

**PROLOGUE**  
**THE LIFE OF YELLOWSTONE KELLY**  
BY  
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The procession left the Commercial Club at 2:30 that afternoon, moving slowly on foot to the soulful dirge and steady thump of muffled drums from the Rotary Club's boys' band. West along Third Avenue the retinue proceeded, turning south at Broadway to First Avenue North, then east to Twenty-second Street, where autos were boarded for the final leg of the journey to the crest of the "rim."

It was an impressive group, headed by color bearers, then city officials, Boy Scouts, the band and a firing squad. These were followed by a solitary horse with boots reversed in the stirrups and a saber hanging from the saddle. Finally came the casket itself, resting atop a flower-bedecked wagon drawn by four horses, followed by pall bearers and an honor guard of veterans old and recent.

Most evident were the younger veterans of World War I, but here and there could be seen a few old soldiers in blue, aging members of the G.A.R., from the Spanish and Indian Wars. Proud and straight they marched, these veterans from an era long since passed but not forgotten in the minds of those remaining few who had known and tasted the times of which they had been a part.

This day, the twenty-sixth of June, 1929, was warm and pleasant, typical of the season here in the magnificent valley of the Yellowstone River. It was a day he would have appreciated, he who now lay peacefully within the confines of his flag-draped casket.

Reaching the "rim" the casket was removed from the wagon and placed next to the prepared repository that would soon claim it for eternity. This final resting place, overlooking the great sweep of valley below, was a grand spot indeed – made a man's heart ache with the beauty of it all, not to mention the memories.

From here, a man could gaze out across as fine a view as God ever created. From here, he could look downstream, eyes squinted against the glare of bright sunlight coruscating off the rushing waters of the Yellowstone and recall the time he had come upriver on the old *Far West* with Grant Marsh and Sandy Forsyth back in '73.

Just to the east rose Pompey's Pillar, that towering chunk of sandstone that had served as a register of historic passage from Lewis and Clark to the present, and offering a view nearly as splendid as that currently spread out before a man's musing gaze.

Two days' ride to the south – allowing, of course, that a man had a good horse under him – stretched those tawny slopes where George Custer and his men found their immortality.

To the north lay the Judith Basin, the Big and Little Belt Mountains, and a score of other places that hearkened back to a time when life was sweet and strong; when a man was seldom out of sight of the vast buffalo herds that swarmed over the land, and the aroma of ribs roasting over an open fire produced a contentment of the spirit now vanished along with the herds themselves. Ah yes, if a man had to settle on a final spot, he would be hard pressed to improve on this.

Presently, Mr. Ben Harwood addressed the group, briefly recounting the life of this man to whom they had come to pay their last respects. When he had finished, David Hilger, secretary of the Montana Historical Society and official representative of the state of Montana, paid tribute to the deceased.

Then the firing squad assembled and at the command, fired a volley toward the azure sky, the report trailing off into the high lonesome distance of this waning, early summer afternoon. Finally, American Legion buglers stepped forward and in a moment, the plaintive melody of taps rose above the gathered assembly like the far, thin cry of the wolf whose own presence in this country was now but a memory, like the remains of the man honored by the haunting refrain that bade him farewell.

And so now, finally, it was finished. After nearly four score years and a life that most little boys imagine somehow will be theirs and most old men reach back for wistfully, Luther Sage Kelly had come home at last to his beloved Yellowstone Valley.

*Jerry Keenan is an independent writer/historian and the author of numerous articles and books, including **The Great Sioux Uprising, The Wagon Box Fight, Encyclopedia of American Indian Wars 1492-1890, and Encyclopedia of the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars.** He resides in Longmont, Colorado.*

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