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Frederick E. Phelps: a Soldier's Memoirs (continued)

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FREDERICK E. PHELPS: A SOLDIER'S MEMOIRS

Edited by FRANK D. REEVE

(*Continued*)

November 25, 1871, my wife presented me with my first child, May V. We were very happy, of course, and moved shortly afterwards into a more comfortable house and everything went along smoothly. On the 19th of February, 1874, was born my first boy, Morris B., named after Dick Burnett,[53] but on the 14th of March, 1874, God took the mother of my children. Her death was very sudden and entirely unexpected up to within twelve hours of her decease. This left me in a terrible condition with one child of three and one-half, and a baby not yet one month old, and nearly five hundred miles from the nearest railroad station; but on the 28th of March I started for home, traveling in an ambulance with my two children and a nurse. The nurse was a soldier's wife, whose term of service was about to expire and who, not intending to re-enlist, went with me as one of the escort, his wife acting as nurse for the baby. The Post Ordnance Sergeant had gone violently insane a short time before and I was ordered to take him to Fort Leavenworth enroute to the Government asylum at Washington. I had a hard time with him; although he only had one arm, he was violently insane most of the time and had to be watched constantly. The husband of my nurse and a man named Crane, of "I" Troop, 8th Cavalry, who had been cooking for us for sometime, rode with the crazy man in the light escort wagon and we followed in the ambulance. When we arrived at a little place called Tecolote,[54] about forty miles below Fort Union, the baby was taken violently ill and, though I drove recklessly for over thirty miles with the mules on a dead run, he died within an hour after our arrival at Fort Union; in fact, I am not sure that he was alive when we got there. Two

53. Dick Burnett was a boyhood friend of Phelp's. He died of consumption at the age of twenty-two.

54. Tecolote was on the old Santa Fe trail about ten miles south of Las Vegas, New Mexico.

days afterwards he was buried in the Post cemetery, four of my classmates acting as pall bearers. The cemetery was in a deep valley and, after I had left, a cloud burst sent a tremendous volume of water down the valley; the hillside on the east slid into the valley and the cemetery was blotted out of existence. When I returned a year later I could not locate the grave, the whole cemetery being buried under twelve or fifteen feet of sand and rock; it was simply impossible to find it. Finally I reached the railroad after being snowed in twice enroute and arrived at Urbana about the first of March, where I left the nurse and May while I proceeded to Washington with the insane man and his two guards. My mother met me at Urbana and on my return from Washington I went with her to Saint Mary's, my old home. When my wife died I weighed about one hundred and fifty pounds, and when I got home in May I weighed only ninety. I was very ill for several months and was finally taken to Cincinnati to be examined by Doctor Bartholow, a famous expert and head of the Ohio Medical College. He asked me if my spine had ever been injured and when I told him, "No, not that I could remember," he examined me from head to foot. He found a small white scar in the small of my back and asked me if I knew whence it came. I remembered at once that in my first year at West Point I had had a fight with another cadet in a room and my foot slipped; I fell across the edge of an iron bunk, injuring my back at the time quite severely. He at once informed me that the spinal cord had been injured, and that the mental and physical trouble that I had experienced had resulted in the disease settling in the weak spot.

I was under his treatment for over six months. He advised me to remain in the open air as much as possible, especially advising hunting and fishing trips. I returned to St. Mary's in September, at once purchased a skiff and arranged with Ed Burnett, who lived very near us, and Charley Davis, his brother-in-law, to camp out on the reservoir. On the south side of the reservoir, about half way up, was a small island called "Eagle's Nest" island from the fact that a pair of eagles had made their nest in a large dead

tree near the island for years. There was a little shanty on this island and I rented the island for the entire fall from the owner for a small sum. Burnett had a rubber tent which just fitted over the shanty, making it waterproof. We used to build our fire outside. Charley Davis was the cook, and a very fine one. We took provisions with us, of course. We placed about two feet of oat straw in the bottom of the shanty and, being well supplied with blankets and buffalo robes, spent most of the fall there hunting and fishing; it did me a world of good. Our last trip to "Eagle's Nest" island was in November, 1874. The day after we went into camp we had what in the West would be called a blizzard. During the night the wind blew with terrific force and our little shanty rocked; we were afraid it would collapse. We had always built our fire outside of the tent; the wind blew away all the embers and we found it impossible in the morning to build a fire.

The ice had formed some twenty-five or thirty feet wide around the island, but not very thick; sleet driven by the terrific wind beat like shot on the rubber tent, and at first we all concluded to remain in our hut during the day. In pleasant weather, the ducks generally stay in the middle of the reservoir in the open water where it was almost impossible to approach them, going to the shallow water near the shore morning and evening to feed. I knew that with this wind and the big waves that were running, they would have to go near shore for shelter during the day. So about ten o'clock I put on my rubber coat, pulled on my rubber hip boots, and started out in my skiff for the mouth of a creek about two miles above where I felt I would have good shooting, and I did. Tieing my boat to a stump, I turned my back to the storm and, as the ducks came flocking in, I had great success. The only drawback was that my gun was a muzzle loader and my hands became so cold that it was difficult to place the cap on the nipple, but I stuck to it till about three o'clock when I started back. I had only gone a short distance when a flock of geese came by and I knocked one down with the first barrel, the second barrel missing fire. The goose was only wounded and immediately started swimming out

toward the open water; I followed in hot pursuit, but soon found that I would not be able to overtake him, so I stopped long enough to reload then pushed on with all my might, finally getting near enough to kill him. Just at that moment my boat ran on a snag, the roots of which were evidently buried deep in the bottom, and I could not get my boat off. I whirled it around and round, rocked it from side to side, and finally concluded that I would have to jump out, which I did, the water being only a little above my knees, but unfortunately I stepped into a hole and got one boot full of icy water. I then secured my goose, clambered back into the boat, pulled the boot off, poured out the water and put it on again, but I discovered almost at once that with the intense cold my foot would freeze before I could get back to camp. The sleet and snow were still driving with great force before the wind, so I rowed ashore and, pulling my boat up on the land, made my way through the snow drifts to a farm house about half a mile distant. The farmer's wife was very kind to me, told me to take off my boot and stockings and thoroughly dry myself before a good big fire. She brought me also about a peck of oats which she heated in a skillet; we poured them into my boot, reheating and replacing them time and again to get the dampness out of the woolen lining of the boot. Finally I got comparatively dry, returned to my boat and hurried down to camp. I arrived there just at dark. We still had no fire and the only provisions left were bread and butter, but we snuggled down into our tent, lighted our pipes, spent a cozy evening and slept soundly all night, notwithstanding the storm. The next morning we concluded to break our way out through the ice, and I led with my boat, which was the heaviest and strongest, breaking the ice with a pike pole, followed immediately by Mr. Burnett, who had a canvas boat, with Mr. Davis bringing up the rear. We had not gone more than ten yards before a cake of ice ripped the canvas boat open and it immediately filled, Mr. Burnett jumping into Mr. Davis' boat just in time. We returned to the island and pulled his boat up on the shore. I then told them that I, having a larger boat, would strike

across the reservoir to Stearn's farm just opposite our island and about five miles distant, would get a conveyance there, go down to the east bank, get a large double-oared boat with two boatmen and come up after them. When I got into the open water I found the waves running eight or ten feet high, and I commenced to fear I was not going to get through; I took off my boots, threw off my hunting coat and chained my gun in the boat, so if it upset and I should drown they would know what had become of me when the boat was found. After struggling hard for over two hours I finally reached the shelter of dead trees, which extended out into the water for over half a mile in the north side, and here the water was comparatively smooth; but just as I got into it, one of my oar locks snapped so that I had only one oar and my pole left. I poked the boat to the edge of the ice and soon found that I was going to have difficulty. The ice was too thick to force the boat through it and when I went to the bow to break the ice with the pole, the boat would drift back. By sounding, I found that the water was about up to my armpits, so seeing no other way I sprang overboard, the water coming to my shoulders, seized the chain at the bow of the boat and, taking our axe in my hand, broke the ice ahead of me and waded to the drift wood which was piled up along the shore several hundred yards wide. Here I pulled my boat up on a log and made my way to Anderson's farm, the house of which was down near the water and three miles below Stearn's farm, I having drifted down that far with the wind. I knew Mr. Ferguson very well, but he had gone to town, and his nephew, a new fellow from Cincinnati, who was visiting there, was alone in the house. After I got warm, he went out with me to the boat, helped me to carry my ducks and goose, my roll of blankets, and a basket of dishes to the house. I had eighty-five ducks this time and we had to make two trips. He then hitched up a light wagon, took me to town and promptly charged two dollars for doing so. It was then after dark so I had to wait till morning when I hurried out to the east bank, and was just putting out with the large boat when I discovered Burnett and Davis

coming down in Davis' boat, having left Burnett's boat on the island.

