

From The Pampas to The Prairie

By C. D. LaNAUZE, Lacombe, Alberta

Editor's Note: In the December '47 and March '48 issues of **CANADIAN CATTLEMEN** the author dealt with his father's experiences as a rancher in Uruguay from 1872-1879. His father has lost everything in South America in a great drought and now starts for Canada in 1880 to join the newly-formed North West Mounted Police.

FATHER apparently had been engaged in Ireland for he arrived at Halifax on the 18th of May on the SS "Peruvias," went to Toronto and in June left there by boat for Duluth, U.S.A., with a squad of recruits. From there it was two days by rail to Bismark, S.D., and then 18 days up the Missouri River to Fort Benton, Montana. Of his journey to the West he writes as follows:—"Coming up the river we had to rough it a good deal; the steamer was very crowded and there was no cover for sleeping under; sometimes you would find yourself sleeping in a pool of water but fortunately we only had a couple of wet nights. The steamers are built on purpose for shallow rivers, are flatbottomed, draw about 3 feet of water and are propelled from behind. The current is very strong, so much so that you run down in a third of the time it takes to run up. We passed and shot at a large herd of buffalo that were feeding close to the river but with no effect, but we shot some antelope which came in well for meat, but saw no game later when we crossed the prairie. One day some trappers and hunters came aboard the steamer with a lot of deer skins and buffalo hides and an Indian scalp. They had shot him while he was stealing their horses so were clearing out in case his friends should scalp them. We steered sometimes so close to the river bank that we would get shots at beaver, duck and antelope. It is wonderful how beaver can cut down large trees to build their dams."

In his first letter from North West Mounted Police Headquarters he gives his address as follows: "Fort Walsh via Fort Assiniboia, Montana, U.S.A., July 1st, 1880." "Here we are at last at Headquarters having had just a month's journey from Sarnia, Ontario. We had steamed up the great Missouri River for over 1,000 miles till we arrived at Fort Benton. The river is not navigable any further. We took wagons to carry the baggage and for those who did not like walking, and we averaged about 30 miles a day. I walked all the way, 150

miles, it being much preferable to the jolting of the wagons. The Fort here is nicely situated in a valley surrounded by wooded hills and we are living in tents. The mosquitos sometimes are very bad and as big as 'daddy-long-legs' and don't they bite! Even me and I am used to them. I don't see much of the noble savage among the Indians; the squaws put me in mind of the West of Ireland people going about with various colored blankets and their general appearance much resembles the pictures we see of the distressed Irish. There are any number of them around barracks looking out for something to eat around mess time. At present we are going through the regular routine of soldiers' life—drill, fatigue and sentry and today I am mess orderly having to wash up plates, dishes and serve meals; we all have to take our turn (Author—This was also my first job at Regina barracks in September, 1908). The grub is not the most refined but a good appetite works wonders in getting down dry bread, tea and coffee without milk or sugar. Vegetables and such luxuries are just not to be had. I am in first rate health and getting up muscle every day. I suppose we will be here for a year at least. This is not a place for cattle runs or anything else except Indians but I hear further North is much better. We are about 700 miles from Winnipeg so you see the Mounted Police have a wide

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range. A soldier's life is very different from a sheep farmer's. The pay is so bad this year that they could not get enough recruits after all their talk about the difficulty of getting in. In fact they took in any well-made, healthy man. Today is a general holiday except for those on duty and there is to be a cricket match, old hands versus recruits."

And this was how Dad found the Mounted Police six years after its inception. There is a fine oldtimer alive today who made the trip from Toronto to Walsh with Dad. He is Mr. Norman Macleod of Lethbridge, a nephew of Colonel Macleod who came west at the age of 16. Norman writes me as late as November 6, 1947, and says, "The party was under command of Supt. Irvine (later the Force's Third Commissioner) in which were your father, Frank Mansfield (now 86, of Merritt, B.C.) and many others. We left Toronto via the Grand Trunk for Sarnia and from there by boat

