AN ARMY TRAGEDY

by JOHN BRAND

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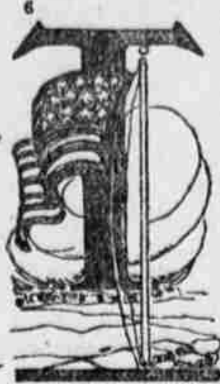

"THE Stars and Stripes is a dirty rag," said Gambler Hunt.

"Apologize for that," demanded the chevroned sergeant.

"No," said Hunt.

Sergeant Hoeg leaned forward and slapped the gambler's face. There was a flash, the sharp crack of a "six-gun," and the sergeant lay a crumpled heap on the barroom floor.

Sergeant Hoeg was taken to the hospital at Fort Willamette, a mile away. Gambler Hunt was placed in the new county jail under the courthouse on the plaza, in charge of the county sheriff. And the town of Willamette went its way, but with a difference. No gamblers sunned themselves and trimmed their finger nails in front of the Main street saloons. No soldiers traveled to and from the fort across the dusty flat. The Twentieth United States cavalry deserted the town and attended strictly to its own affairs on the military reservation.

Stillness hung over the town, the tense stillness that spells danger and waits for an event. No crowds gathered. Citizens talked of the shooting with an unspoken question in their eyes as they looked out toward the fort. The sheriff was uneasy. "If that man Hoeg dies—" he said, and shook his head.

Out at the fort military routine ground along without a ripple—stables, guardmount, drill, parade—and if the men were dangerously angry they gave not a hint of it. The post commander, who was also colonel of the Twentieth, eyed them proudly. "They are taking it well," he said to his officers. "I know them. They are veterans, and obey orders. The law will take care of that man Hunt." The officers agreed. Not a threatening or angry murmur reached officers' row from the barracks. As a matter of precaution all passes were stopped and orders issued that no enlisted man should leave the reservation except on duty.

It was all that could be done. The men meant no mischief, but suppose they did? The strongest guard would be a rope of sand around the cluster of frame buildings called "fort." The one only way to prevent any possible trouble would be to take the troops out on a "hike"—practise march, it was called then—somewhere away from the place for a time. But the colonel would have had to ask orders from the war department to do this. And when the war department heard the reason for the request it would have thrown an official fit, and probably have convened a board of doctors to inquire into the sanity of the post commander at Fort Willamette. It is not probable, however, that such a thought entered the veteran colonel's head. He knew his men. They were veterans, proud of the flag they served and the cloth they wore.

Next day word came to the town that Sergeant Hoeg was dead. The sheriff went to see the prosecuting attorney. "That Hoeg man's dead. I don't like this business a heap," he told the prosecutor.

"What's the matter? The town's quiet."

"So's the fort. Too plenty much quiet. If the soldiers was buckin' round in town, or even out at the fort there, I wouldn't mind. But they're quiet—fightin' quiet. They're keepin' away from town, and when they do come—" The sheriff wagged his head dismally.

"Very well," said the prosecuting attorney. "We'll go out to see the post commander and ask him to put an extra guard on and keep his men away from the town until things quiet down."

The prosecuting attorney was young, but he should have known better. He had been a soldier himself, had studied law while wearing a blue uniform at this same Fort Willamette. For civil authority to give or suggest orders to an officer in the regular army is to invite flat snubbing. He should have known, but he bustled confidently out to the fort. The sheriff followed, protesting. "We're goin' to the snubbin' post," he said.

The old fort smiled peacefully in the afternoon sun. Blue-shirted troopers lounged in the shade of barrack porches and corrals. The guard dozed on the benches in the guardhouse sallyport. A casual officer sauntered along the board walk down officers' row. The canteen was deserted. "Too plenty much quiet," commented the sheriff.

At headquarters the colonel received them courteously.

"What can I do for you, gentlemen?" he asked.

"We are afraid your men will lynch Hunt."

"My men have been forbidden to leave the reservation until further orders. They obey orders."

"We have heard rumors. You must put a strong guard around—"

"I command this post, gentlemen. Good afternoon."

