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The Canadian Post

LINDSAY, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 24, 1908

TWO SOLDIERS.

By Capt. CHARLES KING.

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And so it happened that when Capt. Noel stepped from the train that afternoon at the old station the telegraph messenger came forward to meet him, touching his cap and saying, "This dispatch has been awaiting you, sir, since 11 o'clock this morning. I have just had a dispatch from the post, and K Troop got in two hours ago and is already starting."

"Why, I must go out to the post!" he said to the operator. "I am not at all ready to take the field. Let them know that I have arrived, and will come out there without delay. Better have the troop unsaddled and wait for my coming."

"Will the captain pardon me?" said the operator. "The orders from the department commander that went through this morning were that the troop should not take more than an hour in refitting at the post and should start at once. I thought I could see them coming over the divide just as the whistle blew."

The captain gave no sign of enthusiasm as he received this news. He was still pondering over the contents of his dispatch from the commanding general—its tone was so like that of his order from the war department—so utterly unlike what his admiring circle of relatives and friends would have expected. Stepping into the telegraph office he took some blanks and strove to compose a dispatch that would convince the general that he was wild with eagerness to ride all night to the support of Lane, and yet that would explain how absolutely necessary it was that he should first go out to the post. But the fates were against him. Even as he was gnawing the pencil and chafing his brain the operator called out:

"Here come some of 'em now, sir."

And looking nervously from the window Noel saw three horsemen galloping in to the station. Foremost came a lieutenant of infantry, who sprang to the ground and tossed the reins to his orderly. One of the men had a led horse, completely equipped for the field, with blankets, saddle bags, carbine, canteen and haversack; and Noel's quick intuition left him no room to believe that the steed was intended for any one but him.

The infantryman came bounding in. "Is this Capt. Noel? I am Mr. Renshaw, post adjutant, sir, and I had hoped to get here in time to meet you on your arrival, but we were all busy getting the troop ready. You've got your orders, sir, haven't you? My God! captain, can't you give me the fort and beg the major to let me go with you? I'll be your slave for a lifetime. I've never had a chance to do a bit of real campaigning yet, and no man could ask a better chance than this. Excuse me, sir, I know you want to get right into something. Mr. Mason said his 'straw' would fit you exactly; but if you could take me along, you're bound to get there just in time for the thick of it." And the gallant little fellow looked, all eagerness, into Noel's unresponsive face. What wouldn't the hero of the Queen City club have given to turn the whole thing over to this ambitious young soldier and let him take his chances of "glory or the grave!"

"Very thoughtful of you all, I'm sure, to think of sending horse and kit here for me, but I really ought to go out to the post. There are things I must attend to. You see, I left the instant I could induce them to relieve me, and there was no time to make preparations."

"But you can't have heard, captain, your troop will be here in ten minutes. Capt. Lane by this time is past Pyramid mountain, and will strike them early in the morning. There won't be any time to go out to the post; you've got to ride out or gallop most of the night as it is."

"Capt. Noel, pardon me, sir," interrupted the operator. "The general is in the office at Wilcox station. He wants to know if you have started from here."

"Tell him the troop isn't here yet. I'm waiting for it."

"Under comes the troop, sir," called out Mr. Renshaw, who had run to the door. "Now let me help you with your kit. Bring that canvas bag in here, order."

Three minutes brought a message from "the chief." "Leave not a moment on the way. Report here by wire the arrival of your troop and the moment you start. Behind time now."

Four feet! There was no suspicion to certify that his pallid cheeks were due to suspended heart action, no senatorial courtesy to beg for staff duty, no Mrs. Biggs to interpose. He had just time to send a dispatch to Mabel announcing that he took the field at the head of his troop at once, another (collect) to Amos Wilders, Esq., of similar import, and one to the general, saying that at 4:45 they were just on the point of starting, when the troop, fifty strong and in splendid trim, came trotting in, and Mr. Mason grimly saluted his new captain and fell back to the command of the first platoon.

