

A DAY WITH COLONEL W. F. CLOUD

PROLOGUE

In the drama of the Civil War, a performance of Colonel Cloud will probably become of historic interest when the history of the Cherokee People shall have been fully written.

When the Indian Expedition returned from Flat Rock, about twelve miles above Fort Gibson to Cabin Creek in July, 1862, Colonel Cloud, who had just joined us with his regiment from an expedition into Western Kansas against hostile Indians, was detached with his command to go to Tahlequah and bring out Chief John Ross and the archives of the Cherokee Nation.

This duty he performed with delicacy and tact, and when the Chief with his entourage of a dozen or so prominent men of the Nation, as Councilors, Judges, Attaches, and their families, in carriages joined us at Cabin Creek, the Colonel and his command were assigned as a special escort to the distinguished caravan to Fort Scott.

This was a time of grim-visaged war and there was no particular ceremony for the occasion when the Chief, his Councilors and Attaches came to us, but all were treated with the distinguished consideration due them, for many of us viewed it as more than a passing event of the great struggle that was being contested on a thousand fields. Here was the head of a Nation with all his advisers and the archives of his people being removed from the country because they were too weak and helpless to protect themselves against the wishes of either of powerful friends who were championing their rights and interests.

He Relates Some Humorous Incidents

I had read of Colonel Cloud's recent visit to Mexico, and shortly after his return I met him and he told me that while in that country he had collected considerable material which he was going to use in a book which he was preparing for publication, the title of which would be "Mexico and Mexican Politics," or "Mexico under the X-Ray."

The Colonel had a standing invitation to visit me in my

home in Kansas City, Kansas, and to bring with him his manuscript and spend the day with me and to compare notes in regard to the work we were employed upon in our leisure.

He accepted my invitation and found it convenient on June 3, 1895, to come over from Kansas City, Mo., and bring with him his manuscript on Mexico and Mexican Politics and spend the day with me and take dinner with us.

I knew he had been a Methodist minister, interesting in conversation and full of anecdotes and incidents connected with civil and military life, and having served in the same army, "*The Army of the Border*," and "*The Army of the Frontier*," during the Civil War, our conversation naturally drifted into matters concerning the campaigns in which we participated.

He was one of the most active and energetic cavalry officers in our army in this region. Most of the time he commanded a brigade or military district and had touched elbows with many of the commanders of these armies. He was full of information in regard to the large operations of our army from the battle of Wilson Creek down to the Great Price Raid through Arkansas and Missouri in September and October 1864; he was familiar with many humorous incidents and had a natural gift in relating them; he wore long dark hair that touched his shoulders, during the war and afterward; his dashing appearance made him a familiar figure in the *Army of the Border*, and in *The Army of the Frontier* during the war period.

During his visit, he read to me several chapters of his manuscript on "Mexico and Mexican Politics," or as he expressed it, turning the X-Ray on Mexico and Mexican Politics, and we commented on the policy of President Diaz, who was serving his third or fourth term as President of the Republic, and we doubted the methods by which he was perpetuating himself in office; we did not believe that the people of this country would stand for a President being elected for a third or fourth term, although General Grant, the most popular hero we have ever had, failed in his aspirations to receive a nomination for a third term.

From the information Colonel Cloud obtained while in Mexico, he was impressed that the Mexican President was a man of great force of character, and was inclined to

praise him for his success in maintaining order in the government of so turbulent a people; but admitting the President's many excellent qualities as an executive, it seemed to me that he was in reality a dictator, and that he was establishing a precedent that would in time bring violence and civil war to the Mexican Republic. Some of the chapters of his work dealt with biographical sketches of the great men of Mexico and of their struggles in giving the country' independence after European powers had sought to impose upon Maximilian, a foreign prince supported by foreign bayonets.

Having passed in review the principal chapters of the manuscript of his book, our conversation turned to the events and incidents of the Civil War which came under our observation, and as I was at work on Volume II of my *Civil War on the Border*, I ventured to ask him to illuminate some points on the capture of Fort Smith, in which he took a prominent part under General Blunt in September, 1863. He had taken a prominent part in the military operations over nearly all the territory covered by my work, and I was glad to have the opportunity of inviting him to criticise or illuminate certain points on which I knew he had accurate and original information. He had read my Volume I of *The Civil War on the Border*, dealing with the military operations in the region covered during the years 1861-62,—a region I had designated the "Border," meaning the western parts of Missouri and Arkansas, and the eastern parts of Kansas and the Indian Territory, and of course our discussion touched on the events and incidents described in Volume I, from the battles of Carthage and Wilson Creek, down to the battle of Prairie Grove, as well as the description of the operations I was preparing for Volume II, in nearly all of which I participated.

