

BATTLING FOR AN AMERICAN TITLE

By EDWARD B. CLARK
DRAWINGS BY DEARBORN HEWITT



WASHINGTON—For two consecutive sessions a bill has been before congress to give to Brig-Gen. Frank D. Baldwin, United States army (retired) the rank of major general. Some day perhaps the bill will become a law, for it is worthy of passage, as Baldwin is worthy of honor. The home of this retired officer as present is in Colorado, though he comes to Washington occasionally to live over old days with comrade veterans, many of whom have chosen the nation's capital for their homes.

It is rarely that one can get, Gen. Baldwin to speak of his services in the army, but his friends are not slow in speaking for him and every word that they say in praise is borne out by the records which are hidden away in the war department.

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On the retired list of the army with Gen. Baldwin is Brig-Gen. John H. Babcock, a close friend of the man who led the mule team charge and a frequent visitor to Washington. It is doubtful if Gen. Babcock's nearest neighbors in his little country home in Saratoga county, N. Y., suspect anything of the fire eating possibilities that lie hidden in the person of this gray-haired peaceful-looking and retiring man.

Gen. Babcock left the service not long ago and at once departed for the little place in the foothills of the Adirondack mountains where he might gratify his love of country life. If the general refuses to talk of his army achievements to his neighbors and if they are curiously inclined they might send for a government record, which, though only five lines long, contains in it the nub of the story of one of the most gallant feats ever performed by an officer of the United States army.



THE INDIANS SHOT AT THE GALLANT OFFICER FROM DEPRESSIONS IN THE PRAIRIE

Frank D. Baldwin has been in so many fights for his country that the counting of them assumes the proportion of a mathematical problem. For years upon years after the civil war in which he distinguished himself time and again, he fought nearly every form of Indian that the plains of the United States has produced. There was one fight in which Baldwin was engaged which deserves a place in song and story, if some song or story writer could be found equal to the occasion. In the days of the campaign of which this fight was a feature there was only one bar on Baldwin's shoulder, for he was a junior first lieutenant of infantry. The campaign was a long one and the fights followed fast and followed faster.

While on detached service in Newport, Ky., in June, 1874, Baldwin heard that his regiment was to be ordered, under Col. Nelson A. Miles, to make an expedition into the Indian territory. The lieutenant went to the front as fast as a train and a horse could carry him. When he reported for duty Miles, who knew Baldwin's record in the civil war, put him in command of the command that was composed partly of whites and partly of Indians.

With his scouts back of him Lieut. Baldwin had a dozen engagements, one after another, with the confederated bands of Cheyennes, Kiowas, Arapahoes and the southern Comanches. The one fight, however, which for picturesqueness stands out most prominently in the battle list, did not take place until after Baldwin had been in the field for many months. It was the fight of his life, not in the engagement's size nor yet, perhaps, in its importance, but in what an officer who saw it declares to have been "his howlingly funny features."

It was picturesque and it was funny all right, but it was dangerous as well, and Baldwin lost some of his men, and took his own life in his hands 20 times before he won his splendid victory against tremendous odds. The daring of the general commanding the department, and by the congress of the United States, which gave Baldwin his second medal of honor for his work on that day.

By one of the military freaks of fortune, Baldwin, although only a lieutenant, found himself in November, 1874, in command of D company of the Fifth infantry, D troop of the Sixth cavalry, and of 12 of the scouts of the organization with which he had originally taken the field. He had about 100 men all told when he reached the banks of McClellan's Creek, Tex. There he found in front of him fully 500 Indian warriors splendidly armed and apparently lusting for a fight. Every army officer who afterwards learned the circum-

stances of the situation declared that Baldwin would have been justified in waiting for reinforcements, but Baldwin believed that he should strike at once, and strike hard.

The Indians, a mixed command of the finest fighting savages on the plains, were led by Chief Gray Beard, a noted warrior. Baldwin learned that the Indians had with them two white girl captives and his desire to rescue them reinforced his desire for a fight on general principles.

The lieutenant looked his men over and saw that they had a stomach for the coming scrimmage. With the command of four six-mule teams, Baldwin feared that a detachment of the reds might flank him when he was making his charge and kill his mules and destroy his field necessities. He dashed for a bit of high ground, a plateau-like formation with its flat surface occupying a little more than an acre. The instant he reached the place selected he ordered his troopers to dismount and to trench themselves as well as they could. The men lost no time in throwing up earth enough to give them some slight protection from the bullets which were pouring in.

Babcock would not get off his horse, although his men begged him to do so, and they were kept from dragging their commanding officer to the ground and to place of partial safety only by instilled discipline and by Babcock's peremptory commands to leave him alone.

The Indians advanced within range and protected themselves in the hollows of the prairie. They sent volley after volley up the incline to the hilltop and man after man behind the poor earthenwork protection was stricken. Babcock continued his ride up and down the line. His blouse was cut twice by bullets but his men did not know it.

"Boys, they can't hit a thing," said Babcock. "They've been shooting at me and no bullet has come nearer than the north pole. Give it 'em. Hold 'em off and relief will be here in no time."

The shots from the Spencers and Henrys of the savages, or from most of them, ceased hitting the extemporized earthworks. The men lying prone knew that nearly all the projectiles were passing over their heads and they knew also that every painted warrior antagonist was turning loose at the figure of the commanding officer riding back and forth on his horse as indifferently as if there were not an Indian on the frontier.

No one in that troop ever knew why Babcock was not killed. The Indians said afterwards that he had some "big medicine" with him that turned away the bullets. Finally a shot cut Babcock's boot and wounded his horse. He turned the animal about quickly so that its other flank was toward the men, to whom he serenely said: "Those fellows can't hit a barn door."

The commanding officer continued to ride up and down the line and the bullets continued to cut the air all about him.

Suddenly every savage head showed at once. The troopers slammed in a volley that claimed some victims. The showing heads were followed by showing bodies and in another instant the warriors were erect and running to the far rear for their ponies. They made off, leaving their dead and wounded behind them. Far over the plains, Lieut. Babcock, from his horse, saw the main column advancing. Relief was in sight.

The enlisted men told the story of Babcock's bravery, and congress gave him a medal of honor. Later the officer, who is now living in retirement, distinguished himself twice in action against the Apaches at Tonto Creek and at the Four Peaks in Arizona. There he won the brevet rank of lieutenant-colonel to add to the honor conferred by his congressional medal of bronze.

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In the spring of the fourth year of peace after the civil war—that is to say peace between white men—the Kiowas, the Arapahoes and the Cheyennes made western Nebraska, western Kansas and eastern Colorado a section of what John Hay might have called "git-edged hell." Lieut. Babcock, in the absence of his captain, was ordered to the command of a troop of cavalry and to take the field.

With his trooper followers Babcock was far in advance of the main command on the frontier of Nebraska. They reached the bank of Spring creek on the morning of May 16, 1869. While there a band of 250 of the best warriors of the plains appeared in front of the cavalry troops as though the savages had come from the ground. Lieut. Babcock caught sight of the reds in time to give him a moment or two for preparation. He would not run and he could not attack, for he was completely surrounded and the savages outnumbered his force more than six to one.

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