COURAGE THAT WAS BULLET-PROOF

By EDWARD B. CLARK

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SOME of the younger non-commissioned officers of the army have [illegible] many stories of their [illegible] to [illegible] stripes [illegible]. An old sergeant who has been doing duty at Fort Myer [illegible] with a warmth of admiration, and [illegible] the devotion to duty of Hans Mueller, who years ago was a trumpeter in the Third cavalry.

Hans was more or less of a jest for the jokers of the men of his troop. He took all kinds of jibes with a good nature that was as perfect as it was stolid. The trumpeter knew more about music than he did about [illegible]. When for awhile he tried what the other men called straight soldiering he was continually getting tangled up with his equipments and on several occasions at skirmish drill he came within an ace of shooting himself. His comrades told Hans that so long as he confined his efforts to killing himself they would offer no strenuous objection, but that if he got real careless and shot the head off some one else he would [illegible] for trouble. As a matter of fact, he did one day come pretty close to putting a bullet through the heart of Sergeant Peter Nelson, who forthwith [illegible] Hans in an approved style. Capt. Roberts called Hans "[illegible]" and said that he must stick to his trumpet.

The [illegible] of his chief made Hans feel badly. He knew the whole scale of calls from reveille through fatigue, recall and drill to taps, but his soul wasn't in his music. Down deep in Hans' soul there came a thought that somehow he was not like other men. The smartness of appearance which

THERE FOR FIVE MINUTES THEY EXCHANGED SHOTS WITH THE REDS

TYPICAL MEMBERS OF THE UTE TRIBE

characterized Sergeant Nelson, Corporal Brady and a score of privates he knew could never be his. There was lacking in his makeup that something which gives dash to a soldier. Hans used to fall over his feet in a most unmilitary way and his hands were never in their proper places. There was one thing, however, that could be said of him—he always tried to obey orders implicitly. He generally blundered a number of times while making the attempt, but the intent was right and that covers a multitude of sins much more serious in nature than mere blunders.

The Third cavalry was in the Wyoming country in the Elkhorn creek region. There had been a good deal of trouble with the Nez Perces and L troop had been kept on the jump most of the time for a month. L troop was Hans' outfit. There had been one constant succession of scoutings. It had been necessary to send small squads in half a dozen different directions at one and the same time. The trumpeter had been forced to stay with the main body, which was not a very big main body at that, at all times. He had been in everything in which the troop was engaged, but the idea of sending Hans out on a reconnaisance where coolness and the subtlety of the devil were necessary for safety was the last thing that ever entered the head of the troop commander.

One day, however, one of the coldest days of the second winter month, it became necessary to send a scouting party to investigate the rumor of the approach of a band of savages. Now it happened that the whole band was fagged out, and this in a nutshell is the reason why Hans Mueller found himself for the first time in his life in a position of acute responsibility. He was ordered by Capt. Roberts to proceed with Sergeant Nelson and two privates northwest until something was "felt" or until the sergeant was satisfied that a wrong report had been turned into the camp.

When the little body set out the fatigue of the individual members of the troop showed that it was not, so to speak, strong enough to keep these same individuals from giving Hans a send-off. Hans had a carbine and a revolver. His trumpet was hanging up on a peg. One of the bystanders said to the sergeant in command, "Look out for Hans if you happen to get in a scrimmage. The first thing you know he'll forget himself and he'll try to blow 'retreat' on his carbine. You may lose one man if Hans puts his mouth to the wrong end of the barrel."

Then they said a few other things to Hans. He was told to be sure not to get his canteen mixed up with his cartridge belt and to make sure that he took note of the landmarks on the way out, so he could get back to camp in a hurry if he happened to hear an Indian shoot off a gun. Hans took all this well enough, because the thought of actually going out on a scout was sufficient to knock all other things out of his head, resentment along with them. Sergeant Nelson, who was an old and tried campaigner, turned to his men and said: "We are getting near the place where we may expect to see something." Then he spoke seriously to Hans: "Mueller," he said, "you're not half as bad, perhaps, as the troopers make out, but I tell you honestly that I'm kind of afraid of you when it comes to a pinch. Do the best you can and don't run. As a matter of fact I think Jim Crosby was pipe-dreaming when he brought the rumor of reds in this vicinity into camp, but you may have a chance to see trouble, and if you do, please stick."

