

Ten Years' Trial

By Gen. CHARLES KING

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to the left lung lines of covering soldiers were sweeping to and beyond the gray walls, where the Tagals were still desperately battling to save their batteries. Two battalions of the Columbias, their colonel in their midst, were dashing straight at the insurgent works along the Guadeloupe road. The right wing of the Evergreens, with ringing cheer, had enveloped the native section of the pretty suburban town and were crashing through bamboo and nipa, fighting their heroic way straight for the Plaza and the river bank beyond, rolling up the yelling bands of brown men, well nigh panic-stricken at the dash and vigor of the American dragoon. Across the Concordia, at the heels of the brigade commander, the Washoes had carried their colors, all book rolls on the subject thrown with the silken folds to the winds of the morning, and then in magnificent, irresistible charge bore down with the bayonet on the redoubts and earthworks toward the river and side by side with the Evergreen left and two of the reserve companies of the Columbias, had swept the field like a cyclone, whirling the yelling rebels into the stream, tumbling over guns, gunners and crouching foes until in a mad chorus of exultant cheers they lined up at the bank over which in terror scores of their tormentors of the earlier hours had plunged in hopes of reaching the opposite shore. Along the parapets, among the bamboo thickets, under the walls of the old gray convent and everywhere across the open field the dead and wounded lay in little pools of brownish red, brave lads in blue and tumbled heaps of stricken foemen, their loose, light uniforms all stained and soaked with gore.

Not until after five long hours of patient endurance had the brigade received the longed for, prayed for word to advance, and the pent up rage for battle burst like a torrent on an astonished foe swept helplessly before it. Foremost in the magnificent charge of his cheering men, Langdon, sword in hand, had leaped among the guns at the river redoubt, his cheek seamed by the stinging lash of a bullet, his hat brim torn by the desperate lunge of a bolo, the last thrust of a cursing little Tagal officer fighting like a rat in a corner, for the bayonet of a lusty ser-

gent had transfixed him on the spot. Close under the outer works a little squad of men had gathered about the stricken form of the gallant old major, dying, sword in hand and with almost a smile on his lips as Langdon knelt and raised the grizzled head and stanch the blood that welled from a mortal wound. Victory brilliant, complete, decisive, had rewarded their determined assault, the warm handclasp, the enthusiastic praise of the brigade commander, his "Gloriously done, Langdon!" bringing cheer after cheer from the exultant battalions, but the heart of the colonel was sore. It was hard to lose such lives as these that were ebbing away there in all the radiance of the morning sunshine. It was sad to part with this trusted and loyal subordinate. It was bitter to think that that other and older friend who had never swerved in sorrow and adversity now lay dead to the tidings of this most soldierly achievement—that Melville might never know how thorough had been Langdon's indication of the faith and trust reposed in him. Silently, sadly, the Washoes bore the lying major back to the walls of the old convent within the lines. Reverently they began the gathering up of the dead, and tenderly, these stout hearted fellows, they strove to minister to the wounded, friend and foe alike, while cowed, sootling, silent, the luckless prisoners were swept up from the curving shores, from under the floors of native huts, from the ditches and drains along the village walls. Away out to the right front, up the river road toward Guadeloupe, the pursuing Columbias were still volleys at Ricart's rear guard, what there was left of it, but Santa Ana, with all its stores of ammunition and supplies, was the prize of the brigade, and the veteran general of division, riding out to snare the scene and congratulate the victors, stopped to shake hands with Langdon and add his word of praise and compliment and to inquire as to his wound. "Only a pin scratch, general, that wouldn't hurt at all if I could know there was no truth in the story that General Melville is killed."

"Oh, I won't believe it!" said the chief. "You're only authority and mine is Colonel Nathan, and Nathan's only authority is that latch of the past week. They had it that you were mortally hit and half your regiment killed. Where is Colonel Nathan, anyhow?" "I don't know, sir," answered Langdon guardedly. "I haven't seen him since daybreak." The major general turned in saddle and looked back across the bloody field toward the roofs of Pao glistening between him and the whs towers of Manila, another mile beyond. The pale blue clouds had drifted away. In their place dense volumes of black smoke were beginning to roll skyward from three or four points in the thronging suburb, and the crackle of burning bamboo sounded like a distant funeral.

They've been firing on our wounded and ambulances from the church and native houses," said the general briefly. He was thinking—he couldn't help it—of the words of two battery officers he had overheard as he stood at the knoll watching the triumphant advance of his division. Rodney May was the first speaker, and the battery commander had heard without either reproof or dissent.

