

## THE ARMY OF THE CALLAHAN

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ing Flitter Bill and the gaping crowd a military salute and started for the yawning mouth of the Gap—riding with shoulders squared and chin well in—riding as should ride the commander of the Army of the Callahan.

Flitter Bill dropped his blinking eyes to the paper in his hand that bore the commission of Jefferson Davis and the Confederate States of America to Mayhall Wells of Callahan, and went back into his store. He looked at it a long time and then he laughed, but without much mirth.

## II

GRASS had little chance to grow for three weeks thereafter under the cowhide boots of Captain Mayhall Wells. When the twentieth morning came over the hills, the mists parted over the Stars and Bars floating from the top of a tall poplar up through the Gap and flaunting brave defiance to Black Tom, his Harlan Home Guard, and all other jay-hawking Unionists of the Kentucky hills. It parted over the Army of the Callahan asleep on its arms in the mouth of the chasm, over Flitter Bill sitting, sullen and dejected, on the stoop of his store; and over Tallow Dick stealing corn-bread from the kitchen to make ready for flight that night through

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the Gap, the mountains, and to the yellow river that was the Mecca of the runaway slave.

At the mouth of the Gap a ragged private stood before a ragged tent, raised a long dinner-horn to his lips, and a mighty blast rang through the hills, reveille! And out poured the Army of the Callahan from shack, rock-cave, and coverts of sticks and leaves, with squirrel rifles, Revolutionary muskets, shot-guns, clasp-knives, and horse-pistols for the duties of the day under Lieutenant Skaggs, tactician, and Lieutenant Boggs, quondam terror of Roaring Fork.

That blast rang down the valley into Flitter Bill's ears and startled him into action. It brought Tallow Dick's head out of the barn door and made him grin.

"Dick!" Flitter Bill's call was sharp and angry.

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"Yes, suh!"

"Go tell ole Mayhall Wells that I ain't goin' to send him nary another pound o' bacon an' nary another tin-cup o' meal—no, by —, I ain't."

Half an hour later the negro stood before the ragged tent of the commander of the Army of the Callahan.

"Marse Bill say he ain't gwine to sen' you no mo' rations—no mo'."

"*What!*"

Tallow Dick repeated his message and the captain scowled—mutiny!

"Fetch my hoss!" he thundered.

Very naturally and very swiftly had the trouble come, for straightway after the captain's fight with Hence Sturgill there had been a mighty rally to the standard of Mayhall Wells. From Pigeon's Creek the loafers came—from Roaring Fork,

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Cracker's Neck, from the Pocket down the valley, and from Turkey Cove. Recruits came so fast, and to such proportions grew the Army of the Callahan, that Flitter Bill shrewdly suggested at once that Captain Wells divide it into three companies and put one up Pigeon's Creek under Lieutenant Jim Skaggs and one on Callahan under Lieutenant Tom Boggs, while the captain, with a third, should guard the mouth of the Gap. Bill's idea was to share with those districts the honor of his commissary-generalship; but Captain Wells crushed the plan like a dried puff-ball.

"Yes," he said, with fine sarcasm. "What will them Kanetuckians do *then*? Don't you know, General Richmond? Why, I'll tell you what they'll do. They'll jest swoop down on Lieutenant Boggs and gobble him up. Then they'll swoop down

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on Lieutenant Skaggs on Pigeon and gobble him up. Then they'll swoop down on me and gobble me up. No, they won't gobble *me* up, but they'll come damn nigh it. An' what kind of a report will I make to Jeff Davis, General Richmond? *Captured in detail*, suh? No, suh. I'll jest keep Lieutenant Boggs and Lieutenant Skaggs close by me, and we'll pitch our camp right here in the Gap whar we can pertect the property of Confederate citizens and be close to our base o' supplies, suh. That's what *I'll* do!"

"General" Richmond groaned, and when in the next breath the mighty captain casually inquired if *that uniform of his* had come yet, Flitter Bill's fat body nearly rolled off his chair.

"You will please have it here next Monday," said the captain, with great firmness.

