

THE LEGIONNAIRE

by
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PERHAPS—said the officer of the Legion—you are one of those who believe this War, with its great guns, its masses of men, its trench warfare, squeezed all the romance out of fighting, as a hand squeezes water from a sponge—*drip-drip-drip*. Perhaps you say to yourself that in the old days the individual of lofty idealism, of indomitable

courage, performed deeds of signal bravery and valor, but that now men fight only in mass like two hordes of rats, and the individual is submerged. No?

Well, you are right. Such is not the case. I am thinking of Jules Lenart, "Jules of the Point," some called him, and others "The Pigsticker."

This Jules was a Belgian boxer who came to Paris years before the War and fought

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all comers. He weighed, perhaps, seventy kilos—one hundred and fifty pounds. Yet often he would fight men twenty, thirty pounds heavier than he. He was beaten often, but he was respected, because you see he was clever and very brave. He would fight and never give in.

At length he accumulated a little fund of savings, and on the edge of Montmartre he opened a little atelier for instructions in his art. Stout men who wanted to pull in their waists so that they could stroll on the boulevards like dandies also came to him. He became a little better known, made a little money, it began to look as if the hardships of life were behind him.

And then—the War.

“*Monsieur*,” said he to me, when I told him in his gymnasium that I would no more have the time or inclination to come and box with him, “*monsieur*, the gymnasium will not be here to receive you, if you come.”

“Henri joins his regiment, yes,” I said, naming his assistant, “and you return to Belgium, *n’est ce pas?*”

“But, no, *monsieur*,” rejoined Jules. “In Belgium there is no Jules Lenart upon the regimental rolls. And the man Jules used to be could not show up, even to defend his country, without those stupid *gendarm-erie* remembering a certain little affair.”

“What then?” said I.

“I would join the Foreign Legion,” said he. “Will *monsieur* be good enough to arrange it?”

“It shall be arranged,” said I.

It was.

I did not ask, of course, the nature of that “certain little affair” which the *gendarm-erie* of Belgium would remember. I did not seek to learn what name Jules had borne in the past. It is not customary to seek such information in the Legion. A Legionnaire is gaged by the present, alone.

Need I dwell upon the training period? It was very brief. When Von Kluck and the Crown Prince attempted to press their pincers shut upon Paris, the Legion was among the hard nuts which refused to be cracked and which bent the pincers back. Alas, however, so many of my children were not alive to answer roll call afterward that the new men in training were called up to fill the gaps. Among them was Jules.

I was his captain, and could follow his career. I was also bayonet instructor. Thus I saw early that Jules would excel at the

use of that weapon, which in those days before the development of lines locked in trenches was much employed. His cleverness as a boxer helped him. Those were terrible days, filled with fighting. Jules could never seem to get enough of it. When we met the enemy, he fought like a demon, and each time he would slay more Germans than the last.

He took a simple pride in his exploits. Our men call the bayonet “Rosalie.” “This day,” Jules would say, on returning from a charge in which he had been invincible and had slain I know not how many; “this day, Rosalie drank a stomachful. Now she must rest.” Then he would polish that long and incredibly thin bayonet which the Legionnaires carry.

It was a little grotesque, *n’est ce pas*, to see that sturdy little fellow, five feet four, with his thin face over which the skin was drawn tight like an onion, sit there polishing his Rosalie and talking to her in a low voice? I would think, sometimes, as I watched him, of a little girl with a doll. She croons to it, rocks it in her arms, or speaks of it in the third person, saying “Rosalie must go to sleep now.” Just so it was with Jules and Rosalie.

At length he would put it away, scratch a battered ear, memento of his ring days, or lay a thick finger alongside his broken nose and his shrewd little eyes would stare down its length and he would say, “There, Rosalie, sleep now, for soon we shall have another pig or two to stick.”

Because of this expression of his, his comrades termed him the Pigsticker. More rarely he was called Jules with the Point. His reputation grew, not only among us but among the Germans, too.

He won the War Cross, more rarely given in those days than later. It was for an exploit in which he saved me when I was wounded, and bore me back, over his shoulder, like a sack of meal, and herding twelve prisoners before him. So you may observe he was a good soldier to have in one’s command. Yet he was not a model soldier. Ah, but who looks for models in the Legion? The men of the Legion want fighting and forgetfulness. That is when they are best. That is when they are devils. Give them a quiet sector, with nothing to do except keep clean, and they grumble. It was so when we got into a quiet sector in Champagne. And Jules grumbled worst of all

He got into trouble; he committed petty misdemeanors. I had to overlook much.


Often he would go by himself and sit and brood with his bayonet in his hands. Then he would talk to it in low tones, like a child to its doll, saying:

"Rosalie, this loafing can not last. Take heart, Rosalie. Soon we shall have a nice fat pig to stick."

Sometimes, when I would come upon him quietly, and overhear him saying such things, I would shudder.

"To what end," I would ask myself, "does this war bring men? Here was a nice fellow, getting along well in his gymnasium back in Paris, a very human, genial man. Now he is a little mad and thinks only of killings and of blood."

