

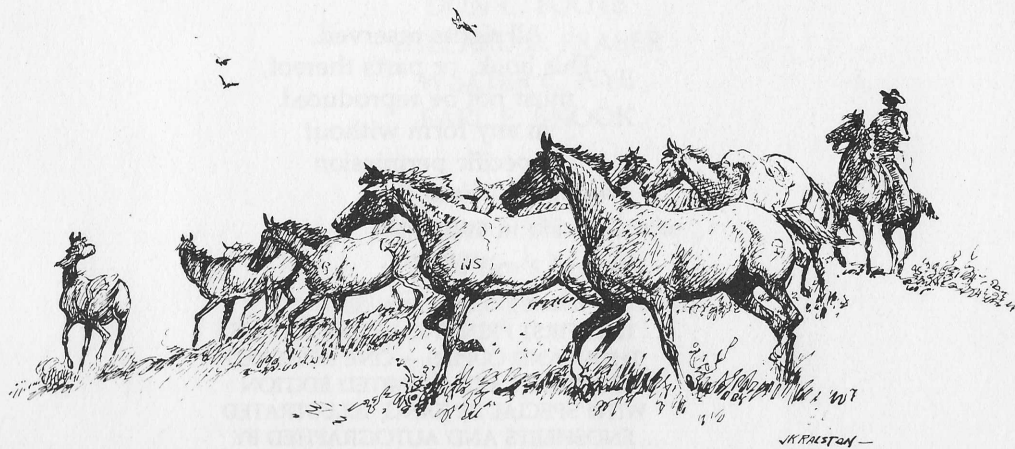
The Voice of the _____ CURLEW



J. K. RALSTON'S STORY OF HIS LIFE

As told to John A. Popovich

The Voice of the CURLEW



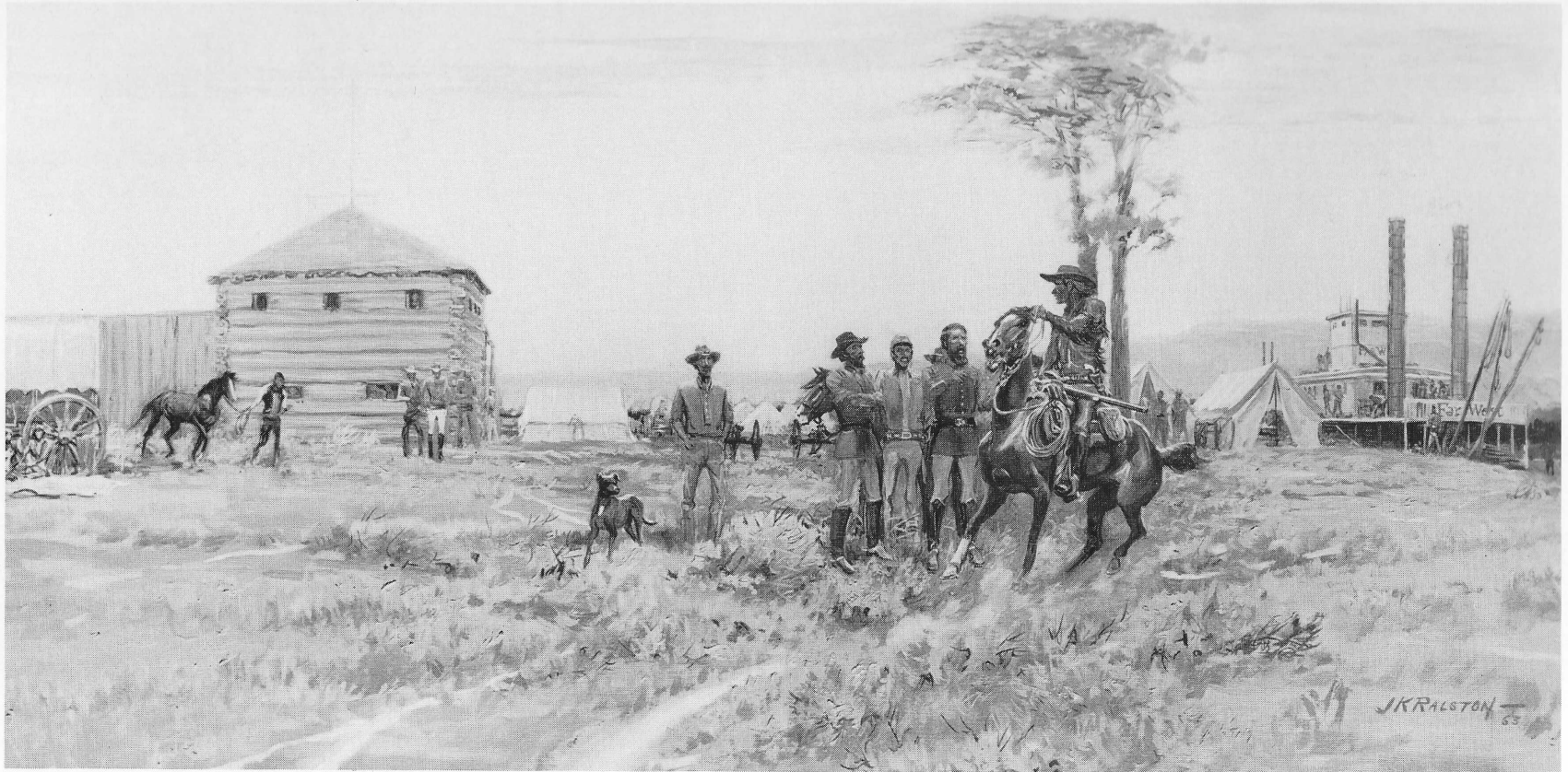
J. K. RALSTON'S STORY OF HIS LIFE

— As told to John A. Popovich —

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J. K. RALSTON



MC - 9 MUGGINS TAYLOR - MAN WITH CUSTER MASSACRE MESSAGE

Oil on Canvas

3'X5'

1963

Kathryn Wright - Billings, MT

The setting for this painting is at the military supply camp at the site of Fort Pease just below the mouth of the Big Horn River on the Yellowstone. We see General Terry giving a dispatch to Muggins Taylor to be delivered to Fort Ellis advising of Custer's defeat on June 25, 1876. The steamer Far West is moored at the river bank awaiting further orders. Ken portrays the pathos which hangs like a somber cloud over all who are stunned by the disaster.

J. K. RALSTON'S STORY OF HIS LIFE

For those who might question the title of this book "The Voice of the Curlew", it was a nickname pinned on Ken while riding for the 79 outfit in 1914. Most cowboys were labeled with a monicker of some kind, too often not complimentary. While night herding, Ken would sing and someone remarked, "It sounds like the cry of the curlew."

Ken's story covers nearly every facet of his life, his family's background and how they came to Montana during the early days of the gold strikes. His childhood days and of the many moves made by the family often prompted by the lure of gold glittering in the gulches. Then there were times when they lived on different ranches — that appealed to all the Ralston boys. He