Adventures of Black Sam, Oregon "Bull Puncher"

This Story of Historical Interest to Eastern Oregon, An Installment to Be Printed Weekly by The Evening Observer, Is Told by Sam Ayotte to Jack Hunter of The Park.

(FOURTH INSTALLMENT)

"Well, sir, every one of us believed that the four bucks were an envoy from the red warriors bringing an ultimatum demanding either fight or surrender. In either case death seemed to stare us in the face!

"To augment our fright, just then, another hundred or yelling devils were coming on the trail from the west. Here we were between two bands of seemingly hungry scalpers!

"To our surprise this last bunch passed on loping towards the wigwam encampment.

"With the hand the four bucks shaded their eyes from the bright morning sun just rising over the Wall-low-how mountains, extending the other hand pointing across the beautiful Grande Ronde basin.

"First I saw a cloud of dust. Then the largest band of elk I ever saw came in sight. There must have been all of a thousand elk in that band. They came on a trot and when the lead was not over half a mile from us, they stopped and looked at us for about a minute, then they scattered about like sheep feeding on the good grass growing there thick and tall.

"I always thought that Grande Ronde basin was the prettiest spot on the trail between California and Montana. And that morning looking from this warm water lake over miles of green wild fields, dotted with monarchs of the Rockies—the elk bearing tremendously large antlers—extending my view to the ridges and peaks of the Wall-low-how mountains spotted white with granite — I tell you, that the scene was a wonderful one, and for a few minutes I fancied what beautiful homes could be made here. How happy I would be to see my father, mother, brothers and sisters all settled right here. And Lizzie and I would be the king and queen of our domain.

"But here I was, perhaps in a few hours, I would be no more; for I was certain those Indians meant business.

"I was wakened from my reveries by old Jim Carroll who whispered low and said:

"'Boys, let us shoot the four red men and run. We can reach old Van Pelt's camp before they catch us. That's one chance for our lives.'

"In a moment I sized up the situation.

"'Yes, I returned, there is one chance to bring the whole shebang on that little settlement and massacre the women and children. I am not saying that I am not scared, but, Black Sam has never run yet, or put the lives of others in danger trying to save his own hide. I am not a goody sugar plum kind—but I believe in God and Providence. And I believe that if we are to die this way, it is His will. And right now I am inclined to think that no serious thing will happen. Why was it that the other Indians just passed by and did not surround us?"

"Why, Carroll's plan was foolish. Old Van Pelt's camp I imagine was where Island City is now. There was three or four families there. And I didn't want them killed. I turned to the four bucks still watching the elk. I recated my 'charm' and 'counterasign.'

"They laughed and the elder man came forward extending his arm, spoke in Indian:

"'Appomatox shee-shin comstock kee-a-may?'

(Understand we are your friends near. Are you?)

"They all came in our circle and shook hands with us. The old fellow was Chief Aleiya with Appushwa-hite; Timothy and Kooskoos-tas-cut. They had come to buy some tobacco.

"I hurried and gave them a ten pound caddy of Canadian plug Black Jack chewing. They gave me twenty dollars, which I refused, but they insisted upon me to take it. I was near certain that all dangers were passed, but I felt that there might be treachery, although Indians had never played false with me before.

"Aleiya looked at our sick bulls. He spoke to the younger man who loped back to their camp. The chief told me that this was their land from the Lalouse country to the great Wall-low-how, and that we could stay here as long as we wanted. Then the other fellow came back bringing a buffalo skin sack half full of bark juice of some kind. Two of them mixed some with water and gave each bull a drink. Aleiya told me 'Bull all right maybe three days.' That afternoon every one of them was feeding with the elk. Our entire outfit of bulls were cured.

"Then Aleiya invited us to their encampments. We went and we witnessed one of the grandest Indian feasts I ever seen or heard of. They had congregated here to celebrate the weddings of four couples who had taken the advantage of a priest whom they named Father Francois, passing here on his way to the coast. So it proved that instead of war paints, they were decorated in a general pow-wow in which they reveled in all their historical dances for enjoyment.

"There I ate all the food that the Indians eat. Some was fine, while others were simply impossible for a white man. Meat of all description — dried and smoked, broiled and roasted, and there was raw meat—I tasted everything they had. And danced to the tom-toms —we all joined in and made merry. (Here Sam danced around the room with a "Ki-yi Ki-yee song.)

"The next day we brought for presents to the young married couples, a keg of syrup and a sack of corn meal. They seemed to appreciate the gift. An old, old squaw gave us her benediction and presented us with a large bead each for a talisman to carry in our pocket.

"That afternoon a man came riding in our camp. He came right to me and said in the French brogue:

"'Was your namm wan Sam Mayotte?'