Then I would speak to Jules and attempt to reason with him, but he would only stare at me vacantly and salute, and I would go on with a little more sadness at my heart.

 ONE night there was a little raid, and my men brought in a prisoner. He was a Saxon, and thus we learned that for three days now there were Saxons in line opposite us. Does that not mean anything to you? It did to us. We knew the Saxons for the best of the Germans. They keep their word when given. With the Saxons opposing on a quiet sector, one could enter into agreement to let things rest for a day or two and feel assured the Saxons would not attempt to play tricks.

This prisoner made a statement while the men who had brought him in were still present, which led to what followed. He informed us proudly there were three famous bayonet-wielders among the Saxons and added:

"We have heard the Pigsticker is here. He will meet his match when he goes out again."

One of the guards, Ledoux, a gossip, hurried at once to Jules with this word.

"Ha, what is that you say?" cried Jules, busy at his endless task of polishing Rosalie.

He put her up hastily and came to find the prisoner. They met outside the door of my dugout, as the Saxon was being led away.

Jules thrust his broken nose into the other's face.

"Pig," he cried, thumping his chest, "behold. I am the Pigsticker. I would fight your three great men at once. Yes; I would

chew them up and spit them out. So." And he spat.

This Saxon was a sturdy fellow, a man of intelligence, and he spoke French. He did not tremble before Jules. Instead, in a tone of contempt, he said:

"Perhaps they would not condescend to fight you. You fellows are jail-birds."

It is true, my children of the Legion have not a savory reputation, and this is known to the Germans. Yet, what would you? A Legionnaire is touchy of his honor. Jules knocked the prisoner down.

It was not nice, but judge for yourself.

Then Jules retired and thought. Presently he obtained a piece of board and a little black paint, and was observed busying himself about something. At length he brought it to his comrades in his dugout and displayed it proudly.

"Excellent," they cried when they had read, "we shall put it up at dawn."

And, when daylight came, above the lip of our trench stood this board. It was a challenge. It was the Pigsticker's challenge to the three Saxon champions. He would engage to fight them all, he had written. If the conditions were accepted, he would advance with no arms except his unloaded rifle and bayonet to a point midway between the trenches. Then one German champion was to advance to meet him. When they engaged, a second was to leave the German trenches, and when he should reach the Pigsticker, the third was to advance.

Absurd bravado, you say to yourself, perhaps. Have it as you will. The Pigsticker trembled for hours after that challenge was issued. Yet when one comrade, more daring than the rest, undertook to chaff him for this trembling the Pigsticker gave him, first, a terrible glance, and then a terrible buffet. No, he did not tremble because of fear at having committed himself to a course that quite possibly spelt death. Instead, he shook lest the Saxons should not accept.

And this became apparent when three hours later, having read his challenge through their glasses, the Saxons answered it in kind, accepting and setting the duel for the following day. Then Jules ceased his trembling and became magnificent.

"Ah," he cried gaily, and he drew his bayonet and kissed it, "now Rosalie shall drink her fill."

Yet Jules was not content. He must have the terms of the duel explicit. Once more rose his bulletin board, to be scanned through German glasses, and answered in kind. There must be truce between the two sectors, no interference, and the victor to leave the field undisturbed by the enemy; it must be a duel to the death. So it was agreed.

Here, then, was about to occur that at which I hinted in the beginning—a duel between warrior heroes like the combats of olden time while opposing armies looked on.

Need I speak in detail of the ensuing hours? What the Saxons did I know not. But Jules was untroubled at thought of the morrow and slept extra long.



NEXT day, at the appointed hour, he mounted the fire-step, kissed a hand to his comrades, leaped across the parapet and, clutching his rifle and Rosalie, set forth into No Man's Land. All along our lines we watched him, and I doubt not the Germans did the same. Yet, at the first, heads stayed discreetly low, and none showed.

When he reached the middle of that space between the lines, Jules halted and stood at ease, resting on his rifle, looking toward the farther lines. Then a German with his gun and bayonet clambered over the parapet, there, and started forward to meet Jules. Remember, these were Saxons, and we trusted them to come with unloaded rifles. With Prussians it would have been different.

The German approached Jules warily, and they crossed bayonets. At that moment, a second German leaped his parapet and started forward. It was in the agreement that this should be so, but now our hearts misgave us. To engage three champions in this fashion? It was too much. Not even the Pigsticker could battle so. The trenches were only one hundred meters apart; it was only fifty meters to the center. What chance would be the Pigsticker's to polish off the first opponent ere the second arrived, and the third?

And now in our anxiety, all prudence was cast aside. Our heads uprose above the parapet, so that we could observe all that took place. Nor were the Germans more careful. Above the two opposing lines of trenches were these rows of heads, like heaped-up cannon-balls, like targets in a

gallery. However, the truce was respected, and not a shot was fired.

We could see more clearly, and also it became apparent our anxiety for Jules was somewhat premature. For, ere the second champion arrived to cross bayonets with him, he had given the first a terrible thrust in the chest, near the heart, and he had fallen to the ground.