"It's just what Eric said at Pawnee ten years ago. He has come steadily up and Nathan gone steadily down in the good opinion of every square man in the regiment. Yesterday they were on a level as far as rank goes; today I'm letting Langdon's name go in for brevet and Nathan's won't be heard of."

"Where on earth is Colonel Nathan?" asked the brigade commander as he reined in on the Plaza under the walls of the great church where two companies of the Columbias were fanning their hot faces with their broad brimmed hats, and the men looked at each other and grinned.

"Where on earth is Colonel Nathan?" again demanded the division chief as he and the brigadier rode through the smoke of blazing nipa huts from whose walls the lurking Tagal rifles had shot down but a few moments before attendants of the wounded, friend and foe alike. A surgeon, looking up from the stretcher over which he was bending, ducked his head toward distant Pao.

"Away back yonder, colonel. You won't find him this side of the Concordia." And the two seniors exchanged glances. Not until out of range of his tensing ears was another word spoken. Then the division commander began to free himself of his impressions.

"When the story of this day's work is told, your Washoes and westerners, especially Langdon, will be glorified," said he, "but what shall be said of Nathan?"

meanly passing over his own. A different to think over this. It is all so different." And Melville stole away and left him with the brief oriental twilight just shrouding the skies.

CHAPTER XX. The summer had come and gone. The state regiments were summoned home for muster out, and thrice their number in regulars and national volunteers were gone or going to Manila. Only in small bodies and rather as banditti or guerrillas were the enemy encountered. The lightning dashes of the cavalry north and south in Luzon and the tireless scouts and marches of the infantry had scattered the insurgents in every direction. The war had dwindled to a campaign of detachments, "like old Arizona days," as the troopers put it, and, full of honors and the consciousness of duty faithfully done, with thin ranks and in many instances thin, grant ranks, the soldiery of the wide west was sailing back across the seas and being welcomed with tumultuous acclamations at San Francisco. The Columbias mourned the loss of many a gallant lad laid buried in the Philippines, but parted without perceptible emotion with their original lieutenant colonel, Nathan resigned the silver leaves long months before they fought their last fight, preferring brief garrison duty to the march of a lieutenant colonel of the United States.

Only a mere dozen of the junior officers attended that feast. It happened delectably despite the lavish flow of wine. Every field officer "regretted," and certain of the captains possibly unshed in the ways of society never even acknowledged the courtesy. Major Train, who had been promoted lieutenant colonel on Nathan's resignation, would not even notice him. The colonel's greeting was gruff and distant. Some of the men laughed about when Nathan rode over to camp, and the situation was the talk of the great assemblage of returning volunteers when in came the transport with the war-worn Washoes. Eric Langdon at their head, simultaneously greeted by the throng the day they disembarked. And Nathan asked for leave of absence. In civilian dress and accompanied by his wife and a single servant, he drove to the ferry unnoted of the cheering crowds that greet the air with shouts for Langdon and his devoted men.

It took fall a fortnight to complete the examinations and all the preliminary papers before the final muster out of the brave band of brothers they had become. There were returning regiments in whose membership there lived the ranklings of discord and jealousy, but the Washoes had put no creed and no recriminations. They believed in God, they loved their country, and they swore by Eric Langdon. The governor and his staff came by special train from the northeast to meet them on their return, and Crosswell, too, was there, and both their seniors and many men with the bees of possible offices buzzing in their bonnets, and all of these had much to say in public and in all their many speeches to the listening warriors in praise of their heroic colonel, the one thing sure to evoke unshouting applause and much to say in private to that silent soldier himself. The burden of their united song was a source of keen and emotional delight to Langdon and to Melville, who, with his household, was waiting orders of the war department at the Colonial. It would be so very much better for Langdon, said all these statesmen, to accept the high commission they proposed obtaining for him in the regular service than to think of entering political life, which they could truthfully assure him was so sadly uncertain and full of disappointments.

