

FOLSOM, ALFRED F. (DEC'D)

ARMY EXPERIENCES.

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Barry, Anna R. - Journalist.
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Written, about two years ago,

by Alfred F. Folsom, (deceased),

formerly of Canadian County, Oklahoma.

I came to Canadian County in 1884, as a young buck private in "Uncle Sam's" Army. I had enlisted that year in a group which, I had been told, was going to be sent into Oklahoma, and I was rearing to go where the Indians were wild and wooly and where the buffalo roamed. I was somewhat disappointed when we took up our occupation of Oklahoma, as I had expected to find an Indian or two hiding behind each bush and hillock that I encountered. We were here a month before I saw my first Indian, and he was a mild old fellow wearing nothing more romantic than an old horse blanket. I felt mightily abused, I want to tell you. Here I had expected to see every Indian I met, all decked out in war paint, beads and hugh feather head dresses. Well, I soon learned that they never dolled up except for special occasions, a war, feast, wedding or religious ceremony of some kind. We soon grew to note the make-up of the Indian and thereby knew what to expect of him. I was sta-

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tioned first at Fort Sill, but later was moved with my Company to Fort Reno where we did scouting to keep the "Sooners" out of the Territory. We had a lot of fun being hard boiled to the different guys whom we would find sneaking across the border but occasionally we would run into some men not so easy to scare, and then a little roughing would take place that wasn't so easy on the soldier. One instance of the tables being turned I shall relate.

We were always sent out in twos for scout duty and this particular time, a guy of the name of Tim McCoy and I were out together. He wasn't the Tim McCoy in the story, but he was just about as tough and liked to fight better than anyone I ever knew. He'd start a row over nothing, just to see if he could lick a guy, and he usually did. I don't remember that I ever saw him whipped but once, and that time he claimed that the other fellow employed unfair tactics in order to win. Tim and I had been out four days, and had ousted two different groups of "Sooners", when we came upon a party of three men, two of whom we had escorted off the Territory a week or so previously. Tim walked up to the camp fire, kicked over a kettle steaming over the coals, and growled to the men who had half risen from their positions

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around the camp fire, "Now you guys git out, of here pronto, before I have to muss you up. We told you two not to come back into the Territory, and if we ever catch you in here again, you're going to jail. Now git out." With that he overturned their can of coffee into the coals. That was a trifle more drastic than I approved of, but I said nothing. The biggest of the three men rose slowly to his feet and said: "Fahdnah, don't you all think you'h bein' a bit too rough? What was the need of spillin' ouah suppah? I don't think I like that, and I know I don't like you." and without further words or warning, he swung at Tim's chin. Tim instinctively dodged the blow and countered with a right to the Southern boy's ear that rocked him on his feet. It was one of the prettiest fights I ever saw, and lasted perhaps a half hour before Tim hit a blow that stretched the Southerner out on the ground, cold. Tim had a bloody nose and his left eye was surely but slowly closing. He wiped the blood from his mouth, spit out a tooth and snapped to the other two fellows: "Load up your truck, and this young gladiator here, and git. When he comes to, tell him never to pick a fight with Tim McCoy again, for the next time I won't be so easy with him." The fellows lost no time at all, had all

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their belongings strapped on their pack mule, hoisted the still unconscious man across his saddle, mounted their steeds and rode off. When they were about fifty feet away, one of them turned in his saddle and shouted to us: "You'll hear from us again soon, and the next time you won't get off so easy either. We always pays our debts and you got plenty coming to you." We only laughed at his threat, for it wasn't the first of its kind we had heard, and nothing ever came of it. We rebuilt the fire, boiled some coffee and cooked our supper, then rolled up in our blankets and were soon sound asleep. We were so tired, that it was broad daylight before either of us awakened. The first thing I did, was to look over to the place where we had left our horses the night before. We never picketed them, but always hobbled them just in case one took a notion to return to camp without us. You cannot possibly imagine my surprise and shock to discover there were no horses to be seen on the prairie and we could see for miles around as there was nothing but practically level plains for miles. We began automatically to search for the horses, although we knew it was no good. About a hundred yards from camp, I came upon the hobbles and tied to them was a note which read: "Many happy re-

