Philip Henry Sheridan

Personal Memoirs of P. H. Sheridan

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The Memoirs of General P. H. Sheridan, Vol. 1

General Philip Henry Sheridan

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VOLUME I.

CHAPTER I.
ANCESTRY—BIRTH—EARLY EDUCATION—A CLERK IN A GROCERY STORE—APPOINTMENT—MONROE SHOES—JOURNEY TO WEST POINT—HAZING —A FISTICUFF BATTLE—SUSPENDED—RETURNS TO CLERKSHIP—GRADUATION.

My parents, John and Mary Sheridan, came to America in 1830, having been induced by the representations of my father's uncle, Thomas Gainor, then living in Albany, N. Y., to try their fortunes in the New World: They were born and reared in the County Cavan, Ireland, where from early manhood my father had tilled a leasehold on the estate of Cherrymoult; and the sale of this leasehold provided him with means to seek a new home across the sea. My parents were blood relations—cousins in the second degree—my mother, whose maiden name was Minor, having descended from a collateral branch of my father's family. Before leaving Ireland they had two children, and on the 6th of March, 1831, the year after their arrival in this country, I was born, in Albany, N. Y., the third child in a family which eventually increased to six—four boys and two girls.

The prospects for gaining a livelihood in Albany did not meet the expectations which my parents had been led to entertain, so in 1832 they removed to the West, to establish themselves in the village of Somerset, in Perry County, Ohio, which section, in the earliest days of the State; had been colonized from Pennsylvania and Maryland. At this period the great public works of the Northwest—the canals and macadamized roads, a result of clamor for internal improvements—were in course of construction, and my father turned his attention to them, believing that they offered opportunities for a successful occupation. Encouraged by a civil engineer named Bassett, who had taken a fancy to him, he put in bids for a small contract on the Cumberland Road, known as the "National Road," which was then being extended west from the Ohio River. A little success in this first enterprise led him to take up contracting as a business, which he followed on various canals and macadamized roads then building in different parts of the State of Ohio, with some good fortune for awhile, but in 1853 what little means he had saved were swallowed up —in bankruptcy, caused by the failure of the Sciota and Hocking Valley Railroad Company, for which he was fulfilling a contract at the time, and this disaster left him finally only a small farm, just outside the village of Somerset, where he dwelt until his death in 1875.

My father's occupation kept him away from home much of the time during my boyhood, and as a consequence I grew up under the sole guidance and training of my mother, whose excellent common sense and clear discernment in every way fitted her for such maternal duties. When old enough I was sent to the village school, which was taught by an old-time Irish "master"—one of those itinerant dominies of the early frontier—who, holding that to spare the rod was to spoil the child, if unable to detect the real culprit when any offense had been committed, would consistently apply the switch to the whole school without discrimination. It must be conceded that by this means he never failed to catch the guilty mischief-maker. The school-year was divided into terms of three months, the teacher being paid in each term a certain sum—three dollars, I think, for each pupil-and having an additional perquisite in the privilege of boarding around at his option in the different families to which his scholars belonged. This feature was more than acceptable to the parents at times, for how else could they so thoroughly learn all the neighborhood gossip? But the pupils were in almost unanimous opposition, because Mr. McNanly's unheralded advent at any one's house resulted frequently in the discovery that some favorite child had been playing "hookey," which means (I will say to the uninitiated, if any such there be) absenting one's self from school without permission, to go on a fishing or a swimming frolic. Such at least was my experience more than once, for Mr. McNanly particularly favored my mother's house, because of a former acquaintanceship in Ireland, and many a time a comparison of notes proved that I had been in the woods with two playfellows, named Binckly and Greiner, when the master thought I was home, ill, and my mother, that I was at school, deeply immersed in study. However, with these and other delinquencies not uncommon among boys, I learned at McNanly's school, and a little later, under a pedagogue named Thorn, a smattering of geography and history, and explored the mysteries of Pike's Arithmetic and Bullions' English Grammar, about as far as I could be carried up to the age of fourteen. This was all the education then bestowed upon me, and this—with the exception of progressing in some of these branches by voluntary study, and by practical application in others, supplemented by a few months of preparation after receiving my appointment as a cadet—was the extent of my learning on entering the Military Academy.

When about fourteen years old I began to do something for myself; Mr. John Talbot, who kept a country store in the village, employing me to deal out sugar, coffee, and calico to his customers at the munificent salary of twenty-four dollars a year. After I had gained a twelve-months' experience with Mr. Talbot my services began to be sought by, others, and a Mr. David Whitehead secured

them by the offer of sixty dollars a year—Talbot refusing to increase my pay, but not objecting to my advancement. A few months later, before my year was up, another chance to increase my salary came about; Mr. Henry Dittoe, the enterprising man of the village, offering me one hundred and twenty dollars a year to take a position in the dry-goods store of Fink & Dittoe. I laid the matter before Mr. Whitehead, and he frankly advised me to accept, though he cautioned me that I might regret it, adding that he was afraid Henry (referring to Mr. Dittoe) "had too many irons in the fire." His warning in regard to the enterprising merchant proved a prophecy, for "too many irons in the fire" brought about Mr. Dittoe's bankruptcy, although this misfortune did not befall him till long after I had left his service. I am glad to say, however, that his failure was an exceptionally honest one, and due more to the fact that he was in advance of his surroundings than to any other cause.

I remained with Fink & Dittoe until I entered the Military Academy, principally in charge of the book-keeping, which was no small work for one of my years, considering that in those days the entire business of country stores in the West was conducted on the credit system; the customers, being mostly farmers, never expecting to pay till the product of their farms could be brought to market; and even then usually squared the book-accounts by notes of hand, that were often slow of collection.