"Noel to the front!" was The Chronicle's head line on the following morning far away in the Queen City.

CHAPTER XIV.

Lane finds himself confronted one instant by a savage warrior.

Not an instant too soon, although he has ridden hard since earliest dawn, has Lane reached the rocky pass. North and south the Peloncos are shrouded in the gloom of coming night, and all over the arid plain to the eastward darkness has settled down. In previous days he has learned the country well, and he knows just where to turn for "tanks" of cool water for horses, mules and men—the cavalry order of precedence when creature comforts are to be doled out. He knows just where to conceal his little force in the recesses of the rocks and let them build tiny fires and make their coffee and then get such rest as is possible before the coming day; but there is no rest for him. Taking two veteran soldiers with him, and leaving the troop to the command of his lieutenant, an enthusiastic young soldier only a year out of the cadet gray, the captain rides westward through the gloaming. He must determine at once whether the Indians are coming toward the pass by which the San Simon makes its burst through the range, or whether, having made wide detour around the little post at Bowie among the Chiricahua mountains, they are now heading southward again, and taking the shortest line to the border before seeking to regain once more their old trail along the San Bernardino. How often have their war parties gone to and fro along those rocky banks, unmolested, unpursued!

And now, secure in the belief that they have thrown all the cavalry far to the rear in the "stern chase" which no Apache dreads, will knowing how easily he can distance his hampered pursuers, the renegades, joined by a gang of the utterly "unreconstructed" Chiricahua, are taking things easily and making raids on the helpless ranches that lie to the right or left of their line of march. Fortunately for the records these are few in number; had there been dozens more they would only have served to swell the list of butchered men, of plundered ranches, of burning stacks and cornals, of women and children borne off to be the sport of their leisure hours when once secure in the fastnesses of the Sierra Madre far south of the line. Death could not come too soon to the relief of these poor creatures, and Lane and all his men had been spurred to the utmost effort by the story of the railway hands that they had plainly seen several women and children bound to the spare animals the renegades drove along across the iron track.

Among the passengers in the pillaged stage coach were the wife and daughter of an Indian agent, who had only recently come to this arid territory and knew little of the ways of its indigenous people. Nothing had since been seen or heard of them. Capt. Rawlins and two soldiers, going up as witnesses before a court martial at Grant, were found hacked almost beyond recognition, and the driver, too, who seemed to have crawled out among the rocks to die. Verily the Apaches had good reason to revel in their success! They had hoodwinked the honest, dodged the cavalry, plundered right and left until they were rich with spoil, and now, well to the south of the railway, with a choice of either east or west side of the range, their main body and prisoners are halted to rest the animals, while miles to the rear their faithful vedettes keep watch against pursuers, and miles out to the west the most active young warriors are crying havoc at the ranch of Tres Hermanos. It is the red glare of the flame towards the sunset horizon that tells Lane the Apaches cannot be far away. The instant he and his comrades issue from the gorge and peer cautiously to the right and left not only do they see the blaze across the wide valley, but northward, not more than half a mile away, there rises upon the night wind a faint, but unmistakable—the war chant of the Chiricahua.

"Thank God," cries Lane, "we are here ahead of them!"

Half an hour's reconnaissance reveals to him their position. Far up among the bowlders of the range, where pursuing horsemen cannot rush upon them in the night, they have made their bivouac, and are having a revel and feast while awaiting the return of the raiders or news from the rear that they must be moving. The range is rugged and precipitous north of the gorge; cavalry cannot penetrate it; but Lane's plan is quickly laid. He will let his men sleep until 3 o'clock, keeping only three sentries on the lookout, one of these mounted and west of the gorge to give warning should the Indians move during the night. Then,

leaving the horses concealed among the rocks south of the stream, with two men to guard them, he will lead his company to the heights and as close as possible to the Apache camp, lie in hiding until it is light enough to distinguish objects, then dash down into their midst, rescue the prisoners in the panic and confusion that he knows will result from the sudden attack, send them back as rapidly as possible, guided by three or four men, to where his horses are corralled, while he and his little band interpose between them and any rally the Apaches may make.

