

“SMITHY”

THE ADJUTANT'S MADNESS

MILITARY “crime” is not crime at all, as we law-abiding citizens recognize it.

The outbreak in the Anchester Regiment was not a very serious affair; from what I can gather, it mostly took the form of breaking out of barracks after “lights out.”

But, explained Smithy, it got a bit too thick, and one of the consequences was that the guard was doubled, pickets were strengthened, and the ranks of the regimental military police were, as a temporary measure, considerably augmented. I explain this for the benefit of my military readers, who may wonder how it was that both Smithy and Nobby Clark happened

to be together on Number One post on the night of The Adjutant's Madness.

"I was tellin' the troops only the other night," said Smithy, "what would 'appen if they didn't give over actin' the billy goat:

" 'Some of you bloomin' recruits,' I sez, 'think you're doin' somethin' very wonderful, climbin' over the wall, an' goin' into town when you ought to be in bed an' asleep; but it's the likes of me, an' Nobby, and 'Appy Johnson, chaps with twelve years' service, who's got to suffer. I'll bet you old Uncle Bill will start doublin' the guard to-morren'

" 'Don't be down'arted,' Nobby sez; 'take a brighter view of life, Smithy.'

"Sure enough, next day it came out in orders that the guard was to be doubled, an' me an' Nobby was for it.

"When we mounted guard, the Adjutant, old Umferville, came over an' inspected us.

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“ ‘Who’s first relief on Number One post?’ ’e sez.

“ ‘Clark an’ Smith, sir,’ sez the sergeant.

“ ‘I don’t want you chaps to make too much noise walkin’ about, or shoutin’,’ sez the Adjutant, an’ I’m blowed if ’is face wasn’t as red as a piller-box.

“ ‘What’s the matter with Uncle Bill?’ sez Nobby, as we was marchin’ off.

“ ‘I believe ’e’s frightened about somethin’,’ I sez, puzzled.

“ Number One post is between the back of the Adjutant’s ’ouse and the wall where the chaps nip over. It used to be the Colonel’s ’ouse; but when Uncle Bill got married a couple of years ago, the Colonel generously ’anded it over, an’ took an ’ouse in town that wasn’t so damp.

“ It was the most excitin’ guard me an Nobby ever did, an’ it was all through Uncle Bill. You never saw such goin’

on in your life. 'E dodged in an' out of 'is 'ouse all day long. 'E'd start to walk across the square, then stop, as if 'e'd forgot something, then walk back to the 'ouse, then walk out again, then stop an' bite 'is nails an' stare more ghastly at nothin'.

"Once as 'e was passin', me an' Nobby shouldered arms to im, an' 'e stopped dead an' looked at us. 'E didn't move, but stood stock still for about five minutes starin' at me an' Nobby, sayin' nothin', an' me and Nobby felt quite uncomfortable.

"'Everything all right, sentry?' 'e sez at last.

"'Yes, sir,' sez me an' Nobby.

"'Sentry——' 'e sez, then stopped.

"'Which one, sir?' sez Nobby, an' the officer stared.

"'Are there two of you?' 'e sez.

"'Yes, sir,' sez me an' Nobby, an' 'e

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got very red an' muttered somethin' an' walked off.

"We was talkin' about it in the guard-room that night when we was drinkin' our guard allowance—one pint a man, accordin' to regulations. All the other chaps 'ad noticed Uncle Bill's strangeness, too.

"'It's drink,' sez Nobby, shakin' 'is 'ead. 'Wot a pity to see a pore young chap go wrong, all for the sake of the cursed liquor—after you with that pot, Smithy.'

"'You've 'ad your whack, Nobby,' I sez; 'don't come it on a pal.'

"'Did I?' sez Nobby. 'I must 'ave been thinkin' of the Adjutant.'

"'I think 'e's 'aunted,' sez a chap from 'D'—a young chap.

"'Aunted!' sez Nobby, scornful. 'Why, there ain't no ghosts after Christmas, fat 'ed!'

" 'Never mind about Christmas,' sez the young chap; 'it's my belief 'e's 'aunted, there's a spirit or somethin' follerin' 'im about.'

" 'Dry up,' sez Nobby, shudderin', for me an' 'im was on the worst relief, ten to midnight, an' four to six.

