

PART THIRD
THE STOCKMEN'S INVASION
PREPARATIONS

Page 22

Mercer says, "The invasion of the state of Wyoming by a band of cut-throats and hired assassins, in April, 1892, was the crowning infamy of the ages. Nothing so cold blooded, so brutal, so bold and yet so cowardly, was ever before recorded in the world's history."

Plans for the invasion were made when a gathering of prominent cattlemen met in Cheyenne in the winter of 1891-92. There, it is thought (real details were kept secret), the plans agreed on were later carried out. This was the belief until, John Clay, in his book, MY LIFE ON THE RANGE, "let the cat out of the bag" by admitting that Major Wolcott had talked with him while he, Johnnie, was on a visit to the Deer Creek Ranch in the spring of 1891; almost a year before the invasion. Clay admits that it was a great idea, but says he discouraged it. "Canny Johnnie" had ridden the people so long that he knew just about how much "spurring" they would stand. Johnnie told Wolcott, so he says, that it was impracticable and advised against it. After "sleeping it over," Canny Johnnie again advised against it, but, he left and went to Europe without any attempt to stop the work. It failed, thanks to Jack Flagg, Red Angus and the loyal citizens of Johnson County, and Johnnie helped dig up a hundred thousand dollars to get his murdering friends out of trouble.* Canny Johnnie disclaims any personal part in the plot; to be sure, it was a failure. Had it succeeded, undoubtedly, he would have gladly posed as the leader, or at least one of the leaders. These prominent stockmen attending this mid-winter meeting were all wealthy men. A list was made out and signed by them, and then, headed by their signatures, was circulated throughout Wyoming and Northern Colorado, and elsewhere, where known sympathizers resided.

Rumor credits this "extermination fund" (a name coined by Mercer), with running up into the neighborhood of \$100,000.

To their everlasting credit, be it said, a number of stockmen refused to subscribe to this, and during all the trouble, held strictly aloof. Still enough came through to furnish the finances as well as the promised support.

Mercer tells how several members of the Board of Livestock Commissioners, the heads of the great cattle organizations, and others of their kind, spent part of the winter in consultation with Ex-Governor Baxter, making his office in the Commercial block their headquarters. He also tells of the plans in detail; how they made friends with the commandant at Fort D. A. Russel (and the means they used in doing so), thereby securing for the army, invasion tents and other supplies. He mentions how the State Senators at Washington, through misrepresentation and fraud, were led to give (in a manner) their sanction. Mercer does not mince matters, neither does he withhold names. All is set down, the guilty are named, and in many cases, with their official positions and their portraits.*

In preparation for the forthcoming events, beginning at the holiday season, articles (inspired articles) began showing up in the various papers throughout the United States. In Washington, D. C., Chicago, Omaha, New York City, Philadelphia, Kansas City, St. Louis, San Francisco, and other points widely scattered, these articles appeared. To again quote Mercer, "Weeks before the start, the Denver papers fairly bristled with blood-curdling stories of the outrages committed by the desperate home-seekers north of the Platte River, against the cattle kings."

The settlers were called "thieves," "rustlers," "murderers," and "outlaws." They were a band of desperadoes, convicts, ex-convicts and other criminals, who, in organized bodies, were setting aside all law and order and running things with a high and mighty hand. No cattleman's life or property was safe in Northern Wyoming. Great herds had been wiped out, butchered or run off and sold. Hourly, the lives of owners, superintendents, foremen and employees were in danger.

Law was powerless and nothing but organized force could reclaim the country and free it from the rule of the desperadoes. The poor, but honest people, the few there were, in Buffalo, Casper, Douglas and other crime-ridden places, were powerless and were begging and pleading, almost on their knees, for the stockmen to organize and sweep the riff-raff from the land; to remove the law officers, who were elected and supported by the criminal element, and to place the country once more under the rule of law and order.

This for effect. The truth of the matter is, and was, the northern part of the state was quiet and law-abiding, except for the trouble caused, stirred up and fomented by the stockmen and their hired bullies and paid killers. "Red" Angus, Sheriff of Johnson County, was a real HE-MAN of the old fighting Scotch stock. A lover and a believer in law and order. And, believe you me, Red Angus, if left to himself and unhampered by state and government interference, was fully capable of handling any condition of affairs. So too, was Malcom Campbell of Converse County. Two better, or more fearless and capable men, never held office in frontier towns. Each was absolutely fearless and ready, at any time, to give life itself in defense of his duties. We speak from our own knowledge, as both men, at the time, were personal friends and well-known to us.