From the time I ceased to attend school my employment had necessitated, to a certain degree, the application of what I had learned there, and this practical instruction I reinforced somewhat by doing considerable reading in a general way, until ultimately I became quite a local authority in history, being frequently chosen as arbiter in discussions and disputes that arose in the store. The Mexican War, then going on, furnished, of course, a never-ending theme for controversy, and although I was too young to enter the military service when volunteers were mustering in our section, yet the stirring events of the times so much impressed and absorbed me that my sole wish was to become a soldier, and my highest aspiration to go to West Point as a Cadet from my Congressional district. My chances for this seemed very remote, however, till one day an opportunity was thrown in my way by the boy who then held the place failing to pass his examination. When I learned that by this occurrence a vacancy existed, I wrote to our representative in Congress, the Hon. Thomas Ritchey, and asked him for the appointment, reminding him that we had often met in Fink & Dittoe's store, and that therefore he must know something of my qualifications. He responded promptly by enclosing my warrant for the class of 1848; so, notwithstanding the many romances that have been published about the matter, to Mr. Ritchey, and to him alone, is due all the credit—if my career justifies that term—of putting me in the United States Army.

At once I set about preparing for the examination which precedes admission to the Military Academy, studying zealously under the direction of Mr. William Clark; my old teachers, McNanly and Thorn, having disappeared from Somerset and sought new fields of usefulness. The intervening months passed rapidly away, and I fear that I did not make much progress, yet I thought I should be able to pass the preliminary examination. That which was to follow worried me more and gave me many sleepless nights; but these would have been less in number, I fully believe, had it not been for one specification of my, outfit which the circular that accompanied my appointment demanded. This requirement was a pair of "Monroe shoes." Now, out in Ohio, what "Monroe shoes" were was a mystery—not a shoemaker in my section having so much as an inkling of the construction of the perplexing things, until finally my eldest brother brought an idea of them from Baltimore, when it was found that they were a familiar pattern under another name.

At length the time for my departure came, and I set out for West Point, going by way of Cleveland and across Lake Erie to Buffalo. On the steamer I fell in with another appointee en route to the academy, David S. Stanley, also from Ohio; and when our acquaintanceship had ripened somewhat, and we had begun to repose confidence in each other, I found out that he had no "Monroe shoes," so I deemed myself just that much ahead of my companion, although my shoes might not conform exactly to the regulations in Eastern style and finish. At Buffalo, Stanley and I separated, he going by the Erie Canal and I by the railroad, since I wanted to gain time on account of commands to stop in Albany to see my father's uncle. Here I spent a few days, till Stanley reached Albany, when we journeyed together down the river to West Point. The examination began a few days after our arrival, and I soon found myself admitted to the Corps of Cadets, to date from July 1, 1848, in a class composed of sixty-three members, many of whom—for example, Stanley, Slocum, Woods, Kautz, and Crook —became prominent generals in later years, and commanded divisions, corps, and armies in the war of the rebellion.

Quickly following my admission I was broken in by a course of hazing, with many of the approved methods that the Cadets had handed down from year to year since the Academy was founded; still, I escaped excessive persecution, although there were in my day many occurrences so extreme as to call forth condemnation and an endeavor to suppress the senseless custom, which an improved civilization has now about eradicated, not only at West Point, but at other colleges.

Although I had met the Academic board and come off with fair success, yet I knew so little of Algebra or any of the higher branches of mathematics that during my first six months at the Academy I was discouraged by many misgivings as to the future, for I speedily learned that at the January examination the class would have to stand a test much severer than that which had been applied to it on entering. I resolved to try hard, however, and, besides, good fortune gave me for a room-mate a Cadet whose education was more advanced than mine, and whose studious habits and willingness to aid others benefited me immensely. This room-mate was Henry W. Slocum, since so signally distinguished in both military and civil capacities as to win for his name a proud place in the annals of his country. After taps—that is, when by the regulations of the Academy all the lights were supposed to be extinguished, and everybody in bed—Slocum and I would hang a blanket over the one window of our room and continue our studies—he guiding me around scores of stumbling-blocks in Algebra and elucidating many knotty points in other branches of the course with which I was unfamiliar. On account of this association I went up before the Board in January with less uneasiness than otherwise would have been the case, and passed the examination fairly well. When it was over, a self-confidence in my capacity was established that had not existed hitherto, and at each succeeding examination I gained a little in order of merit till my furlough summer came round—that is, when I was half through the four-year course.

My furlough in July and August, 1850, was spent at my home in Ohio, with the exception of a visit or two to other Cadets on

furlough in the State, and at the close of my leave I returned to the Academy in the full expectation of graduating with my class in 1852.

A quarrel of a belligerent character in September, ,1851, with Cadet William R. Terrill, put an end to this anticipation, however, and threw me back into the class which graduated in 1853. Terrill was a Cadet Sergeant, and, while my company was forming for parade, having, given me an order, in what I considered an improper tone, to "dress" in a certain direction, when I believed I was accurately dressed, I fancied I had a grievance, and made toward him with a lowered bayonet, but my better judgment recalled me before actual contact could take place. Of course Terrill reported me for this, and my ire was so inflamed by his action that when we next met I attacked him, and a fisticuff engagement in front of barracks followed, which was stopped by an officer appearing on the scene. Each of us handed in an explanation, but mine was unsatisfactory to the authorities, for I had to admit that I was the assaulting party, and the result was that I was suspended by the Secretary of War, Mr. Conrad, till August 28, 1852—the Superintendent of the Academy, Captain Brewerton, being induced to recommend this milder course, he said, by my previous good conduct. At the time I thought, of course, my suspension a very unfair punishment, that my conduct was justifiable and the authorities of the Academy all wrong, but riper experience has led me to a different conclusion, and as I look back, though the mortification I then endured was deep and trying, I am convinced that it was hardly as much as I deserved for such an outrageous breach of discipline.