Langdon listened with the same quizzical smile, but said very little. He knew perfectly well that all Washoes couldn't change the laws and that nothing short of a special act of congress could place him in the army with any rank he cared to accept. He had been tendered the colonelcy of one of the new regiments, but the surgeons shook their heads. Crosswell clamored for his return to the office. The Washoe Zerph, that was at odds with the governor, swung out its banner to the breeze with "For Governor, General Eric Langdon, the Hero of Manila," irrespective of the fact that there had been a hundred or more equally heroic and as little versed in politics. It was "done for delectation," as the governor's henchmen took pains to assure Langdon, but most people throughout the state and the regiment to a man took it seriously, and their own names and names were sorely worried. There is nothing so sure to stir things the wrong way for all parties and principally for himself as the injection of the martial hero into politics. Langdon was for announcing in so many words that he would never permit the use of his name, but Crosswell, the veteran of a dozen campaigns, bound him to silence. "Think what you please, do what you please, when the time comes, but meanwhile keep your own counsel. No matter if you don't want the governorship or any civil office, let 'em think you do. It's the surest way to get what you do want." The whole state delegation in congress, the governor and his backers were clamoring by wire for Langdon's immediate promotion to the grade of brigadier general. That would insure his going back to the Philippines and being far out of the field when conditions were in order. But Washoe is too many hundreds of miles from Washington for them to impetrate in person, and letters and telegrams are far easier to answer than personal pleas, and "influence," said Melville, "is inversely as the square of the distance." The brevet of the silver star was wired without much objection at the war office, and the Washoes cheered with joy over the news that for conspicuous bravery in half a dozen actions, including Baliga-

bangsang, where he was severely wounded, their colonel was brevetted a general.

It was relief at night to get away from the thronging camp and the importunities of statecraft and to find refuge at Melville's quiet, cozy suite of rooms at the handsome old hotel. Lips that smiled and eyes that shone were ever there to welcome him and with the general he could talk unreservedly. Neither by education nor temperament was he fitted for political life. His intrigues and devices were detestable to him, his associations galling. As a lawyer he had seen—had had to see—much of the chicanery with which the whole edifice is surrounded. He had no ambition in that direction. His law practice had begun to be lucrative before the outbreak of the war and had been to become more so as soon as he could resume work. All the old debts, with interest, had long since been paid. He had bought land and was drawing plans for a pretty home when the trumpets sounded to arms. He had even begun to dream of a chateau for that estate. Certain batteries of the old regiment were stationed in the harbor, and officers who were his contemporaries in the old days at Pawnee, and in the juniors both, now came to his disciplined, well ordered camp and looked with appreciative eyes upon those staid, seasoned battalions and envied him his experience and opportunities. Torrance had got his double bars at last and gone on to Manila as the last of the old regiment were sent on to the soldier in his sought reconciliation with the man who had won such honors in the campaign. The full realization of the wrong he had done Langdon long since dawned upon him, and yet how horribly awkward was his position! Other men in the regiment who had quarreled with their kind and wanted to end the strain of long misunderstanding could go to Melville, were of some advice, and sympathetic. Melville would help him in any way others only withheld. But Torrance was barred. Melville was the only man to whom he could not go for in his rancor he had so far forgotten himself and what was due a woman as to name one of Melville's household in his denunciation of his brother lieutenant.

Langdon had cordially greeted and received certain of the old regiment who had held about in his days of trouble, but when he came to Melville, he told him of their contribution and regret. They had wronged only Langdon. Torrance had spoken disdainfully of a brave girl whose offense in the eyes of the small mob element at Pawnee was that she stood by the sorrowing man and thought him deservingly dead, and now would Langdon be apt to forgive an affront to Ethel Graham? Mrs. Torrance, after the new captain sailed for Manila, wished to take rooms with these pleasant army people at their favorite cantinero. She loved his house, but everybody knew her husband had been knocked flat by Langdon for impertinent mention of Miss Graham, and, though it happened ten years before, the breach had never been healed. Torrance had never sought pardon. How could she go there? The Washoes were taking the mountain air up at Tahoe, waiting for the volunteers to disperse, but the major's leave was for only two weeks. The Washoes were still in camp and the day of muster out not yet determined. The governor and his satellites were now less clamorous for speedy settlement of their papers and somewhat given to suggestion that, after all, "it wouldn't pay for the regiment to come to the capital. They wouldn't have their arms and their equipments, etc., all having to be turned in at the Presidio, so it would hardly be like a military parade. All things considered, it would be just as well for the boys to scatter at Frisco and each choose his own homeward way." So the military authorities bent their energies toward getting rid of those regiments whose staymen were clamorous, and thus it happened that the Washoes returned while the Washoes were still in camp, and it might have been better had that leave been extended.

To be continued

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