The expedition, having plenty of money, was well organized. With them was a competent surgeon and with him, as the cowmen's official sheet, the Cheyenne Daily Tribune proudly boasted was "everything that may be needed." The set of surgical tools carried by the invading surgeon was the personal property of Acting Governor Barber, himself a surgeon.

The invading force consisted of men variously estimated at the time as from three to five hundred. This, even at the start, was far too high and these exaggerated reports were, doubtlessly, sent out by the cow-men, intentionally, in order

to further awe and abash the northern counties. Later, the real force, hired thugs and blood thirsty cow-men, was found to exceed, if at all, little more than the three score mark.

To be sure, dozens of cow-men had agreed to join. Many had put up money but when the time came, and closer acquaintance with the leaders and better understanding of the plot, made plain just what was intended, many of the cow-men, men at heart, rebelled, refusing to accompany the drive. I talked, just recently, with one of these "deserters." He is a warm, personal friend, a 32nd degree Mason, A Mystic Shriner, and in addition, we both belong to various other lodges. As we were talking over old times, he said, "Billie, it was too much for me. I could have stood for, and frequently had in the past, hanging a horse or cattle thief, but when I learned that they were out to commit murder by wholesale; to drive out men, women and children; to shoot down officers of the law and city merchants, I became suspicious." The plan had been to kill off Sheriff Angus, his deputies, Jack Flagg, and a score or more of Buffalo's "undesirables," and then drop back to Natrona, Converse and Weston Counties and there, kill off, or drive away, the men whose names were already on the lists carried by the leaders. He went on to say, "A little further investigation convinced me that the real aim of this expedition was to drive out the settlers. Of course, the confiscated stock would pay all, or at least the greater part of the expense of the expedition. The happiest day in my life was the day I found out the truth and deserted the ranks of the invaders and returned to my home and family." My friend, then a young man in his thirties, is now long past his three score and ten. We have been friends for around forty years.

The men, outside the cattlemen and their personal employees, were recruited from various southwestern points; *Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and Colorado sending the most. Many of them actually believed they were to assist the law in cleaning up outlaw bands of horse and cattle thieves, but when they learned the truth, the more honorable portion deserted.

As recruit agents, to the south and southwest, were George W. Baxter, R. M. Allen, Frank M. Canton and Tom Smith. H. B. Ijams, Secretary of the Board of Livestock Commissioners went to Idaho for the same purpose. He secured George Dunning, to whose confession, frankly and freely made, we are indebted for the real "inside facts" of the infernal and nefarious doings. Dunning states, under oath, that the hired gun-men came north to Wyoming, promised \$5 per day and all expenses. These expenses included horse, saddle, bridle, guns, ammunition, bedding, car fare, food and the like. Salary was to start with the signing of the contract. In addition to this, for every rustler killed, each man in the command was to receive the \$50 bonus. This offer was made to "stimulate trade" but in reality it had the opposite effect. Real men grew suspicious and refused to enlist; reading between the lines and familiar with past cowmen's doings, they figured it was a plot to remove objectionable settlers and homesteaders.

Still, by the latter part of March and the first of April, Canton, Baxter, Smith, Ijams and others had recruited a band of some fifty to sixty (including their own men). Most of them, or at least many of them were former U. S. Marshalls, sheriffs, deputies, ex-rangers, etc., with a fair sprinkling of real southern (Texas) desperadoes. These (the Texas portion) arrived in Cheyenne from Denver on Monday and Tuesday, April 4 and 5, 1892.

So far, I have carefully followed proceedings as outlined in Mercer's BANDITTI OF THE PLAINS. From now on, while I will still keep within sight of Mercer, who, four and thirty years ago pointed out the road, I shall give things more from the personal viewpoint. Some small amount of my own, but more of that of my life-long friend and companion, Charles B. Negus. At this time known as Charles N. Solon, taking the name, Solon, from the family that reared him after the death of his

parents until he reached the age of sixteen and started westward to look-out for himself. He was known as Solon until the outbreak of the Spanish-American War, when, enlisting in the Wyoming battalion, he took his own legal name, enlisting and fighting under it, going in as private and coming out Seargeant Negus.

END OF PART THIRD