

An Appointment to Meet CAPTAIN X

By Marquis James

The Big Plan of the Government's for Demonstrating the Nation's Power for Defense Here Explained

(Editor's note: The following story by Marquis James appeared in the August 15th issue of The American Legion Weekly, and is deemed of such interest, in view of the approaching Mobilization Day, September 12th, that it is here reprinted for Headlight readers.)

To rally the memory there is nothing quite like an old song. Take this fragment:

You're in the Army now,
You're not behind a plow,
You're doing your hitch,
You'll never get rich,
You're in the Army now.

These lines—slightly amended, it is true—are from a roundelay of the Regular service which had a certain vogue during the World War. The roundelay is very old—just how old no one seems to know—but the pastoral flavor of the second line indicates that it goes back to a day when the standing army was drawn considerably from country boys who wearied of the farm and joined the Army to see the world.

The fourth line, incidentally, unmasks a truth which the American Legion has been harping on for a long time. A man doesn't join the Army with any expectancy of founding a fortune. Which is proper. But the people who have rendered the necessary service of supplying the soldier with the fighting wherewithal have founded many a fortune. This took place in the last war and in all others. It is improper. The Legion is at work to change this procedure—which however, is another story.

This story concerns the fact that, as the song says, you're in the Army now—meaning by you and by now the present moment. The chances are that you are not in the Regular establishment. You may not be a member of the National Guard or the Reserve Corps or of a Citizens Military Training Camp. You may be so peaceable and unprovocative of action and intent that you wouldn't even play a saxophone on the back porch on a Sunday morning. Nevertheless—providing that you are between the ages of eighteen and forty-five and are physically O. K.—you are a part of the military forces of the United States. You are in the Army now. Not merely the Army, by and large, but such-and-such division, such-and-such regiment and such-and-such company, which is commanded by Captain X.

On the twelfth day of next September you will see just how it is. Your town and community will see, and the country will see as a whole. On that day and date there will be a general demonstration of the Army's—or, rather, the nation's—new mobilization plans which have been devised since the World War for use in an emergency. The affair will be known officially as a "defense test." It is the first of its kind we have ever had.

On September 12th you have an appointment to meet Captain X. Your neighbors and your town will meet him, too. They will meet his command—which also is your command and your neighbor's across the way. The captain will be present in the flesh. Probably you will know him now, in his civilian and not in his military capacity. He may be a lawyer or a merchant on Main Street. He may be a member of your Legion post.

Your fellow townsman, Captain X, holds his commission in the Officers' Reserve Corps. He commands the military company which would go from your town or part of town or your county in case the country were called to defend itself. It is a shadow company now. Maybe within the company area there are three or four lieutenants, commanding spectral platoons, but nothing more than that. But if an emergency came this shadow company would acquire substance. The squads would fill up and join together into platoons and the platoons would unite into the company and your community's representation in the national defense effort would march off presently to the regimental gathering place. There it would fuse with other companies from the countryside roundabout, and the regiment would be born. The regiment fully organized and equipped, and with elementary training, would show up in tact at the big divisional cantonment. Your State—to use a convenient geo-

graphical unit—would be ready for war.

Thus the gathering for the national defense. The word gathering expresses it better than any other mobilization the military men call it, but it is merely a succession of gatherings together. Men gather and form small units, small units gather and form larger ones, and so on until you have an army of proper size to cope with the situation. The embattled farmers used the same system in Revolutionary times. They had no big cantonments then. The colonies were poor and couldn't afford to pay carpenters fifteen dollars a day or pass out cost plus contracts to contractors to build a cantonment for 40,000 men in ninety days, to congregate thirty or forty thousand men in one place and then try to sort them out and organize them. British armies were on the ground making menacing motions.

We had to get armies together as quickly and inexpensively as possible. We hit upon the gathering process, which first comprehended the company, complete and ready for action, then the regiment, the brigade and so on. Sometimes a company had to do a little fighting on its own hook before it had a chance to join up with the rest of the regiment. If ready to fight it fought. If not ready it dispersed and took to the woods, reassembling at a more auspicious time and place. Fancy an untrained, un-equipped and unready division shut up in a half-finished cantonment doing that.

After 149 years of experimentation and error we are getting our defensive plans back in conformity with the sound and simple system used by the dauntless little armies which won our national independence. Washington tried to perpetuate his system but lost out. Pershing, capitalizing the experiences of the World War, led the movement which has recaptured it from the past. The defense test of September 12th is merely a demonstration to the country of the operation of this reborn program of protection.

"In past emergencies," said Pershing lately, "we have had no plans, and relying upon hastily created forces, we have suffered from the extreme confusion which goes with such a sudden expansion. In the late war, after enormous expenditures and serious loss of time in construction and in transportation, we eventually concentrated masses of untrained individuals in a few centers, distant from ties and associations, where they were segregated into military units and trained with the utmost difficulty.

"Profiting by these experiences, the new policy contemplates skeleton units partially trained in advance, which can be concentrated locally. In an emergency things must move swiftly and without confusion. This will depend upon the perfection of the plans and their comprehension by the public.

