

Private Pete's Primer Makes Soldiers of Unschooled

By SLOAN TAYLOR

Washington, D. C., Nov. 13.—This is the story of a simple, touching and instructive book—Technical Manual



A typical classroom in which the Army teaches reading, writing and arithmetic at Camp Niantic, Conn.

No. 21-500—called drily the Army Reader, and commonly known also as Private Pete's Primer.

Private Pete's Primer is the introduction to the arts of reading and writing, the science of arithmetic, the graces of social behavior and the meaning of the Army of the United States in a fighting democracy, to thousands of illiterate GIs. It is for the boys who, for some reason, never learned to read or write—and hundreds of others who speak or understand only a foreign language.

It is a deceptively offhand canny little volume of 148 pages, pro-

Here are some things that Pete Smith uses in the Army.

Write the right words on the lines below.



A simple lesson for an illiterate trainee.

fusely illustrated with clearly lined pen drawings and set up in large type similar to that found in first-grade textbooks.

Courses Have Double Goal.

It is, in short, the means of solving the Army's problem of what to do with men who grew up in ignorance or know no English—and it is by way of salvaging them

to become (a) good soldiers and (b) literate citizens.

The hero, of course, is Private Pete Smith 32399282 T43, of RFD2, Lost Creek, Ky.—non-existent, but as real in evolution as any flesh and blood kid plucked from the hills and taken into the Army.

He can't spell C-A-T on Page 1, but by Page 148, after a barracks bull session, he can stand on his feet and say confidently of the war:

"Now I begin to understand. We are still free men. We must always be free in the United States of America and in the whole world. That is why we are fighting. That is why we must win."

Special Training Units.

Private Pete and his career become musts for men who can't read or write, at Special Training Units of the various Service Commands after the Army General Classification Test at induction centers indicates they meet all military training requirements except education.

Four years of grammar school is the minimum at which the Army will accept men. At the STU schools they are given the equivalent of that in a streamlined course of eight to 13 weeks.

As trainees, the men wear fatigue uniforms and helmets and are given pre-military training—but the primer is the main staple of their existence during the school period.

The subtlety of the manual lies in the fact that it not merely teaches the letterless soldier to read and write—it indoctrinates him into Army life. It teaches him drill, exercise and cleanliness; what to do with his money; what to tell the folks at home, and what to do with his spare time. If it won't wean him away from comicstrip books, it will at least teach him to read the balloons.

Starts With Induction.

The four-part, 17-chapter book opens with "A Day With Private Pete." In it Pete is first introduced

to an Army camp. He is given his identification tags—and taught how to write his name and serial number. Space is left on a facing page for the trainee to practice.

His bed, barracks bags and laundry tag are introduced—and he is told that in one of these bags goes his soiled clothing with the laundry as its ultimate destination.

He is learning to read and he is learning that "a soldier keeps his things in order in the barracks." He is taught to identify everything within the barracks.

He is shown a plan of the barracks and told to count the number of beds illustrated. He is introduced to reveille, showers, shaving, components of his uniform, chow and the use of utensils, inspection and discipline—all through the medium of simple declarative sentences and pointed illustrations.

Pete Learns to Write.

Part 2 tells how Pete writes a letter.

"I do not look the same any more," he writes. "The boys say that I look much better. I can read, and as you see, I can write a letter."

Pete's come a long way.

He writes of learning to drill—and the actual orders and forma-



At Fort Ontario, N. Y., Sergt. Harry Safstrom (right) helps Pvt. Chin Choy of New York City write a letter in English to his parents.