Knowing well that they are armed with magazine rifles and supplied by a paternal bureau with abundant ammunition, knowing that they outnumber him three to one, knowing that by surprise the whole tribe will have assembled and must infallibly detect the pitiable weakness of his own force, it is a desperate chance to take; but it is the only one—absolutely the only one—to save those tortured, agonized women, those terror-stricken little ones, from a fate more awful than words can portray.

By 8 or 9 in the morning, he argues, K Troop must certainly reach him; he knows them to be fresh and strong; he knows that they have had only short and easy marches and therefore can easily come ahead all night long and be rounding the Pyramid spur by daybreak. He knows Mason well and can count on that young officer doing his "level best" to support him. Alas! he does not know that Mason is compelled by this time to fall back to second place and that the last man on whom he can possibly count "in a pinch" is now in command of the looked-for troop.

The night wears on without alarm. Well night wears on, Lane has thrown himself at the foot of a tree to catch what sleep he may, and he feels as though he had not closed his eyes when Corp. Shea bows over him to say it is 2 o'clock. Nonelessly the men are aroused; silently they roll out of their blankets, and obedient to the low toned "fall in" of the first sergeant, seize their arms and take their place in line. There Lane briefly explains the situation; tells them of the position of the Apache bivouac; details Corp. Riley and four men to guard the post, secure and lie away with the prisoners, and orders all the rest to fight like the devil to drive the Apaches higher skelter into the rocks.

"Let not one word be said nor a trigger pulled until we are right among them. Wait for my command, unless we are detected and fired on. If we are, blaze away at once; but never stop your rifle; get right in among them. Let Riley and his men make instant search, be sure they leave neither woman nor child behind, and start them back here. The rest of us will fall back slowly, keeping between them and the Apaches all the time. Never let them get near those prisoners. That is the main object of our attack. Once back here with the horses, we can pick out places in the rocks from which we can stand the Apaches off until K Troop comes. Rest assured Lieut. Mason and his men will be along by 8 or 9; and it cannot be that the cavalry now pursuing the Apaches from the north will be more than a few hours behind. Now, do you understand? For there will be no chance of orders up there. Leave your canteens; leave anything that will hinder or rattle. Those of you who have on spurs, take them off. Those of you who have Tomto or Apache moccasins, take off your top boots and put on the ones they are all the better for going up these hillsides. Now get your coffee men; make no noise, light no additional fires, and be ready to move in twenty minutes."

Then he pencils this brief note: "Commanding Officer Troop K, Eleventh Cavalry."

"We have headed the Apaches and will attack their camp the instant it is light enough to see, rescue their captives, then fall back here to the gorge of the San Simon. They far outnumber us, and you cannot reach us too soon. I count upon your being here by 8 in the morning, and hope with your aid to hold the enemy until Greene's command arrives. Then we ought to capture the whole band. Do not fail me."

"FREDERICK LANE,"

This he gave to Sergt. Luce, with orders to ride back on the trail until he meets K Troop and deliver it to Lieut. Mason or whoever is in command, and in half an hour Luce is away.

And now, just as the dawn is breaking and a faint pallid light is stealing through the tree tops along the rocky range, there come creeping slowly, noiselessly along the slope a score of shadowy forms, crouching from bowlder to bowlder, from tree to tree. Not a word is spoken, save now and then a whispered caution. Foremost, carbine in hand, is the captain, now halting a moment to give some signal to those nearest him, now peering ahead over the rocks that bar the way. At last he reaches a point where, looking down the dark and rugged hillside before him, he sees something which causes him to unslung the case in which his field glasses are carried, to gaze thither long and fixedly. With all eyes upon their leader, the men wait and listen; some cautiously try the hammers of their carbines and loosen a few cartridges in the loops of their prairie belts. A signal from Lane brings Mr. Royce, the young second lieutenant, to his side. It is the boy's first experience of the kind, and his heart is thumping, but he means to be one of the foremost in the charge when the time comes. Watching closely, the nearest men can see that the captain is pointing out some object nearer at hand than they supposed, and the first sergeant, crouching to a neighboring rock, looks cautiously over, and then eagerly motions to others to join him.