" When we mounted at 'last post' Nobby sez to me:—

" 'Do you think there's anythin' in that ghost idea, Smithy?'

" 'No,' I sez. 'Still,' I sez, 'you never know.'

" 'What's that?' sez Nobby, pointin' to a shadder movin' along the wall. So I shouts:—

" 'Alt!—who goes there?'

" It turned out to be little Bobby Burns tryin' to break out of barracks, an' me an' Nobby captured 'im an' shoved 'im in the clink.

" Just before twelve me an' Nobby was

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standin' at ease, when we 'eard a most 'orrid groan. We jumps round with our 'arts in our mouths, an' there was the Adjutant in 'is overcoat an' slippers.

“ ‘What the dickens are you starin' at?’ ’e sez.

“ ‘Beg pardon, sir,’ stammers Nobby, I thought you was a ghost!’

“ But the Adjutant didn't seem to 'ear what we said. 'E just walks up an' down mutterin' to hisself. Bimeby 'e sez, 'Keep a sharp look-out, an' don't make too much noise—d'ye hear, you Clark; d'ye 'ear, you Smith?' ’e sez fiercely.

“ ‘Yes, sir,’ sez me an' Nobby; an' then the Adjutant went indoors.

“ ‘Drink,’ sez Nobby solemnly. ‘Let this be a warnin' to you, Smithy.’

“ When we come on duty again at four in the mornin' the two chaps we

relieved looked scared out of their lives.

" 'I shall be bloomin' glad when it's daylight,' sez one of 'em ; ' we've 'ad 'an orrid time.'

" ' 'Ow so ? ' sez Nobby.

" ' The Adjutant's gone orf 'is napper : mad, that's wot 'e 'is,' sez the chap. ' 'E's bin walkin' up 'an down talkin' tō 'isself an' moanin' an' chuckin' 'is arms about.'

" ' Nice thing, ain't it ? ' sez Nobby, after we was posted ; ' if you ask me-- why, 'ere the beggar comes again.'

" ' What shall we do ? ' I sez.

" ' Wait till 'e gets violent, then bang 'im with the butt of your rifle.'

" ' You do it,' I sez.

" ' No, you'd better do it, Smithy ; you're the oldest soldier !'

" Up comes Umferville, and I'll take my oath there was tears in 'is eyes.

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“ ‘Sentry,’ ’e sez in a chokin’ voice, ‘challenge all persons approachin’ your post.’

“ ‘Yes, sir,’ sez me an’ Nobby.

“ ‘Don’t allow nobody to pass without challengin’,’ ’e sez wildly, an’ then run back to his ’ouse like mad.

“ ‘Balmy,’ sez Nobby ; ‘let’s go an’ tell the sergeant.’

“ ‘Better wait,’ I sez. So we waited.

“ ‘The beggar ’asn’t bin to bed,’ sez Nobby after a bit, ‘there’s lights in all the rooms.’

“ ‘I wonder what ’is missus thinks,’ I sez, an’ I felt sorry for Mrs. Umferville, who’s a lady bred an’ born.’

“ It wanted about an hour to daybreak when out rushes the Adjutant again an’ makes straight for us.

“ ‘Ere ’e comes,’ I sez, liftin’ up the butt of my rifle. ‘Nobby, you’re evidence that I only ’it ’im to save your life,’ I sez.

" 'Your life!' sez Nobby hastily.

" 'Up comes Umferville, sort of laughin' an' cryin'.

" 'Sentry,' 'e sez, 'wot about your orders?'

" 'Wot orders, sir?' I sez..

" 'Some one's come into barracks,' 'e sez excitedly, 'an you 'aven't challenged 'im.'

" "'E ain't passed 'ere,' sez mē an' Nobby together.

" 'Yes, 'e 'as,' sez the Adjutant. 'Listen!'

" We listens.

" "'Ear anything?' sez the Adjutant.

" Suddenly Nobby lets out a yell.

" 'Guard, turn out,' 'e shouts, an' out come the guard with a run.

" 'Wot's up?' sez the sergeant of the guard.

" 'Present arms!' sez Nobby, 'to the Adjutant's new baby,' 'e sez."