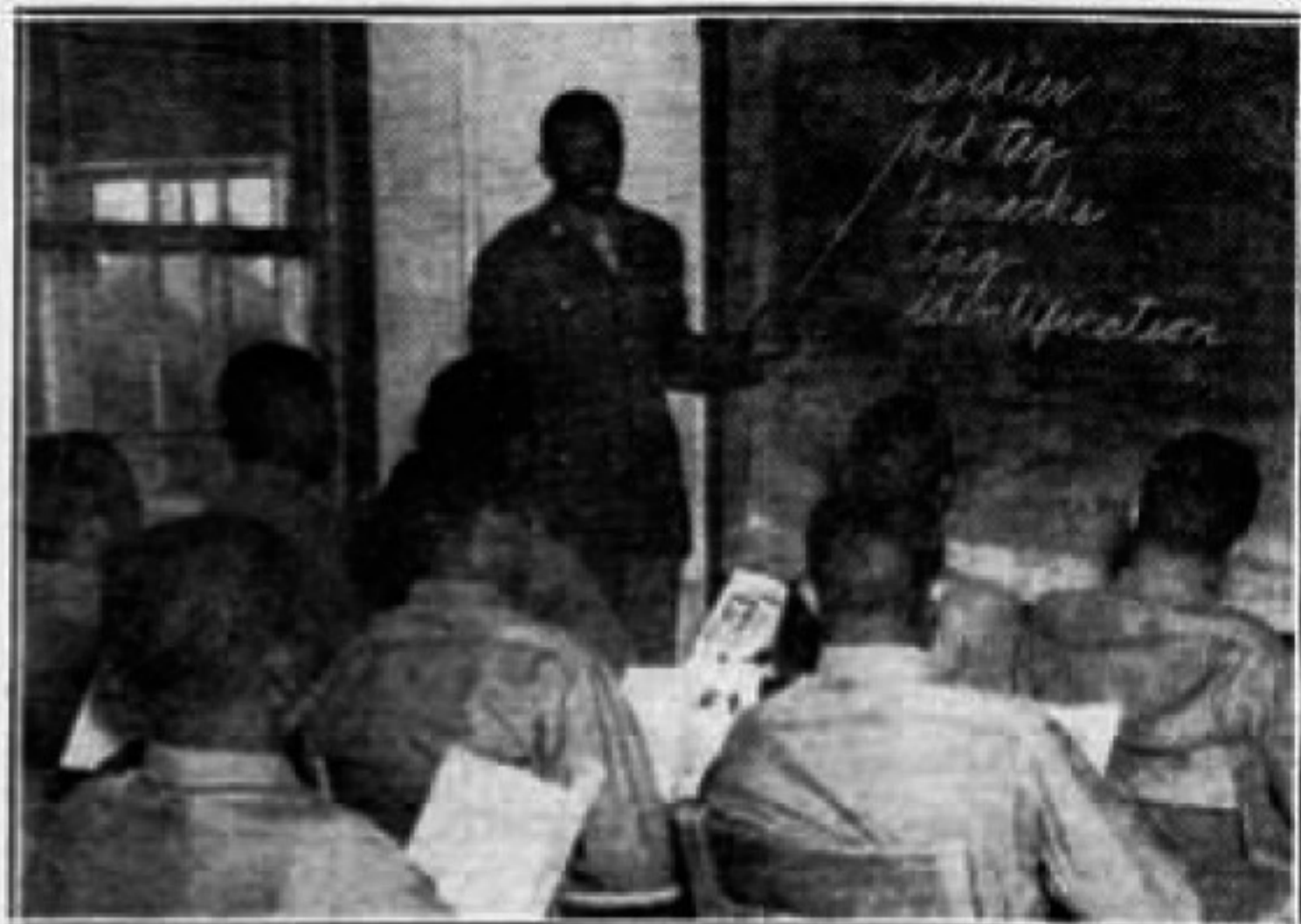
tions are embodied in the letter. He learns the meaning—and communicates it in writing—of discipline and order.

"The Army Pays Private Pete" in Part 3. Pete learns to husband his money; to buy Army insurance; to buy War Bonds; to keep an account of what he spends and where, and to count his change. He does his arithmetic, too, by adding, subtracting and multiplying the familiar objects about him—men, squads, guns, pencils.

Reaches Full Stature.

And in Part 4, "Private Pete Smith of the Army of the United States," Pete reaches full stature as a man and a soldier. He understands now what makes a good soldier—obedience, loyalty, determination, alertness and an understanding of teamwork and group ethics.

Pete discovered, through discussion, of the fight being waged by the United Nations and he read,



Corp. Joshua Williamson, former world's high jumping champ, teaches a group of trainees how to spell at Holabird Signal Depot, Baltimore.

for perhaps the first time, Tom Peine's words, written during the Revolutionary War: "These are the times that try men's souls."

The first camp visited in order to get some idea of how the primer is being applied, was Fort Ontario, N. Y., where there are several classes of non-English-speaking Chinese. Lieut. Col. Robert M. Mantor of Manchester, N. H., commanding officer of STU 1210 permitted attendance at one of the Chinese classes. The instructor was a former school teacher who had been inducted into the Army.

He asked a trainee to read: "The soldiers eat in the mess halls." The Chinese trainee could not pronounce "eat," so the teacher asked him what he did in a mess hall. The answer was: "Chow."

Fluent in Other Tongues.

Occasionally a non-English-speaking trainee is exceptionally well versed in other languages. There was a Greek seaman, for example, who spoke French and German as well. He was aboard a British cargo vessel which was torpedoed. Rescued, he was taken to this country and is now in the Army.

After two weeks at STU at Fort Ontario he could whiz through Private Pete and knew enough English to negotiate with a banker for the exchange of his British money to American currency.

At Fort Ethan Allen, near Burlington, Vt., there was a multilingual group of Orientals, French

Canadians, Scandinavians, Italians and Portuguese. They are part of STU 3114, commanded by Capt. Roland M. Stover of Concord, N. H.

Their teachers were young women recommended to the War Department by the Massachusetts Department of Education because of their experience in dealing with immigrants seeking naturalization papers.

Incidentally, non-English-speaking trainees who are illiterate in their own tongues are given several days of visualization instruction before beginning with Private Pete. This consists of showing them pictures of objects and teaching them to pronounce the English names.

Problems for Psychiatrist.

Functional illiterates—men who can read but do not understand what they read—are the most difficult problem of all and they are usually subjects for the post psychiatrist.

At Holabird Signal Depot, Baltimore, Md., the third STU post visited, the trainees are Negroes, mainly from Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York and Virginia.

They are taught by Negro instructors who rate anywhere from private, first class, to sergeant. A number of the instructors are college graduates. Other are athletes and musicians. There is, for example, Corp. Joshua Williamson, former world's high jump champ, a graduate of Xavier State University.

Oppenheim Collins

Brooklyn • Fulton at Lawrence St.