There was no question as to Terrill's irritating tone, but in giving me the order he was prompted by the duty of his position as a file closer, and I was not the one to remedy the wrong which I conceived had been done me, and clearly not justifiable in assuming to correct him with my own hands. In 1862, when General Buell's army was assembling at Louisville, Terrill was with it as a brigadier-general (for, although a Virginian, he had remained loyal), and I then took the initiative toward a renewal of our acquaintance. Our renewed friendship was not destined to be of long duration, I am sorry to say, for a few days later, in the battle of Perryville, while gallantly fighting for his country, poor Terrill was killed.

My suspension necessitated my leaving the Academy, and I returned home in the fall of 1851, much crestfallen. Fortunately, my good friend Henry Dittoe again gave me employment in keeping the books of his establishment, and this occupation of my time made the nine months which were to elapse before I could go back to West Point pass much more agreeably than they would have done had I been idle. In August, 1852, I joined the first class at the Academy in accordance with the order of the War Department, taking my place at the foot of the class and graduating with it the succeeding June, number thirty-four in a membership of fifty-two. At the head of this class graduated James B. McPherson, who was killed in the Atlanta campaign while commanding the Army of the Tennessee. It also contained such men as John M. Schofield, who commanded the Army of the Ohio; Joshua W. Sill, killed as a brigadier in the battle of Stone River; and many others who, in the war of the rebellion, on one side or the other, rose to prominence, General John B. Hood being the most distinguished member of the class among the Confederates.

At the close of the final examination I made no formal application for assignment to any particular arm of the service, for I knew that my standing would not entitle me to one of the existing vacancies, and that I should be obliged to take a place among the brevet second lieutenants. When the appointments were made I therefore found myself attached to the First Infantry, well pleased that I had surmounted all the difficulties that confront the student at our national school, and looking forward with pleasant anticipation to the life before me.

CHAPTER II.
ORDERED TO FORT DUNCAN, TEXAS—"NORTHERS"—SCOUTING DUTY—HUNTING—NEARLY CAUGHT BY THE INDIANS—A PRIMITIVE HABITATION —A BRAVE DRUMMERBOY'S DEATH—A MEXICAN BALL.

On the 1st day of July, 1853, I was commissioned a brevet second lieutenant in the First Regiment of United States Infantry, then stationed in Texas. The company to which I was attached was quartered at Fort Duncan, a military post on the Rio Grande opposite the little town of Piedras Negras, on the boundary line between the United States and the Republic of Mexico.

After the usual leave of three months following graduation from the Military Academy I was assigned to temporary duty at Newport Barracks, a recruiting station and rendezvous for the assignment of young officers preparatory to joining their regiments. Here I remained from September, 1853, to March, 1854, when I was ordered to join my company at Fort Duncan. To comply with this order I proceeded by steamboat down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers to New Orleans, thence by steamer across the Gulf of Mexico to Indianola, Tex., and after landing at that place, continued in a small schooner through what is called the inside channel on the Gulf coast to Corpus Christi, the headquarters of Brigadier-General Persifer F. Smith, who was commanding the Department of Texas. Here I met some of my old friends from the Military Academy, among them Lieutenant Alfred Gibbs, who in the last year of the rebellion commanded under me a brigade of cavalry, and Lieutenant Jerome Napoleon Bonaparte, of the Mounted Rifles, who resigned in 1854 to accept service in the French Imperial army, but to most of those about headquarters I was an entire stranger. Among the latter was Captain Stewart Van Vliet, of the Quartermaster's Department, now on the retired list. With him I soon came in frequent contact, and, by reason of his connection with the Quartermaster's Department, the kindly interest he took in forwarding my business inaugurated between us—a lasting friendship.

A day or two after my arrival at Corpus Christi a train of Government wagons, loaded with subsistence stores and quartermaster's supplies, started for Laredo, a small town on the Rio Grande below Fort Duncan. There being no other means of reaching my station I put my small personal possessions, consisting of a trunk, mattress, two blankets, and a pillow into one of the heavily loaded wagons and proceeded to join it, sitting on the boxes or bags of coffee and sugar, as I might choose. The movement of the train was very slow, as the soil was soft on the newly made and sandy roads. We progressed but a few miles on our first day's journey, and in the evening parked our train at a point where there was no wood, a scant supply of water—and that of bad quality—but an abundance of grass.

There being no comfortable place to sleep in any of the wagons, filled as they were to the bows with army supplies, I spread my blankets on the ground between the wheels of one of them, and awoke in the morning feeling as fresh and bright as would have been possible if all the comforts of civilization had been at my command.

It took our lumbering train many days to reach Laredo, a distance of about one hundred and sixty miles from Corpus Christi. Each march was but a repetition of the first day's journey, its monotony occasionally relieved, though, by the passage of immense flocks of ducks and geese, and the appearance at intervals of herds of deer, and sometimes droves of wild cattle, wild horses and mules. The bands of wild horses I noticed were sometimes led by mules, but generally by stallions with long wavy manes, and flowing tails which almost touched the ground.

We arrived at Laredo during one of those severe storms incident to that section, which are termed "Northers" from the fact that the north winds culminate occasionally in cold windstorms, frequently preceded by heavy rains. Generally the blow lasts for three days, and the cold becomes intense and piercing. While the sudden depression of the temperature is most disagreeable, and often causes great suffering, it is claimed that these "Northers" make the climate more healthy and endurable. They occur from October to May, and in addition to the destruction which, through the sudden depression of the temperature, they bring on the herds in the interior, they are often of sufficient violence to greatly injure the harbors on the coast.