The Colonel was a Major in the Second Kansas Infantry Volunteers and commanded the regiment after the fall of Colonel Mitchell and the death of General Lyon at Wilson Creek, and was not only familiar with the military operations over the territory covered by my work, but was also familiar with the topography of the country from having marched over it many times during the different campaigns.

As the official reports of the minor military operations over the territory covered by my work, were very incom-

plete, I would probably have profited by meeting and conferring with the Colonel while preparing my first volume. His prominent position as an officer of the army during the war, had brought him in contact with many of the prominent men of Kansas, as well as with prominent officers of the army, and he could talk interestingly of them as well as of incidents of the war; he knew much of their strength and weaknesses of character; he was popular with the army, for he always seemed to be full of good humor and ready to relate humorous incidents that put others about him in light-hearted moods.

In reviewing the Paririe Grove campaign, ending in the capture of Van Buren and General Hindman's steamboats and cargoes of supplies, he related an amusing incident that did not get into the official reports and was not mentioned by the Press correspondents who were sometimes with our army in the field, but not very often.

After driving the Confederates from Dripping Springs and entering Van Buren on the heels of the flying foe, Colonel Cloud led a column down the north side of the Arkansas River three or four miles for the purpose of cutting off several steamboats that were endeavoring to escape down the river and succeeded in capturing them at a point where the channel was near the north bank and brought them back up to the city with their cargoes of corn and sugar and other supplies for the Confederate army then encamped on the south side of the river. While employed in this part of the operations he discovered indications of a Confederate camp on the south side of the river four or five miles below Van Buren, but could not determine how large a force there was in it, whether it was the main part of General Hindman's army, or only a detachment of a brigade or division. After the artillery firing across the river at Van Buren between the belligerent forces had died away with its reverberating echoes in the dusk of the evening and it was getting too dark for the Confederates to observe the movements of the Federal forces, the Colonel requested and obtained permission from General Blunt to take a hundred or so mounted men and a section of Captain Allen's First Kansas Battery of Rifled Ten pounder Parrott guns and march down on the north bank of the river and open fire upon the Confederate camp, which he

had discovered earlier in the evening. With his small force he reached a point on the river opposite the Confederate encampment without having been discovered by the enemy, for he marched with as little noise as possible, hoping to surprise the Confederates. Halting his command, he looked over the river, which was about half a mile wide at that point, to observe whether he could see any movement of troops in the encampment on the other side, for it was quite dark. He soon discovered a man on the opposite shore and shouted to him, "Whose command is that over there? Are there any Feds in the neighborhood?" The man shouted back the name of the command and stated the Feds were in Van Buren, and asked the Colonel where he had come from, and he replied from Van Buren.

This further conversation between them took place at long range over the river:

Confederate: Where did you come from?

Colonel Cloud: Van Buren.

Confederate: How did you come down?

Colonel Cloud: Through the woods. Where is Gen. Hindman?

Confederate: At Fort Smith fighting the Feds.

Colonel Cloud: Is there any way I can get over the river?

Confederate: I have a skiff. Can your horse swim? Shall I bring the skiff over for you?

Colonel Cloud: No, I will send over, and then turning to Lieutenant Tenney who had his guns in position, directed him to open fire upon the Confederate camp, and his gunners who were in their proper places, pulled the lanyards, and the guns belched forth fire and shot and shell with a terrific roar in the stillness of the night, sending elongated percussion shells singing through the air and over the Confederate camp, striking the ground and ricocheting and doing damage in camp and two or three miles beyond.

The roar of the guns had hardly died away when there came back over the water, the reply from the Confederate on the opposite shore, "If that's what you are going to send over, you can go to Hades."

When the Colonel was in the neighborhood some time afterward, he found that one of the shells from his guns had

struck a house about three miles south of the river and exploded, a piece of it striking and burying itself in it; that another shell exploded doing damage to a man's buggy as he was driving along the road several miles from the scene of action.

The Colonel related another humorous incident that came under his observation on returning from Little Rock to Fort Smith the latter part of September 1863. He made the march to open communications between the Federal forces of General Steel and General Blunt. After General Blunt maneuvered the Confederate forces under General Cabell out of Fort Smith, ending in the fight at Backbone Mountain, the Federal forces marched into the city unopposed and Colonel Cloud was placed in command of the Post, General Blunt having become ill.