In the spring of 1875 I had so far recovered that I felt I could go back to my regiment, though I still had two months sick leave left. I saw in the papers that the Apaches[55] had again broken out in New Mexico. I hurried to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and reported to General Pope, asking him to send me to New Mexico at once. When he learned that I still had two months leave, he looked at me rather quizzically and asked why I was giving up part of my leave; when I told him that I supposed my troop was in the field against the Indians, and it was my business to be with them, he informed me that the report was a canard and my troop was at its usual station. However, he expressed his pleasure when I insisted upon going out anyhow, and told me that he would not forget it. The first battalion of the 6th Cavalry was then in camp at Fort Lyon, preparing to march down through New Mexico to Arizona for station, and he ordered me to report to the commanding officer of that battalion for duty as Quartermaster, stating that the battalion commander would be instructed that, when we arrived at Santa Fe, I should be relieved from that duty to go on down to my station. This was a great help to me for the railroad fare to Fort Lyon, then the terminus of the railroad, was forty dollars, and the coach fare from there to Fort Bayard was one hundred and fifty dollars, so I saved all this.

I went to Fort Lyon and in a few days the battalion moved out for Santa Fe. The commanding officer furnished me a horse and also a wagon to carry my baggage, which consisted solely of one trunk, but of course I filled it up with stores so as to relieve some of the other wagons. The commanding officer was Captain McLellan[56] of the 6th Cavalry; among the other officers I found Lieutenant

55. In addition to previous citations concerning the Apache story, see R. H. Ogle, "Federal Control of the Western Apache 1848-1886," NEW MEXICO HISTORICAL REVIEW, XV, 189-248 (April, 1940).

56. Curwen Boyd McLellan was born in Scotland. He enlisted in the Army as a private, November 17, 1849. He was commissioned 2nd Lieutenant, May 14, 1861, and attained the rank of Lieut.-Colonel, May 6, 1892. He was cited for meritorious service against Indians in the San Andreas mountains, New Mexico, April 7, 1880.

Nichols,[57] who graduated two years after I did and whom I knew very well, and he invited me to mess with him. We arrived at Santa Fe in June and met the First Battalion, 5th Cavalry, coming up from Arizona; I found several classmates and old acquaintances in this regiment. From Santa Fe I went down by coach, a distance of two hundred miles, and joined my troop.

When my wife died at Fort Bayard the previous year her remains were laid away in the Post cemetery, a desolate plot on the slope of a hill with no fence and only one old tree; she was buried under this juniper tree. The day after I arrived I went to the cemetery and, to my astonishment, found that a brick tomb with granite foundation had been built above her grave, with a wooden slab set in the front giving her name and date of death, and the whole surrounded by a neat picket fence painted white. Captain Steelhammer,[58] 15th Infantry, was in temporary command of the Post when she died, and was still in command when I returned. I went to thank him for this and, to my astonishment, he informed me that he had very little to do with it. Before I left the Post orders had been received to rebuild it; a large number of military convicts, perhaps sixty, had been sent there from various other Posts to serve out their sentences, mostly for desertion, and they were engaged in quarrying stone for the new buildings. One of these stone quarries was immediately behind the officers' line, and just behind the quarters that I occupied when my wife died. He informed me that a few days after I had left, one of the convicts asked permission to see him and told him that Mrs. Phelps had always been very kind to the convicts, that they had appointed him a committee to ask the commanding officer for permission to burn brick and build a tomb over her grave and put a fence around it, and to show that they did not ask this to get out of their other labor, they asked that they

57. Thomas Brainard Nichols was born in Vermont. He graduated from the United States Military Academy and was commissioned 2nd Lieutenant, 6th Cavalry, June 14, 1872. He resigned from the service, June 30, 1876.

58. Charles Steelhammer was born in Sweden. He enlisted in the Union Army during the Civil War as a private; commissioned 2nd Lieutenant, September 2, 1864, he was promoted to the rank of Captain, November 1, 1866.

might be allowed to do it on Sundays, the only day of rest they had. He gave them permission, and they built the stone foundation; they burned the brick from clay taken from a bank near by, prepared the board themselves, painfully sawed the railings and pickets out of two-inch plank by hand, dressed them neatly and put up the fence. He told me that one man, named Boyle, who was my old friend the baker, whom I had captured the year before, was the leader. I sent for Boyle and asked him about the matter, why he and the others had gone to all this trouble, as I did not know that my wife knew any of them. He told me that when they were working in the stone quarry and I had gone to my office, Mrs. Phelps used to come to the back door and ask the sentry, who was guarding them, to let six of them come to the kitchen where she gave them a good meal. He also asked me if I had never noticed that there was no cold meat or pieces of bread or things of that kind left in the house, also if I had never noticed that my smoking tobacco must have gone rapidly. I laughed and said, "Yes." I always supposed my servant took it. He said, "Mrs. Phelps used to give us all the cold bread and meat in the house, frequently pie or cake, and also gave us a hand full of smoking tobacco each;" tobacco was not furnished to prisoners, and they appreciated that above everything else. He said she used to stand in the front door and if she saw me coming she would run back and warn them, when they would hustle out to their work. They had so appreciated this that they kept a regular roster so that each man got his dinner and tobacco in turn. They had fixed the grave to show their appreciation of what she had done for them. When she was buried, her remains were carried to the grave by six sergeants of my troop, and I think every man of the garrison, except the necessary guard, attended.

I remember noticing also, and very much to my astonishment, a large number of convicts, under guard, standing near the soldiers, and I wondered how they came to be there; when I asked Steelhammer about it, he informed me that the convicts had asked special permission to attend the funeral and he had allowed it, sending a guard of course

with them. I asked Boyle how long he had yet to serve. He told me his sentence was three years and that he had served about one-half of it. I looked up his record and found that he had been a model prisoner, not having a mark against him, so I told him to put in an application for a pardon, which was forwarded through the usual official channels; at the same time I wrote a personal letter to General Pope telling him all these facts, and he promptly pardoned him. When the order for his release came, I sent for him and asked him if he wanted work. He said he did, very much. I told him that I knew the manager of a silver mine about ten miles east of there who was anxious to get good men, that I had spoken to him and he said he would give Boyle employment at good wages. I gave Boyle some money and told him to report at the mine as soon as possible. Poor fellow, my kindness was fatal to him, for two days afterwards his body was found on the trail leading to the mine, bristling with Apache arrows; it would have been better to have left him in the prison.

In December of that same year I received an order to proceed at once to Santa Fe and to report to Lieutenant Philip Reade,[59] a former classmate, now a retired Brigadier General, for duty, under his orders, building a military telegraph line from Santa Fe down the Rio Grande through to Arizona. I obeyed the order immediately and had gotten as far as Fort Selden on the Rio Grande, where I met the Colonel of my regiment, J. Irwin Gregg,[60] with headquarters and one troop, enroute to Texas. The order transferring the regiment by marching from New Mexico to Texas had come out some two weeks before, and one troop had already left Fort Bayard for Texas; it was understood that my troop would not go till spring, but General Gregg informed me that a new order from Department headquarters ordered my

59. Philip Reade was born in Massachusetts. He graduated from the United States Military Academy and was commissioned 2nd Lieutenant, May 13, 1867. He was promoted to 1st Lieutenant, December 8, 1878.