"The fundamental idea of our defensive plans is formed on the principle of local organization. The system follows the chain of military responsibility until the commander of each company is given his share of the task. His plan of action must take into consideration the neighborhood facilities for recruitment, assembly, shelter, equipment and training his unit. He is in direct contact with his home people, whose interest and spirit are invoked to his aid.

"We hope by this defense test to impress upon the individual officer and citizen soldier his particular function if war comes. We have never before undertaken such a step, and in the last emergency we found ourselves in a serious dilemma. The idea is to suggest to the officers their respective duties, and to indicate just enough to let them visualize the problem for themselves.

"To illustrate, take for example Captain Smith of Laclede, Missouri, where I hail from. Captain Smith is called out on Defense Day. He wonders what it is all about and what he has to do. We are going to tell him that it is up to him to make a study of the problem. He will probably conclude first that he should locate some place for his headquarters. Then he should plan for the enrollment of the men of the community, decide where they should be quartered, determine on local arrangements for feeding them and select a drill

ground. He would probably call his lieutenants and non-commissioned officers together on Defense Day and discuss the organization of the company. So when an emergency really comes he will have thought it all out.

"Without such preliminary training, without a demonstration of our mobilization plans to the country, one could not expect them to work when a crisis is upon us."

The law authorizing this new scheme of preparedness is the Army Reorganization Act of 1920. The American Legion strove hard to get it passed. For four years the War Department has been working on the plan this act made possible. The department thinks the time has come to give an account of its stewardship by demonstrating these plans to the country. Every citizen and every community will be shown the part he and it are expected to play. The thing will be done publicly and openly. The United States has no hostile feelings toward any nation or any people, and hence no need for concealment of the fact that it means to be intelligently prepared to defend itself.

The official announcements of the War Department point out that September 12th, which has been selected as the date of the defense test, is an appropriate one. It is the sixth anniversary of the beginning of the Battle of St. Mihiel, the first full-scale all-American offensive of the World War. The American First Army, commanded personally by Pershing, began the drive which swept the St. Mihiel salient clear of German troops who had been there four years. There is no gainsaying that the demonstration planned should form a suitable observance of this anniversary.

But another event transpires on that day, which the defense test also suitably marks. Pershing was too modest to permit it to be noted in the official announcement, but this test marks Pershing's farewell to the Army. September 13th will be Pershing's birthday. He will be sixty-four years old—the age at which army officers must retire from active service. Pershing will relinquish his command at midnight on September 12th, at the completion of this great demonstration of a nation ready to defend itself—a demonstration which Pershing more than any other man in this country has made possible.

Arrangements are in full swing to make Defense Day worthy of the events it commemorates and worthy of its significance as concerns the future security of our country. The President has approved of the program of the War Department. Governors of States and mayors of cities and towns are being asked to set the day aside by proclamation, and give it over to patriotic observances. National Commander Quinn of the American Legion has urged every Legion post to participate locally in the observances. The American Legion, The American Legion Auxiliary and thirty-six other veteran, military and patriotic organizations of men and women have pledged their support.

Milton J. Foreman, Past National Commander of the Legion and chairman of the Legion's National Committee on Military Policy, has been named chairman of the special committee to supervise the Legion's part in the defense test. Chairman Foreman also happens to be the major general commanding the 33d National Guard Division, which will give him something else to think about in this connection. Most of the people concerned with this test, from Pershing down to Captain Smith of Laclede, Missouri, and Captain X of your town, are Legionnaires. That is why the participation of the Legion in this event will be a vital part in it. A staff colonel in Washington (a Legionnaire, too) assured this writer some time back that "the success of this undertaking seems about up to the Legion. If it weren't for the Legion I really believe we would hesitate to try it on such a grand scale. But the Legion is mainly responsible for the Act of 1920, which makes this defense test possible, and it doesn't seem to us that the Legion is going to abandon its child."

The colonel's humane expectations do him credit. The Legion isn't going to abandon its child. It is going to look out for him and try to give him a proper bringing up.

The plans which will be tried out next month are for a mobilization of almost 4,000,000 men, grouped in three field armies, nine corps and fifty-four combat divisions. Of these divisions nine are composed of Regular troops. They are kept at less than half-strength in peacetime, but they are always in readiness for active service. They constitute the first of defense. National Guard divisions number eighteen, which average about one-third wartime strength, but they could be recruited up, equipped and placed in the field in fairly quick order.

The backbone of our defensive scheme, however, is the twenty-seven divisions of the Organized Reserves.

This is the citizen army, which in peacetime exists only as a shadow. Every one of these divisions is completely organized on paper, and every small move has been thought out against the contingency which might necessitate their organization, in fact. To each division is allocated so much territory, from which it must draw its recruits. In the sparsely settled regions of the west a divisional sector may cover a couple of States. Where the population is denser the sectors are smaller. New York City, with as many people as several States combined, must raise a division—the 77th. Divisional sectors are divided into brigade and regimental components. Regimental domains are split into company areas. Not an acre of ground in the whole United States has been overlooked. Wherever you reside you are in one of these company areas. Save for a few Regulars at the division headquarters, these twenty-seven Reserve divisions are officered by Reservists. Your company area has its commander—Captain X.

