



# Dick Barrett

## *He Was S.J. Hero*

"I just came back from the hospital after a stay of several weeks," began the note which Jay McCabe received recently with an Easter card postmarked from Staten Island, N.Y. The writer of it was Sing Kee, who was one of San Jose's most admired heroes of World War I. Jay, who was chairman of the reception committee that welcomed him home, describes Sing as San Jose's first hero.

Sing thought it was about June 19, 1919 that he came back to the adulation of the crowd and the arms of his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Chung Kee, residents of San Jose's Chinatown in those days.

By looking back in our files, I was able to pinpoint the date better than that. Sing arrived in San Jose on the evening of Friday, June 13, 1919. Saturday morning's Mercury told of the event. A box accompanying the main story said in part:

"San Jose tendered Sing Kee, the Chinese boy hero, a great ovation upon his arrival in the city last evening about 7:30 o'clock. Sing has received the adulation of a nation, which has acclaimed him as one of its truest heroes. He remained at a listening post in the Argonne Forest, with the 77th, or 'Liberty' division when all his companions were killed or had deserted him, and amid a perfect hell of shot and shell calmly wired news of the enemy to 'Yankee' gunners behind the lines for several hours . . ."

A Mercury reporter asked Sing if he was glad to be out of it all.

"I certainly am," Sing was quoted. "I am like the doughboy who said that he was de-mobilized, delighted and de-loused."

The official reception followed a procession to Chinatown, where a platform had been erected, and where the streets were decorated. Sing was welcomed home by Charles M. O'Brien, representing City Manager W. C. Bailey, who was unable to attend. James P. Sex was speaker of the evening and presented Sing with a gold watch. The Chinese community gave him a packet of cash. Jue Tong, another Chinese war hero, was honored at the same time. The festivities ended in a burst of firecrackers.

Members of the committee with McCabe were D. M. Denegri, William Curry, H. W. McComas, L. J. Flannery and Ben Peckham.

On Sunday, June 15, Sing spoke at the First Baptist Church, mainly answering questions, as he was described as a bashful fellow who would rather face the German Army than an audience.

On June 20 there was a note on the front page of the Mercury saying that Sing Kee wished to express his gratitude to his friends for the honors he had received.

"Sing Kee is unspoiled by all the honor that has been done him," the Mercury said. "He wears his Distinguished Service Cross — a token for which many men would sacrifice almost anything—far back on the inside of his coat."

Sing Kee went East after that, married and became a family man. His son, Norman, is practicing law in New York and himself has a son who will enter Harvard next September.

Sing, what kind of time is that gold watch keeping?