Civil authority went back to town in a hurry, the prosecutor angry, the sheriff apprehensive. For the sheriff felt that he knew the situation better than did the colonel. The Twentieth cavalry had not been stationed long at Fort Willamette. They had come fresh from scouting and Indian chasing in the southwest in joyous anticipation of the comforts of a quiet post and of a civilized "sure enough," real town, not a group of 'dobe shacks in a desert. The enlisted men found a state of things they weren't used to and didn't like. Willamette had long since forgotten the days when the fort was a protection, and looked on it mainly as a source of revenue, while the enlisted men were merely more or less of a nuisance. Like all other western towns in the '80s and '90s Willamette was "wide open." Gamblers and gambling were a strong element in its life. From the suave and solid man of family who owned his home and business property, and dealt parental discipline by day and faro at night, to the casual "tin horn," the sporting fraternity was always in evidence. The Eighteenth cavalry, which had preceded the Twentieth at the fort, had learned to let the gamblers alone. Whenever a row occurred between the sport and the soldier the town marshal grabbed the soldier first—and last generally. Then the unlucky soldier was whipsawed—fine and jail in town—guardhouse and court-martial when he went back to the post. "Fighting B" and "Drunken G" and "Crazy I" troops of the old Eighteenth grew discreet if not wise. They avoided trouble and the gamblers grew to think they owned the town. The Twentieth knew nothing of this and its enlisted men were neither discreet nor wise. The result of several clashes with the town "tin horns" and sports had already made them feel that they were not getting an even break. Moreover, had not a man just been pardoned by the governor after receiving a 20-year sentence for a deliberate, foul and unprovoked murder? The case was an offense to justice still rankling in the minds of soldiers and civilians alike. Every one said it was safer to kill a man than steal a cow. The sheriff knew all this and feared that this murder of Sergeant Hoeg, one of the best-liked men in the regiment, would be more than they would stand. On his return from the post he deputized twelve good men and placed them as guards in the jail. Gamblers eagerly volunteered, but he would have none of them.

The town buzzed now. Soldiers were going to attack the jail, it was said. But not a blue uniform was seen on the streets. When taps had sounded across the flat, the fort was silent, with only the sentries pacing back and forth in the moonlight. Just the same, Sheriff McFarland posted his men in the jail and waited. Near midnight a whisper went round the saloons: "They're coming." The walks around the plaza filled with an expectant crowd. The jail in the basement of the courthouse was dark, but everyone knew that behind it was Hunt, guarded by the sheriff and twelve determined men with Winchesters. An attempt was made to notify the fort, but wires were cut and messengers were all too slow.

Across Poverty flat, down Main street, into the plaza swung a body of men, in army overcoats turned wrong side out, campaign hats, carbine at shoulder, Colt's forty-five at hip. It was the army-trained machine in action, swift, silent, certain. It circled the plaza in column of fours. Sentries took post at a curt word of command. The crowds fell back before threatening carbine muzzles. Up the broad stone walk, "Right front into line. Halt," and a grim platoon faced the jail door with carbines at the ready.

The leader stepped out briskly and hammered with a pistol butt.

"What do you want?" asked the sheriff from inside the door.

"We want Hunt."

"Now, boys, you don't—" began the sheriff. But the leader's voice cut in, clear, determined.

"No talk, sheriff. Open that door or we dynamite it."

Dynamite! The sheriff weakened. He looked up at his men standing with ready Winchesters at the head of the corridor steps, where they could have held back a regiment. "They've got dynamite. I guess we'll have to let 'em in, boys. Don't shoot," said he, and opened the door.

What followed was short, sharp—and terrible. Three men took Hunt from his cell and marched him to front and center of the waiting platoon.

"Have you anything to say?" the leader asked.

"No."

"Do you want to pray?"

"No."

He was given a shove forward. The men who held him stepped back to the ranks.

THERE WAS A FLASH, THE SHARP CRACK OF A SIX GUN

"Fire!"

Thirty United States carbines barked and Gambler Hunt fell to the walk a crumpled heap, as Sergeant Hoeg had fallen to the barroom floor two days before. There was no need for a second volley. Not a bullet went wild. The platoon looked for a moment at the riddled body, then moved fours right across the plaza, picked up its sentries and vanished at the end of Main street. The second act of the tragedy was over.

It had been staged and played in a very few minutes. To thinking men it held disquieting significance. If trained fighting men could steal away from their officers, defy law and add murder to murder, the community was in peril. The town wasted no sympathy on Hunt, but condemned the lynching. They blamed the officers at the fort for having, as they put it, allowed the outbreak to occur. The gambling contingent held it only proved the army no good, anyhow. The soldiers were loafers, too lazy to work. They did nothing but eat up the money of the taxpayers, said the hardworking experts of the faro and monte tables. The post commander could have prevented the lynching if he had done what the sheriff told him to do.

