

Ray's Recruit

.....BY.....
CAPTAIN CHARLES KING, U. S. A.

AUTHOR OF "THE COLONEL'S DAUGHTER," "FROM THE RANKS," ETC.

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(Continued.)

A "Gandy" battalion was that with which Mainwaring danced away that sweet May morning, men and horses the pictures of health and high condition and eager for the field and the fray. Standard, with his four troops, had marched eastward for the lower valley, but Main-

waring was to hasten to the hills, gather up the little force still in stockade at the nearest agency, then sweep on down to join the others. The telegraph line was repaired to Crested Butte, where the mutiny began, and there came this startling message just in time to meet them:

"Sioux agency reports that Lord Lunemouth and party of friends, 12 in all, including guides, passed up the Ska en route to the northern hills two days before the outbreak. Use all means in your power to find and protect him. Acknowledge receipt and report action."

It was forwarded to Mainwaring by Atherton, who said he was coming post-haste to take command in person in that part of the field; meantime to lose not a moment, but to do his best. As usual, the call went out for Ray.

Two days later, away up among the pine crested heights, hot on the trail of a big war party of Indians, the sorrel troop was pushing. Mainwaring, with the three remaining companies, was

have prompted so hazardous a plan. The agent at Brace Springs swore he had done his best to dissuade them, but there were three Englishmen who had never seen elk and were possessed with longing to stalk and shoot them. They were lavish with their money. Their interpreters talked directly to some of the old chiefs, Thunder Eagle and Rolling Bear especially, and the presents made these warriors caused the Sioux to clamor for more, but won a lordly permit from the crafty leaders to go shoot what they would—the Sioux wouldn't care—and so led them squarely into the trap. Ray had found the debris of one of their camps toward noon of the second day of his daring march and four hours later as he sped along their northward winding trail he came suddenly upon a deep cleft among the hills, away down in whose depths trickled an ice cold rivulet where the tourists had drunk their fill, then gone on up the opposite heights, and after them, swift pursuing, a formidable war party that had evidently come up this tributary to the Ska hoping here to find and intercept their prey.

Men and horses of Ray's troop both were weary. They drank eagerly, and some eyes, already haggard, looked appealingly at the set face of their captain. Forty-eight hours had they come with but scant halt for rest, and there was hardly a man in the party that could not have slept instantly had he lain down on that soft, inviting turf—all, perhaps, but the indomitable leader and the tall trooper originally of the center set of fours, yet so often on this second day riding side by side with, instead of following six yards behind, his commander, the place where the orderly is supposed to be. Scott, the young lieutenant, who should perhaps have taken exception to such favoritism, seemed to understand and object not at all. "Hunter was up through here last month with surveyor's escort," was the explanation, and, though some men might have growled the information that "other fellers were along, too," no one seemed to object, for the reason that it was thoroughly known that Hunter made topographical notes from day to day and had them with him now, and it was these to which Ray so frequently referred as they hastened on.

Plainly enough had the captain seen the symptoms of growing exhaustion on both his men and mounts—the dark lines under the deep set eyes, the utter silence that prevailed along the dusty little company, the painful stumbling of the horses and the constant effort needed to keep closed on the head of column. But he knew his men, and they knew him. It was not the first by many times they had been called upon to ride with life or death the stake. Somewhere, not three hours ahead probably, was a murderous band of Sioux seeking

to redress undoubted injuries by the only method the Indian knows—the blood of the pale faced brothers of those that had wrought the wrong.

That these tourists had bought the consent of their chief to hunt, camp and explore through the Indian lands, that they were innocent of wrongdoing, that they despised the robbers of the red man as much as the Indian hated him, had no bearing on the case. These were white men, rashly intruding far within the Brule lines at a time when the Great Spirit, through their medicine men, had sounded the call to battle, and high or low, rich or poor, English or American, man, woman or child, it made no difference. That fated party represented just so many coveted scalps, no more and no less, and if Indian strategy could compass their capture alive or their destruction without the spilling of a drop of Indian blood all the more would their warrior band receive the acclamations of a tribe that worshiped prowess like unto that of the prairie wolf or fleet footed fox. Ninety strong, led by a daring young chief whose father and mother both had died when the soldiers of the long hair dashed upon their village some years before, they had cut loose from all bands around the Ska and hastened in search of the white invaders guaranteed by old Rolling Bear safe conduct not a week before.

And unerringly their instinct led them to the lovely park country on the north side of the hills, for there was noble game in profusion. Thither must the lordly whites have gone, rich in horses, arms, stores and provisions of every kind, and for months the Sioux were starving.

It was the sight of the fresh hoof prints of fourscore ponies that settled all question of rest at the rivulet in the mind of Captain Ray. "Men," said he, "I hate to wear you out, but before another sunrise we must circumvent these fellows, or it's all up with the tourists."

There were Irish troopers in the leading four who loved to talk of the Clanna-Gael and home rule for Erin and death to "England's cruel red" when time hung heavy on their hands in

forgoten now. Like the famous Evericks, they only talked of mutiny when no other fighting was to be done. Only the horses seemed to groan at the command to mount, and once more on went the sorrels all secure.

An hour after nightfall, in the bright light of the climbing moon, they had splashed through another shallow, foaming stream in another and narrower rift among the hills, two veteran sergeants, with Ray and Hunter, well out in front, when just as the foremost, a shadowy form, rode warily to a little point of bluff 300 yards ahead Ray's gauntleted hand swung high his scouting hat in air, as half turning in saddle he signalled "Halt!" for the leader rider was gesticulating wildly, and Sergeant Conners came galloping back.

"Tread 'em, by God, sir!" he cried, in excitement irreplaceable. "They've stopped for a scalp dance. You can hear 'em plain."

Yes, faint, but distinct, beating quicker every minute, the weird throb of the war drum could be heard, and with it the shrill whoop and yell of excited dancers.

"Then you're right, Hunter," promptly spoke the captain. "That can mean only one thing. They've located the party over in Keogh's park, just where you said they'd pitch their camp, and these beggars mean to jump them at dawn. We'll show 'em a trick worth ten of that, won't we, Dixie?" he continued, patting the neck of the game little sorrel he rode. "What blessed luck that they should stop to celebrate!"

Slowly, cautiously, the shadowy troop led forward to a grove of pines not far from the water's edge and close to the sheltering bluff beyond which the warriors were having their jollification. There they waited, breathless, the sound of revelry gaining every minute on the night. Taking Conners and Hunter with him, Ray crept forward to reconnoiter—he and his sergeant veterans in the craft, Hunter a novice, whose heart beat wildly, but who never faltered.

(To be Continued.)

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They drank eagerly.

trotting down into the valley of the North Fork to intercept and beat back further parties should they be tempted to follow their friends in the search for the unsuspecting tourists. Atherton, with the Wintrop battalion at his heels, was coming across country to the support of Mainwaring, while old Standard, on familiar ground, was rounding up stragglers down the Ska, herding them back to the agency and eagerly watching for the coming of the troops from Rossiter and the big posts away to the north. Then the Indians would be hemmed in.

But meantime what damage might they not do! There were no railways then save the few trunk lines, no means, except by marching, to reach the fabled Indian lands, and Lo was in his glory. Warned of their peril, settlers, herders and stockmen had taken to flight and abandoned the lower valley, so the Indian was riding, proud monarch of all he surveyed, over the broad waste of the lowlands, burning, pillaging and raising, as the newspaper men first on the scene expressed it, "no scalps, but much hell." If only good news could be heard of those tourists, all might yet be well. But what mad brained trick could

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