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Regulars Get No Glory

Siboney, July 9.—Of course people all over the United States are dying to hear the names of the men who are conspicuous with the army is particularly conspicuous for bravery. The bravery of an individual here is not a quality which causes him to be pointed out by his admiring fellows; he is, rather, submerged in the general mass. Now, cowardice—that would make a man conspicuous. He would then be pointed out often enough, but—mere bravery—that is no distinction in the Fifth Corps of the United States Army.

The main fact that has developed in this Santiago campaign is that the soldier of the regular army is the best man standing on two feet on God's green earth. This fact is put forth with no pretense whatever of interesting the American public in it. The public doesn't seem to care very much for the regular soldier.

The public wants to learn of the gallantry of Reginald Marmaduke Maurice Montmorenci Sturtevant, and for goodness sake how the poor old chappy endures that dreadful hard-tack and bacon. Whereas, the name of the regular soldier is probably Michael Nolan and his life-sized portrait was not in the papers in celebration of his enlistment.

Just plain Private Nolan, blast him—he is of no consequence. He will get his name in the paper—oh, yes, when he is “killed.” Or when he is “wounded.” Or when he is “missing.” If some good Spaniard shoots him through he will achieve a temporary notoriety, figuring in the lists for one brief moment in which he will appear to the casual reader mainly as part of a total, a unit in the interesting sum of men slain.

In fact, the disposition to leave out entirely all lists of killed and wounded regulars is quite a rational one since nobody cares to read them, anyhow, and their omission would allow room for oil paintings of various really important persons, limned as they were in the very act of being at the front, proud young men riding upon horses, the horses being still in Tampa and the proud young men being at Santiago, but still proud young men riding upon horses.

The ungodly Nolan, the sweating, swearing, overloaded, hungry, thirsty, sleepless Nolan, tearing his breeches on the barbed wire entanglements, wallowing through the muddy fords, pursuing his way through the stiletto-pointed thickets, climbing the fire-crowned hill—Nolan gets shot. One Nolan of this regiment or that regiment, a private, great chums in time of with a man by the name of Hennessy, him that had a fight with Snyder. Nearest relative is a sister, chambermaid in a hotel in Omaha. Hennessy, old fool, is going around looking glum, buried in taciturn silence, a silence that lasts two hours and eight minutes; touching tribute to Nolan.

There is a half-bred fox terrier in barracks at Reno. Who the deuce gets the dog now? Must by rights go to Hennessy. Brief argument during which Corporal Jenkins interpolates the thoughtful remark that they haven't had anything to eat that day. End of Nolan.

The three shining points about the American regular are his illimitable patience under anything which he may be called upon to endure, his superlative marksmanship and his ability in

action to go ahead and win without any example or leading or jawing or trumpeting whatsoever. He knows his business, he does.

He goes into battle as if he had been fighting every day for three hundred years. If there is heavy firing ahead he does not even ask a question about it. He doesn't even ask whether the Americans are winning or losing. He agitates himself over no extraneous points. He attends exclusively to himself. In the Turk or the Cossack this is a combination of fatalism and wooden-headedness. It need not be said that these qualities are lacking in the regular.

After the battle, at leisure—if he gets any—the regular's talk is likely to be a complete essay on practical field operations. He will be full of views about the management of such and such a brigade, the practice of this or that battery, and be admiring or scornful in regard to the operations on the right flank. He will be a tireless critic, bolstering his opinions with technical information procured heaven only knows where. In fact, he will alarm you. You may say: "This man gabbles too much for to be a soldier."

Then suddenly the regular becomes impenetrable, enigmatic. It is a question of Orders. When he hears the appointed voice raised in giving an Order, he is a changed being. When an Order comes he has no more to say; he simply displays as fine a form of unquestioning obedience as there is to be seen anywhere. It is his sacred thing, his fetish, his religion. Nothing now can stop him but a bullet.

In speaking of Reginald Marmaduke Maurice Montmorenci Sturtevant and his life-sized portraits, it must not be supposed that the unfortunate youth admires that sort of thing. He is a man and a soldier, although not so good either as man or soldier as Michael Nolan. But he is in this game honestly and sincerely; he is playing it gallantly; and, if from time to time he is made to look ridiculous, it is not his fault at all. It is the fault of the public.

We are as a people a great collection of the most arrant kids about anything that concerns war, and if we can get a chance to perform absurdly we usually seize it. It will probably take us three more months to learn that the society reporter, invaluable as he may be in times of peace, has no function during the blood and smoke of battle.

I know of one newspaper whose continual cabled instructions to its men in Cuba were composed of interrogations as to the doings and appearance of various unhappy society young men who were decently and quietly doing their duty along o' Nolan and the others. The correspondents of this paper, being already impregnated with soldierly feeling, finally arose and said they'd be blamed if they would stand it.

And shame, deep shame, on those who, because somebody once led a cotillon, can seem to forget Nolan—Private Nolan of the regulars—shot through, his half-bred terrier being masterless at Reno and his sister being chambermaid in a hotel in Omaha; Nolan, no longer sweating, swearing, overloaded, hungry, thirsty, sleepless, but merely a corpse, attired in about forty cents' worth of clothes. Here's three volleys and taps to one Nolan, of this regiment or that regiment, and maybe some day, in a fairer, squarer land, he'll get his picture in the paper, too.