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"It is necessary to the proper discipline of my troops." And it was there the following Monday—a regimental coat, gray jeans trousers, and a forage cap that Bill purchased from a passing Morgan raider. Daily, orders would come from Captain Wells to General Flitter Bill Richmond to send up more rations, and Bill groaned afresh when a man from Callahan told how the captain's family was sprucing up on meal and flour and bacon from the captain's camp. Humiliation followed. It had never occurred to Captain Wells that being a captain made it incongruous for him to have a "general" under him, until Lieutenant Skaggs, who had picked up a manual of tactics somewhere, cautiously communicated his discovery. Captain Wells saw the point at once. There was but one thing to do—to reduce Gen-

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eral Richmond to the ranks—and it was done. Technically, thereafter, the general was purveyor for the Army of the Callahan, but to the captain himself he was—gallingly to the purveyor—simple Flitter Bill.

The strange thing was that, contrary to his usual shrewdness, it should have taken Flitter Bill so long to see that the difference between having his store robbed by the Kentucky jay-hawkers and looted by Captain Wells was the difference between tweedle-dum and tweedle-dee, but, when he did see, he forged a plan of relief at once. When the captain sent down Lieutenant Boggs for a supply of rations, Bill sent the saltiest, rankest bacon he could find, with a message that he wanted to see the great man. As before, when Captain Wells rode down to the store, Bill handed

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out a piece of paper, and, as before, the captain had left his "specs" at home. The paper was an order that, whereas the distinguished services of Captain Wells to the Confederacy were appreciated by Jefferson Davis, the said Captain Wells was, and is, hereby empowered to duly, and in accordance with the tactics of war, impress what live-stock he shall see fit and determine fit for the good of his command. The news was joy to the Army of the Callahan. Before it had gone the rounds of the camp Lieutenant Boggs had spied a fat heifer browsing on the edge of the woods and ordered her surrounded and driven down. Without another word, when she was close enough, he raised his gun and would have shot her dead in her tracks had he not been arrested by a yell of command and horror from his superior.

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"Air you a-goin' to have me cashiered and shot, Lieutenant Boggs, fer violatin' the ticktacks of war?" roared the captain, indignantly. "Don't you know that I've got to *impress* that heifer accordin' to the rules an' regulations? Git roun' that heifer." The men surrounded her. "Take her by the horns. Now! In the name of Jefferson Davis and the Confederate States of Ameriky, I hereby and hereon do duly impress this heifer for the purposes and use of the Army of the Callahan, so help me God! Shoot her down, Bill Boggs, shoot her down!"

Now, naturally, the soldiers preferred fresh meat, and they got it—impressing cattle, sheep, and hogs, geese, chickens, and ducks, vegetables—nothing escaped the capacious maw of the Army of the Callahan. It was a beautiful idea, and

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the success of it pleased Flitter Bill mightily, but the relief did not last long. An indignant murmur rose up and down valley and creek bottom against the outrages, and one angry old farmer took a pot-shot at Captain Wells with a squirrel rifle, clipping the visor of his forage cap; and from that day the captain began to call with immutable regularity again on Flitter Bill for bacon and meal. That morning the last straw fell in a demand for a wagon-load of rations to be delivered before noon, and, worn to the edge of his patience, Bill had sent a reckless refusal. And now he was waiting on the stoop of his store, looking at the mouth of the Gap and waiting for it to give out into the valley Captain Wells and his old gray mare. And at last, late in the afternoon, there was the captain coming—coming at a swift gallop

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—and Bill steeled himself for the onslaught like a knight in a joust against a charging antagonist. The captain saluted stiffly—pulling up sharply and making no move to dismount.

“Purveyor,” he said, “Black Tom has just sent word that he’s a-comin’ over hyeh this week—have you heerd that, purveyor?” Bill was silent.

“Black Tom says you *air* responsible for the Army of the Callahan. Have you heerd that, purveyor?” Still was there silence.

“He says he’s a-goin’ to hang me to that poplar whar floats them Stars and Bars”—Captain Mayhall Wells chuckled—“an’ he says he’s a-goin’ to hang *you* thar fust, though; have you heerd *that*, purveyor?”

The captain dropped the titular address

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now, and threw one leg over the pommel of his saddle.

"Flitter Bill Richmond," he said, with great nonchalance, "I axe you—do you prefer that I should disband the Army of the Callahan, or do you not?"

"No."

The captain was silent a full minute, and his face grew stern. "Flitter Bill Richmond, I had no idee o' disbandin' the Army of the Callahan, but do you know what I did aim to do?" Again Bill was silent.