tells about living on the Capital P ranch, of their association with the neighbors they were so fond of and with whom they shared the cares of the day. But there were also the good times which often countered the trials and tribulations felt by so many who pioneered the new untrampled land.

Ken's stories wear both masks of life's drama; of comedy and sometimes of tragedy, but it was always met with fortitude and courage. The chapter on 'Working the Range' records an era that is long forgotten and which lives only in the minds of a very few today. Ken tells of attending the Chicago Art Institute, his hitch in the Army, and of his courtship and marriage. He tells of living out on the west coast doing commercial and graphic art work and then returning to the ranch.

Much of Ken's life was spent in Billings as a professional artist. He dwells on this important segment of his life, telling about his paintings and commissions. Over the years Ken acquired a host of friends and many of them are remembered in his story.

Unfortunately, three stories are not included in the narrative. These are: The story of how his father and uncles were stranded by a sudden snowstorm while hunting in the mountains. They were saved by the uncanny instinct of their lead horse who led them out, in armpit deep snow, through a perilous canyon pass. The second story is about the callous murder of his uncle Jake, in 1903, while trapping in the mountains. The third story is of uncle Frank's tenure in the employ with the Rockefeller family in New York state. Not having these stories in the first person, I was reluctant to offer a secondhand version.

John A. Popovich