The occupation of Fort Smith by the Federal forces practically closed aggressive operations in Western Arkansas and the Indian Territory until the determination of the operations under Federal General Steel, which had for their objective the occupation of Little Rock, the capital of the State, which General Price had fortified and was attempting to hold.

At that time the country along the Arkansas River between Fort Smith and Little Rock was occupied by the Confederate forces, and as there was no telegraphic communication between Generals Blunt and Steel, Colonel Cloud obtained permission from General Blunt to take a battalion of cavalry and a section of artillery, and march down on the north side of the river until he came in touch with General Steel's forces. The march was made without any serious opposition from Southern guerrillas, and on arrival at Little Rock with his small command, found that General Steel had driven General Price out and entered the city September 1st, the same day the Federal forces had marched into Fort Smith. Of course General Steel was delighted with the Colonel's success in establishing communications between the Federal forces occupying the two most important positions in the State, the central and western parts, and giving the Federal forces control of the Arkansas River, which would enable them to transport supplies by steamboats for troops at Fort Smith and contiguous territory, instead of by wagon trains from Fort Scott, a distance of nearly three hundred miles,

part of the route over a rough region, subject to almost constant attacks by Southern bandits.

But on his march down the river, the Colonel found that the news of the Federal occupation of Fort Smith had spread through the country, and near Dardanelle he was joined by about three hundred Union men, who were assembled on one day's notice, cheering and enthusiastic for the Union, and an odd feature of it all was, that several officers and about one hundred of these men had opposed him in the action at Backbone Mountain only a few days before, some of them still wearing the Confederate uniform and Confederate beltplates. These unionists were organized into six companies, and with this re-enforcement he continued his march to Dardanelle, and on arriving there found a Confederate force under Colonel Stirman, Arkansas cavalry, estimated at one thousand strong, with four pieces of artillery.

He made a vigorous attack upon this force and after nearly three hours fighting the Confederates retreated down the river, leaving two hundred head of cattle and a large amount of wheat and flour to fall into his hands, besides capturing one Captain and twenty privates as prisoners.

The Colonel was a man easily approachable, stood little on his dignity as a commanding officer, mingled freely with all classes, chatted pleasantly to all who came to him, and made them feel that all were equally interested in the Union cause, which championed the rights of the plain people, and he easily won their respect and confidence. His position as commander of regiment, and sometimes of a brigade or a district, had brought him in close relations with commanding generals and prominent men, and his wide experience and keen observations had given him command of language, so that he could make an interesting address on impromptu occasions, nearly always introducing a few humorous incidents.

He was at Dardanelle three days; he was the first Federal officer who had been there during the war, and as his fame had out-traveled his movements, a committee of Unionists called on him and desired to know if he could find it convenient to address them at a meeting arranged for that evening, and he accepted the invitation, and when the people assembled, he was introduced to the audience by a prominent

Union man of that section, who, in a few introductory remarks, stated that the people were glad to have the opportunity of honoring and hearing from him; that they had heard of his achievements in the military operations in Southwest Missouri, Northwest Arkansas and the Indian Territory for more than a year; that it was a keen pleasure to have so distinguished an officer of the Union among them, and that he could probably give them accurate information in regard to important events in recent operations.

On rising to speak, the Colonel thanked the chairman for the complimentary remarks he had made, and acknowledged and appreciated the distinguished honor the Unionists had conferred upon him by inviting him to speak, and of the pleasure it gave him to find so many Unionists in that part of the State; that henceforward they could rely on the Government to assist and support them in their struggle for liberty and justice, and he hoped that it might have their loyal co-operation.

Continuing his address he went on to relate recent events of importance in the operations of the army. He told his audience he had just received information that Federal General Steel had captured Little Rock and that General Price's army was in full retreat in the direction of Arkadelphia; that General Blunt in his recent operations had crossed the Arkansas River at Fort Gibson and defeated Confederate Generals Steel and Cooper at Elk Creek, Indian Territory, and pursued them to Boggy Depot, captured their supply depots at Northfork and Perryville, and then turned upon General Cabell and drove him from Fort Smith and defeated him at Backbone Mountain.

He touched upon the persistent efforts of Southern leaders to misrepresent Union officers and soldiers and their ideals and characters, to make the Southern people bitter toward them without any justification, and related an incident that came under his notice at Fort Smith where he was boarding in a private family; that the lady, the boarding house keeper or hostess with whom he boarded, he knew was a strong Southern sympathizer, but treated him with courtesy and proper consideration; that he made it a point to make the people feel at ease in all business relations with him, when they knew as a matter of fact his "mailed fist" could make

them feel very uncomfortable; that a niece of the lady with whom he boarded frequently came over to see her, and was introduced to him, and was not slow in letting him know of her bitter feelings towards all Northern men, and told him she would soon want a permit and pass to go south; that she could not live under Yankee rule.

