

## DESERTION BY WHOLESALE,

General Guster in his paper in the *Galaxy* for August, "My Life on the Plains," tells the following story of an attempt at wholesale desertion:

In a previous chapter reference has been made to the state of dissatisfaction which had made its appearance among the enlisted men. This state of feeling had been principally superinduced by inferior and insufficient rations, a fault for which no one connected with the troops in the field was responsible but which is chargeable to persons far removed from the theatre of our movements, persons connected with the supply departments of the Army. Added to this internal source of disquiet, we were then on the mainline of overland travel to some of our most valuable and lately discovered mining regions. The opportunity to obtain marvellous wages as miners and the prospect of amassing sudden wealth proved a temptation sufficiently strong to make many of the men forget their sworn obligations to their government and their duties as soldiers. Forgetting for the moment that the command to which they belonged was actually engaged in war, and was in a country infested with armed bodies of the enemy and that legal penalty of desertion under such circumstances was death, many of the men formed a combination to desert their colors and escape to the mines.

The first intimation received by any person in authority of the existence of this plot was on the morning fixed for our departure from the Platte. Orders had been issued the previous evening for the command to march at daylight. Upwards of forty men were reported as having deserted during the night. There was no time to send parties in pursuit, or the capture and return of a portion of them might have been effected.

The command marched southward at daylight. At noon, having marched fifteen miles, we halted to rest and graze the horses for one hour. The men believed that the halt was made for the remainder of the day, and here a plan was perfected among the disaffected by which upwards of one-third of the effective strength of the command was to seize their horses and arms during the night and escape to the mountains. Had the conspirators succeeded in putting this plan into execution it would have been difficult to say how serious the consequences might be, or whether enough true men would remain to render the march to Fort Wallace practicable. Fortunately it was decided to continue the march some fifteen miles further before night. The necessary orders were given and everything was being repacked for the march, when attention was called to thirteen soldiers who were then to be seen rapidly leaving camp in the direction from which we had marched. Seven of these were mounted and were moving off at a rapid gallop; the remaining six were dismounted, not having been so fortunate as their fellows in procuring horses. The entire party were still within sound of the bugle, but no order by bugle note or otherwise served to check or diminish their flight. The boldness of this attempt at desertion took every one by surprise. Such an occurrence as enlisted men deserting in broad daylight and under the immediate eyes of their officers had never been heard of. With the exception of the horses of the guard and a few belonging to the officers, all others were still grazing and unsaddled. The officer of the guard was

directed to mount his command promptly, and if possible overtake the deserters. At the same time those of the officers whose horses were in readiness, were also directed to join in the pursuit and leave no effort untried to prevent the escape of a single malcontent. In giving each party sent in pursuit instructions, there was no limit fixed to the measures which they were authorized to adopt in executing their orders. This unfortunately, was an emergency which involved the safety of the entire command, and required treatment of the most summary character.

It was found impossible to overtake that portion of the party which was mounted, as it was afterwards learned that they had selected seven of the fleetest horses in the command. Those on foot, when discovering themselves pursued, increased their speed, but a chase of a couple of miles brought the pursuers within hailing distance.

Major Elliott, the senior officer participating in the pursuit, called out to the deserters to halt and surrender. This command was several times repeated, but without effect. Finally, seeing the hopelessness of further flight, the deserters came to bay, and to Major Elliott's renewed demand to throw down their arms and surrender, the ring-leader drew up his carbine to fire upon his pursuers. This was the signal for the latter to open fire, which they did successfully, bringing down four of the deserters, although two of them were worse frightened than hurt.

Rejoining the command with their six captive deserters, the pursuing party reported their inability to overtake those on horseback. The march was resumed and continued until near nightfall, by which time we had placed thirty miles between us and our last camp on the Platte. While on the march during the day a trusty sergeant, one who had served as a soldier long and faithfully, imparted the first information which could be relied upon as to the plot which had been formed by the malcontents to desert in a body. The following night had been selected as the time for making the attempt. The best horses and arms in the command were to be seized and taken away. I believe that the summary action adopted during the day would intimidate any who might still be contemplating desertion, and was confident that another days march would place us so far in a hostile and dangerous country that the risk of encountering large war parties of Indians, would of itself serve to deter any but large numbers from attempting to make their way back to the settlements. To bridge the following night in safety was the next problem. While there was undoubtedly a large proportion of the men could be fully relied upon to remain true to their obligations and to render any support to their officers which might be demanded, yet the great difficulty at this time, owing to the sudden development of the plot, was to determine who could be trusted.

The difficulty was solved by placing every officer in the command on guard during the night. The men were assembled as usual for roll-call at tattoo, and then notified that every man must be in his tent at the signal "taps" which would be sounded half an hour later; and that their company officers would walk the company streets during the entire night, and any man appearing outside the limits of his tent between the hours of "taps" and reveille would do so at the risk of being fired upon after being once hailed.

The night passed without disturbance, and daylight found us in the saddle and pursuing our line of march towards Fort Wallace. It is proper to here record the fact that from that date onward desertion from the command during the expedition was never attempted.

## THE NORTHWESTERN BOUNDARY COMMISSION.

The Joint Commission appointed by the Governments of Great Britain, the United States and Canada to define the boundary line between the Dominion and the United States on the 49th parallel, between the Lake of the Woods and the Pacific, will commence work in a few days. Congress last March authorized the Secretary of War to entrust the work, so far as the United States are concerned, to the Engineer Bureau of the Army, instead of placing the survey under civil control. The following officers, under the act in question, have been detailed for the purpose:—Lieut. Col. Francis C. Farquar, Lieut. Col. Wm. J. Twining, Lieutenants James F. Gregory and John N. Weeden, United States Engineers; Lieutenants F. W. Green, Fourth Artillery, and C. F. Palfrey, First Artillery.

The civilians of the United States party are: Archibald Campbell of Washington, United States Commissioner, J. E. Bangs, of Washington, Assistant Astronomer, J. Francis Harding of Washington, Secretary; Prof. John F. Clarke, of Antioch College, Ohio, Astronomer; F. Von Shraeder, of Detroit, Assistant Engineer; and G. W. Hatch M. D., of New York City, Surgeon.

Dr. Hatch and Mr. Harding are both natives of the State of Maine, where they are both well known.

The organization of the Commission consists of two astronomical and two surveying parties. The country along the northern boundary of Minnesota and the adjoining western territories is now well known, and military posts and settlements have been long established there. The four engineers and two artillery officers detailed for the service will all the places of commissioner, chief astronomers and surveyors. There are six assistants to the latter, besides a surgeon and quartermaster. The rest of the expedition consists of six men at \$75 per month, twenty-six men at \$45 per month, four cooks at \$50 per month, twelve teamsters at \$45, eight messmen at \$45, eighty pack mules, or twelve waggons and fifty six mules. The party is to be supplied with subsistence by the Government at the rate of fifty cents per day.

REMITTANCES Received on Subscription to THE VOLUNTEER REVIEW up to Saturday, the 31st Inst:—

RICHMOND, Ont.—Lieut. John Kelly, \$2  
KEPPEL.—Francis Wrigley, \$1.  
LAWRENCEVILLE, Que.—Capt. Wm. D. Lawrence, \$2.  
RICHMOND, Que.—Capt. E. B. Prendergast, \$1.