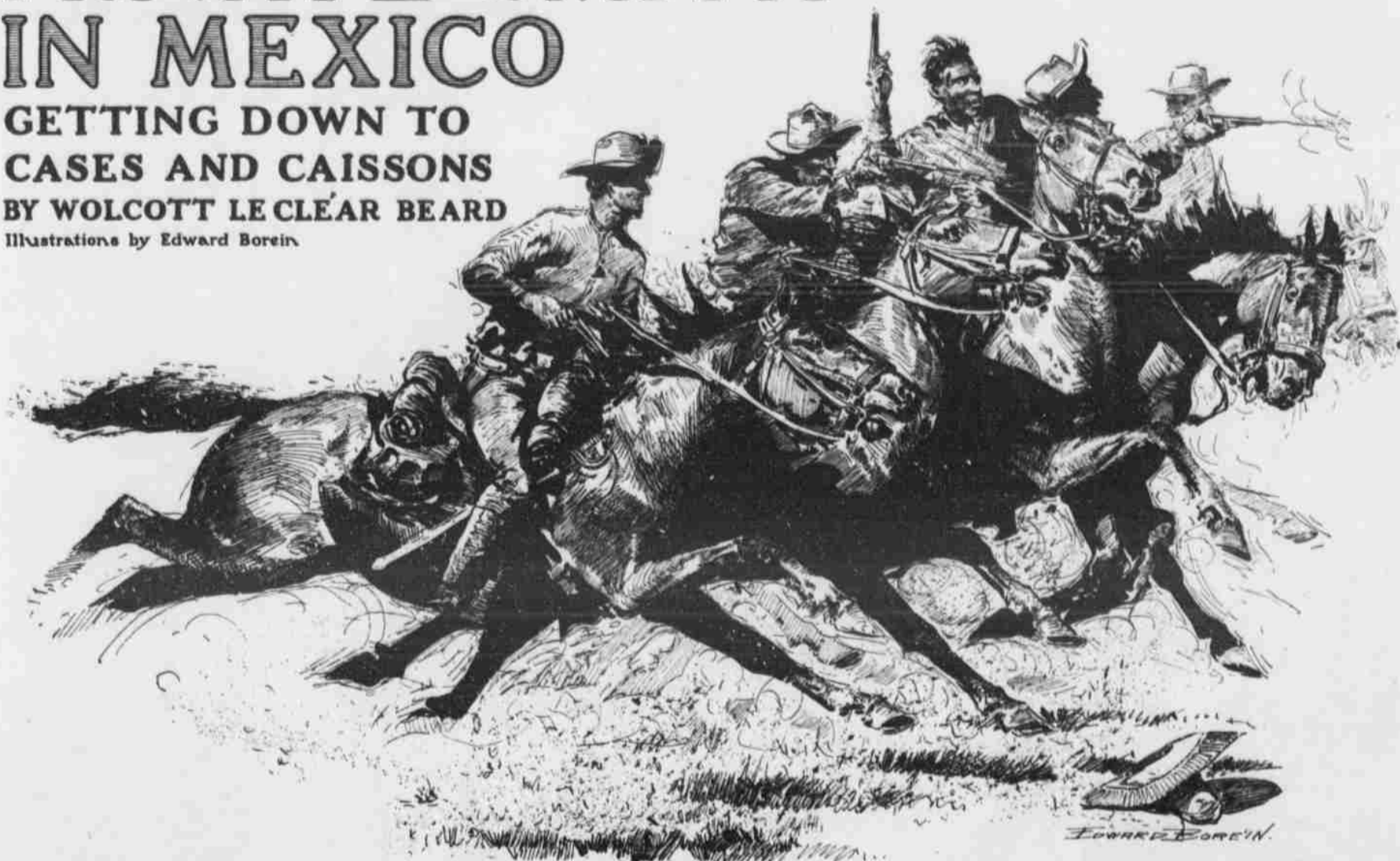


# PRIVATE SMITH IN MEXICO

GETTING DOWN TO  
CASES AND CAISSONS  
BY WOLCOTT LE CLEAR BEARD

Illustrations by Edward Borein



OVERHEARD not long ago a grizzled and wise old recruiting sergeant, immaculate in his well-fitting uniform, and none the less a good American because he had been born in County Clare, engage a shabby young man in conversation that had behind it certain ulterior motives. The shabby one shook a dubious head.

"I can't see it," he said. "Soldiering in time of peace don't make any hit with me, and even if we do have a little fuss with Mexico it wouldn't be a war—it would be a picnic. But there won't be any war. Those alphabetical republics are mediating."

The old sergeant spat scornfully.

"Mediatin'!" he repeated. "Faith, it puts me in moind av three tomeats thryin' for to mediate bechune a boarhound an' a bull-tarrier livin' in the nex' block. For a little the dogs moight lishen to the miaowin'. Thin they'd lose interest, an' turnn to their own affairs again. No, lad, soon or late, as sure as th' divvle wears petticoats, the war will come. There's no way out, ye see."