"'I answered, yes, my name is Sam Ayotte.'

"'Ma naimn is Sam Mayotte, too. An' I got one letturr she say I got a girl in Nu Yark. Me got girl in ole Quebec, I no un'stand dat.'

"'Speak United States, or else speak French. I can understand both, but I'll be —— if I can understand what you're saying.' I told him; and after that he spoke French.

"He was working for Asa Oldman who, I am pretty sure discovered what is known as the Sturgill Bar Mine at the mouth of Pine creek or near Robinette now. He also was prospecting around what is known as Virtue Flat. Anyway, this man Mayotte had received my letter and my friend Oldman had sent him after me clean from the Snake river and back, just to hand me a letter. But them days a letter was most valuable. It was a letter from home and Lizzie.

"It told me that my mother had died the year before. And Lizzie was taking care of the children until I would return. She begged of me to go home at once for my father was old and feeble and might be taken away any day now that his companion was gone. That gave me the blues so that I had to postpone our departure for two days.

"At first I decided to sell out and go home. Then upon reconsideration, I had set out a goal to achieve. I wanted not less than $10,000 to start a home for Lizzie and I, and all I had would not come to more than $4000. So I decided to stay another year.

"That fall I was heading west again to warmer climate. A caravan of 25 wagons drawn with mules and oxen joined me and we made camp one night at the forks of Powder river.

"We turned our stock loose to graze. I had a bull that I called 'Tom' who was rather frisky and I turned him and his mate yoked together. About an hour afterwards, we heard the two bulls bawling and crashing through the brush. They soon appeared coming right for camp. Hanging to Tom's neck was a mountain lion. At once I saw what the matter was. The lion was caught in some way in the low over the neck. This was about the most exciting thing for a little while I have ever witnessed. Women and children screamed and hid themselves; even some of the men were scared. But some of us had to help the poor bulls. So I took my good stick and managed 'Jip' the off bull to stand still and hold Tommy. And the captain of the immigrants, Daniel Fisk killed it with a pole axe.

"You see, the lion had jumped on Tom's neck and had inserted one paw between the thick part of the neck and the bow. He then had taken a strong hold with his claws through the thick hide and around the big cord of the bull's neck. Then it seemed as if the fool didn't know enough to release his grip. If he had done so he would have been free at once. But he hung on and it was an impossibility for it to get loose. And we couldn't very well shoot it, for fear of killing the ox too. So Fisk who was afraid of nothing, used the axe on him. But, let me tell you that was some mountain lion experience that I will never forget.

"This was the fall of 1859, and Mrs. Fisk had a book called Uncle Tom's Cabin. A school marm by the name of Henrietta Spaulding, was with the party. She claimed to be a niece of H. H. Spaulding, the missionary. Anyway she read that book some every evening we camped until we reached Rutter creek on the Umatilla. They stopped there and I proceeded on.

"Well, sir, that book told me a lot about this slave business. And I decided right there if ever there was a war like Dan Fisk said there was going to be, I would go as fast as I could.

"In the spring of 1860 I came in company with four old forty-niners who were going east after their folks to come back and settle somewhere in Oregon. They were looking over the country as they went to locate a suitable place.

"They were fine old fellows and had plenty of money. Their names were Conley, Newlin, Hanson and Van Order. Newlin told me that he was the brother of the Newlin who brought the first wagon to the Columbia river in 1840. I always heard before that Marcus Whitman had crossed the first wagon over the Blue mountains. But this man Newlin told me that Whitman had left his wagon at Fort Boise.

"I had good company until I reached Payette. There they went on to Fort Hall, where they intended to catch the stage coach.

"I'll never forget them old fellows, for I learned more about the conditions of the country from them than I ever did before. Old Conley was a Tennessean and Newlin, I believe, was from Illinois and Van Order was from Pennsylvania; Hanson, I don't remember where he came from. However, Conley and Hanson were strong for slavery, while Newlin and Van Order were great Lincoln fellows. They would come near fighting sometimes, but like true old pioneers always ended the argument in a friendly way.

"I wouldn't say anything, but I was body and soul with Lincoln. And these four men were sure that war was inevitable. I was sure also that if it happened I would go and fight for the union.

"These old fellows had brought many presents for folks, friends and relations they had along the road. Among many things, four pigs, two dozen chickens and eight sheep. Besides they had 12 horses and eight mules. And potatoes, wheat, oats and different garden seeds. Sugar, coffee and molasses and cheese with other kinds of food. They also had a supply of tobacco and whiskey. All was distributed along the route mostly from La Grande to the Snake river.