That was a pretty tough thing to have to say to a soldier with Uncle Sam's uniform on his back. Stick! Mueller's face went almost white under realization that the true significance of that admonition was that the sergeant had a pretty strong fear in his heart that this trumpet tooter was a coward. Stick! He would show them if he was only given a chance.

Sergeant Peter Nelson was an old and tried campaigner, indeed, but that day he had made a mistake. He led his three men straight into an ambush. There was a score of painted Nez Perces straight across their track. The Indians had very little cover, but they used it so artfully that the old sergeant had actually thought that the bit of embankment and the few scattered bowlders did not offer cover enough to conceal a jack rabbit.

The first intimation of the Indians' presence was a volley. Sergeant Nelson went to the ground with a wound in his side. One of the privates, shot through the shoulder and leg, fell with him. The two men crawled behind a couple of rocks and secured temporary shelter. At the savage volley Hans Mueller's heart went to his throat. With the other private, who, like Hans, was unhit, he fell back about 40 yards and went behind an adequate cover. There for five minutes they exchanged shots with the reds, who, in accordance with Indian custom, would not charge across the open, but depended rather upon being able to pick off the soldiers and then to go forward without danger and take the scalps. Hans Mueller found that he could use his carbine. His heart went down in his throat. He looked around him and saw that there was some chance of holding the savages off for hours. Out beyond he saw his two stricken comrades. They were not dead. He knew that because he saw them move and occasionally weakly raise themselves and send a shot in the direction of the red foe. Hans said to himself, "Those men must be brought back here." Then he handed his carbine to his comrade and with it his belt and ammunition. "You may need these," he said, "if those fellows hit me." Then he jumped over the rock in front of him and with his long, shambling, ungainly stride he made for the side of Sergeant Nelson. The Indians pumped at him. The balls whizzed by his head, cut his clothes in three places and spat spitefully at his feet. Telling Nelson to grab his carbine, Mueller raised the sergeant in his arms and made for back cover. He dropped the sergeant under the shadow of the rock and then stood on his feet.

"Where are you going, Mueller?" said Sergeant Nelson.

"I'm going after Dodds," said Mueller, and he cleared the little rock to the front once more.

"God bless you, Mueller," was what he heard above the crackling of the rifles to his front. He reached the side of the wounded Dodds, raised him and started back with him across the strip of hell. Twice he staggered, as volleys rang out, but he reached the side of his comrades and placed Dodds between Nelson and the unwounded trooper.

Then Hans Mueller fell dead.

Relief came to the surviving cavalryman. The two wounded lived. In the little cemetery at a post in the far northwest there is a headstone which is inscribed:

"Hans Mueller, Trumpeter and Soldier. His courage was bullet proof."

There passed through the gates of Fort Myer the other day a man with coal black face and snow-white hair. His bearing was military to a degree, notwithstanding the fact that he limped painfully. His shoulders were thrown back and his head erect and carried with a probably conscious air of pride. The limp in the gait, however, was so marked that an observer, if he gave the subject any thought at all, would know that this negro would never run a step in his life.

The name of the Fort Myer visitor was and is Henry Johnson, one time of Troop K, Ninth United States cavalry. If certain of the soldier officers and enlisted men of the colored outfit of Uncle Sam had known that the thought that this limping ex-soldier would never run again had entered into an onlooker's mind, he probably would have said: "No, Johnson never will run again, but if he could have kept up the gait that he once showed these 100-yard sprinting records that we hear so much of in this day of sports would be headed by another and the name of the holder would be Henry Johnson."

There isn't the slightest doubt among cavalry officers who have long memories that the world's champion sprinter was lost to track fame when Henry Johnson, colored trooper went lame 25 years ago.