60. John Irwin Gregg was born in Pennsylvania. He enlisted in the Army as a private, December 29, 1846, and was mustered out with the rank of Captain, August 14, 1848. He re-enlisted at the outbreak of the Civil War and was mustered out with the rank of Major General of Volunteers. He again enlisted with the rank of Colonel, 8th Cavalry, July 28, 1866.

troop to proceed at once. I showed him my order to go to Santa Fe, which order had been issued by the District commander, General Granger,[61] Colonel of the 15th Infantry. He called my attention to the fact that orders from Department headquarters were of more recent date than my order from District Headquarters, and came from higher authority; he told me that, in his opinion, I should obey the last order, especially as it came from higher authority and, as it ordered my troop to Texas, and did not except me, it was my duty to return to my troop at once and go with it to Texas. I immediately returned to Fort Bayard, reporting my action by mail, and in about a week I received another order from the District commander peremptorily ordering me to report at Santa Fe, which I did. General Granger, the District commander, and Colonel of the 15th Infantry, had been a Major General during the war, and was a very distinguished soldier, but arbitrary and overbearing. When I reported to him, he asked me sternly why I had not obeyed the first order. I explained all the circumstances to him and called his attention to the fact that I was practically between two fires: that the District commander had ordered me to Santa Fe and the Department commander, who was his superior and knew of the order, had ordered my troop to go to Texas at once, and had not excepted me from the provisions of that order; that I had been advised by my own Colonel, also a distinguished soldier of the Civil War, to join my troop and that, in perfect good faith, I had taken his advice. I knew what was behind all this anger on his part. General Granger, though a fine officer in some respects, was a foul mouthed brute in conversation and a hard drinker; a great many ladies declined to have anything to do with him. He had been to my station the year previous on an inspection tour; my wife had declined to meet him and he was very sore on that subject. He informed me that if I would apologize to him personally for my wife's refusal

61. Gordon Granger was born in New York. He graduated from the United States Military Academy and was commissioned Brevet 2nd Lieutenant, 2nd Infantry, July 1, 1845. He attained the rank of Major General, March 13, 1865. See the *DAB* and *Appletons' Cyclopedia.*

to meet him he would overlook the matter. Of course I promptly refused, and he informed me that I would be tried by courtmartial for disobedience of orders. I knew that no court would convict me; although I expected to be put in irons, I was not, for some reason, and was ordered to remain at Santa Fe until a court could be ordered. The Acting Assistant Adjutant General of the District at that time was Lieutenant Thomas Blair,[62] 15th Infantry, and an intimate personal friend of mine. The next morning about nine o'clock he came to the hotel and, slapping me on the shoulder, said, "Old man, the Lord is certainly on your side. General Granger fell dead in his office an hour ago." Pulling a bundle of papers out of his pocket, he grinned as he said, "Allow me to present to you the charges he had preferred against you, and which were lying on his desk awaiting his signature when the devil got him." I have never forgotten in all these years the look of satisfaction on Blair's face, for he, like all the other officers, utterly despised General Granger. I immediately reported to Lieutenant Reade, and in a few days started south, having been directed to begin my work, at a little Mexican town called Los Lunas,[63] building the line from Los Lunas to Fort Craig, a distance of about one hundred miles. I left Santa Fe with my detachment of about thirty soldiers, five six-mule wagons loaded with rations, wire, tents and tools, and on the last day of 1875 I arrived at Albuquerque. There was no bridge across the river and the ferry boat was some two miles above the town. I directed my men to march up to the ferry boat, cross over and come down on the other side to the ford, which was just below the town, while I proceeded to the ford with the wagons to see them across. The river was full of floating ice and very high. I knew the ford was full of quick sand. My wagons being heavily loaded, I was in doubt if we would be able to

62. Thomas Blair was born in Scotland. He enlisted in the Union Army as a private at the close of the Civil War and was commissioned 2nd Lieutenant, May 22, 1867. He attained the rank of Captain, August 25, 1877, and was dismissed from the service, August 5, 1879. His proper name was Thomas Blair Nicholl.

63. Los Lunas is an early Spanish settlement about twenty miles south of Albuquerque; it was named after the Luna family.

cross, but by doubling the teams, putting twelve mules to a wagon, I got all across but one which was loaded with coils of telegraph wire. Just as this wagon was in the middle of the river the tongue pulled out and the wagon commenced to settle immediately in the quick sand. To my great amusement I found that about a dozen of the men, thinking to save themselves a march of five or six miles up to and back from the ford, had concealed themselves in this wagon, the heavy canvas cover hiding them, and here they were marooned in the middle of the river. I immediately ordered them to jump out and each man take a coil of telegraph wire and wade across. The water was above their waists, but they were up against it and it didn't take them very long to unload the wagon. We then fastened a heavy chain to the front axle, attached six mules to the end of the chain and pulled the wagon through. Each wagon carried an extra pole; it did not take very long to put a new one in place and we hurried to the nearest village, about eight miles, where we went into camp.

When I saw how cheerfully the men worked in the ice water, I sent a man back to Albuquerque and bought a gallon of fiery whiskey; when we were through, I gave each man two or three big drinks and told them to march rapidly ahead of the wagons to keep from getting chilled, and they all came out all right. From January to April I was engaged in building this line, and finally ran the wire into Fort Craig, about the middle of April; then I received orders to join my regiment in Texas. I took the stage coach to Santa Fe and from Santa Fe to Kit Carson, whence I proceeded by rail to Fort Leavenworth. I had not seen my child May for over a year. When I asked General Pope for thirty days leave before proceeding to Texas, he looked at me a moment and said, "You are the young man who gave up part of his leave last year because you thought your troop was going into the field, are you not?" When I said, "Yes," he told me I could have my thirty days leave. I hurried home and spent three weeks at Urbana, Saint Mary's, and Celina. After Maria's death, I had moved Aunt Martha Cowan and my wife's two sisters, Mary and Maggie, to Saint Mary's and

they lived almost opposite my father. Maggie secured a school in Celina, while Mary and Aunty kept house and took care of May. Aunt Martha Cowan, or Aunty, as she was always called, was a remarkable character. She was the sister of the mother of Mary, Maria and Maggie. Their father and mother both died within a year, leaving them at the tender age of six, four, and two, alone in the world. She devoted her whole life to them. She cared for them as a mother, saw that they had a good education, and was one of the best women I ever knew. She was about sixty years of age then, thin and gaunt, with more independence than I ever saw in anyone, straight as an arrow in body and mind, absolutely fearless, fearing nothing or anybody, and I loved her sincerely. When May's mother died, I had given May to her sister Mary, and now she had been dead over two years. I wanted my child; yet, if I took her west with me, I had no one to care for her, for she was then only five, and Mary declared that it would break her heart to give her up. We talked the matter over frequently and finally concluded there was only one way out of the difficulty, that was for us to be married. My leave of absence had about expired and I just had time to get back to my post, Ringgold Barracks,[64] Texas; my trunk and grip were on the porch, and the hack waiting for me at the gate to take me to the depot, when aunt Martha called me to one side and said, "If you and Mary are going to get married, I want you to be married at once. I am getting old and if anything should happen to me you might not be able to get a leave of absence, but if you are married now, you can leave her here and she can join you when you are ready." I called Mary and my sister Sue into consultation and we all agreed that it was the best thing to do; accordingly that same evening, the eighth of May,

64. Ringgold Barracks was located on the left bank of the Rio Grande in Latitude 26° 23′ and Longitude 98° 47′, one-half mile southeast from Rio Grande City, Texas, and about five miles north of Camargo, Mexico. It was established October 26, 1848, abandoned during the Civil War, and reoccupied in June, 1865. A new Post was built in 1869 farther from the river.

For early description of forts in Texas see Col. J. K. F. Mansfield, "Report of the Inspection of the Department of Texas in 1856," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XLII, No. 2 (October, 1938). For a recent compilation of data see Joseph H. and James R. Toulouse, *Pioneer Posts of Texas* (San Antonio, Texas: The Naylor Company, 1936).

1876, we were married in my father's house. It was so sudden that we had not time to send for Maggie who, as stated, was teaching at Celina, and I immediately left for my station and did not see Mary again for fourteen [?] months, when she joined me at Ringgold Barracks, bringing May with her. She had only been there a month when I was ordered to Fort Clark.[65] My troop had preceded me and I was ordered with about twenty men, who had been left behind, to escort a train of wagons loaded with ordnance stores to Fort Clark. I had an ambulance for myself and family, and we started on the first day of July [?]. The road from Ringgold Barracks to Fort Clark followed up the Rio Grande as far as Fort Duncan,[66] through a country as desolate as any desert. It wound for miles through immense beds of cactus higher than a wagon top and impenetrable to anything, except here and there where there was a cattle trail. The sand was very deep and traveling slow, and we only made twelve or fifteen miles a day.

