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NARRATIVE OF A DOCTOR'S EXPERIENCE AS A LINE
OFFICER AND COMBATANT, IN THE FALL OF 1860.

THE incidents and events here described happened so long ago, that they have become shadowed and dimmed by time; but, at the urgent request of an old friend with whom I have shared my blankets on the old frontier, before it was ruined by railroads and modern improvements, I venture on the indulgence of the reader with a view of preserving a record for the benefit of the service, of happenings in which I have always taken great pride as a medical officer and a soldier.

February, 1859, found me back at my post of duty at Fort Fillmore, N. M., after a hard and severe winter campaign with Captain WASHINGTON L. ELLIOTT, of the Mounted Rifles and other officers, against the Pinal Apache, north of the Gila River, in and around the Pinal Apache Mountains, Arizona Territory. Being young, strong, active and ambitious, I went to work to build up a practice in my profession, which I soon succeeded in doing in the neighboring villages of La Mesilla, Las Cruces, Doña Aña and the scattered ranches along the river valley; I had patients from as far as Sonora and Chihuahua, Old Mexico. I had bought a fine team of Kentucky thoroughbreds from Lieutenant WM. B. LANE, Mounted Rifles, that he had trained to run in harness in case the Indians ever got after him; a very necessary precaution in that wild and unsettled country, for they were likely to turn up unexpectedly at any moment.

Rumors by mail had reached us from "Department Headquarters" Santa Fé, N. M., that a winter campaign was to be made against the Navajo Indians in New Mexico during the coming winter of 1860-61. I had been post surgeon at Fort Defiance in the heart of their country, for over a year and a half, and had then gone through a war waged against them, under the command of Colonel DIXON S. MILES, Third U. S. Infantry; and having afterward gone through another Indian campaign out in Arizona, I knew it was not my detail for the field, so I settled down to business and practice at Fillmore, confident that I would not be called upon, for there were other medical officers avail-

x Indians

able in the Department who, I knew, had not been in the field. Suddenly and unexpectedly, there came an order from Department Headquarters at Santa Fé, for me to proceed immediately to Fort Craig, N. M., and to report for duty with a column of troops organized to operate against the Navajoes in the coming winter campaign. I had only a very few days to fix up my business affairs; public property, as well as private, was left in the care of a hospital steward, in whom I had no great reliance, and who afterwards turned out to be a rascal. This was the second time I had to drop everything to obey orders: both times I lost nearly all I left, but many other officers had the same luck. I was off in a few days over the "Jornada del Muerto" with an escort of a corporal and three or four men with two pack mules, one carrying the hospital panniers, the other for my own use. The distance to Fort Craig was about one hundred and twenty miles, one hundred without any water. On my arrival, I found that the column of troops, two companies of infantry and one of Mounted Rifles, under command of Captain LAFAYETTE McLAWS, Seventh U. S. Infantry, (afterwards a distinguished soldier in the C. S. A.) had left two days before. Knowing the fact that a stern chase is a long one, I determined at once not to halt long, but to push ahead as soon as possible. So after a short halt, during which time the medical officer on duty at Craig, whose work I was doing, but whose family, as usual in those days, couldn't spare (?) him, did not do me even the scant courtesy of calling on me. I overtook the command at the village of Picacho (then Pulvedero) on the right bank of the Rio Grande. From this place Captain McLAWS had orders to go west over a trail and through a pass in a range of mountains known as the "Sierra de los Ladrones" (Robber Mountain).

My escort was now relieved and ordered back to Fillmore.

The command consisted of Company "D," Seventh Infantry, under Captain McLAWS, Company "K," Seventh Infantry, under Lieutenant AUGUSTUS H. PLUMMER, and Company "G," Mounted Rifles, First Sergeant FALVEY, commanding, no officer being present. Lieutenant PLUMMER was A. A. Q. M. of the column and Captain McLAWS commanded the entire force. We also had some fifteen Mexican guides and packers.