The object of the defense test is to give this shadow force of 4,000,000 men substance for a day. Regular troops in post and garrison, wherever they may be, at home and in our territories overseas, will be mustered, inspected and paraded, put through military exercises most likely to interest the civilian population round about. The Army will keep open house. Visitors will be cordially welcome. The same with the National Guard. They will be called out for the day by the governors of the respective States. They will assemble on their armories and on their drill grounds. The public is invited to come and see something that will be worth seeing.

This part of the defense test is simple. The Regulars and the Guardsmen have been called to active service so many times that they know what to do and how to do it.

The picturesque and interesting, and also the vital, part of the test will be the theoretical calling up of the twenty-seven Organized Reserve divisions. That is where you come in and where your town comes in. If you and your town do your parts the larger aspects of the situation will take care of themselves. Everything will move like the works of a clock, though you will be testing out a program of national defense which hasn't been tried out in this country since the Revolutionary War. The Civil War witnessed a semblance of it, however. In the North and in the South the young men of a community would get together and form a company, sometimes electing the officers by ballot. The company would march some place and join with other companies and form a regiment. By these means the armies of the Union and of the Confederacy grew like a snowball co-ordinated and supervised, this method of mobilizing has the complicated system we used in 1917 and '18 beaten all hollow.

The arrangements for your rendezvous with Captain X are in charge of two local committees. A mobilization

committee for your neighborhood will be named by the governor, and a military committee by the commanding officer of the corps area in which your community is situated. By the time this is printed these steps probably will have been taken. The job of the mobilization committee will be similar to that of the local draft boards during the war. It will be their duty to obtain the personnel which, for the day of September 12th, will give substance to the shadowy ranks of the company of Captain X. This committee will appeal to local community organizations such as the Rotary and Kiwanis clubs, the churches, the Boy Scouts, to turn out and enlist for the day. And, of course, the Legion will have made their plans to show up in a body.

The job of the military committee is to acquaint Captain X with what is expected of him. The captain will muster his one-day company, and maybe lead it in a parade. He will explain to it, and to all others who will gather to listen, just what would happen if this mobilization were the real thing. Company headquarters would be established at the firehouse. There recruits would be sworn in as they were accepted by the draft board. The first platoon would be billeted in the vacant store on Marble avenue, the second platoon in the old ice house across the railroad tracks, and so on. Or the men could sleep at home if it did not interfere with their military duties. Smith's grocery and Jones meat market would supply provisions for the mess and receive Captain X's I. O. U.'s on Uncle Sam. Uniforms and equipment would arrive. The fair grounds would be turned into a drill field. Within thirty days the company would be on its feet presenting a creditable appearance and ready for orders to concentrate at the regimental meeting place.

Captain X will explain these things at a big gathering, which, the war department suggests, should be opened with prayer. A speaker, some public man who can hold an audience, will make the principal address. There will be music, and after that a ball game, picnic, barbecue, dance or what ever the crowd likes best. Some towns already are planning diversions which will be worth going miles to enjoy.

Reports will be rendered to the Secretary of war on every meeting which will be held—and there will be thousands of them. The military aspect of the matter will be covered in one report, and the War Department expects to get much useful information in this manner. Hundreds of minor changes of the general plan may suggest themselves. One never knows exactly what a peace of machinery will do until he sees it tried out. Especially is this true of human machinery. The civilian aspect will be covered in another report; the enthusiasm shown, the clarity with which Captain X puts over his stuff, and the extent to which the community seems to grasp it—all this will be shown forth and sent to Washington to be studied and kept on file.

Thus the first public exhibition of a scheme of national defense which Washington, as President, sought to introduce. It had worked so well during the War for Independence that the first President thought it good enough to be used as a basis for our permanent plan of defense. But Washington, it seems, was one of those dangerous militarists who went around with a chip on his shoulder. Congress had another idea. We had won our freedom and there wouldn't be any more war. Congress declined to appropriate the trivial sum Washington needed to organize an officer's reserve corps, which are the very verterbrae of such a plan of defense.

Congress could point with pride to this move toward universal peace for about fifteen years. Then the War of 1812 came along. The Old Revolutionary leaders mostly were dead. The

men they had led were too old to fight again. The result was something our histories like to pass over as swiftly as possible. With insignificant forces the British licked the tail out of our green troops and burned the capitol at Washington. Only our Navy, which gave his British Majesty's sea forces the worst series of trimmings they have ever received in all history, saved the country from worse disaster and possibly the loss of the independence which Washington had won. We triumphed on the sea because our Navy had a trained reserve of seamen to draw from in the shape of our merchant marine. This is just what Washington wanted for the land forces, but Congress, with the approval of the electorate, had said no, that would be militarism. (Continued on page 7)

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