

The Battle of Standing Rock

By A. B. Welch, Lt. Col. F. A. Res.

A man dressed in the uniform of the United States Indian Police stood beside his horse just outside the door of the Store-building at the Agency of the Standing Rock Reservation, at Fort Yates, North Dakota, and carefully tied a bolt of white cloth to the saddle. Tacanpa Luta (Red Tomahawk), the Teton Sioux, stood well over six feet in his moccasined feet and his face was as calm as that of some old bronze figure of the Serene Buddha, in some long forgotten jungle of the Orient, as he listened to the instructions of Pahaska (White Hair) as Major James McLaughlin, the representative of the Indian Department at that troublesome post among the Sioux upon the right bank of the Missouri, was known among his Indian wards.



*Mato Watakpe (Charging Bear)
 Lieutenant Colonel A. B. Welch, 338th F.A.-Res.*

"My nephew, listen. You will carry this letter to Mato Kokipapi (Afraid of the Bear)," said the beloved and trusted Major. "You will find him somewhere upon the Grand River. Already, police from the Porcupine and Grass Creek and from the Spotted Horn Bull country on Oak Creek and from the Cannon Ball, are riding that way. Afraid of the Bear will lead you to the camp of the Ghost Dancers upon the Grand. There you will find Sitting Bull. While it is yet dark tonight, he must be arrested and under no circumstances shall you permit him to escape. This white cloth you will tear into strips and wear about your necks, in order to distinguish your friends from the others. Go now, find Lieutenant Afraid of the Bear. Do not fail."

Tomahawk looked again to his saddle; examined the knots which held the roll of white cloth; presently: "I have a wife and children," he said, "if I fall there, what will become of them?" The stern, worried face of the white haired executive softened and he locked the door of the

storehouse carefully before he replied: "We shall take care of your family and bury you under a tall stone with your name upon it. Go now; look sharp and ride hard. Ateyapi kin miya ca he pelo." (I, the Agent, have said this.)

The Indian Sergeant mounted at once; turned his horse's head toward the south; rode out past the quarters of Lieut. Col. W. F. Drum, the Commanding Officer of the military post; on by the already lighted barracks. The guards at the stables noticed him; watched him disappear into the white sternness of the cold December night, and the strange, minor tunes of the Indian's weird death song was whirled back to them upon the wings of the bitter, rising wind.

"Them Injuns is sure hell on oprie music, all right, aint they, Slim?" said one buffalo coated guard to another, as they met at the corner of a stable and cut fresh chunks of tobacco from a black plug.

"Wall, me, I aint much on thet singin' stuff and I caint savvy their lingo neither, but when Injuns sing like that feller, look out—somepin's gwine ter drap. When we changed guard over ter the Old Man's Headquarters, I seen thet there white haired Injun Agent atalkin' ter him and Cap'n Fechet an' they all looked mighty damn serious, I'm a'tellin ye. An' I heerd a feller in the office say as how the Quartermaster Sergeant told him they was goin' ter issue us six days chuck, termorrer. We air agoin arter Sittin' Bull, sartin sure. I reckon. 'At's right, Slim, I heerd 'im say it my own se'f."

Meanwhile Red Tomahawk, the Sergeant, followed the indistinct snow covered trails which led in the general direction of the rendezvous, deep down in the fantastically painted gorges of the tumbled bad-lands along the Grand, fifty miles away. With the instinct of the born horseman of the plains, he nursed his horse for the supreme effort. The story of that ride is an epic among the Sioux; the "Battle in the Dark," that cold morning of December the 15th, 1890, at the camp of the hostile Ghost Dancers under the Medicine Leader Sitting Bull and the fanatical adherents of the Messiah ceremonies, with forty-two U. S. Indian Policemen and four Indian volunteers, together with the affair at Wounded Knee which followed soon after, was the last armed demonstration of the warlike Sioux, and it is to the lasting honor of that people, that members of their own tribes were the instruments used by the far-sighted Major McLaughlin, to suppress the fanatical Messiah Craze and thus lead the Sioux into the broader light of civilization.

But read the simple, unadorned story of brave Sergeant Red Tomahawk as told by him to his adopted brother Mato Watakpe, (Charging Bear) better known as A. B. Welch, Lt. Col., F.A. Res., of Mandan, North Dakota, and now Executive Officer of the 338th F.A.

"I was a Sergeant of Indian Police. A few days before this fight with Sitting Bull's people, Major McLaughlin sent me to bring back a man by the name of Buffalo Bill (Wm. Cody), who was then on his way to have a talk with Sitting Bull. I started after him at night time. It was cold. When I got down on Four Mile Creek I looked for him. I could not see his party nor his fireplaces. I rode down the banks towards a house there. Bde (Halsey) a Sioux lived there. There was no light in the house. I went in. About five men were there. They were sitting around a table, talking. I said: 'I have come from the Agent. You must come back with me now.' Buffalo Bill did not talk any. They went back with me. That is all about that.