

# **TRIALS OF A STAFF-OFFICER**

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Trials of a staff-officer by Charles King

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**CHARLES KING**

**TRIALS OF A  
STAFF-OFFICER**



TRIALS  
OF  
A STAFF-OFFICER.

BY  
CAPT. CHARLES KING,  
AUTHOR OF "THE COLONEL'S DAUGHTER," ETC.

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## PREFACE.

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ODD experiences fall to the lot of every soldier. Even the subaltern who has spent the quarter of a century since the great surrender in plodding around after a platoon—and such has been the stagnation of promotion that the case is by no means imaginary—can tell of queer times in the reconstruction days; of cheerful *badinage* with mobs of women in the Brooklyn “Whisky War” when the troops were sent down to help the marshals break up illicit distilleries; of rural hospitalities as they tramped through Pennsylvania during the big strike of '77; of perilous days on the Indian frontier; even of out-of-the-way sensations in out-of-the-way garrisons; but, take it all in all, a junior in the line is apt to find life more or less monotonous. To break this he might well be tempted to try other duty; but it is certain that, were it all to be done over again with the view of seeking the path wherein life might be most placidly enjoyed, nothing would tempt the present writer to quit the shelter of his tactical two yards from the rear rank for any staff position, unaccompanied by rank and emolument, the army could offer. Indeed, but for certain experiences gained, characters encountered, and scenes visited, “Mr. X.” would be inclined to think he had made a big mistake in ever allowing himself to be assigned to other than troop duty, and nothing but the fact that he had been mercifully endowed with the faculty of seeing

the humorous side of a scrape enabled him to get through some of those hereinafter referred to without an attack of nervous prostration. That he escaped that blow entirely is due to the consummate good luck which enabled him to steer clear of the one military maelstrom which would have swamped him utterly: He never had to be post quartermaster; though the mere fact of his having been ordered to temporarily take charge of the office of a sick comrade nearly resulted in his being proclaimed a felon.

The trouble now is that, on looking over these sketches,—many of them written years ago,—Mr. X. is confronted with the fact that they fall far short of making those old-time "Trials" half as whimsical as they seem to him. With the best intentions in the world, and a readiness to undertake any duty or responsibility his superiors might unload on him, it must be seen that his capacity for getting into snarls and tangles was simply illimitable. The smallest item of rashness was cocksure to develop into a mammoth of consequences when least expected. Who could have predicted that, when the judge-advocate of the court signed the memorandum receipt for stationery handed him by the quartermaster's clerk at Jackson Barracks in '72, he was bringing upon himself a direful communication to reach him two years later when he lay wounded and helpless in far-away Arizona, and to say that his pay would be stopped if he did not immediately proceed to account for the following quartermaster's property, for which he was responsible,—to wit:

One Inkstand.

Mr. X. remembered that inkstand well. He had been the aide-de-camp who overhauled some of the bids for

stationery, and this particular inkstand was a blown-glass affair, about one inch in height, one and one-half inches across the base, and of a capacity of perhaps one-quarter thimble. They were furnished at a price of something in the neighborhood of six cents a gross, and were such a nuisance that the post quartermaster had determined to get rid of them at all hazards. So he unloaded one or more on every board or court that met at the barracks, and dropped the same number from his papers. Here, of course, is where the trouble comes in. One can "expend" pens, ink, paper, etc., but cannot so get rid of what is only an inkstand in name. *That* must be taken up on regular papers and accounted for monthly,—at least it had to be in '72-'74. The fact that this particular inkstand was expended before the court was sworn—at the expense of a vagrant cat on a neighboring wall—has no bearing on the case. Mr. X. never thought of the brittle little box as a factor of possible magnitude in his future, but it seems the Quartermaster's Department at Washington got riled at him for not making out a dollar's worth of papers for a mill's worth of goods,—thought him recalcitrant when he wasn't thinking of that business at all, but chasing Apaches for all he was worth, and so in his hour of need the blow fell. Fortunately there was a department commander to interpose betwixt him and the deluge.

And then, talking of department commanders, who would have supposed that, when the genial and kindly chief of the Missouri, one stormy March morning in '76, absolutely forbade Mr. X.'s attempting to proceed from head-quarters to a Western post with his wife and child, and declared, "Never mind your leave expiring to-