Then the prosecuting attorney did a most amazing thing and the last act of the tragedy began. Though not a soldier was to be seen about the town, he telegraphed to Washington: "Town in the hands of a military mob from the fort. Send help at once." The message struck the national capital like a Kansas cyclone. Thunder and lightning from the war department followed. Orders for arrests, boards of inquiry, courtmartials galore, chased each other after the first stuttering inquiries over the wires from stanch old officers who couldn't believe their military ears and eyes.

The court of inquiry developed little not already known. Hoeg was dead. Hunt had been killed by soldiers. But who were they? As witnesses the enlisted men were a frost. They stuck together and were either volubly ignorant or sullenly close mouthed.

Courtmartials were convened. A few—a very few—men were punished, more or less. Several deserted when things grew warm. And last of all happened a thing which must have caused the county officials who failed to protect their prisoner much satisfaction. No hint was dropped of the sheriff's failure to do his sworn duty. But the war department had to save face somehow. Its action reminds one of the Chinese emperor, who when his army mutinied always beheaded the general. The post commander of Fort Willamette was court-martialed for neglect of duty. He was already broken in spirit, weighed down by the stain on the honor of his regiment, but he was convicted, and sentenced to confinement to reservation limits and loss of pay for a year. The sentence didn't count for much; it was the stain on his record that must have most deeply wounded him.

The murder of Sergeant Hoeg "just happened." The lynching of Gambler Hunt might have been prevented if the army had not been tied hard and fast in red tape, or if among the officers, civil and military, on the spot there had been one big enough to meet the crisis.

As for the punishment of the enlisted men who were the real offenders, well—all this happened 20 years ago. There was no "big stick" in the White House then.

FIREWORKS TO PROTECT CROPS.

The great grain fields of the Sandborn ranch in Shasta county, Cal., are ingeniously protected at night from the vast flocks of wild geese and other aquatic fowl that do immense damage to crops by means of a display of fireworks.

Skyrockets and Roman candles were bought in large quantities by the management of the ranch and men are stationed at various points. Whenever a flock is heard honking in the distance several skyrockets or a shower of colored balls from a roman candle are sent upward and as a result the birds give the ranch a wide berth.

HARD TO PLEASE.

"You have lost two cooks this week, haven't you?"

"Yes; one left because my husband flirted with her, and the other left because he didn't."—Houston Daily Post.

TOO MUCH FOR EASTERNER

Pilgrim Was Looking for Iron Springs, But That Story Was More Than He Could Stand.

He was a weary, thin and sallow-looking American, who had never been so far west before, and when he struck Carson City he hailed the first native he met.

"Can you tell me, sir, if there are any mineral springs about here?"

"From the east?" asked the westerner.

"Yes."

"Come here fer yer health?"

"Yes."

"Tried everything, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Tried surphur springs?"

"Yes. Didn't help me a bit."

"Been to Arkansas?"

"Yes, and everywhere else."

"What kind of water are you looking for now?"

"Well, no kind in particular. I was told, though, that I'd find a variety of springs out here."

"Going to locate?"

"That depends."

"Well, stranger I have got just what you want. A vacant lot in the best part of the city. Finest iron springs in the country. Go and see for yourself."

"But how do you know it's iron?" queried the easterner.

"Well, pardner, I drove my horse through it and he came out with iron shoes on his feet. And that ain't all. I drove some pigs down there to drink. They turned into pig iron, and I sold them to the iron foundry. Just what you want. For sale, cheap. Why, halloa! What's the matter?"

The weary easterner had turned abruptly and was walking off up the road.—San Francisco Chronicle.

Why England Believes in a King.

The great majority of Englishmen of all grades and opinions do undoubtedly believe in a king, and think they have some fairly good reasons for doing so.

The great reason, of course, is that on the whole the system works, or seems to work, fairly well. It is very costly. Everything included, it probably costs ten times as much as the average man thinks; and if a rate were levied for the purpose on him, he might feel it and begin to grumble. But the money is derived from the duchies, or voted from the taxes, and nobody feels the pinch or even knows the difference. It is a rallying point for all kinds of senseless anachronisms and abuses. But in an old country many things have a better chance of continued existence by being old than by being good, and an abuse comes to be esteemed almost when its hairs are gray and its years many. It promotes snobbery and creates snobs, though it will not be supposed to be unpopular on that account.—The Congregationalist.

To Save Alcott Home.