In the month of November, 1879, a band of Ute Indians surrounded a small command of United States regulars, composed for the greater part of Troop K, Ninth colored cavalry. There was for a while the heaviest kind of fighting, and at close quarters. Finally the reds retreated a little way, but still held their cordon of braves intact. The temporary withdrawal for a short distance did not give the troops a breathing spell, for they set to work at once to intrench. They succeeded, with their horses and impediments and by a vigorous use of the shovel, in forming and in throwing up a fairly strong defense bulwark. After this had been done small parties, under cover of the rifles of their comrades, went out to a considerable distance from the entrenchment and there dug rifle pits at intervals in a circle about the inner and stronger defense.

Into these well-covered rifle pits guards were dropped with a plentiful supply of ammunition and such little water and provender as could be spared. There was one man in each pit. They were absolutely protected from the front and they were put there to perform the usual useful duty expected where troops are thus besieged. Unless the Utes actually succeeded in getting into these pits, the men there were safer than were those behind the extemporized fortification in the center. After the pickets had been placed in the pits and the fatigue and posting parties had returned to the central point of defense, the Indians drew in. The red circle was drawn closer and closer and the bullets from the Ute rifles tore through the frail parts of the barricade and soldier after soldier was killed or wounded.

TOOK A COURSE LIKE THE FLIGHT OF A SNIPE

Three times the Indians were driven off, only to return again. They had lost heavily, but seemed to be roused to a maddened pitch that made them heedless of caution. For the fourth time they were sent hurtling backward and then there came the awful necessity of sending instructions to the men in the outlying pits.

The captain commanding was just about to give over all idea of attempting messenger communication because of the deadly nature of the errand, when Private Henry Johnson came up to him, saluted, and said that he would like to volunteer to make the round of the guards.

"You can't do it, Johnson," said his commanding officer. "It's death."

"Yes, I can, sah; I'm a sprinter. When they shoots at me running sideways 'round the ring they can't do nothing but cut daylight behind my back. I've beat everything in the regiment running and I beat everything in my state before I 'listed."

The result of this dialogue and some thought on the captain's part was that a moment afterward a blue-clad figure was darting in zigzag lines straight away from the barricade toward the first rifle pit. How that negro did run, notwithstanding the fact that he took a course like the flight of a snipe when it is first flushed. He simply tore. He had not gone 30 yards before a hundred feathered heads were seen raised and the faces below showing doubtless in sheer amazement at the sight of that flying figure. Then rifle after rifle spoke visiously, but Johnson, the sprinter, sped on. He reached the first pit unscathed and fell into it by the side of the guard. There he stayed long enough to "breathe" himself and to turn over his orders.

No one thought in the strain of that awful time to "hold a watch" on the sprinter. There never has been a doubt since that the world's records before and after were smashed. There were eight of the guard pits, and the race between each was but a repetition of the last, the Indians popping away all the while at the devoted messenger. Johnson left the seventh pit and started for the eighth. His pace showed no sign of abating. Some of the Indians, in following the circling course of the black, had closed in from left to right along the circumference of their own circle in order to mark the messenger's course more perfectly with their sights and shots. The result was a concentration of fire and Johnson, while speeding like a scared jack rabbit, suddenly stumbled and went to earth. He was up again like a flash and on he passed, but his step was lagging a little now. Once more he went down, then up again and once more haltingly and slowly for ten yards, then down again with his face in the sand, and then on for ten yards more, this time on his hands and knees, and then he rolled into the last rifle pit.

Everyone knows of the outcome of the Milk River Ute campaign. How the beleaguered men were relieved and of the march that was necessary to relieve them. Before those men, almost dying of thirst, would one of them go from the barracks to the sparkling river, they went in a mass to rifle pit eight and there picked up Johnson and carried him to the water. Henry Johnson, colored private of Troop K, had only three holes in him, but his sprinting days have been over for a quarter of a century. It is because the soldiers who saw Johnson run forgot to hold a watch on him that another man now claims the world's sprinting record.