The Apache hiding place is not three hundred yards away. Down the mountain side to the west and up the range to the north their sentries keep vigilant guard against surprise; but what man of their number dreams for an instant that on the south, between them and the Mexican line, there is now closing in to the attack a little troop of veteran campaigners, led by a man whom they have learned to dread before now? Invisible from the valley below or the heights up the range, their snuffing fire can be plainly seen from where Lane and his men are now concealed. But nothing else can be distinguished.

Far over to the western side of the

valley the faint red glow tells where the ruins of the ranch their young warriors had destroyed, and any moment now their exultant yells may be heard as they come scampering back to camp after a night of dexterity, and find every body will be up and moving off and well on the way southward before the sun gets over the crest. Lane knows he must make his dash before they can return. There would be little hope of rescue for the poor souls lying there bound and helpless, with all those scores of young fighters close at hand.

The word is passed among the men: "Follow closely, but look well to your footing. Dialogue no stones." Then, slowly and stealthily as before, on they go—this time down the hill towards the faint lights of the Indian bivouac. A hundred yards more and Lane holds up his hand, a signal to halt; and here he gives Mr. Royce a few instructions in a low tone. The youngster nods his head and mutters to several of the men as he passes: "Follow me." They disappear among the rocks and trees to the right, and it is evident that they mean to work around to the east of the bivouac, so as to partially incircle them. Little by little the wan light grows brighter, and close at hand objects far more distinct. An Indian is just passing in front of the nearest blaze and is lost in the gloom among the stunted trees. One or two forms are moving about, but they can only dimly be distinguished. Lane argues, however, that they are getting ready to move and no time is to be lost.

"Spread out now," is the order, "well to the right and left, and move forward. Be very careful." And once more they resume their catlike advance. Nearer and nearer they creep upon the unsuspecting foe, and soon many a form of sleeping Apache can be made out, lying around in the grassy basin in which they are holding for the night. Lane motions to Corp. Riley to come close to his side. "I can see nothing that looks like prisoners; they must be among the trees there, where that farthest fire is burning. Keep close to me with your men. Pass the word to the right, there. All ready."

And now they are so near the Indians that the voices of one or two squaws can be heard chattering in low tones; then the feeble wail of an infant is for a moment brought to their straining ears; then far out over the level valley to the west there is a sound that causes Lane's blood to tingle—faint, distant, but unmistakable—a chorus of Apache yells. The raiders are coming back; it is time to strike the blow. Now or never seems to be the word as the men glance at their leader and then into each other's faces.

"Forward! no shot, no sound, till they see us; then cheer like mad as you charge! Come on, men!"

Quickly now following his lead, they go leaping down the hillside. Thirty-fifty yards without mishap or discovery. Sixty, and still no sound from the defense; then a sudden stumble, the rattle of a carbine sliding down the rocks, a muttered execration; then a shrill, piercing scream from the midst of the bivouac; then—

"Charge!"

In they go—the "Devil's own Da's."

The still air shags with their wild hurrahs and the crash of their carbines. The flames jet light up the savage scene and show squaws and screaming children rushing for shelter among the rocks; Apache warriors springing from the ground, some manfully facing the rush of the foe, others fleeing like women down the hillside.

Never halting an instant, the soldiers dash through the camp, driving the dusky occupants helter skelter. Lane finds himself confronted one instant by a savage warrior whose eyes gleam like tiger's under the clutch of coarse blankets. He clubs his carbine, and the hammer comes crashing down on the Indian's skull just as Corp. Riley drives a bullet through his heart.

(Continued next week.)

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