The Colonel told the audience that he took her railery good-naturedly, and replied that he would give her a permit to go South when she desired it, but added that she might like the Federals better when she got better acquainted with them; that she admitted she might if they were all as nice and gentlemanly as he, but did not think she could stand it long to live under Federal authority. He further told his audience that he thought no more about the matter until a short time afterward when his hostess invited him to a wedding on a certain evening, and on inquiring in regard to the parties, was told that one of the contracting parties, the lady, the bride-to-be, was her niece, who was so determined on going South when the Federal troops came in, and that the groom was a soldier in his command, and that he graciously accepted the invitation, attended the wedding and kissed and danced with the bride, which brought hearty applause.

The Colonel continued his march from Dardanelle to Little Rock and after a conference with General Steel, a rest for two days and replenishing his commissariat, he started on his return march to Fort Smith, a distance of two hundred miles, and it was on this return march that another incident attracted his attention. Two of his men who had reputations of being somewhat reckless, and who usually scouted and foraged on his flanks a mile or so off at times, when he arrived at Lewisburg on the river, were noticed by their comrades driving into town with a two-horse team with two women in the wagon, and one of his men informed him that the two men were going to marry the two women whom they had picked up in the country. He paid little attention to the matter at the time, but later in the day, a minister or preacher in the town came to him and stated the two couples, two soldiers of his command, wanted to get married and desired to know if he, the Colonel, had any objection to the ceremony being performed. The Colonel politely replied he had no desire to interfere with the people in such matters, and that

his side in the war was in favor of the Union. When informed that the prospective grooms were soldiers of his command the Colonel asked, "Are the men who wish to get married, the two men who drove into town to-day with the two women in the wagon?" "They were the same men," the minister replied, and Colonel Cloud gave his consent, and the matrimonial knot was at once tied.

Another soldier of his command who was somewhat of a wag, and was present to witness the marriage, when the parties rose to have the ceremony performed, stood up with them and said in military fashion, "Right dress, eyes to the front; this is a military wedding." Before performing the ceremony the minister asked each of the parties their names so that he could refer to them in pronouncing the ceremony and benediction, and turning to one of the men, asked him the name of his intended bride and he replied that he did not know her name, nor which one of the women he was to have, as he had met them only that day. The same was asked of the other groom-to-be, and each of the women with about the same reply, the contracting parties not having ascertained each other's names, nor decided which parties would be united with which. The women, however, soon decided each, which man she would take, which was acquiesced in by the men, and the ceremony was duly performed and all seemed happy and satisfied. This seemed to be love at first sight; the soldiers took their wives with them on to Fort Smith, and lived with them during the remainder of their service and for many years after the war when they returned to Kansas, the Colonel permitting the women to live with their husbands in the company as laundresses.

This short courtship in which the parties agreed to take each other for better or worse, before they knew each other's names, or before they knew anything about each other's antecedents, resulted in unions that were more lasting than many unions that took place after years of courtship and under more favorable conditions.

Our army operations in the Southern States brought out some very humorous incidents relating to matrimonial ventures, and the grotesque situations growing out of some of them would doubtless draw a smile from those who are usually almost impervious to humor.

These unions of Federal soldiers with Southern girls of strong Southern sympathies, were usually as happy and lasting as where both parties were of the same political faith. A Southern girl who married a Federal soldier might defend the South after her marriage to him, but it was not that kind of defence that displayed disloyalty to the Union, and she was always ready to defend her husband against unjust remarks when they were assailed by Southern friends. Such unions were not to be deprecated, for they often had the effect of impressing upon the minds of ultra Southerners that our army was made up of young men who were not to be outdone in manliness, courage and chivalrous conduct towards women, even in the country of the enemy. Nearly all the soldiers of the Union army were young men of the age to be easily attracted by the charms of the opposite sex, even if they were in the enemy's country. When they were furnished with their regular uniforms, regular allowance of clothing and rations, and required to observe the proper sanitary regulations, the discipline of the service made them appear to good advantage, in fact as a fine looking lot of young fellows and not likely to be spurned by the young women who had never seen their equals in ideals of young men. The country people of Arkansas, even before the war, generally wore a very plain, coarse clothing, usually colored brown or dingy with native barks, and during the war it was of a still coarser kind worn by the men folk, often worn to tatters and repaired with patches upon patches and lacking in neatness and tidiness.

—WILEY BRITTON,
Author of *The Civil War on the Border*,
Two Volumes.