I well remember that on the afternoon of the fourth of July we arrived at a water hole around which there was no brush, but scattered on the sand almost as far as eye could reach were thousands of carcasses of sheep. A man had a large flock there a short time before when some disease broke out among them; he lost his entire herd, and the dead bodies were so close together that a man could almost jump from one to another. The water hole was nothing but a pond of rain water. We had gotten somewhat in advance of our wagons. There was not a particle of shade. The July sun beat down on the alkali until it was like an oven, and all around the prairie we could see the waves of heat rising.

65. Fort Clark was established June 20, 1852, in Latitude 29° 17′ and Longitude 100° 25′ forty-miles north of Fort Duncan (or Eagle Pass) on Las Moras creek. It was abandoned March 19, 1861, and was reoccupied December 10, 1866. The reservation was 3,963 acres.

A useful background study for the reader of Phelp's *Memoirs* is Carl Coke Rister, *The Southwestern Frontier 1865-1881* (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1928).

66. Fort Duncan was established, March 27, 1849, in Latitude 28° 42′, Longitude 100° 30′, across the Rio Grande from Piedras Negras, Mexico. It was abandoned at the outbreak of the Civil War and reoccupied, March 23, 1868. The Post of Eagle Pass was located on part of the reservation of Fort Duncan.

There was no odor from the dead sheep for, strange as it may seem to those who have never been in this climate, the air is so dry that dead animals do not putrefy but simply dry up, and though we were surrounded by thousands of dead beasts there was not a particle of odor. For the first and the last time in her life Mary broke down and cried, saying that she did not believe that God intended people to live in such a country as that. She was hot, thirsty, and tired; the only water to be had was from that pool and it, of course, while clear, was luke warm. However, I had a tent fly in the boot of the ambulance, and the driver and I stretched it from the top of the ambulance to the ground, making a shade. I filled my canteen with water and, being covered with several thicknesses of blanket, I wet it thoroughly and hung it up in the shade; in a little while the water became cool enough to drink. I made her a pitcher of lemonade, not with lemons, for they were not to be had in that country at any price, but with sugar of lemons, a bottled powder provided for that purpose; the wagon shortly after coming up, we had a good supper prepared, and she became more reconciled.

We arrived at Fort McIntosh,[67] near Laredo, Texas, a few days after; the night we arrived there, I was taken with malarial fever and laid in the hospital for a week, but every one was very kind to us and we proceeded on our journey, arriving at Fort Clark about the first of August. Fort Clark was then, as now, a large post at the head of Las Moras creek, on a rocky plateau. It was only intended for eight companies and there were then twelve or fifteen stationed there. Consequently the officers' quarters were very much crowded, and the best I could do was to get three rooms over another officer in a story and a half house. Our rooms had a sloping ceiling, were small and uncomfortable, but Mary soon made them very home-like. Two officers lived on the ground floor, one of whom was Captain Thomas J.

67. Fort McIntosh was established, March 1, 1849, about one mile from Laredo, Texas, in Latitude 27° 30′ and Longitude 99° 29′. The State of Texas ceded jurisdiction of the site (208 acres), December 19, 1849. It was abandoned during the Civil War and reoccupied, March 8, 1867.

Wint,[68] 4th Cavalry, who afterwards became a Brigadier General, and is now dead; and a Second Lieutenant, a little fellow named Murray,[69] now a Colonel of Cavalry and commanding officer at Columbus Barracks. They gave us the use of the dining room and kitchen and in return they took their meals with us. I had not been there a month when our troop was ordered to a place about sixty miles away to cut cedar posts, and I was gone over a month, leaving Mary alone among strangers at the post; but one good thing among army customs is that the officer and the officer's wife must call on another officer's wife, when she comes to the post, within forty-eight hours, so that she soon became acquainted with everybody at the post and got along very nicely. On our return we were immediately ordered with all the rest of the Cavalry to Pinto creek, a beautiful little stream six miles away, where we could graze horses, thus saving the cost of hay; here we remained until December.

Sometime in September or October, 1877, I received orders to report to Lieutenant John L. Bullis,[70] 24th Infantry, who was in command of the Seminole Indian Scouts, and to go with him, as we then supposed, to guard a crossing of the Rio Grande near the mouth of Las Moras creek. Lieutenant Bullis had been in command of these Seminole Indian Scouts for two or three years, and had gained a great reputation as a scouter and fighter. These Seminole Indians were a queerly mixed lot. They were the descendants partly of the Seminole Indians who had been removed from Florida, sometime in the forty's, to the Indian territory, and then had drifted down into Texas. A portion of them were only part Seminole, being descendants of negro slaves captured

68. Theodore Jonathan Wint was born in Pennsylvania. He enlisted in the Union Army as a private during the Civil War and advanced to the rank of 1st Lieutenant, 6th Pa. Cavalry, July 1, 1864. Mustered out, September 30, 1864, he re-enlisted and attained the rank of 2nd Lieutenant, 4th Cavalry, November 24, 1865, and rank of Captain, April 21, 1872.

69. Probably Cunliffe Hall Murray, born in South Carolina. He graduated from the United States Military Academy and was commissioned 2nd Lieutenant, 4th Cavalry, June 15, 1877.

70. John Lapham Bullis was born in New York. He enlisted in the New York Infantry, August 8, 1862, as a corporal and rose to the rank of Captain, August 18, 1864. Mustered out on February 6, 1866, he re-enlisted as 2nd Lieutenant, September 3, 1867.

by the Seminoles who had kept them as slaves and intermarried with them. Nearly all had a strain of Mexican blood, so that there was a mixture of Indian, Negro, and Mexican. Generally a mixture like this produces a vicious man, but these men were quite orderly and excellent soldiers. They had a little village about three miles below Fort Clark, and were constantly employed scouting all over western Texas under Bullis. He was a small, wiry man with a black mustache, and his face was burned as red as an Indian. He was a tireless marcher, thin and spare, and it used to be said of him that when he wanted to be luxurious in scouting, he took along one can of corn. Of course, this was only said in fun, but it was a fact that he and his men could go longer on half rations than any body of men that I have ever seen, and I had a great deal of experience with them. Besides myself, Lieutenant Maxon and Jones[71] of the 10th Cavalry, with a detachment from their regiment which was, and is, a colored regiment, also reported to Bullis. We made a night march to the mouth of Las Moras and bivouacked under a few scattering trees for nearly a week. By this time I began to suspect that we were there for some other purpose and was not surprised one night, about nine o'clock, when Bullis directed us to be ready to march to the Rio Grande, about two miles distant. We were directed to leave our pack animals behind under guard and to take one day's cooked rations. We forded the Rio Grande by moonlight and then Bullis informed us that we were to make a dash to the head of a creek about twenty or twenty-five miles distant to surprise, if possible, a gang of horse and cattle thieves who made that their rendezvous.[72] We started at once and traveled hard all night, galloping and trotting alternately, but the twenty miles stretched into thirty; just at daylight we caught sight of a large building looming up, which proved to be our

71. Thaddeus Winfield Jones was born in North Carolina. He graduated from the United States Military Academy; commissioned 2nd Lieutenant, 10th Cavalry, June 14, 1872, he was promoted to 1st Lieutenant, November 20, 1879.

Mason Marion Maxon was born in Wisconsin. He graduated from the United States Military Academy and was commissioned 2nd Lieutenant, June 15, 1869, and 1st Lieutenant, April 24, 1875.