The post near Laredo was called Fort McIntosh, and at this period the troops stationed there consisted of eight companies of the Fifth Infantry and two of the First, one of the First Artillery, and three of the Mounted Rifles. Just before the "Norther" began these troops had completed a redoubt for the defense of the post, with the exception of the ditches, but as the parapet was built of sand—the only material about Laredo which could be obtained for its construction—the severity of the winds was too much for such a shifting substance, and the work was entirely blown away early in the storm.

I was pleasantly and hospitably welcomed by the officers at the post, all of whom were living in tents, with no furniture except a cot and trunk, and an improvised bed for a stranger, when one happened to come along. After I had been kindly taken in by one of the younger officers, I reported to the commanding officer, and was informed by him that he would direct the quartermaster to furnish me, as soon as convenient, with transportation to Fort Duncan, the station of my company.

In the course of a day or two, the quartermaster notified me that a Government six-mule wagon would be placed at my disposal to proceed to my destination. No better means offering, I concluded to set out in this conveyance, and, since it was also to carry a quantity of quartermaster's property for Fort Duncan, I managed to obtain room enough for my bed in the limited space between the bows and load, where I could rest tolerably well, and under cover at night, instead of sleeping on the ground under the wagon, as I had done on the road from Corpus Christi to Laredo.

I reached Fort Duncan in March, 1854., and was kindly received by the commanding officer of the, regiment, Lieutenant-Colonel Thompson Morris, and by the captain of my company ("D"), Eugene E. McLean, and his charming wife the only daughter of General E. V. Sumner, who was already distinguished in our service, but much better known in after years in the operations of the Army of the Potomac, during its early campaigns in Virginia. Shortly after joining company "D" I was sent out on scouting duty with another company of the regiment to Camp La Pena, about sixty or seventy miles east of Fort Duncan, in a section of country that had for some time past been subjected to raids by the Lipan and Comanche Indians. Our outpost at La Pena was intended as a protection against the predatory incursions of these savages, so almost constant scouting became a daily occupation. This enabled me soon to become familiar with and make maps of the surrounding country, and, through constant association with our Mexican guide, to pick up in a short time quite a smattering of the Spanish language, which was very useful to one serving on that frontier.

At that early day western Texas was literally filled with game, and the region in the immediate vicinity of La Pena contained its full proportion of deer, antelope, and wild turkeys. The temptation to hunt was therefore constantly before me, and a desire to indulge in this pastime, whenever free from the legitimate duty of the camp, soon took complete possession of me, so expeditions in pursuit of game were of frequent occurrence. In these expeditions I was always accompanied by a soldier named Frankman, belonging to "D" company, who was a fine sportsman, and a butcher by trade. In a short period I learned from Frankman how to approach and secure the different species of game, and also how to dress and care for it when killed. Almost every expedition we made was rewarded with a good supply of deer, antelope, and wild turkeys, and we furnished the command in camp with such abundance that it was relieved from the necessity of drawing its beef ration, much to the discomfiture of the disgruntled beef contractor.

The camp at La Pena was on sandy ground, unpleasant for men and animals, and by my advice it was moved to La Pendencia, not far from Lake Espantosa. Before removal from our old location, however, early one bright morning Frankman and I started on one of our customary expeditions, going down La Pena Creek to a small creek, at the head of which we had established a hunting rendezvous. After proceeding along the stream for three or four miles we saw a column of smoke on the prairie, and supposing it arose from a camp of Mexican rancheros catching wild horses or wild cattle, and even wild mules, which were very numerous in that section of country along the Nueces River, we thought we would join the party and see how much success they were having, and observe the methods employed in this laborious and sometimes dangerous vocation. With this object in view, we continued on until we found it necessary to cross to the other side of the creek to reach the point indicated by the smoke. Just before reaching the crossing I discovered moccasin tracks near the water's edge, and realizing in an instant that the camp we were approaching might possibly be one of hostile Indians—all Indians in that country at that time were hostile—Frankman and I backed out silently, and made eager strides for La Pena, where we had scarcely arrived when Captain M. E. Van Buren, of the Mounted Rifle regiment, came in with a small command, and reported that he was out in pursuit of a band of Comanche Indians, which had been committing depredations up about Fort Clark, but that he had lost the trail. I immediately informed him of what had occurred to me during the morning, and that I could put him on the trail of the Indians he was desirous of punishing.

We hurriedly supplied with rations his small command of thirteen, men, and I then conducted him to the point where I had seen the smoke, and there we found signs indicating it to be the recently abandoned camp of the Indians he was pursuing, and we also noticed that prairie rats had formed the principal article of diet at the meal they had just completed. As they had gone, I could do no more than put him on the trail made in their departure, which was well marked; for Indians, when in small parties, and unless pressed, usually follow each other in single file. Captain Van Buren followed the trail by Fort Ewell, and well down toward Corpus Christi, day and night, until the Indians, exhausted and used up, halted, on an open plain, unsaddled their horses, mounted bareback, and offered battle. Their number was double that of Van Buren's detachment, but he attacked them fearlessly, and in the fight was mortally wounded by an arrow which entered his body in front, just above the sword belt, and came through the belt behind. The principal chief of the Indians was killed, and the rest fled. Captain Van Buren's men carried him to Corpus Christi, where in a few days he died.

After our removal to La Pendencia a similar pursuit of savages occurred, but with more fortunate results. Colonel John H. King, now on the retired list, then a captain in the First Infantry, came to our camp in pursuit of a marauding band of hostile Indians, and I was enabled to put him also on the trail. He soon overtook them, and killing two without loss to himself, the band dispersed like a flock of quail and left him nothing to follow. He returned to our camp shortly after, and the few friendly Indian scouts he had with him held a grand pow-wow and dance over the scalps of the fallen braves.