The route of the column was well selected, strategically speaking, as we would flank any of the tribes that might be fleeing from their own country, down into and toward Arizona. But it was altogether a new route for troops with a pack train; indeed, I doubt that any troops had ever gone over this route before, at least, since the days of the early Spanish Conquerers.

There was no commissioned officer with Company "G," of the Mounted Rifles, a circumstance not unusual in those ante-bellum days, when it seldom happened that there was more than one officer on duty with a company. The distance was so great and the journey so tedious, that it took months for an officer to reach his post and company, where it now takes only as many days; so that when an officer got into "the states," and had any kind of a social or political pull, he generally managed to stay away until it suited him to join.

It was now the most delightful month of the year, that of October; the bosque of cottonwood trees was full to overflowing with numbers of mocking birds, whose varied and beautiful notes filled the air and made it tremulous with song and rich melody; the mountains bathed in liquid blue appeared so vast in their deep, grand quiet, that it seemed almost profane to disturb their majestic rest; however, grim war knows no seasons, knows neither poetry nor sentiment, and orders had to be obeyed. Company "G" was about sixty men and horses strong, all in good condition for the field; the men were nearly all old soldiers, but there were in the company a few raw recruits who had only lately joined. The first sergeant's name was JOHN FALVY, afterwards commissioned as an officer. Other non-commissioned officers were Quartermaster Sergeant RANCH, Duty Sergeants JOHN COX, JAMES McCORMICK and THOMAS BRIERLY. The names of the corporals escape my memory. Our chief guide was a venerable old Mexican, who lived near Las Lunas, N. M. A day or two after starting, Captain McLaws told me, while riding along at the head of the column on the trail, that he was going to put me in command of Company "G," for the purpose of communicating with the non-commissioned officers, as he found it difficult to make them understand what he wanted done, and he must have a commissioned officer in command in order to do full justice to the company, and prevent dissatisfaction among the men. He explained that my duties would be to ride at the head of the company, camp with it, sign the morning report, make the guard detail, and report to him every evening for orders. This was in addition to my duties as assistant surgeon of the command. That evening the order was issued (unfortunately it has been lost, although carefully preserved for years), and was promptly obeyed. The next morning found me at the head of my company, with which I camped and slept for the next fifteen days, thoroughly identifying myself with the non-commissioned officers and men, watchful of their interests and rights, allowing no gouging (?) by the infantry officers, who were in the majority, in guard or picket details, signing company reports, etc.

I take pleasure in bearing testimony that no one could have had command of braver, more gallant and trustworthy soldiers than those men proved themselves to be. Since then I have accidentally had the pleasure of meeting several of them, and always find them in places of trust and honor, as ordnance sergeants, etc. I take occasion now to acknowledge the assistance rendered me in writing this article by Mr. JOHN J. HANLON, late private Company "G," Regiment Mounted Rifles, now and for many years a trusted messenger in the Army Medical Museum, Washington, D. C.