"Anyway," said the shabby young man, loath to quit his position, "it wouldn't be a war: it would be a picnic."

"So ye think," answered the old sergeant, gravely. "An' so—may the saints forgive them for fools—do millions av the men in this country think. So the British thought when thim Boer farmers started to get on their hin' legs. Yet, if ye remimber, t'was no picnic they had. Anything, at any toime, may set two neighborin' families to serappin' across the line fence av their baek yarrds. Anything, at anny toime, may set nations to serappin' in the same way. Spishally if wan family—or nation—wants peace, an' so the other is decayed into the belafe thot it don't dare fight. If Mexico is so decayed be us, Mexico will get licked sooner or later. But t'will be no picnic, lad! The job what the British had wit' the Boers, so will our job be wit' the Gr'asers. The same, only worse—far, far worse!"

THOUGH impressed, the young man still was incredulous. Beliefs so deeply rooted as those which he had expressed, die hard.

"Why—hang it all!—we'd put half a million men in the field!" he protested.

"Aye. All av thot. Maybe more, firrst an' last," agreed the sergeant. "An' may God pity most av those same men whin th' toime comes! For—lishen, now!—fightin', even in th' ranks, is a thrade what has to be larned loike anny other thrade. By sthrippin' our coast defince foorts, we can put wan army corps—only wan, moind!—av thrained men in the field. The rest will be amachures—rank amachures, ar'feers an' all. They'll do th' worrk. Yes, soon or late thim amachures'll do ut! But befoor it's done there'll be manny what have left their bones to whiten an' bleach on thot burrnin' desert. Manny what had no need to, an' who wudden't if they had been proper instruted to startt wit'. An' so the counthry will pay high—pay in lives an' sorrow an' money an' every other way—pay champagne proices fer beer—an' bad beer at thot!"

THAT war with Mexico may be averted is an encouraging prospect. That mediation shall have succeeded is to be hoped. That the occupation of Mexico is simply being postponed is a military feeling that unfortunately seems to prevail. In any event, the following authoritative article is of timely interest as a forecast of maneuvers south of the Rio Grande in the spread of war.—THE EDITOR

Not only did the sergeant speak with deep conviction, but deep feeling, as well. So, convinced at last, the shabby young man became a "rooky," officially known as Private John Smith.

Discarding former beliefs and prejudices with his shabby civilian kit, John hastens to assume those that go with his new uniform. First and foremost is the heartfelt conviction that our tiny standing army, man for man, is the equal, if not the superior, of any other in the world. He is quite right; facts, in the main, justify him. The second prejudice that he makes his own is an immeasurable contempt for the "amachure." Here he is wrong.

No words ever were truer than those of the old sergeant; "fighting, even in the ranks, is a trade that must be learned like any other trade." True also it is that instruction on the drill-room floor or even in occasional maneuvers through a settled and civilized country go only a pitifully short way toward preparing the amateur for work on the frontier. A third truth is that the custom, adhered to by many organizations, of allowing the enlisted men to elect their officers, is as bad as a custom can be. An efficient army can never be in the nature of a republic. Personal popularity is a poor standard by which to judge a man's capacity for command.

BITTERLY as he would resent this statement, it nevertheless is true. John himself, in these early army days of his, is still in the amateur class. He, however, is associated with professionals, who know. To learn the many things necessary to lift himself from that class will be comparatively easy for him. It is during this period of learning that the citizen under arms will suffer. It is through his suffering that the country will pay the fearful price of which the sergeant spoke; "champagne prices for beer, and bad beer at that." But, having paid it, the citizen also will learn. Then he also will have graduated as a professional, and owing to his high average of intelligence, he will be the best there is—what is left of him.

Then comes the day when the neighbors finally and definitely fall out, and their sons are called upon to fight in the quarrel of their respective houses. In our country, towns and cities are gay with hunting as *The Girl I Left Behind Me* crashes and rattles through the streets. Behind the bands many John Smiths, made and in the making, swing along in their khaki, as yet unsoiled, at two steps to the second, as the regulations require.

The sidewalks are lined with cheering men and tremulous with the white, fluttering handkerchiefs of the girls who are to be left behind—girls who are sweethearts, sisters, wives or mothers, trying desperately to be brave as only women can be while giving to their country all that they love best in the world. A train vanishes around some curve, or a ship kicks her way out of a harbor. Many of the handkerchiefs now make more or less furtive dabs at the eyes of those who waved them. Men and women go on their various ways, wondering what is to happen next. So does John Smith wonder.

While trying vainly to make himself comfortable on the seat of a "tourist" sleeper, or lounging against the rail of a transport, (Continued on Page 6)