Efforts are being made to inaugurate a movement for the preservation of the old Alcott homestead in Concord, Mass., where Bronson Alcott lived and died and where Louisa Alcott created the immortal children that run through the pages of "Little Men" and "Little Women." The place at present is fast falling into hopeless decay and action must be started soon if it is to be preserved at all. "Perhaps if Miss Alcott had been dead two centuries instead of only about 30 years her former home would not be in such a dangerous plight as it is today," said a New York woman who is trying to interest others in its preservation. "But by and by Miss Alcott will have been dead 200 years and if Orchard house is not saved now American soil in future generations will be the poorer for our neglect. We never shall raise a harvest of ancient associations for our land unless we take care of the associations while they still are comparatively modern."

A Different Sort of Doctor.

Dr. Charles Harriss, the well-known Canadian musician and composer, tells an amusing story about himself.

While he was on his way to South Africa, he desired to keep his identity a secret. During the voyage one of the passengers managed to get into conversation with the musician, and asked him if he would medically examine his little girl who was with him on the boat.

"My dear sir," replied Dr. Harriss, 'I have never examined a child in my life."

Ten minutes later, he overheard the passenger say, in the smoking-room: "There you are; didn't I say that man was a fraud?"

The Girl Grad.

Mark Twain was a firm believer in the higher education of woman, but Hartford still remembers a speech he made one June to a platform of Hartford girl graduates.

This speech, a humorous attack on the college girl, ended:

"Go forth. Fall in love. Marry. Set up housekeeping. And then, when your husband wants a shirt ironed, send out for a gridiron to do it with."

Metaphorically Speaking.

"What do you think of these new palaces I have been rearing?" asked Mr. Dustin Stax.

'Magnificent," replied the cynic.

'Yet," he proceeded with a visible effort to be modest, "this earthly pomp reminds me that all the world is a stage."

"Right. And the modern tendency is to make up with the fine scenery for bad acting."

UNDEFEATED CHAMPION OF THE NORTHWEST.

T. A. Ireland, Rifle Shot, of Colfax, Wash., Tells a Story.

Mr. Ireland is the holder of four world records and has yet to lose his first match—says he: "Kidney trouble so affected my vision as to interfere with my shooting. I became so nervous I could hardly hold a gun. There was severe pain in my back and head and my kidneys were terribly disordered. Doan's Kidney Pills cured me after I had doctored and taken nearly every remedy imaginable without relief. I will give further details of my case to anyone enclosing stamp."

Remember the name—Doan's.

For sale by all dealers. 50 cents a box. Foster-Milburn Co., Buffalo, N. Y.

Wrong Angle.

"There's a bright side to everything."

"A bright side! Bah!"

"Well, there is."

"Do you mean to tell me, doctor, that there is a bright side to my having had my leg amputated?"

"Indeed, there is; and if you could put yourself in my place you could really see it."

Important to Mothers

Examine carefully every bottle of CASTORIA, a safe and sure remedy for infants and children, and see that it Bears the Signature of Chas. H. Fletcher.

In Use For Over 30 Years.

The Kind You Have Always Bought.

HIS HOPES.

Jinks—Do you expect to move this spring?

Fickle—I expect to, yes; but hope my wife may decide to grant me a reprieve.

Up to Date Milking Scene.

"What's going on around here?" asked the surprised visitor. "Is this a hospital?"

"Oh, no," answered the tall man in the silk hat; "this is the stage setting for a New England farm drama. The next act will be the milking scene."

"But I thought the young lady in the antiseptic apron was a trained nurse?"

"Oh, no; she is the milkmaid. The young man in the rubber gloves that you thought was a doctor is the farm boy. As soon as they bring in the sterilized stool and the pasteurized pails and find the cow's tooth brush the milking scene will begin."

The Secret.

"Miss Bright," whispered Miss Gaussip, "can you keep a secret?"

"Yes," replied Miss Bright, also whispering, "I can keep one as well as you can."

A "Corner" In Comfort

For those who know the pleasure and satisfaction there is in a glass of

ICED POSTUM

Make it as usual, dark and rich—boil it thoroughly to bring out the distinctive flavour and food value.

Cool with cracked ice, and add sugar and lemon; also a little cream if desired.

Postum is really a food-drink with the nutritive elements of the field grains. Ice it, and you have a pleasant, safe, cooling drink for summer days—an agreeable surprise for those who have never tried it.

"There's a Reason" for

POSTUM

Postum Cereal Co., Limited, Battle Creek, Mich.