Our trail was very rough, and so steep and precipitous in many places as to endanger the safety of the packs, ammunition and animals, necessitating unloading, leading the animals and carrying by hand. One day, shortly after I fell in command of the company, when waiting for the infantry to close up, it struck me that it would not be a bad idea to see how Company "G" drilled, for we were out for a fight, and one was likely to occur any day. We had struck a nice open piece of ground, suitable for the purpose, and Sergeant FALVY was ordered to drill the company at skirmish drill, dismounting and preparing to fight on foot. The sergeant hesitated some little time before he caught on to what was said, as if he hadn't heard me distinctly; and so the order was repeated, when he gave the required commands. I will here remark that I had had an experience of three years, and this was my third Indian campaign with the Second Dragoons and Regiment of Mounted Rifles, with such soldiers as RICHARD S. EWELL, R. S. C. LORD, WASHINGTON L. ELLIOTT, JOHN P. HATCH, WM. B. LANE, WM. W. AVERELL, F. J. CRILLY and others, and I had quietly and almost insensibly picked up a good many points about mounted drill. After coming right into line, Nos. 1, 2 and 3 had dismounted and deployed as skirmishers, No. 4 sitting in his saddle. I quietly rode down the line, and found, to my surprise, fully one-half of the horses standing with their bridles loose and unsecured by No. 4. This would have been, in a fight, a probable cause of a stampede. I called Sergeant FALVY from the skirmish line, took him along the company line and showed him the great peril they would be in if a fight was to take place. The recall was sounded. The men were shown their mistake, instructions were given them how to act, and the drill was repeated. This time I found only a few loose reins; again the recall was sounded and the drill was repeated; they were now told that whoever was found so indifferent and careless as to neglect securing his horse, would get an extra hour of guard and picket duty that night. No more mistakes happened after this, and the drill was kept up daily for from a half hour to one hour, so that, when I

was relieved of the command by Lieutenant E. P. CRESSY, Mounted Rifles, I had the pleasure of turning over a well drilled and well set up company of mounted riflemen.

FALVY and the non-commissioned officers were terribly cut up and deeply mortified at the ignorance shown by the company, and were profuse in their apologies and explanations as to the reasons, all of which I knew personally to be correct.

Some few days after getting through the pass, and back of the mountains, we camped in a beautiful vale near a fine spring of pure water. Near this camp I found on top of an isolated rock, covered over with a growth of large piñons and oaks, quite a well preserved ruin of an ancient village or fort; steps had evidently been made to its top, up through a narrow passage, that could readily be defended by a few men. The houses were small in size and oblong, to suit the shape of the top of the rock. The ruin consisted of an outside wall of small square stones, a large portion of which was yet standing. Inside there were apparently many small and separate rooms, abutting against the wall, in each one of which was an opening as if for a port hole, for use in defense. Opposite these there was a larger room or rooms, apparently the residence of the captain or chief. The thought has often occurred to me since, that this might have been the ruins of a bandit's den; and it is possible the mountain range in this way got its name "Sierra de los Ladrones."

The trail led us through a heavily timbered country, fairly well watered, and now and then we would pass through lovely little secluded valleys, in one of which we usually camped for the night. At one of these camps the spring was unusually large, discharging a great volume of pure, sparkling water; and the men of the command honored me by giving it my name, but the map-makers had no correspondent along, and the compliment is now undoubtedly lost to fame.

The mounted company always led the way out of camp, and, with the guides, was the pioneer of the column. I had instructions about selecting camp, and remember coming, one evening, into a lovely little valley, shut in by hills and mountains, with a limpid, sparkling, laughing mountain stream bubbling and purling through its length. The left bank, which was elevated and covered over with a fine forest of noble pine trees, was selected by me for the infantry companies. The right bank was fringed near its edge by a heavy growth of alder bushes; the company was halted among them, horses were unsaddled and mules unpacked. In the mean time I had gone over to Captain McLAW's camp to get orders and instructions for the night,

as to guard, etc. On my return, I saw that the servant had spread my blankets, fixed the pillow, and had gathered and tied some bushes over it, so as to protect me by their shade from the hot sun. The lay out was very tempting to a tired man, so taking off my coat, and without looking for or expecting anything, I knelt at the foot, and let myself fall at full length. As my head struck the pillow the ominous and fearful buzz of a rattlesnake struck my ear; you can judge that I fooled away no time in getting off that pillow and bed. The sergeants told me that the men had killed quite a number of the reptiles, and they thought we had got into a den. Fortunately no one was bitten; the one that had made himself so familiar and home-like under my pillow was a fine specimen, was promptly killed, and the company was as promptly moved out of the bushes into the open. I suppose there are very few persons who ever got so close to a rattler and escaped. For years after I would recall, in my sleep and dreams, that beastly and horrible noise.