The Saxons had sent their least expert champion first; that was apparent. This second was a man of shrewder technique. He gave Jules many smart thrusts, and there they thrust and parried, balanced on the balls of their feet, with the first German quiet and still on the ground between them.

Yet was Jules the better, and presently he gave the other a terrible thrust in the throat, so that his Rosalie passed clear through and took the air at the back. The Saxon slumped down, dragging Rosalie with him, but Jules by a quick movement freed her and drew her dripping out.

It was time. For as Jules jumped clear and put himself on guard, the third champion was upon him.

He was a bad man to meet, this third. From our prisoner I learned a little about him. He was the Saxon instructor in bayonet practise. He came accoutered, on his feet rubber-soled shoes with which to grip the ground well; on his body only short running-pants ending at the knee, and a sleeveless jersey, thus giving arms and legs full play. Here when the Pigsticker was spent from his previous encounters, and bleeding, too, from many wounds, came the best of the German champions, and he was fresh. My heart misgave me. So, too, did those of our men, for they did not answer the hoarse cheer which went up from the Saxon lines as the Saxon and the Pigsticker crossed bayonets.

That one yell, however, was all that arose. Silence followed, such silence that we could plainly hear the rasping of steel on steel and the labored breathing of the fighters.

The Germans, you may know, have one main thrust. It is started, as is ours, with the left hand upon the barrel, the right upon the stock of the rifle. And it is started shoulder high. But while we retain our left hand upon the barrel, the German releases his. Thus he can shoot his bayonet farther forward than can we. It is as if two men boxed, one with a longer reach. And of this thrust, the Saxon was a master. Yet,

just as when boxers are matched the one with the longer reach not always can land his blow, so it was with the German. For we have many thrusts and parries, we have developed the science of bayonet-play from the older science of fencing. And of all our thrusts and parries, Jules Lenart—the Pig-sticker—was master.

Around and around they circled, each crouching, gun and bayonet advanced. Cut, slash; thrust, parry. Jules was touched several times. How badly, we could not know. That Saxon was truly a terrible fighter. Both men were drawing in great sobbing breaths. In that awful stillness, the sound of it came quite distinctly to our ears.

Suddenly, pinning all his hopes upon it, the Saxon executed his main thrust. With lightning-like quickness, he lunged far forward. Yet Jules was able to parry the blow. His upflung rifle, just in time, turned the other's weapon aside, so that the bayonet merely grazed his head. Quicker to recover, Jules brought his rifle whirling down, and before the other could regain his balance he was spitted upon Rosalie.

The Saxon sagged to the ground. Slowly, fumblingly, seeing to our overwrought nerves to be forever about it, Jules Lenart freed his bayonet from the body. He stood erect with an effort, leaning upon his rifle, looking at the three foemen, like heaps of clothing, upon the ground before him. Then his hand came up in a salute to the worthy dead, he turned, and started back.

Not even then was the spell upon my Legionnaires broken. Not even then did the Saxon lines give tongue. None even moved in either line. We stood there, on our respective parapets, like so many graven figures of stone. There was neither cheer, nor imprecation, nor movement. It was as if some force vast and beyond the puny comprehension of man had laid its influence upon us all, to keep us from speech or action. For my part, the blood drummed in my ears, and it seemed as if my temples would

burst. In all the world there was only Jules Lenart, plodding back on wavering legs to our lines, leaning upon his rifle, groping with it as a blind man with a cane.

Presently he sank slowly to one knee. One hand still grasped the rifle, the other was pressed upon the ground. Then at last we came back to conscious life, and two or three of Jules' comrades could stand that no more, and leaped over the parapet. But Jules' glazing eyes saw them, and it was as if the sight put into him new life.

He stood upright, a terrible figure, dripping blood, stood as if on parade.

"No, no," he cried violently; "go back!"

They hesitated, respected his wish, and fell back to the trench. Jules came on. He was a terrible figure, indeed. But he faltered no more.

He reached the parapet. He clambered over. Strong hands reached to support him, but he put them aside. He gained the first step. He leaped down into the trench.

Then that inhuman accession of strength deserted him. He collapsed, as the Legionnaires gathered around. He lay still, one hand upon his Rosalie. And we saw how his uniform was cut to ribbons, how his body gaped with countless wounds inflicted by the Saxon bayonets, with his life-blood pumping from them.

Even yet, however, Jules Lenart was not dead. Quite suddenly he sat up, blood spurting anew from him and staining the legs of those nearest; and, pulling his cap from his head, he cried in a loud voice:

"*Vive la Belgique. Vive le Légionnaire.*"

He fell back, and that is how Jules Lenart died. We counted twenty-seven wounds upon him.

That night, upon patrol, we found a green wreath where Jules had fought, and on it a card which read:

TO JULES LENART, THE PIGSTICKER. A GREAT FIGHTER.

A Saxon had left it there. It was Jules Lenart's epitaph.

