

Bledsoe 1956

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE TWO YEARS' WAR.

A Raid near Trinidad.—Battle of Redwood Creek.—Scouting parties from the forts.—Death of Samuel Minor, Joseph Sumption and John McNutt.—The Trinity.—Sandy Bar.—Capt. Miller's Defeat.—The Willow Creek Fight.—Position of the Mountaineers.

A sensational scene interrupted the monotony of life at Trinidad in June. The people, every minute expecting an army of savage warriors to sweep down upon the place like so many human vultures, in hot haste prepared for the worst. Some left for Union and Eureka; some barricaded their houses and prepared to fight; all anticipated that an attack would be made upon them. Their fear was caused by a raid of the enemy near the town. A band of Redwood warriors, coming unexpectedly into the settlement, drove the laborers away from the Trinidad saw-mill, robbed a house and burned it, went to the mouth of Little River and robbed and burned another house, and when they had secured enough booty to satisfy them, returned to the mountains from whence they came.

The Mountaineers were not inactive. They had

enough to do, when pack-trains had to be escorted across the mountains, houses had to be guarded, swiftly moving bands of savages had to be trailed over deserted hills and through dangerous cañons. The escorting of pack-trains was the most dangerous part of their work, and it was in the performance of this duty that a detachment of Co. C participated in a hard-fought battle on Redwood Creek, near Minor's Ranch—a fight that is recorded in local history as one of the most desperate encounters that occurred during the war. Manheim's pack-train of 35 mules, escorted by Lieut. Middleton and 18 men of Co. C, went from Union to Fort Gaston, on Monday, July 6th, with a load of flour; and on Tuesday morning, the 7th, they started on their return. In the evening the train camped on Redwood Creek, twenty miles from Fort Gaston and close to Minor's Ranch. Here Lieut. Middleton and two others left the train and pushed on to Union, the escort remaining with the train under command of Sergeant G. W. Day. The men were up early on the morning of the 8th. Their frugal meal was soon eaten and preparations were made for the homeward journey. The mules were driven up, and the packs were being placed on them, when the enemy opened fire from two sides of the camp, from the underbrush across the creek, and from a high bluff in the rear. The entire force of the whites at this time consisted of Sergeant Day and 17 men of Co. C, two men of Co. B, and two packers—22 in all. The Indians numbered at least 100, and they had the advantage in position, as well as profit-

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ing by the confusion in the camp resulting from the surprise. The Indians, too, were well armed with guns. Not an arrow was sent into the camp, but a rain of bullets fell thick and fast. The fight had lasted three hours, half of the white force being disabled, when five of the Mountaineers climbed the bluff in the rear, dislodged the enemy and drove them across the creek. At noon the Indians reluctantly withdrew, carrying their dead and wounded from the field. How many Indians were killed could not be ascertained. The Mountaineers suffered severely. In their exposed position it would have been impossible to gain shelter, and contesting the fight bravely and stubbornly, as they did, added to the danger of their position. Two men were despatched to Fort Gaston for reinforcements, and Sergeant Day took account of his losses. Ten men, half of the number in camp, were wounded in the fight. The official list of the wounded prepared by Sergeant Day contained the names of Chas. L. Kell, Co. C, wounded in thigh and arm, dangerously; John Blum, Co. C, right lung and leg, dangerously; Wm. Taylor, Co. C, thigh, shoulder and hand, dangerously; Gilford Bridges, Co. C, ankle, severely; Andrew Foote, Co. B, thigh, slightly; George Robinson, Co. C, thigh and leg, slightly; Wm. Stevenson, Co. C, leg, slightly; Wm. Griffin, Co. C, cheek and arm, slightly; J. McMahan, Co. C, hand, slightly. Sergeant Day was also slightly wounded in the thigh. At 4 o'clock of Thursday morning Sergeant Hurst and 7 men of Co. B arrived and reinforced the tired and exhausted detachment,

and on Friday 10 men from Co. C arrived from Union. The wounded men could not be moved before their wounds were dressed. Three surgeons were summoned to the camp. When the surgeons considered their removal safe, the wounded were conveyed to Fort Humboldt. The fact that the fight was with men of Co. C, which was raised in Trinity county exclusively, and the further fact that great bravery had been exhibited by them, naturally elevated that Company at once to a high place in the estimation of the people. The battle could not be claimed as a victory, it is true, yet it had shown, in the beginning of a long conflict, the brave and determined character of the Mountaineer Battalion.

Reports from the scouting parties first sent out from the Forts were not of an encouraging nature. The scouts were energetic and persistent, yet the only practical result of their work was a knowledge that the Indians were trying to concentrate their forces. The exact locality of their base of operations was not determined, though it was understood to be somewhere in the Redwood Creek region. Some tribes were in the mountains at the head of Pilot Creek, where they were almost inaccessible, and where they might elude the vigilance of pursuers until hunger compelled them to seek the more open country of the foot-hills. Co. B sent out many small detachments for scouting purposes, who thoroughly explored the country in the vicinity of Fort Baker. Lieuts. Geer and Beckwith and Sergeant Bradford traveled over a large extent of country in the neighborhood of

Yager Creek and Larabee Valley, satisfying themselves that the enemy had moved to another locality.

The locality of the hostile tribes was not long concealed. It was brought to the attention of the citizens of Union, especially, in a manner which could inspire nothing but feelings of dread and dismay. The 3d of August was a day marked by excitement in Union fully equal to that which had reigned in Trinidad a few weeks before. The women and children were gathered in a fire-proof store for protection, the Arcata Guards turned out with their arms, citizens who did not belong to the Guards were armed with anything of which a weapon could be made, and every possible preparation was made to resist the general attack which all anticipated was soon to be made. It transpired, however, that a general attack had not been planned by the Indians; the sole cause of the excitement was the murder of a citizen in the suburbs of the village. The murder was atrocious and horrible, being committed by a few Redwood Indians, the victim being Samuel Minor, a logger of Union. Samuel and Isaac Minor, brothers, and Wesley Sumption were at work in the woods a few hundred yards from the village on the morning of August 3d. Isaac worked a little while and then returned to town: Samuel remained at his work in the woods, and Sumption, who was driving the team, left the logging camp with his third load at 11 o'clock. Sumption had driven away when he heard a shout back in the woods. Thinking that Minor had cut his foot, or that a tree had fallen on him, Sumption ran back to his assistance. A horrible scene was

revealed when he had passed the intervening trees. He saw Minor lying face downward on the ground, saw an Indian fix an arrow to his bow and drive it deep into Minor's prostrate form; and saw another Indian take Minor's ax and strike him a powerful blow on the head. Then the murderers left, and Sumption raised up his fallen comrade. His assailants had shot him first in the back, the deeds which Sumption witnessed being merely the superfluous exhibition of their ferocity. Minor was not dead, and in the house of his brother he lingered till half-past seven o'clock that evening. Capt. Miller, of Co. C, arrived that evening with a detachment of Mountaineers, and started in pursuit of the murderers, but it was impossible to follow their trail. Guards patrolled the streets of Union through the night following the murder, and Col. Whipple ordered Capt. Miller to send out scouting parties daily between Mad River and Freshwater Slough. That the deed was committed by a few—probably not more than four or five—did not lessen the probability that there was a large tribe in the immediate neighborhood of Union.

August and September brought desolation and death to the Trinity. That section of the vast mining region of the North was almost depopulated through the effects of the war. Every house in one of the most thickly-settled districts on the river, for a dis-