"Old La Grande was sprouting up pretty fast in 1860, and there the eight sheep were unloaded and given to two families. The first sheep to come in the country. They were Merinos and in fine condition. Four of them were presented to Mrs. Jack Sheppard by Jesse Conley. I never saw kids so tickled as I watched them and helped them a little while playing with the sheep that were regular pets. The other four were given to a family by the name of Anthony.

"It was on this trip, I believe, that I came closer to dying, by being scalped alive. We made camp on Burnt river, near a small settlement where Durkee is. I believe they called it Durkee then. Newlin broke a small looking glass after supper. He at once said that someone in the bunch would have some misfortune. I laughed at him. I never was superstitious. There was an old fellow, a trapper by the name of Valdez, camped just a little ways down the river. I wanted to see him for a friendly chat. So a young Swede who was helping Newlin with his horses came with me. We reached the camp just after sunset. Along about 10 o'clock I suggested of going back. Valdez insisted to talk some more and that we could stay with him all night going back early morning in the daylight. So I stayed for a while, but somehow I was determined to go back to our camp that night, I had to get up so early in the morning tending my bulls. Peterson decided to stay with old Valdez. I came back to camp and went to bed.

"The next morning Peterson didn't show up. We wondered why. So we started and coming to the trail leading to Valdez, we stopped and went to the camp to inquire about Peterson. We found both of them dead on the floor with their heads skinned from the top clean to the neck!

"They had been scalped in bed as we could see and died in torture rolling off on the floor.

"Young Peterson had about $200 and that was gone. The old man was supposed to have lots of gold dust. The cabin was ransacked from one end to the other.

"Around the cabin there was sand spots and we saw two or three tracks of an exceptionally large moccasin. Van Order measured it with his hands. It was fully three hands across, about 21 inches long!

"This was undoubtedly 'Big Moccasin' the halfbreed. His real name was Alexis Payette a French Canadian halfbreed and a terror. He was killed later so I have heard since.

"Well sir, we passed another day there with painful duties. While we buried the two victims Van Order and Conley tracked the bandit for some miles but he was going straight for the mountains.

"Now was Newlin right about his looking glass prophecy? And how was it that I didn't stay there that night?

"Well, sir, at Payette the four old fellows had done away with most of their heavy freight and needed me no longer. A fellow by the name of Alec Spencer hired me to take his whole outfit to the Grande Ronde near the Cove. Spencer was about 45 and a hard looker. They told me he was a fighter, too, a sort of bully. He didn't have a very good reputation around there. They said that he had raised a patch of corn and had stolen some more making it all in corn juice to sell to the Indians. Anyway I took him, for he paid me a good price. He had sent his wife and kids ahead with horses and he and a young fellow named Staples came along with outfit. He had about fifty gallons of home spun whiskey. He had horses, two pigs and a goat. About forty odd chickens in a large coop and a lot of old traps which loaded my wagon to the limit.

"Between Deadman's Pass and Emmigrant's Spring one of my wagons broke down. We had to stop for repairs. There were eight other fellows all coming to investigate Grande Ronde for locations.

"Along in the evening an old Indian and his squaw with a granddaughter halfbreed came to our camp. He showed me papers telling that he was a peaceful good old Indian named Ip-sut-am-moose asking to be treated with courtesy. The papers were signed by W. H. Tappan, agent; and William Craig, interpreter, from Fort Stevens in the Lapwai valley. (Walla Walla, Wash.)

"He asked me if he could camp near us. I told him, 'Certainly.' The granddaughter's name was Susie Blue Bird. She was about eighteen and as pretty a girl as anyone wanted to see.

"I heard Spencer pass remarks about her that I didn't like a little bit. And after supper I and Spencer with his hired man Staples went to see the Indians. Spencer brought a bottle along and offered them a drink. But the old fellow refused saying that he was a good Christian and didn't drink.

"The old Indians who could speak good French and quite a talker told me a new story about the Whitman massacre. He said that not long after Whitman had come among them in 1836, about 200 Indians had died from a queer disease. So they had named the Doctor Whitman, 'Pa-yu-wet' (Sickness); and they were sure that his medicine was doing the killing. Then a halfbreed from the East named Lewis had told them he had heard Doctor Whitman say that this was the easiest way to kill them off to get their land. So they decided to test his medicine for themselves. They gave some of it to three Indians. Two of them were sick and one was in perfect health. And the three of them died shortly after. So they decided to kill the whole outfit. They went over there and asked for medicines. While the doctor was waiting on one of them, another with a tomahawk hid under his blanket hit him over the head. Then they killed Mrs. Whitman and eight other American white men. He said that the whole bunch Catholics and Protestants were all for killing him and Spaulding.

"While he was telling me his stories I noticed that Spencer and Staples were drinking freely of that corn juice. And I also seen Spencer trying several times to caress Susie. She finally went to bed farther away from him. When

(Continued on page 7)

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