THE DECK OF CARDS

by T. Texas Tyler*

During the North African Campaign, a bunch of soldier boys had been on a long hike. They arrived in a little town called Casino. The next morning being Sunday, several of the boys went to church. A sergeant commanded the boys in church.

After the chaplain read the prayer, the text was taken up next. Those of the boys that had a prayer book took them out. One boy had only a deck of cards, and he spread them out. The sergeant saw the cards and said, "Soldier, put away those cards." After the service was over, the soldier was taken prisoner and brought before the Provost Marshal.

The marshal said, "Sergeant, why have you brought this man here?"

"For playing cards in church, sir," was the response.

The marshal asked the soldier, "And what have you to say for yourself, son?"

"Much, sir," replied the soldier.

The marshal stated, "I hope so, for if not, I will punish you more than any man was ever punished."

The soldier said, "Sir, I have been on the march for about six months. I have neither Bible nor a prayer book, but I hope to satisfy you, sir, with the purity of my intentions." And with that, the boy started his story . . .

"You see, sir, when I look at the ace, it reminds me that there is but one God.

And the deuce reminds me that the Bible is divided into two parts, the Old and the New Testaments.

When I see the trey, I think of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

And when I see the four, I think of the four evangelists who preached the Gospel. There was Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

And when I see the five, it reminds me of the five wise virgins who trimmed their lamps. There were ten of them. Five were wise and were saved; five were foolish and were shut out.

When I see the six, it reminds me that in six days God made this heaven and earth.

"And when I see the seven, it reminds me that on the seventh day, God rested from His great work.

And when I see the eight, I think of the eight righteous persons that God saved when he destroyed the earth: There was Noah, his wife, their sons, and their wives.

And when I see the nine, I think of the lepers our Savior cleansed, and that nine of the ten didn't even thank Him.

When I see the ten, I think of the Ten Commandments that God handed down to Moses on a tablet of stone.

When I see the King, it reminds me that there is but one King of Heaven, God Almighty.

And when I see the Queen, I think of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is the Queen of Heaven.

And the Jack or Knave is the Devil.

When I count the number of spots in a deck of cards, I find 365*, the number of days in a year.

There are 52 cards, the number of weeks in a year.

There are four suits, the number of weeks in a month.

There are twelve picture cards, the number of months in a year.

There are thirteen tricks, the number of weeks in a quarter.

So you see, sir, my deck of cards serves me as a Bible, an almanac and a prayer book."

And friends, this story is true. I know . . . I was that soldier.

*"The Deck of Cards" was written and recorded in 1948 by Country and Western artist T. Texas Tyler. Recited over soft background music, it has been recorded by many other performers as well, most notably Phil Harris and Tex Ritter. The work's origins, however, may be traced historically to The Middle Ages; and to 1778 in Belgium, to 1809 in France, to 1865 in America. It has been known as "Cards Spiritualized" and "The Soldier's Almanac, Bible, and Prayer Book." Variations have likened the five card to the five wounds of Christ, the trey to the Three Kings, the Jack of Clubs to the traitor Judas, and so on. In the early American version published in "U.S. Playing Card Co.'s Official Rules of Card Games" the soldier, his narrative challenged, explains the discrepancy in the number of spots on a deck (actually 364): "As I have never yet seen an almanack (sic) that was thoroughly correct in all points, it would have been impossible for me to have imitated an almanack without a mistake." His observation is well taken, and he is bidden to continue.