72. For thieving along the Rio Grande in Texas and Mexico see Frank D. Reeve, "The Apache Indians in Texas," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, L, no. 2 (October, 1946). Rister, *op. cit.*, and Mansfield, *op. cit.*

destination. This building was in reality an old stone fort, evidently built years before by the Spaniards. It was in the shape of a triangle, each side being about one hundred feet long, and the wall was twelve to fifteen feet high; there was only one door or gate which, unfortunately for us, was on the side opposite the direction from which we approached. We had just emerged from the brush into the open ground when we heard a shrill alarm given, and instantly spreading out, we charged at full speed to gain the gate, if possible, before anyone could escape. As soon as we had surrounded the place, Bullis directed me to take twelve or fifteen men, enter the fort and search every building in it for a notorious thief and desperado who had long been the terror of the frontier. There were about a dozen shacks inside the fort and I searched them quickly and thoroughly, but only found one man. He was a Mexican, and one of the men pulled him out from under the bed by his feet, and he was evidently scared almost to death, for he immediately got on his knees and begged for mercy. I sent him to Bullis, but he was not the man we wanted and he was released. We found plenty of women and boys and soon learned that all the men were absent on a raid, except the leader, and that as soon as we were discovered he had dashed out and made his escape into a swamp which came close to the building. Our trip was, therefore, a failure and, after resting for an hour, we started to return, but fearing that we would be intercepted by the hundreds of thieves and desperadoes that infested the river on both sides at that time, we struck across the prairie for another crossing in the Rio Grande, Hackberry crossing, about fifteen miles below where we had crossed the night before. To arrive at this point we had to make a circuit to avoid passing over the hills on top of which we could have been discovered for miles. We marched very rapidly and, having had only one meal, and I having had none, for someway or other the lunch I had taken along had bounced out of my saddle pocket, we were hungry. About noon I became very weak and Doctor Shannon,[73] the surgeon with us,

73. Probably William Cummings Shannon, born in New Hampshire and appointed Assistant Surgeon, June 26, 1875.

noticing my paleness, rode up beside me, handed me a tin cup with a strong whiskey toddy in it and directed me to drink it. I told him that I never touched liquor, that the love of liquor was hereditary with me and I was afraid to use it, but he insisted that I must take it as medicine and finally I swallowed it. It certainly braced me up wonderfully and I kept my place at head of the column, Bullis having command of the rear guard which he supposed to be the point of danger, until we arrived within about a mile of the Rio Grande. We had kept scouts well in advance; they came back and reported that about two or three hundred cattle thieves had prepared an ambush on both sides of a narrow canyon which we must pass through, and were waiting for us. After a moment of consultation, we plunged into a side canyon and put our horses on the dead run, knowing that the mouth of this canyon would bring us nearly opposite Hackberry crossing anyhow. Arriving at the bank of the river we did not stop to find the crossing but, lead by Bullis, forced our horses over the bank into the swollen river and swam our horses across. We had scarcely emerged on the other side when a crowd of thieves came hurrying down to head us off, but too late. I thought it strange that Bullis did not take us at once into the heavy timber which here lined the river, where we would be protected, but a glance to the right and left brought a broad smile on my face as I discovered, lying flat on their faces at the edge of the brush, about four hundred cavalrymen, all from Fort Clark, under the command of Colonel Shafter,[74] and a little to one side were two Gatling guns carefully concealed behind the brush that had been cut off and stuck in the ground, and lying along side of the guns, ready for business, were the cannoneers. Shafter had carefully arranged the whole plan and was anxiously hoping that these raiders would enter the river when he intended, as he told me afterwards, "to wipe them

74. William Rufus Shafter was born in Michigan. He was commissioned 1st Lieutenant, August 22, 1861, in the Union Army, and was mustered out, November 2, 1886, with the rank of Brevet Brigadier General. He re-enlisted, July 28, 1866, with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. During the Spanish-American War, Shafter commanded the expedition for the capture of Santiago, Cuba. He retired with the rank of Major General, July 1, 1901. The *DAB* carries his biographical sketch.

off the face of the earth," or to open fire on them should they attack us without attempting to cross the river. We remained in plain sight for perhaps five minutes, but seeing that the thieves had no intention of crossing or firing, the command was given and all the troops rose to their feet; of all the stampedes that I have ever seen, I never saw such a one as those thieves made at once. They evidently had no idea that there were any troops there but ours, and as far as we could see them they were still running. This was about three o'clock in the afternoon. I had been in the saddle since nine o'clock the night before and, as soon as we got a bite to eat, I threw myself down on the gravel and never woke up till seven or eight o'clock the next morning when the heat of the sun aroused me. We returned to our camp at our leisure; although the trip was not a success so far as capturing the men we were after was concerned, it taught the thieves that we were watching them closely and they gave us very little trouble for a long time after. We returned to the Post in December and the next spring I again went out into camp. During the winter I had magnificent quail and duck shooting, and never enjoyed a winter more. I used to ride into the Post once a week and stay one day, each officer taking his turn. I sent game to my family and my friends almost daily, and we caught a great many black bass in the creek, so that we lived well. In September or October, Lieutenant Bullis, who had gone on a long scout to the big bend of the Rio Grande, was caught in a canyon by the Indians and severely handled, only getting his men out by his skill and courage, but losing several animals and all his rations.

We were still in camp on Pinto creek, the camp being commanded by Captain S. B. M. Young,[75] 8th Cavalry, now Lieutenant General, retired. He took four troops of Cavalry, one of them being a colored troop, and we made a forced march to Myers springs, about one hundred and fifty miles distant, where we met Bullis; we immediately took his trail

75. Samuel Baldwin Marks Young was born in Pennsylvania. He enlisted in the Union Army as a private and was mustered out with the rank of Brevet Brigadier General, July 1, 1865. He re-enlisted as 2nd Lieutenant, 12th Infantry, May 11, 1866, and was promoted to the rank of Captain, 8th Cavalry, July 28, 1866.

to the Rio Grande, crossed it and pushed rapidly to the place where he had been defeated. We crossed and re-crossed the river and finally ascended a high mountain, I suppose one thousand feet above the river, where we bivouacked for the night on the naked rock. The next morning we descended to the Rio Grande again, crossed and got up on the other side; after working hard for twelve or fourteen hours, we had not gone more than three or four miles in a narrow line. The sides of the mountain were very precipitous; we passed the place where Bullis had been defeated which was a narrow ledge not more than ten or twelve feet wide, with a mountain towering above and the river hundreds of feet below; how he ever got his men out of there, with Indians on both sides, was a mystery to us all. In our party we had an Assistant Surgeon by the name of Comegys,[76] from Cincinnati. He had just joined the army and this was his first scout; he had suffered greatly during the day from the intense heat and the hard climb, and that evening he asked me where our next camp would be. Young was sitting near by and I saw him smile when I pointed to a mountain peak perhaps sixty miles away, as I knew, and with a perfectly grave face informed the doctor that our next camp would be at the foot of this peak, and that there was not a drop of water between the two. In despair he turned to Young and said to him, "Colonel, you may as well bury me right now for I will never live to get there." When he heard the roar of laughter from the officers around he turned on me and upbraided me for playing it on him, but I stuck to it, and the next morning when we started we headed toward this mountain, and I can see yet the look of despair on his face; but we had only gone a few miles when the Indian trail, which we were following, turned abruptly to the left, went down through a canyon and brought us out again on the river, and I think he was the happiest man in camp that night. The next day we pushed rapidly on the trail, made a dry camp, which means a camp without water, except what we had in our canteens, and about noon the next day arrived at the foot of a range

76. Edward Tiffin Comegys was born in Ohio. He enlisted with the rank of Assistant Surgeon, June 26, 1875.

of mountains known as Mount Carmen, or Red Mountains. During the day a blizzard of rain and hail struck us, with a high wind, and we suffered greatly from cold. We finally managed to find a little spring in a hollow and, with cups and knives, dug it out so the water would flow more freely; dipping the water out with our tin cups, we filled our camp kettles and watered the animals which took until nearly midnight. As darkness approached, I looked around for a good place to sleep where I could be protected from the sleet, if possible, for, of course, we carried no tents. I soon found a hollow or depression about the size of a grave and perhaps four feet deep. This was probably caused by the uprooting of a tree, though there were no trees there then. This hole was half full of dead leaves from the sage brush, so I threw my bundle of blankets in which I had a buffalo robe, and around which I had a piece of canvas, into this hole, to indicate that I had pre-empted that sleeping place. Soon after dark, having completed all my duties, I went to this place, spread my canvas on the leaves, on top of this my blankets, and then my buffalo robe, with the hairy side uppermost. I had a long heavy overcoat with fur gloves and a fur cap; getting down and crawling under the blankets, and pulling the buffalo robe over my head, I was just congratulating myself that I had a warm, cozy place to sleep when I heard the voice of Lieutenant Guest,[77] of my regiment, who had a peculiar habit of talking to himself.