Around La Pendencia, as at La Pena, the country abounded in deer, antelope, wild turkeys, and quail, and we killed enough to supply abundantly the whole command with the meat portion of the ration. Some mornings Frankman and I would bring in as many as seven deer, and our hunting expeditions made me so familiar with the region between our camp and Fort Duncan, the headquarters of the regiment, that I was soon enabled to suggest a more direct route of communication than the circuitous one then traversed, and in a short time it was established.

Up to this time I had been on detached duty, but soon my own company was ordered into the field to occupy a position on Turkey Creek, about ten or twelve miles west of the Nueces River, on the road from San Antonio to Fort Duncan, and I was required to join the company. Here constant work and scouting were necessary, as our camp was specially located with reference to protecting from Indian raids the road running from San Antonio to Fort Duncan, and on to the interior of Mexico. In those days this road was the great line of travel, and Mexican caravans were frequently passing over it, to and fro, in such a disorganized condition as often to invite attack from marauding Comanches and Lipans. Our time, therefore, was incessantly occupied in scouting, but our labors were much lightened because they were directed with intelligence and justice by Captain McLean, whose agreeable manners and upright methods are still so impressed on my memory that to this day I look back upon my service with "D" Company of the First Infantry as among those events which I remember with most pleasure.

In this manner my first summer of active field duty passed rapidly away, and in the fall my company returned to Fort Duncan to go into winter quarters. These quarters, when constructed, consisted of "A" tents pitched under a shed improvised by the company. With only these accommodations I at first lived around as best I could until the command was quartered, and then, requesting a detail of wagons from the quartermaster, I went out some thirty miles to get poles to build a more comfortable habitation for myself. In a few days enough poles for the construction of a modest residence were secured and brought in, and then the building of my house began. First, the poles were cut the proper length, planted in a trench around four sides of a square of very small proportions, and secured at the top by string-pieces stretched from one angle to another, in which half-notches hack been made at proper intervals to receive the uprights. The poles were then made rigid by strips nailed on half-way to the ground, giving the sides of the structure firmness, but the interstices were large and frequent; still, with the aid of some old condemned paulins obtained from the quartermaster, the walls were covered and the necessity for chinking obviated. This method of covering the holes in the side walls also possessed the advantage of permitting some little light to penetrate to the interior of the house, and avoided the necessity of constructing a window, for which, by the way, no glass could have been obtained. Next a good large fire-place and chimney were built in one corner by means of stones and mud, and then the roof was put on—a thatched one of prairie grass. The floor was dirt compactly tamped.

My furniture was very primitive: a chair or two, with about the same number of camp stools, a cot, and a rickety old bureau that I obtained in some way not now remembered. My washstand consisted of a board about three feet long, resting on legs formed by driving sticks into the ground until they held it at about the proper height from the floor. This washstand was the most expensive piece of furniture I owned, the board having cost me three dollars, and even then I obtained it as a favor, for lumber on the Rio Grande was so scarce in those days that to possess even the smallest quantity was to indulge in great luxury. Indeed, about all that reached the post was what came in the shape of bacon boxes, and the boards from these were reserved for coffins in which to bury our dead.

In this rude habitation I spent a happy winter, and was more comfortably off than many of the officers, who had built none, but lived in tents and took the chances of "Northers." During this period our food was principally the soldier's ration: flour, pickled pork, nasty bacon—cured in the dust of ground charcoal—and fresh beef, of which we had a plentiful supply, supplemented with game of various kinds. The sugar, coffee, and smaller parts of the ration were good, but we had no vegetables, and the few jars of preserves and some few vegetables kept by the sutler were too expensive to be indulged in. So during all the period I lived at Fort Duncan and its sub-camps, nearly sixteen months, fresh vegetables were practically unobtainable. To prevent scurvy we used the juice of the maguey plant, called pulque, and to obtain a supply of this anti-scorbutic I was often detailed to march the company out about forty miles, cut the plant, load up two or three wagons with the stalks, and carry them to camp. Here the juice was extracted by a rude press, and put in bottles until it fermented and became worse in odor than sulphureted hydrogen. At reveille roll-call every morning this fermented liquor was dealt out to the company, and as it was my duty, in my capacity of subaltern, to attend these roll-calls and see that the men took their ration of pulque, I always began the duty by drinking a cup of the repulsive stuff myself. Though hard to swallow, its well-known specific qualities in the prevention and cure of scurvy were familiar to all, so every man in the command gulped down his share notwithstanding its vile taste and odor.

Considering our isolation, the winter passed very pleasantly to us all. The post was a large one, its officers congenial, and we had many enjoyable occasions. Dances, races, and horseback riding filled in much of the time, and occasional raids from Indians furnished more serious occupation in the way of a scout now and then. The proximity of the Indians at times rendered the surrounding country somewhat dangerous for individuals or small parties at a distance from the fort; but few thought the savages would come near, so many risks were doubtless run by various officers, who carried the familiar six-shooter as their only weapon while out horseback riding, until suddenly we were awakened to the dangers we had been incurring.

About mid-winter a party of hostile Lipans made a swoop around and skirting the garrison, killing a herder—a discharged drummer-boy—in sight of the flag-staff. Of course great excitement followed. Captain J. G. Walker, of the Mounted Rifles, immediately started with his company in pursuit of the Indians, and I was directed to accompany the command. Not far away we found the body of the boy filled with arrows, and near him the body of a fine looking young Indian, whom the lad had undoubtedly killed before he was himself overpowered. We were not a great distance behind the Indians when the boy's body was discovered, and having good trailers we gained on them rapidly, with the prospect of overhauling them, but as soon as they found we were getting near they headed for the Rio Grande, made the crossing to the opposite bank, and were in Mexico before we could overtake them. When on the other side of the boundary they grew very brave, daring us to come over to fight them, well aware all the time that the international line prevented us from continuing the pursuit. So we had to return to the post without reward for our exertion except the consciousness of having made the best effort we could to catch the murderers. That night, in company with Lieutenant Thomas G. Williams, I crossed over the river to the Mexican village of Piedras Negras, and on going to a house where a large baille, or dance, was going on we found among those present two of the Indians we had been chasing. As soon as they saw us they strung their bows for a fight, and we drew our six-shooters, but the Mexicans quickly closed in around the Indians and forced them out of the house—or rude jackal—where the "ball" was being held, and they escaped. We learned later something about the nature of the fight the drummer had made, and that his death had cost them dear, for, in addition to the Indian killed and lying by his side, he had mortally wounded another and seriously wounded a third, with the three shots that he had fired.