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turns of the day. Hope you don't mind walking, but your horses were in a hurry to go home. Adios Amigo Mio"! We didn't need Sherlock Holmes to tell us who had turned our horses loose, and we knew we wouldn't find them until we returned to the Fort if then, for if an Indian caught a glimpse of them, it would be "good-bye horse". We gathered up our equipment, shouldered the saddles and started our long trek back to the Fort. It was just a nice little jaunt of twenty miles, and we were feeling sick at the thought of having to tote all that stuff all those weary miles, for we didn't dare leave those saddles out; it was bad enough to lose the horses. One minute we hoped the horses would reach home, and then we'd almost hope they wouldn't, as we knew what a razzing we were going to be in for when we got back, to say nothing of the bawling out from the old man. We'd do well if we didn't end up as kitchen or stable police for thirty days. We arrived in camp that night, foot-sore and tired to the bone. I think we both had blisters on our feet and shoulders, too, from the rub of the saddles. We were razzed plenty by the other soldiers and were told that the old man wanted us to report to his tent as soon as we came in, which we did immediately. He lectured us for

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twenty minutes, then told us that one horse had come in, but the other probably never would, so he had no recourse, but to give us thirty days each as stable police. We were then allowed to report to the kitchen for food.

Tim and I were both mustered out of the Army on the same date, December 5th, 1888, and we decided to stick together until the opening of Oklahoma for settlement, then come down and take claims. We felt we could make a very good selection, as we had ridden all over it in our duties as scouts. We had quite a lot of pay coming to us, so drew the wad and "beat it" for Kansas City where we intended to have a good time painting the town red. We put by enough cash to see us through the days until the opening of Oklahoma, and what we thought would do us until we got started on our claims, and the rest we proceeded to "blow in" on a good time.

The first of April found us again riding toward the border of Oklahoma. We stopped in Dodge City, and purchased a team of horses, a wagon, plow, supplies of different kinds, a good shotgun and the clothes we considered suitable for life on a farm. Then we were ready to continue our journey into the "promised land". We reached Fort Reno about the

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20th of April and pitched and came along with thousands of other homeseekers. Before we found a good camping spot, we were only about a mile from where El Reno now stands. We milled around in the crowd next day, getting acquainted with some of our neighbors, played some poker that evening for small stakes, and arose before dawn on the morning of the fateful day. The whole camp was stirring by the time we were up; it seemed everyone was afraid of missing the least thing connected with the one grand adventure of his or her life. The line began forming by the time it was light and there was much jostling and fighting for position. We soon discovered the men on our right were the very ones who had turned our horses loose out on the prairie. "Here's where I even scores with these gringos?" Tim drawled, "They needn't think they can get by with what they did to us. Tim McCoy always pays his debts. We'll act as though we don't see them and if they take notice of us, we'll be civil and then ignore 'em, but keep your eyes open." "Now don't do anything foolish, or something that will get us into trouble", I admonished him, "Remember, we came here to get claims, not to pick a fight". "Don't worry about me," he returned, "What I have in mind will do the trick and we won't be any-

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where around when they discover it". And he laughed with relish, but refused to divulge to me his plan.

As it got closer to noon, I forgot all about Tim and his plan, as I had all I could do to remain in the first line. There were some in that line who would resort to anything short of murder to get into the front. I'm telling you a fellow just about took his life in his two hands if he got a good place and kept it. There were quite a few women in the "run" and their sex was no protection to them, they were jostled around as much as the men. I remember seeing Josie Palmer in the crowd, we had met a few days before; she was fighting to hold her place in the line and doing a fine job of it too; I waved encouragement to her and she grinned back but was too busy keeping her pony from rearing and probably injuring someone to risk letting go with one hand to return my wave.