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PAMPAS TO THE PRAIRIES

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to Duluth touching at Port Arthur. The passage from Sarnia was the roughest of the season, having to travel inside the Manitoulin Islands and steaming backwards and forwards with the fog horn going, then to Bismark, the terminus of the North Pacific and the toughest place I have ever seen. Here is an instance. The Sioux had broken out and all the settlers had taken refuge in the town. Most of them were drinking and gambling. A settler had a grievance against one of the card dealers and followed him and knocked him down twice. The card dealer then lost his temper, knocked the settler down and kicked him in the head till he was insensible. A local policeman came to interfere but a bystander pulled a gun on the policeman and told him the settler was only getting what was coming to him. The settler was finally carried into a saloon, laid on a billiard table and died shortly afterwards. That summer I went to Macleod with my uncle by four-horse team from Fort Walsh. The party consisted of Col. Macleod and his batman, Inspector Denny (author of "The Law Marches West") Mr. Hooley, the teamster and myself. The Belly river was very high and the team and wagon were washed off the Ford and teamster and horses all were drowned."

On August 15th Dad writes: "I don't like the country, so far as I have seen, so well as South America but first impressions are not to be relied upon. We are kept pretty busy now; have moved from the Fort and are camped on the prairie two miles away. The Fort is not considered healthy this time of year and we are subject to a sort of fever from the low-lying ground there; we have not had much fine weather and our tents let in water whenever it rains. We get lots of parades, guard mounting, fatigues and our spare time taken up cleaning up boots and pipe claying helmets and gloves, stables, etc. So, except Sunday, we have little time to spare. I don't like the business very much as there is no such thing as going about the prairie patrolling and altogether it is so different from my jolly, free life in South America. We have ranks commencing with constables, corporals, sergeants according to your time of service and experience. The little I have seen of the country around here is not bad, some pretty valleys, well wooded with spruce, fir and pine and other trees. I have found wild gooseberries, currants, raspberries, and seen a lot of flowers I recognized in gardens at home. I hear there is a fine country near Fort Macleod close to the Rocky Mountains, good for cattle raising and not so cold in winter as here. There is a warm wind that constantly

blows there during winter. One of our teamsters with four horses and wagon was lost last week crossing a flooded river. I believe the poor fellow got kicked when trying to extricate his horses. I have been only twice on horseback since I came, when herding, as the horses are watched constantly in case of Indians stealing them. We will soon have more riding as horses are expected and then we will have cavalry drill. Ours is "A" Division—about 50 men, a Captain, Sergeant and Corporal. We have no clergyman here and on Sunday we have a full dress parade and inspection of the orderly office."

On September 11th he writes from Camp Irvine, Fort Walsh. "We have just had a 24-hour snow storm; yesterday the snow was several feet thick around our tents and several were blown down in the night and outside it was piercing cold. Now all has passed over and we have sunshine again. We have escort duty now and then, taking money to pay the Indians and catching a few horse stealers. The Government has agreed with the Indian chiefs of the North West Territory to pay so much a head for each man, woman and child and also to provide them with flour and some oxen to eat when there is a scarcity of game for which they have signed a treaty that they will remain peaceful to the white men and not rob them. We are here to see that these agreements are carried out. Now that the cold weather is approaching the Indians flock into the Forts to get as much as they can out of us. They are cheeky enough sometimes and kick up a great row if they don't get what they want, but I believe have a wholesome respect for the Mounted Police."

On October 9th he writes that at last they are to go to Macleod. "We came down from the Prairie to barracks and passed one night under a roof and next day were ordered to parade with 20 other picked men for inspection to go to Fort Macleod. We were to start this



Gary Wilson stretches out his calf so Charles Colerick of Kevisville, Alta., may vaccinate.

morning but a snow storm prevented us. I am glad to go as I want to see the country within sight of the Rocky Mountains. I have got on well here but don't care about the business very much. Colonel Irvine is very good to us and Colonel Macleod has been re-appointed Commissioner of the Force, another nice man. It may take us days to get to Macleod according to the weather so I scribble this in the long room containing about 50 beds. The fellows on each side of me are playing cards and further on a fellow playing the flute, others singing and talking so it is not easy to write. Our adjutant, Capt. Clarke, died most suddenly last week leaving a young bride. They had come up with us from Canada and there was a military funeral. I was one of the firing party over the grave and we marched with reversed arms." This grave today may be seen in Fort Walsh cemetery.

(The next letter will be from Fort Macleod.)

(To be Continued)



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