At this period I took up the notion of making a study of ornithology, incited to it possibly by the great number of bright-colored birds that made their winter homes along the Rio Grande, and I spent many a leisure hour in catching specimens by means of stick traps, with which I found little difficulty in securing almost every variety of the feathered tribes. I made my traps by placing four sticks of a length suited to the size desired so as to form a square, and building up on them in log-cabin fashion until the structure came almost to a point by contraction of the corners. Then the sticks were made secure, the trap placed at some secluded spot, and from the centre to the outside a trench was dug in the ground, and thinly covered when a depth had been obtained that would leave an aperture sufficiently large to admit the class of birds desired. Along this trench seeds and other food were scattered, which the birds soon discovered, and of course began to eat, unsuspectingly following the tempting bait through the gallery till they emerged from its farther end in the centre of the trap, where they contentedly fed till the food was all gone. Then the fact of imprisonment first presented itself, and they vainly endeavored to escape through the interstices of the cage, never once guided by their instinct to return to liberty through the route by which they had entered.

Among the different kinds of birds captured in this way, mocking-birds, blue-birds, robins, meadow larks, quail, and plover were the most numerous. They seemed to have more voracious appetites than other varieties, or else they were more unwary, and consequently more easily caught. A change of station, however, put an end to my ornithological plans, and activities of other kinds prevented me from resuming them in after life.

There were quite a number of young officers at the post during the winter, and as our relations with the Mexican commandant at Piedras Negras were most amicable, we were often invited to dances at his house. He and his hospitable wife and daughter drummed up the female portion of the elite of Piedras Negras and provided the house, which was the official as well as the personal residence of the commandant, while we—the young officers—furnished the music and such sweetmeats, candies, &c., for the baille as the country would afford.

We generally danced in a long hall on a hard dirt floor. The girls sat on one side of the hall, chaperoned by their mothers or some old duennas, and the men on the other. When the music struck up each man asked the lady whom his eyes had already selected to dance with him, and it was not etiquette for her to refuse—no engagements being allowed before the music began. When the dance, which was generally a long waltz, was over, he seated his partner, and then went to a little counter at the end of the room and bought his dulcinea a plate of the candies and sweetmeats provided. Sometimes she accepted them, but most generally pointed to her duenna or chaperon behind, who held up her apron and caught the refreshments as they were slid into it from the plate. The greatest decorum was maintained at these dances, primitively as they were conducted; and in a region so completely cut off from the world, their influence was undoubtedly beneficial to a considerable degree in softening the rough edges in a half-breed population.

The inhabitants of this frontier of Mexico were strongly marked with Indian characteristics, particularly with those of the Comanche type, and as the wild Indian blood predominated, few of the physical traits of the Spaniard remained among them, and outlawry was common. The Spanish conquerors had left on the northern border only their graceful manners and their humility before the cross. The sign of Christianity was prominently placed at all important points on roads or trails, and especially where any one had been killed; and as the Comanche Indians, strong and warlike, had devastated northeastern Mexico in past years, all along the border, on both sides of the Rio Grande, the murderous effects of their raids were evidenced by numberless crosses. For more than a century forays had been made on the settlements and towns by these bloodthirsty savages, and, the Mexican Government being too weak to afford protection, property was destroyed, the women and children carried off or ravished, and the men compelled to look on in an agony of helplessness till relieved by death. During all this time, however, the forms and ceremonials of religion, and the polite manners received from the Spaniards, were retained, and reverence for the emblems of Christianity was always uppermost in the mind of even the most ignorant.

CHAPTER III.
ORDERED TO FORT READING, CAL.—A DANGEROUS UNDERTAKING—A RESCUED SOLDIER—DISCOVERING INDIANS—PRIMITIVE FISHING—A DESERTED VILLAGE—CAMPING OPPOSITE FORT VANCOUVER.

In November, 1854, I received my promotion to a second lieutenancy in the Fourth Infantry, which was stationed in California and Oregon. In order to join my company at Fort Reading, California, I had to go to New York as a starting point, and on arrival there, was placed on duty, in May, 1855, in command of a detachment of recruits at Bedloe's Island, intended for assignment to the regiments on the Pacific coast. I think there were on the island (now occupied by the statue of Liberty Enlightening the World) about three hundred recruits. For a time I was the only officer with them, but shortly before we started for California, Lieutenant Francis H. Bates, of the Fourth Infantry, was placed in command. We embarked for the Pacific coast in July, 1855, and made the journey without incident via the Isthmus of Panama, in due time landing our men at Benecia Barracks, above San Francisco.

From this point I proceeded to join my company at Fort Reading, and on reaching that post, found orders directing me to relieve Lieutenant John B. Hood—afterward well known as a distinguished general in the Confederate service. Lieutenant Hood was in command of the personal mounted escort of Lieutenant R. S. Williamson, who was charged with the duty of making such explorations and surveys as would determine the practicability of connecting, by railroad, the Sacramento Valley in California with the Columbia River in Oregon Territory, either through the Willamette Valley, or (if this route should prove to be impracticable) by the valley of the Des Chutes River near the foot-slopes of the Cascade chain. The survey was being made in accordance with an act of Congress, which provided both for ascertaining the must practicable and economical route for a railroad between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Ocean, and for military and geographical surveys west of the Mississippi River.