This was Guest's first scout and he had more than once expressed a desire to meet a bear. It was dark as a pocket, but I could hear him or feel him kneel down at the edge of the hole as he threw down his roll of bedding by my side; the next moment he had gotten into the hole himself and, just as he touched the fur of the buffalo robe, I turned on my face, hunched up my back, and gave a groan as nearly as possible to what I thought a bear would make. With one wild yell he jumped out of the hole and ran toward where the men were sleeping, yelling, "A bear, a bear," at the top of his voice, and in a moment I heard the rapid approach

77. John Guest was born in Pennsylvania. He was commissioned 2nd Lieutenant, 8th Cavalry, August 15, 1876.

of feet. I could hear the rattle of the breech locks as the men loaded their carbines, and I thought it was high time to make myself known. So I stood up and called to the men that there was no bear there. Poor Guest never heard the last of this and in 1888, when our regiment was marching from Texas to Dakota, I again met him at old Fort Concho after a lapse of several years. The day after we left Fort Concho, while I was marching at the head of my troop, Guest dropped back by my side and almost immediately I heard from the men behind me the old familiar words, "A bear, a bear," and I saw his face get scarlet. He said in a low tone, "Will 'F' troop never let up on that damn story."

I laughed and said to him, "There are only two or three of the old men left, Murphy is one of them. He is in the first set of twos, and there are one or two old men back of him. If I were you I would drop back and shake hands with them. They would be glad to see you, and you will never hear anything more of it." He dropped back and I heard him call out, "Lord, Murphy, hasn't the devil got you yet," and Murphy gave a laugh; as I looked back, I saw them shaking hands heartily. Murphy fell out with him and, allowing the troop to pass, called his attention to the two or three old men, all of whom he greeted cordially, and that was the last he ever heard of that story.

The next morning we resumed our march and late in the evening we camped on a piece of ground thickly dotted with both hot and cold springs. In the hot springs the water varied from luke warm to a heat so great that a person could scarcely hold his hand in it, while in the cold springs the water was cool enough to drink and, as I remember it, there were perhaps half a dozen of each in a space of eight or ten acres. Of course this was caused merely by two underground streams, one of cold water and the other coming up from hot springs away below the ground.

That evening Bullis sent six or seven of his men to follow the trail a few miles so that we could gain time in the morning. One of these men was sent on top of the mountain immediately above us; just after sunset he came sliding down and reported that the Indians had passed around the point

of the mountain and were then encamped in a deep ravine just on the other side of the mountain, not more than a mile away, but four miles around the point by way of their trail. Colonel Young at once gave us orders that at daybreak we would climb the mountain and attack them from above, forcing them, if possible, into the open plain where we could get a chance. He sent for me and informed me that I would be left behind in charge of the camp. To this I strenuously objected, calling his attention to the fact that I ranked Lieutenant Guest, that I thought I should be allowed the choice of going or staying, and that I wanted to go. Colonel Young and I had had some words in regard to managing the mess a few days before, for as usual I had charge of the mess, and while this disagreement was purely personal, there had been a decided coolness between us; he told me afterwards that if he had not feared that I would think that he was taking unfair advantage of his being in command, he would have insisted that I remain behind, and I have always been sorry since that he did not.

We started up the hill at daybreak, and it was a hard climb. The hill was very steep, covered with loose shale and gravel, and we had to work our way up by clinging to the brush wood that thickly covered it; we had just arrived at the flat top when, sitting down to get our breath for a moment, we discovered a commotion in the camp. We saw the men running out and bringing in the horses from the flat where they were grazing; Bullis said that he had seen one of his men ride into camp at full speed and it was evident that something was wrong. Turning to me Young said, "Damn it, Phelps, I wish you had remained in camp, for you would know what to do, and I don't suppose Guest does;" then turning to Lieutenant Bullis, he directed him to go down and take command of the camp and do what he deemed best. It turned out afterwards that the six or seven men, who had followed up the trail the night before, had discovered some of the Indians' horses just at dark; concealing themselves in the rocks, they waited till daybreak when, instead of returning at once to our camp with the information, they tried to steal the Indians' horses. An opportunity

to steal a horse is one no Indian could ever resist. As they approached the horses, the Indians, who had evidently discovered them also, fired on them, fortunately, or unfortunately, without hitting any of them, and they immediately took refuge in a pile of rocks. There was only six of them against twenty or twenty-five Indians, but one of them sprang on his pony and went back for help at full speed, and that was the man we had seen ride into camp. Had I remained in camp, I would, of course, have mounted all the men there and gone at full speed to the rescue of these men; we found afterwards that I would have cut the Indians off from the ravine and would have driven them straight into Young's command. Lieutenant Bullis mounted twenty or twenty-five men and hurried around, but the time lost had been sufficient for the Indians to start up a canyon. As we arrived on the edge of it, crawling up on our hands and knees, Young and one or two of the officers, peering over, discovered the Indians making their way slowly up the opposite side of the canyon; to me it looked as though they were walking along the side of the cliff like flies, but we afterwards found there was a narrow ledge, in some places not more than three feet wide, and they arrived at the top of the canyon almost at the same moment that we did. My troop had been deployed as skirmishers; I had charge of the left wing and Captain Wells had charge of the right.

I discovered four or five Indians with their horses not more than one hundred yards distant; apparently they had not yet caught sight of us and were a little undecided which way to go. Raising my rifle, I fired straight at a buck, as the warriors are called, and at that distance I fully expected to get him, but just as I fired his horse moved slightly forward and the bullet struck the poor brute instead of the Indian. Like a flash they scattered among the rocks; for ten or fifteen minutes we banged away at each other without anyone being hurt on either side so far as we could discover. We were simply endeavoring to hold them there, for another troop had been sent to make a circuit and we had hopes of holding them until this troop could come up on their rear. I was lying flat behind a rock when I became aware of the

fact that one of those Indians seemed to have a pick at me, for several of his bullets struck very near me. I finally discovered him about one hundred yards to my left by seeing him raise and lower his arm while loading his rifle. I called two of the men near me and, resting our guns on the top of a rock, we waited a moment until he should raise to shoot, when all three of us fired at him at once. He toppled over backward, his gun going over his head, and we heard no more of him.

Just at that moment a bullet struck a piece of rock near my left foot, chipped off a piece of it which struck my left ankle bone with terrific force; when I arose to my feet the ankle gave way beneath me and I could not walk a step. The Indians had rushed down the side of the hill; the men ran to the edge, opened fire on them and, as we afterwards found, succeeded in killing four or five. One of these Indians was on his pony, for they succeeded in getting part of the ponies down the hill. Bending over his saddle, he was going at full speed when a bullet struck him in the back, and he rolled off. One of the men went down and captured his pony, a cream colored one; tied to the saddle was a complete, beautifully dressed buckskin suit, fringed with beads and porcupine quills, the most handsome Indian costume that I have ever seen. I immediately offered the man twenty-five dollars for it, but he declined to part with it; when we got back to Fort Clark he asked me to send it to his girl for him, which I did. By this time my ankle had swollen enormously and I was helped on one of the captured ponies, which one of the men led back to the camp. I knew the doctor had no medicine of any kind, for the mule bearing his medicine chest had fallen over a cliff a week before, and I was greatly worried about my ankle. They had to cut off the shoe and stocking; ripping up my trousers, the doctors saw that it was already swollen to nearly double its usual size and rapidly turning purple. One of the hot springs, as I have mentioned, was close by and, with my blanket spread beside it, I completely immersed my foot and ankle in the hot water; here I remained all night. Possibly nothing better could have been done; in the morning the swelling had gone down at least

half, and much of the soreness was gone. It was a month before I could walk or put on a shoe, but I wore an Indian moccasin which one of my men had picked up and had given to me. We captured something like twenty-five or thirty mules and horses, and afterwards found that the Indian, at whom we three had fired, was the chief and that all three bullets had struck him squarely in the breast. His gun proved to be an old Harpers Ferry musket, model of 1854, with brass rings and the stock extending clear to the muzzle. It was a smooth bore, carrying a round bullet. The gun was loaded, cocked, and capped, but one of the bullets had broken the stock, or possibly the fall had broken it, and it was lying by his side. The men brought it back to me. I took it back to Fort Clark, sent it to the Ordnance Arsenal at San Antonio, had it restocked and it made one of the best single-barreled shot guns that I had ever seen; when I left the troop the men still had it.