"Well, suh, I'll tell you whut I aim to do. If you don't send them rations I'll have you cashiered for mutiny, an' if Black Tom don't hang you to that air poplar, I'll hang you thar myself, suh; yes, by —, I will. Dick!" he called sharply to the slave. "Hitch up that air wagon,

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fill hit full o' bacon and meal, and drive it up thar to my tent. An' be mighty damn quick about it, or I'll hang you, too."

The negro gave a swift glance to his master, and Flitter Bill feebly waved acquiescence.

"Purveyor, I wish you good-day."

Bill gazed after the great captain in dazed wonder (was this the man who had come cringing to him only a few short weeks ago?) and groaned aloud.

But for lucky or unlucky coincidence, how could the prophet ever have gained name and fame on earth?

Captain Wells rode back to camp chuckling—chuckling with satisfaction and pride; but the chuckle passed when he caught sight of his tent. In front of

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it were his lieutenants and some half a dozen privates, all plainly in great agitation, and in the midst of them stood the lank messenger who had brought the first message from Black Tom, delivering another from the same source. Black Tom *was* coming, coming sure, and unless that flag, that "Rebel Rag," were hauled down under twenty-four hours, Black Tom would come over and pull it down, and to that same poplar hang "Captain Mayhall an' his whole damn army." Black Tom might do it anyhow—just for fun.

While the privates listened the captain strutted and swore; then he rested his hand on his hip and smiled with silent sarcasm, and then swore again—while the respectful lieutenants and the awed soldiery of the Callahan looked on. Finally he spoke.

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"Ah—when did Black Tom say that?" he inquired casually.

"Yestiddy mornin'. He said he was goin' to start over hyeh early this mornin'." The captain whirled.

"What? Then why didn't you git over hyeh *this* mornin'?"

"Couldn't git across the river last night."

"Then he's a-comin' to-day?"

"I reckon Black Tom'll be hyeh in about two hours—mebbe he ain't fer away now." The captain was startled.

Lieutenant Skaggs," he called, sharply, "git yo' men out thar an' draw 'em up in two rows!"

The face of the student of military tactics looked horrified. The captain in his excitement had relaxed into language that was distinctly agricultural, and, catching



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the look on his subordinate's face, and at the same time the reason for it, he roared, indignantly:

"Air you afeer'd, sir? Git yo' men out, I said, an' march 'em up thar in front of the Gap. Lieutenant Boggs, take ten men an' march at double quick through the Gap, an' defend that poplar with yo' life's blood. If you air overwhelmed by superior numbers, fall back, suh, step by step until you air re-enforced by Lieutenant Skaggs. If you two air not able to hold the enemy in check, you may count on me an' the Army of the Callahan to grind *him*—" (How the captain, now thoroughly aroused to all the fine terms of war, did roll that technical "him" under his tongue) —"to grind him to pieces ag'in them towerin' rocks, and plunge him in the bilin' waters of Roarin' Fawk. Forward, suh—

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double quick." Lieutenant Skaggs touched his cap. Lieutenant Boggs looked embarrassed and strode nearer.

"Captain, whar am I goin' to git ten men to face them Kanetuckians?"

"Whar air they goin' to git a off'cer to lead 'em, you'd better say," said the captain, severely, fearing that some of the soldiers had heard the question. "If you air afeer'd, suh"—and then he saw that no one had heard, and he winked—winked with most unmilitary familiarity.

"Air you a good climber, Lieutenant Boggs?" Lieutenant Boggs looked mystified, but he said he was.

"Lieutenant Boggs, I now give you the opportunity to show yo' profound knowledge of the ticktacks of war. You may now be guilty of disobedience of ordahs, and I will not have you court-martialled for

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the same. In other words, if, after a survey of the situation, you think best—why,” the captain’s voice dropped to a hoarse whisper, “pull that flag down, Lieutenant Boggs, pull her down.”

### III

It was an hour by sun now. Lieutenant Boggs and his devoted band of ten were making their way slowly and watchfully up the mighty chasm—the lieutenant with his hand on his sword and his head bare, and bowed in thought. The Kentuckians were on their way—at that moment they might be riding full speed toward the mouth of Pigeon, where floated the flag. They might gobble him and his command up when they emerged from the Gap. Suppose they caught him up that tree. His command might escape, but *he* would be up there, saving them the trouble of string-