Fort Reading was the starting-point for this exploring expedition, and there I arrived some four or five days after the party under Lieutenant Williamson had begun its march. His personal escort numbered about sixty mounted men, made up of detachments from companies of the First Dragoons, under command of Lieutenant Hood, together with about one hundred men belonging to the Fourth Infantry and Third Artillery, commanded by Lieutenant Horatio Gates Gibson, the present colonel of the Third United States Artillery. Lieutenant George Crook—now major-general—was the quartermaster and commissary of subsistence of the expedition.

The commanding officer at Fort Reading seemed reluctant to let me go on to relieve Lieutenant Hood, as the country to be passed over was infested by the Pit River Indians, known to be hostile to white people and especially to small parties. I was very anxious to proceed, however, and willing to take the chances; so, consent being finally obtained, I started with a corporal and two mounted men, through a wild and uninhabited region, to overtake if possible Lieutenant Williamson. Being on horseback, and unencumbered by luggage of any kind except blankets and a little hard bread, coffee and smoking-tobacco, which were all carried on our riding animals, we were sanguine of succeeding, for we traversed in one day fully the distance made in three by Lieutenant Williamson's party on foot.

The first day we reached the base of Lassan's Butte, where I determined to spend the night near an isolated cabin, or dugout, that had been recently constructed by a hardy pioneer. The wind was blowing a disagreeable gale, which had begun early in the day. This made it desirable to locate our camp under the best cover we could find, and I spent some little time in looking about for a satisfactory place, but nothing better offered than a large fallen tree, which lay in such a direction that by encamping on its lee side we would be protected from the fury of the storm. This spot was therefore fixed upon, and preparation made for spending the night as comfortably as the circumstances would permit.

After we had unsaddled I visited the cabin to inquire in regard to the country ahead, and there found at first only a soldier of Williamson's party; later the proprietor of the ranch appeared. The soldier had been left behind by the surveying party on account of illness, with instructions to make his way back to Fort Reading as best he could when he recovered. His condition having greatly improved, however, since he had been left, he now begged me in beseeching terms to take him along with my party, which I finally consented to do, provided that if he became unable to keep up with me, and I should be obliged to abandon him, the responsibility would be his, not mine. This increased my number to five, and was quite a reinforcement should we run across any hostile Indians; but it was also certain to prove an embarrassment should the man again fall ill.

During the night, notwithstanding the continuance of the storm, I had a very sound and refreshing sleep behind the protecting log where we made our camp, and at daylight next morning we resumed our journey, fortified by a breakfast of coffee and hard bread. I skirted around the base of Lassan's Butte, thence down Hat Creek, all the time following the trail made by Lieutenant Williamson's party. About noon the soldier I had picked up at my first camp gave out, and could go no farther. As stipulated when I consented to take him along, I had the right to abandon him, but when it came to the test I could not make up my mind to do it. Finding a good place not far off the trail, one of my men volunteered to remain with him until he died; and we left them there, with a liberal supply of hard bread and coffee, believing that we would never again see the invalid. My reinforcement was already gone, and another man with it.

With my diminished party I resumed the trail and followed it until about 4 o'clock in the afternoon, when we heard the sound of voices, and the corporal, thinking we were approaching Lieutenant Williamson's party, was so overjoyed in anticipation of the junction, that he wanted to fire his musket as an expression of his delight. This I prevented his doing, however, and we continued cautiously and slowly on to develop the source of the sounds in front. We had not gone far before I discovered that the noise came from a band of Pit River Indians, who had struck the trail of the surveying expedition, and were following it up, doubtless with evil intent. Dismounting from my horse I counted the moccasin tracks to ascertain the number of Indians, discovered it to be about thirty, and then followed on behind them cautiously, but with little difficulty, as appearances of speed on their part indicated that they wished to overtake Lieutenant Williamson's party, which made them less on the lookout than usual for any possible pursuers. After following the

trail until nearly sundown, I considered it prudent to stop for the night, and drew off some little distance, where, concealed in a dense growth of timber, we made our camp.

As I had with me now only two men, I felt somewhat nervous, so I allowed no fires to be built, and in consequence our supper consisted of hard bread only. I passed an anxious night, but beyond our own solicitude there was nothing to disturb us, the Indians being too much interested in overtaking the party in front to seek for victims in the rear, After a hard-bread breakfast we started again on the trail, and had proceeded but a short distance when, hearing the voices of the Indians, we at once slackened our speed so as not to overtake them.

Most of the trail on which we traveled during the morning ran over an exceedingly rough lava formation—a spur of the lava beds often described during the Modoc war of 1873 so hard and flinty that Williamson's large command made little impression on its surface, leaving in fact, only indistinct traces of its line of march. By care and frequent examinations we managed to follow his route through without much delay, or discovery by the Indians, and about noon, owing to the termination of the lava formation, we descended into the valley of Hat Greek, a little below where it emerges from the second canon and above its confluence with Pit River. As soon as we reached the fertile soil of the valley, we found Williamson's trail well defined, deeply impressed in the soft loam, and coursing through wild-flowers and luxuriant grass which carpeted the ground on every hand.

When we struck this delightful locality we traveled with considerable speed, and after passing over hill and vale for some distance, the trail becoming more and more distinct all the time, I suddenly saw in front of me the Pit River Indians.