This last skirmish occurred on Thanksgiving Day,[78] though I doubt if any of us remembered it until evening. I had had charge of the mess and knew that our supplies were completely exhausted, except for a little sack, perhaps four or five pounds, of flour, and one can of apples, which I had stowed in my saddle bags on my own saddle a week before, intending to give the mess at least something to eat on Thanksgiving Day. While lying beside the spring, boiling my foot, I called to the soldier who cooked for our mess, gave him the flour and the apples and told him to make some apple dumplings, but not to tell anybody. We had no baking powder, so all he could do was to mix up the flour with water, put in some sugar and the can of apples, and boil the dump-

78. "November 1, [1877], near the Rio Grande, Lieutenant Bullis, Twenty-fourth Infantry, with a detachment of thirty-seven Seminole scouts, had a fight with a band of renegade Apaches and other Indians. Captain S. B. M. Young, Eighth Cavalry, with a force of one hundred and sixty-two men, consisting of Troops A and K, Eighth Cavalry, and C, Tenth Cavalry, and Lieutenant Bullis' detachment of scouts, after a very long pursuit, succeeded in surprising this band of Indians near the Carmen Mountains, Mexico, on November 29th. A charge by the troops dispersed the Indians in every direction, with a loss of their camp equipage, seventeen horses, six mules, and some arms; one enlisted man was wounded." *Record of Engagements with Hostile Indians within the Military Division of the Missouri, from 1868 to 1882* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1882), quoted in *West Texas Historical Association Year Book*, IX, 111 (October, 1933).

lings in a kettle. For supper that night we had hard tack and coffee only, for our bacon was all gone, but just as the officers were about to scatter I told them to wait, and our cook produced the dumplings. Well, we ate them, though they were as heavy as lead, and every Thanksgiving Day I remember the apple dumpling supper that we had that day nearly two hundred miles down in old Mexico.

Among the animals captured, we found several mules loaded with dried deer, horse and mule meat, all of which was divided equally among the men and officers, but it only gave us about two or three ounces each and we started back the next day for Myers springs where we had left most of our rations. We marched very rapidly and I suffered intensely with my foot. Finally we arrived at the point where we crossed the Rio Grande, and here Colonel Young directed me, as Adjutant of the scout, to send two men to Myers springs with instructions to Lieutenant Clay,[79] who had been left there with a small detachment, to send us rations. That same evening we were sitting around a little camp fire when Bullis came over and told us that he had found a small sack with a few pounds of rice in it which he would give us. What he was living on, I don't know, but I have always believed that, like his Seminoles, he was living on rattlesnakes, for I have time and again seen the Seminoles kill and skin rattlesnakes and fry them just the same as fish. I had never tried it but once, and that was enough. We put the rice in a big kettle, poured on a lot of water and set it on the fire. I did not know that rice swelled so, but in a few moments it had swelled clear over the top of the kettle, so we concluded that it must be done. We had plenty of sugar left and stirred in a couple of quarts of brown sugar, then gathered around it and each one helped himself. The rice had been slightly scorched and made me deathly sick; it was twenty years before I could eat rice again. The next day we marched about fifteen miles, the horses being very weak, for there was but little grass and, of course, no grain; about dark the two men we had sent to Myers springs came into camp with three mules loaded with coffee, bacon, and hard tack, a most

79. Lieutenant Clay is not identifiable in Heitman, *Historical Register*. . . .

welcome sight. The men had a method of cooking the hard tack which made it very palatable to a hungry man. Breaking the hard bread into fragments, they put it to soak and it soon swelled. They then fried their bacon, poured the bacon grease over the hard bread, and mixed a liberal quantity of brown sugar with it; while it doesn't sound very nice, it certainly was very palatable when a keen hunger was the sauce. The next day we arrived at our old camp at Myers springs. We found Clay had sent us all the rations there were, so here we were one hundred and fifty miles from the nearest post and the men living on quarter rations, while the officers had absolutely none. Jack rabbits were very plentiful, so I took my shot gun, which I had left at this camp, and killed great numbers of them, which we boiled, and I got so sick of rabbit that it was years afterwards before I could eat any again. From this point we sent one of the Seminoles to Fort Clark with a letter to the commanding officer, Colonel Shafter, asking that rations and forage be sent to meet us as soon as possible, and two or three days afterwards, as soon as we could shoe up the horses, we started on our return.

By this same messenger, Colonel Young sent a short official report of the scout to Colonel Shafter, which I prepared, under his direction, on leaves torn from my note book and in pencil. I also wrote a note to my wife telling her that I was all right, that my ankle was much better and not to worry. I endorsed on the back of it a request to Colonel Shafter to send it to her, and both were enclosed in an old envelope and addressed to the commanding officer of the Post. I told the Seminole to make the best speed he possibly could and, on arrival, whatever might be the hour, day or night, to report immediately to the commanding officer and deliver the letter. I also told him to go down to my troop barracks, where two or three men had been left, and they would take care of him, giving him something to eat and care for his horse. I afterwards learned that he arrived at the Post about two o'clock in the morning, aroused Colonel Shafter from his bed, delivered the letter and then went over to my troop barracks. As soon as he came in, the men began

to question him about the scout, as not a word had been heard from us after leaving Del Rio about two months before. The Seminole could talk very little English and perhaps understand less, and the men only knew a few words of Mexican, which was the language that the Seminoles used. He told them, "Heap big fight, muchos Indians killed," which was, of course, an exaggeration. They then asked him if any soldiers were killed. Not understanding the question but, I suppose, believing that it meant if anybody was hurt, he said, "Yes, Adjutante," which is the Mexican for Adjutant. The men knew that I was Adjutant of the command. They were, of course, keenly interested, and asked him if the Adjutant was killed, and again misunderstanding the question, the Seminole nodded his head.

By this time it was daylight. The news that there had been a fight and that the Adjutant had been killed was quickly communicated to other companies, and by them communicated to servants up along the officers' line, or to use an old frontier expression, "the news went up the back porch of the officers' line and came down the front." Mary, of course, knew nothing of this, as she had not left the house at that time. At guard-mount, which took place about eight o'clock, it was customary for the officers to sit out on their front porches with their families and listen to music of the band. Mary took May and started to walk up the line to watch guard-mount. She told me afterwards that whereas officers would usually spring to their feet as she passed their quarters and lift their caps, she noticed that every one of them hustled inside, and she wondered why. About half way up the line she approached a group of three officers who had their backs toward her. One of them was Lieutenant Donovan,[80] of the 24th Infantry, who messed with us. As she approached, she overheard one of the officers say, "Hush, here is Mrs. Phelps, now," and it flashed on her mind in a moment that there was some bad news. Walking straight up to Mr. Donovan she asked him, "Is there any news of

80. Edward Donovan was born in Ireland. He enlisted as a private in the Union Army during the Civil War and was mustered out with the rank of Captain, July 1, 1866. He re-enlisted as a Lieutenant and resigned, July 9, 1878.

the scout," to which he answered by inclining his head. "Is anybody hurt," she asked, and again he inclined his head. "Is Mr. Phelps hurt," she demanded. At that question, Mr. Donovan stepped by her side and said, "Mrs. Phelps, let me take you home." He told me afterwards that quick as a flash she straightened up to her full height and, looking him squarely in the eye quietly said, "Mr. Donovan, I am a soldier's wife, if there is any bad news I want to know it instantly. Is Mr. Phelps dead?" He replied, "Yes, Mrs. Phelps, he was killed on Thanksgiving Day at the head of his troop." She turned ghastly white, took his arm, and leading May by the hand, she went back to our quarters, bowed to him, entered the house and closed the door. In about half an hour Colonel Shafter knocked at the door and she bade him enter. Colonel Shafter was a large, jovial man and generally spoke in a loud tone of voice; in his jovial way, and not noticing the tears streaming down her cheeks, he said to her, "Madam, allow me to congratulate you." A month later he told me that he had not noticed that she had been crying, but that she instantly straightened up and, looking him in the face, she answered in a cutting tone, "Since when, Colonel Shafter, has it been the custom of the Army for the commanding officer to congratulate the widow?" He was dumbfounded for a second, and then blurted out, "If Mr. Phelps is dead, he is a mighty lively corpse, for here is a letter from him." Then, and I believe the only time in her army service, she fainted, and he caught her as she fell to the floor. Laying her gently on the carpet, he rushed out of the room into Mrs. Pond's quarters, next door, and shouted, "For God's sake come over to Mrs. Phelp's house, I have killed her." Mr. Pond[81] ran into the house and dashed water in her face; they lifted her on the bed and in a few moments she revived. We had many a laugh over this afterwards, but at the time it was serious enough. Once afterwards when I was on a scout, Mrs. Wis-

81. George Enoch Pond was born in Connecticut. He enlisted as a private in Company K, 21st Connecticut Infantry, December 9, 1863, and was discharged June 7, 1865. Graduating from the United States Military Academy, he was commissioned 2nd Lieutenant, 8th Cavalry, June 14, 1872.

hart,[82] the wife of an officer of the 20th Infantry, whom Mary and I cordially detested, rushed up to her on the porch, threw her arms around her and said, "Oh, you poor thing, you poor dear." Without attempting for a moment to remove her arms, Mary cooly asked, "What is the matter," and the reply came, "Oh you poor dear, don't you know that your husband has been killed." For some reason or other the gossips seemed determined to kill me off. Mary quietly unwound her arms and then icily said, "My husband has been killed once before. This time I think I will wait for the official confirmation." How this second rumor got out, I never knew.