I began to wonder where on earth Tim was and if he'd be back when the gun was fired, when he suddenly hopped into the rear of the wagon. One coat sleeve was torn loose and his coat was ripped down the back. I naturally thought at once that he had been in a fight, but no, he assured me, he had gotten all pulled to pieces fighting his way through the

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crowd to me. He wouldn't tell me what he had been doing, but every now and then, I could see a satisfied grin on his face. Finally the great moment arrived, and the roar of the starting gun let loose the human tide of homeseekers. They poured out over the prairies in an endless stream, some on foot, some on bicycles, horseback and in every conceivable kind of vehicle. We saw one wagon being drawn by an old man and a horse. We knew right where we wanted to go, so made as much of a bee line for it as we possibly could. We had gone about half a mile when we came upon some men stalled with their spring wagon. Two of them were out trying to untangle the horses, while the other sat in the wagon, cursing. They were our previous neighbors in line. When they caught sight of us, they shook their fists and called us some very uncomplimentary names. Tim only laughed and shouted: "Try walking, t'aint half bad when you get used to it, goodbye boys, Tim's compliments". He then told me what he had done. While the excitement was at fever pitch before the gun's signal, he had slipped around unnoticed by anyone, and had cut half through each tug, on the spring wagon of our enemies, so that when they started it was not long before the harness broke. The fellows fixed up their harness some way

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and succeeded in getting a claim, but it wasn't the one they had intended taking. We managed to reach the claims we had in mind, and staked out our claim before anyone came along. Our claims were just north of where Okarche stands. We proceeded to stock and improve our claims as everyone else did at that time, and by fall were well established and felt that we were sitting on top of the world. We had been keeping pretty close to the farm all spring and summer so concluded we had a little recreation coming to us. We arranged with a young fellow who lived on an adjoining farm to come over and stay for a few days while we went into El Reno for a spree. We had never seen either of the fellows of the wagon escapade since the day of the "run", so what was our surprise to run into them in the first saloon we entered. They gave us surly looks and we passed them without a greeting. Later that evening, we were playing poker in the back room of the saloon when the door opened and they entered. They asked if they might join our game and the other fellow suggested stakes be hoisted, so as Tim had been winning pretty steadily we agreed. Soon after this the tide of luck changed and the three men of our former acquaintance began to win most all the pot. It seemed almost

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uncanny the way they would win. Some of the men dropped out until it wasn't long before there were only the three men of the "run" and Tim playing. They swept the stakes again; by this time Tim had imbibed pretty freely of whiskey and I didn't think his head was clear enough for him to continue the game, and insisted that he come on to the hotel, but he wouldn't hear to such a thing. The play kept on until three o'clock in the morning, with Tim losing far more than he won. Finally one of the fellows suggested that they play one more round and the winner should take the entire pot. To this they all agreed. When the hands were all dealt and the bets made, two of the fellows dropped out but Tim and the third stayed. Tim called and the third man raised, then Tim called him. Just as they started to lay down their hands, I noticed a hand under the table being met by another, and the one meeting the unknown hand was that of the player. I jumped to my feet and caught the player by both arms just as the transaction was completed. I jerked him back, and there was the evidence of his crooked playing in his hand. He was exchanging his hand for a royal flush. Naturally guns immediately flashed and keeping us covered, the three backed out of the room, first snatching all the cash on the

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table. Just as the last one started out the door, Tim made a dive for his feet; he brought him down but got a bullet in his shoulder. They fought furiously for some time, but finally one of the others succeeded in getting in a terrific kick at Tim's side, breaking some ribs. I was busily engaged in a tussle with the other man, and couldn't go to Tim's assistance. However, he managed to free one hand long enough to reach his gun, and blasted away at the nearest man putting a bullet straight through his heart. As he fell dead the fight came to an abrupt halt and soon the room was filled with men who had heard the noise of our battle. We explained what had transpired and several others bore us out, that the three men had been doing a lot of gambling and it had seemed odd to all that they nearly always won if the stakes were high. Tim was not even arrested for shooting the guy, as it was agreed it had been in self defense as we had been ganged. The two remaining men were told to make disposition of their friend, and then to get out of town and stay out. They had been in other scrapes previously and were disliked.

Tim and I returned to the farm in a day or two, satisfied that we had accumulated enough excitement to last us all winter. He married before the winter was over but I man-

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aged to escape matrimony. We continued on as neighbors
but matrimony spoiled Tim for a good companion on town
sprees and I had to go alone from then on.