This caused a halt, and having hurriedly re-capped our guns and six-shooters, thus preparing for the worst, I took a look at the band through my field-glass. They were a half-mile or more in our front and numbered about thirty individuals, armed with bows and arrows only. Observing us they made friendly demonstrations, but I had not implicit faith in a Pit River Indian at that period of the settlement of our country, and especially in that wild locality, so after a "council of war" with the corporal and man, I concluded to advance to a point about two hundred yards distant from the party, when, relying on the speed of our horses rather than on the peaceable intentions of the savages, I hoped to succeed in cutting around them and take the trail beyond. Being on foot they could not readily catch us, and inasmuch as their arrows were good for a range of only about sixty yards, I had no fear of any material damage on that score.

On reaching the place selected for our flank movement we made a dash to the left of the trail, through the widest part of the valley, and ran our horses swiftly by, but I noticed that the Indians did not seem to be disturbed by the manoeuvre and soon realized that this indifference was occasioned by the knowledge that we could not cross Hat Creek, a deep stream with vertical banks, too broad to be leaped by our horses. We were obliged, therefore, to halt, and the Indians again made demonstrations of friendship, some of them even getting into the stream to show that they were at the ford. Thus reassured, we regained our confidence and boldly crossed the river in the midst of them. After we had gained the bluff on the other side of the creek, I looked down into the valley of Pit River, and could plainly see the camp of the surveying party. Its proximity was the influence which had doubtless caused the peaceable conduct of the Indians. Probably the only thing that saved us was their ignorance of our being in their rear, until we stumbled on them almost within sight of the large party under Williamson.

The Pit River Indians were very hostile at that time, and for many succeeding years their treachery and cruelty brought misfortune and misery to the white settlers who ventured their lives in search of home and fortune in the wild and isolated section over which these savages roamed. Not long after Williamson's party passed through their country, the Government was compelled to send into it a considerable force for the purpose of keeping them under control. The outcome of this was a severe fight—resulting in the loss of a good many lives—between the hostiles and a party of our troops under Lieutenant George Crook. It finally ended in the establishment of a military post in the vicinity of the battle-ground, for the permanent occupation of the country.

A great load was lifted from my heart when I found myself so near Williamson's camp, which I joined August 4, 1855, receiving a warm welcome from the officers. During the afternoon I relieved Lieutenant Hood of the command of the personal escort, and he was ordered to return, with twelve of the mounted men, over the trail I had followed. I pointed out to him on the map the spot where he would find the two men left on the roadside, and he was directed to take them into Fort Reading. They were found without difficulty, and carried in to the post. The sick man—Duryea—whom I had expected never to see again, afterward became the hospital steward at Fort Yamhill, Oregon, when I was stationed there.

The Indians that I had passed at the ford came to the bluff above the camp, and arranging themselves in a squatting posture, looked down upon Williamson's party with longing eyes, in expectation of a feast. They were a pitiable lot, almost naked, hungry and cadaverous. Indians are always hungry, but these poor creatures were particularly so, as their usual supply of food had grown very scarce from one cause and another.

In prosperity they mainly subsisted on fish, or game killed with the bow and arrow. When these sources failed they lived on grasshoppers, and at this season the grasshopper was their principal food. In former years salmon were very abundant in the streams of the Sacramento Valley, and every fall they took great quantities of these fish and dried them for winter use, but alluvial mining had of late years defiled the water of the different streams and driven the fish out. On this account the usual supply of salmon was very limited. They got some trout high up on the rivers, above the sluices and rockers of the miners, but this was a precarious source from which to derive food, as their means of taking the trout were very primitive. They had neither hooks nor lines, but depended entirely on a contrivance made from long, slender branches of willow, which grew on the banks of most of the streams. One of these branches would be cut, and after sharpening the butt-end to a point, split a certain distance, and by a wedge the prongs divided sufficiently to admit a fish between. The Indian fisherman would then slyly put the forked end in the water over his intended victim, and with a quick

dart firmly wedge him between the prongs. When secured there, the work of landing him took but a moment. When trout were plentiful this primitive mode of taking them was quite successful, and I have often known hundreds of pounds to be caught in this way, but when they were scarce and suspicious the rude method was not rewarded with good results.

The band looking down on us evidently had not had much fish or game to eat for some time, so when they had made Williamson understand that they were suffering for food he permitted them to come into camp, and furnished them with a supply, which they greedily swallowed as fast as it was placed at their service, regardless of possible indigestion. When they had eaten all they could hold, their enjoyment was made complete by the soldiers, who gave them a quantity of strong plug tobacco. This they smoked incessantly, inhaling all the smoke, so that none of the effect should be lost. When we abandoned this camp the next day, the miserable wretches remained in it and collected the offal about the cooks' fires to feast still more, piecing out the meal, no doubt, with their staple article of food—grasshoppers.

On the morning of August 5 Lieutenant Hood started back to Fort Reading, and Lieutenant Williamson resumed his march for the Columbia River. Our course was up Pit River, by the lower and upper canons, then across to the Klamath Lakes, then east, along their edge to the upper lake. At the middle Klamath Lake, just after crossing Lost River and the Natural Bridge, we met a small party of citizens from Jacksonville, Oregon, looking for hostile Indians who had committed some depredations in their neighborhood. From them we learned that the Rogue River Indians in southern Oregon were on the war-path, and that as the "regular troops up there were of no account, the citizens had taken matters in hand, and intended cleaning up the hostiles." They swaggered about our camp, bragged a good deal, cursed the Indians loudly, and soundly abused the Government for not giving them better protection. It struck me, however, that they had not worked very hard to find the hostiles; indeed, it could plainly be seen that their expedition was a town-meeting sort of affair, and that anxiety to get safe home was uppermost in their thoughts. The enthusiasm with which they started had all oozed out, and that night they marched back to Jacksonville. The next day, at the head of the lake, we came across an Indian village, and I have often wondered since what would have been the course pursued by these valiant warriors from Jacksonville had they gone far enough to get into its vicinity.