The country was covered with *mal pais* [bad land] rock, evidently of volcanic origin, with keen, sharp, edges, and it made the marching very hard. We only made about fifteen miles and camped in a small valley with only the water we had in our canteens. Before starting on this scout I had provided myself with two very large canteens, each made of two tin wash basins with the edges placed together and riveted and soldered. These were covered with four thicknesses of woolen blanket, with a broad leather strap to attach to the saddle. Each of these canteens held four quarts of water; I made it a point to go without water during the day and almost invariably went into camp at night with my canteens full. About four o'clock in the afternoon I went out and posted the pickets and had just returned to camp when a picket stationed on a hill, about half a mile distant, gave the alarm that he saw something by riding rapidly on his horse in a circle. I immediately galloped out to him with a couple of men, and he told me that he believed he saw wagon tops in the distance; with my glasses, I soon saw the tops of four wagons about three miles distant moving along the old overland trail which I knew was there somewhere. I immediately sent one of the men back to Colonel Young with a note, and received from him an order to ride out and intercept them. If they were our wagons to bring them to camp,

82. Alexander Wishart was born in Pennsylvania. He was a Captain during his service in the Union Army, resigning September 10, 1862. He re-enlisted as 2nd Lieutenant, 27th Infantry, January 22, 1867, and was promoted to 1st Lieutenant, October 19, 1867. He was dismissed from the service, January 22, 1881.

but if, as we suspected, they were civilian wagons carrying goods to the upper Post, to take from them such quantities of rations as I thought we might need, giving them a receipt for the same, on which the Government would pay them. I rode out and found that it was our own wagons which Colonel Shafter had pushed out with orders to meet us at the earliest possible moment regardless of the loss of mules, and they had made an average of more than thirty miles a day, which is unusually fast marching for six-mule teams. Three of the wagons were loaded with corn and oats, the other two with rations, and we were a happy lot that night in camp.

In the field our baking was done in a Dutch oven. This is a kind of cast iron pot with three legs and a flat iron cover with edges turned all around for about two inches. To bake bread in this, it is set over a bed of coals; when thoroughly heated, the bread is placed in it, the lid put on and the coals are not only heaped all around the pot, but also on top of the lid which has an iron ring by which it can be easily removed. After a little experience, a cook can bake as good bread in one of these Dutch ovens as in a kitchen range. This night our cook proceeded to make biscuits for our mess and our Dutch oven, being eighteen inches in diameter, made the biscuits of enormous size, seven filling it completely, so that each biscuit was as large as a bowl. Lieutenant George H. Evans,[83] 10th Cavalry, and an old friend, was then stationed at Del Rio, about thirty miles west from Fort Clark. When the wagons passed through there, he gave the wagon master a bucket of fresh butter, containing about ten pounds, to give me with his compliments. As we had not seen butter for over two months, this was very welcome. We broke the biscuits open, put in an ample supply of butter, and waited till the butter had melted and worked all through the biscuit. Lieutenant Guest was a heavy eater; to the best of my recollection, he ate this night five or six of these enormous biscuits; about midnight we had to call the doctor, and it was years before

83. George Howard Evans was born in Pennsylvania. He graduated from the United States Military Academy and was commissioned 2nd Lieutenant, 10th Cavalry, June 14, 1872.

he heard the last of this occurrence. Colonel Shafter had not only sent ample supplies, but the wagon master finally rolled out a barrel addressed to Colonel Young, and when we opened it the first thing we saw on top was the mail that had accumulated at Fort Clark for officers and men; as we had not heard a word from the outside world for two months, the letters and papers were very welcome. Mary had heard of the wagons going out and had written me a long letter so that I was relieved of any anxiety. We proceeded slowly to the Pecos,[84] the rain falling continually; when we arrived at the river we crossed at once and went into camp, and that was one of the most miserable nights that I ever spent. We had no tents, the cold rain fell in sheets all night, and wood was very scarce. One of my men discovered an old government ferry boat about half a mile below the crossing; in a short while they had broken the boat up, which was made of two-inch pine plank, and we had roaring fires everywhere. When we discovered the planks being placed on the fires we were suspicious of where they came from, but so far as I know no questions were asked, as the ferry boat had never been of any use anyhow. I was the Quartermaster and Adjutant of this expedition and the next three days I had as hard work as I ever had in my life to get the wagon trains through. The road was a rough one at best; with the heavy rains the wheels cut through to the hubs and we could only make ten or twelve miles a day. For three days and nights I never had my clothes off and was afraid to take off my boots for fear that I could never get them on again. Finally we arrived at Del Rio and found that Captain Kelley,[85] 10th Cavalry, stationed at this Post, had prepared tents for all our command and had bread and hot coffee ready for the soldiers. Lieutenant Hunt,[86] of the 10th Cavalry, a dearly loved class-

84. The text indicates that they were following the old overland mail route. It is probable, therefore, that they crossed the Pecos river just west of Fort Lancaster. For a map of the route see Roscoe P. and Margaret B. Conkling, *The Butterfield Overland Mail 1857-1869*, vol. 3 (Glendale, Calif.: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1947).

85. Joseph Morgan Kelley was born in New York. He joined the Union Army during the Civil War and was mustered out, March 4, 1863. He re-enlisted with the rank of Lieutenant, March 7, 1867, and attained the rank of Captain, April 15, 1875.

86. Levi Pettibone Hunt was born in Missouri. He graduated from the United States Military Academy and was commissioned 2nd Lieutenant, 10th Cavalry, June 15, 1870. He was promoted to 1st Lieutenant, June 30, 1875.

mate, was stationed there and he invited Geddes Guest and myself to stay at his house. He had only four rooms and one of these had no floor but the earth, but he had scattered hay liberally over the floor and had a number of blankets and buffalo robes; when he apologized profusely for not being able to afford us better accommodations, we hustled him out of the room for, compared to what we had been going through, this warm, dry room was heaven.

The next day we marched to Fort Clark. As we entered the Post, we marched along the road in front of the officers' quarters, and we were certainly a hard looking lot. As the Adjutant, I rode beside Colonel Young at the head of the column. I had lost my blouse, the back of my blue shirt (the only one I had left) was missing, my long hair reached almost to my shoulders, my beard, untrimmed for three months, fell on my breast, and I had on my head a soft wool hat, the crown of which was missing entirely and the brim had also been torn off at various times to help kindle a fire. We marched straight down the line looking neither to the right nor left and, as we turned to the right to go down in front of the commanding officer's office, I saw, from the corner of my eye, Mary and May standing on the porch of our quarters. Colonel Young reported to Colonel Shafter; we marched the companies to their stables and dismissed them then, taking an orderly with me, I trotted up to my quarters and found Mary standing on the porch. I dismounted and said to her, "Hello Old lady." She looked me up and down then, turning to the orderly, who was of my own troop, and whom, of course, she knew, she coolly said, "Orderly, is that my husband?" The grinning orderly touched his cap and said, "Yes, mam." "Take him down to the creek and wash him," was her unexpected reply, and everybody roared with laughter.

This was one of the hardest trips I ever took and my ankle was far from well, but it gradually recovered; it has been weak from that day to this, and has frequently turned under me since.

(To be continued)