I recall one hot day, when the company had dismounted, and was following a narrow trail up a steep hill; one of the Mexican guides rode rapidly back from its crest, and said, in great excitement, that there were "muchos Indios" in the valley over the hill in front of us, and that they were riding fast to escape. At once, in order to prevent their escape, the company was ordered to mount and move forward as rapidly as the trail allowed. When we gained the open valley, I saw several mounted Indians fleeing as fast as their ponies could carry them. The order was given to draw pistols and charge. The Indians were soon overtaken, and the shooting became general and very lively on both sides, more particularly on ours; indeed, being at the head of the company, I soon realized that I was between two fires, and ordered a halt and to cease firing. It turned out that our guide was mistaken as to their number, or that I misunderstood him, more probably the latter, as my knowledge of Spanish was then very limited. On finding only a small party, one of the sergeants and a few men were detailed to pursue them. After our arrival at Camp Fauntleroy, several of our men were ambuscaded and wounded between our camp and the main camp of infantry, which was a mile distant, no doubt in revenge for this charge. My connection with this affair has given me some qualms of conscience, for I was not sure but that these Indians we had charged on were peaceful Pueblos, and I never made any report but a verbal one to Captain McLaws.

I recall most vividly our winding down the mountain and our arrival at Camp Fauntleroy, now Fort Wingate, N. M., and our reception by the officers and men assembled, evidently to see a doctor in

command of a cavalry company. I was very proud of my company, and of the honor conferred upon me by Captain McLaws. My young friends gathered around my horse, and showered congratulations on me. The idea of a doctor having had command, with such highly satisfactory results of a company of mounted riflemen, was novel, and gave rise to any amount of camp talk and gossip.

During our halt the company dismounted and stood to horse, and although showered with invitations from different officers to come down to their tents and have an old-fashioned army toddy, such as can be made only at frontier posts, I steadily, but firmly, declined to leave my place at the head of the company; and when our camp, one mile distant, was selected and assigned us, I conducted Company "G" to it and saw them settled therein. I was very soon relieved of the command by Second Lieutenant Edward P. CRESSY, Mounted Rifles, by order of Major Henry H. SIBLEY, Second Dragoons, commanding cavalry; but never an order or a word was issued in compliment for my unusual but successful services as a line officer and combatant. However, I was considerably consoled when I went to Major JAMES LONGSTREET, Paymaster U. S. A., a gentleman and a soldier, (afterwards a distinguished officer, C. S. A.) to draw that month's pay, and was directed by him to enter my services as commanding officer of a company of mounted riflemen for fifteen days, with the assurance that he would pay it. At that time, it must be remembered, company officers drew ten dollars a month extra pay for commanding companies; I did so, and was paid five dollars in gold, which was carried for many months as a memento.

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I have been informed incidentally, that there is no record on file in the War Department in Washington, as to the organization and march of this column of U. S. troops in the Navajo Indian campaign of 1860-61. If that is so, it would then appear that this is the first and only account ever recorded or furnished by the only living officer now in the service who participated in these stirring scenes.

Brevets were then unknown, excepting a few among the old officers of the line, who had been in the Mexican War. The only medical officer ever brevetted then, was Brevet Brigadier General T. LAWSON, Colonel and Surgeon General U. S. A. No hope of any such reward animated me in the discharge of what proved to be a thankless duty, but my impulses were of a high, chivalrous character; duty, honor, and pride—always good working capital for a soldier, an officer and a gentleman.

Often and often, since these events, the thought has suggested itself that had any fatality happened me, particularly when leading that charge of Company "G," little sympathy would have been given me, and it would have been remarked: "Well, it is a pity, but really he had no business to be where he was, for a doctor's proper place is in the rear with the rear guard and pack train."

J. C. McKEE,

Lieutenant Colonel and Surgeon, U. S. A.

"COLONNADE HOTEL,"

PHILADELPHIA, PA., December, 1890.



