

Billings Boy Makes Good—U.S. Army Style

By ADDISON BRAGGS
Gazette Staff Writer

If local boy-makes-good parades were still in style, they might have staged one for Jack Hay when he got to town Friday. As it was, the man who left here 30 years ago a beset ranger and came back a four-star general was honored as punch at the reception he got.

WE LAUGHED and talked and ate and drank with old friends and ended a 7½-hour visit into yesterday the only way it could be properly ended.

Maj. Gen. John H. Hay went fishing. "It's like waking up after a long dream," said Hay earlier as he drove around town with hooded friend Bill Roscoe. "The old places are still there and the old friends are still there—and they only look a little different."

Hay, who now commands one of the Army's most prestigious

institutions, the Command and General Staff College at Ft. Leavenworth, admitted he wasn't sure he gotten to the right place when he got his first look at the town from the air.

"ABOUT THE ONLY thing I could recognize was the river," he said with a grin. "Everything else was so changed."

Well, he heaved. ALMOST everything else. He remembered the NP depot as it was and remembered when the Indians you saw on the streets still wore feathers. He remembered Connolly's Store and how as a youngster he used to walk in the door and

said expectantly, "I used to love the smell of leather," he said. He saw a picture of a Model T on Roscoe's office wall and recognized it immediately as the one he, Roscoe, Keith Brown and John Duncan (who now lives in Great Falls and couldn't make it to the get-together they had for Hay) drove to Chicago in 1913.

"THE BRAKES WENT out after we got there and we drove all around Chicago using reverse as a brake," he grinned. "I'd sure like to see, after talking with Hay, that he's the sort of person who's proud of his home and his state."

He named one of his most important combat operations in Vietnam where he commanded the "Big Red One" infantry division, Operation Billings.

And more than one correspondent has quoted Hay's favorite comment.

DOWNTOWN, HAY squinted at a store and recognized it as the place his father took him to buy his first suit. "If I remember, it cost seven bucks," he said.

And he saw a window where he and Bob Bailey, whose father was a doctor, went in the surgeon's office, but the tingiest rubber gloves, filled them with water and dropped them on the busy sidewalk below.

Sitting on his cigar, Hay marvelled as he and Roscoe walked into Brown's office and compared it to the Secretary of Army's office suite in the Pentagon.

"I guess I should have stayed up here with you guys," he grinned.

BROWN AND ROSCOE promptly paroled him back. "I'd sure like to," said Hay. "but, by gosh, they just don't have much call for infantrymen up here."

Leaving Brown, Hay and Roscoe headed west—and past Hay's old home at 144 Lowell St. "I remember when that place was the very last house on the edge of town," said Hay. "I used to shoot pheasants out of my bedroom window."

He thought a minute. "Well," he said, "remember my dog?"

Remember "Pat"? Roscoe nodded. Hay and Roscoe looked at the time and wondered if they'd

shrunk.

"The used to be twice that high," Hay grinned. "as a matter of fact, everything seems

smaller and closer than it was. How does that happen? Why did everything seem so far away then?"

ROSCOE CONSIDERED the question and decided that possibly when they were kids they walked everywhere and maybe that was why things seemed so far away.

Maj. Gen. Hay nodded slowly, accepting Roscoe's explanation.

"Remember," he said again, "the model airplanes we used to build?"

Roscoe nodded. "I still build one occasionally," he said.

That's the way it went most of the weekend when a home town boy came back to see what the place looked like today.

And that evening he was with more old friends from grade school, high school and university, all of whom had no difficulty in playing the "Remember When?" game.

It all made for a great weekend.

And it all went to show what everybody had been saying about Jack Hay all along.

If anybody deserved the best the Army had to give, it was him.

And there he is today—a two-star general.

Pretty good for an old Montana boy, huh?

By Rodger

Maj. Gen. John Hay, right, spent a busy weekend in Billings seeing old friends after more than 30 years away—among the oldest and best of whom were Bill Roscoe, left, and Keith Brown.

(Photo by R. H. Johnson/Staff)

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(Photo) Reunion With Maj. Gen John H. Hay

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Sun, Apr 19, 2020