sending it on to you, hoping that whenever you look at it, you'll be reminded of

Your pal,
Jed."

I opened my palm and looked at the thing which had fallen out of the letter. It was a silver medal with the bas-relief of a figure sailing over a hurdle. I turned it over and read, "1942 IC4A Championship, 220 yard low hurdles, second place."