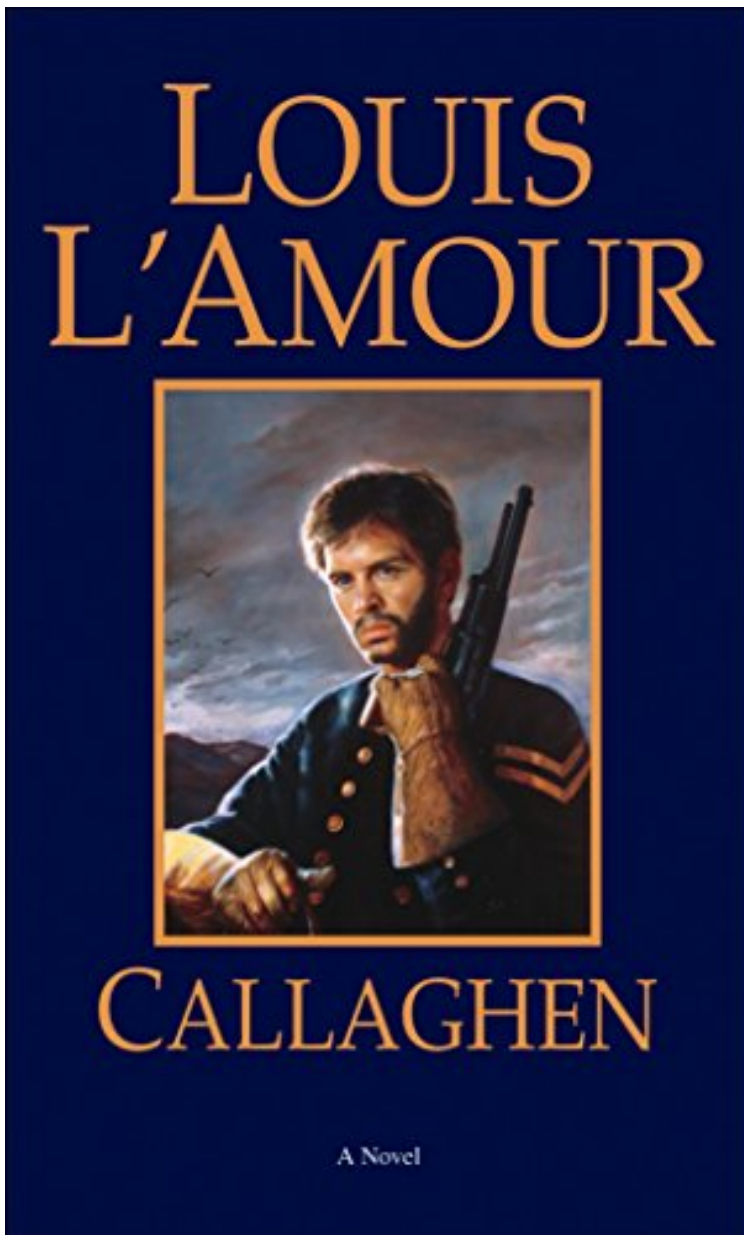


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# Callaghen



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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurCallaghens business is soldiering. For twenty years hed fought all over the world, from China to the deserts of California; now hes a private in the U.S. Cavalry, poorly paid, his enlistment about to run out. Hes ready to move onuntil he comes across a startling discovery: a treasure map belonging to a dead lieutenant who may not have been all that he seemed. The map points the way to an underground river of goldor does it? To find out, Callaghen will have to fight the toughest war of his life: against a fierce Indian warrior, a vindictive commanding officer, and a ruthless gang of outlaws wholl turn what may be a river of

gold into a river of blood. From the Paperback edition. Extrait Chapter One Behind the rocks the Mohaves lay waiting and in the sky, the buzzards. Each was sure of their prey. The four men lay in a flat place, and the sun was high. Two days had passed without water, four days without food, and their ammunition was down to its last few cartridges. Before them was a peak they believed to be Eagle Mountain; if so, there was a water hole up the draw to the right. Of this they could not be sure, but they believed in it as a dying man believes in God. For three days they had thought of that water, longed for it, dreamed wild dreams of it. The most gorgeous woman under heaven would have been spurned by any one of them for one swallow of water, be it brackish, sulphurous, or whatever. The patrol began as they always begin; in this case there were six enlisted men and one officer. The officer was a proud, honorable, and decent young man with his first command, his first patrol into enemy country, where they had seen no enemies for two whole days and nights. A camping spot had been decreed, and when the Delaware advised against it the lieutenant felt he could not permit his decision to be questioned. A few miles farther along, the Delaware assured him, there was a water hole and a defensible position. The young lieutenant hesitated, then decided to stay where they were. They bedded down on level ground, in soft sand. The men slept well, for they were tired. Callaghen was to stand watch the first few hours, to be relieved by Private Baldwin. The night was very clear, and as always in the desert it was cool, almost cold. The heat of the day vanished with the sun, for the rocks and sand did not hold the heat, but surrendered it quickly to the night. Callaghen was wary. He was an experienced soldier, and he did not like the feel of the night, and he had been watching the Delaware. The eastern Indian came of a tribe that numbered great trackers and warriors among them, but they had been driven from their homeland and were now scattered widely over the West. The Delaware had seemed uneasy, his head constantly turning, his eyes busy. The attack came with the first light. Their horses were stampeded, one man was killed, another wounded. Although the just awakening soldiers got off a few shots, there was no indication they had hit anything. The Indians vanished as they had come, fading into the sands like ghosts. What followed was sheer hell. After waiting until the sun was up, the lieutenant formed them into a column of twos and they started out. The lieutenant walked beside Callaghen. "Well, they got what they wanted," he commented, "but it is good to be rid of them." "If we are." "You do not think they have gone?" "No, sir." "Then why don't they attack?" Callaghen shrugged. "It is not their way, sir. They are watching us from out there, to see what we will do. They know this desert. They know what is ahead and we do not. They can plan, but our reaction must depend on circumstances." "You are an educated man," the lieutenant said. "Possibly. I have never been sure just what the term implies." The lieutenant glanced at him, but was silent. They plodded on through ankle-deep sand. The dust rose, covering their clothing, their faces and hands. The wounded man kept up. He had been an Indian-fighting soldier for a long time, and he knew what it would mean to fall behind. The heat was stifling, and there were no clouds. Rocky ridges, bare of vegetation, lay to the left and right, but not close by. Occasionally there were scattered clusters of rock, some greasewood, and clumps of cactus or coarse gray shrubs. At noon the lieutenant called a brief halt. They ate a little jerked beef and a few pieces of hardtack, and took a swallow of water. "Sir? If the Lieutenant will permit?" "What is it, Callaghen?" "There's a long stretch of sand ahead, wide-open country. Off on the right there are some rocks. I suggest that we take shelter there until the sun goes down. I believe they plan to surround us out in the open, where the sun can do their work for them." The idea appealed to the lieutenant, and he had ignored one bit of advice to their cost. "All right," he said, "until the sun goes down. We will march farther and faster when it is cool." Their approach to the rocks was wary, but they arrived safely. The bare rocks were dark red and black, with streaks of quartz through them. It was an isolated cluster, not likely to be chosen by Indians, who prefer a place that can be approached or left under cover. Once in the shade, the men sat down, took off their hats, and put their heads back. The lieutenant started to take a drink, then saw that the others did not do so. Reluctantly he put his canteen down, for he could not permit them to think he had less endurance than they had. Callaghen watched the country around them, but the surrounding sand showed nothing. The Delaware, a soft-walking man, came up beside him. "He listened to you," he said. "I hope he will continue to do so." "Do you know where we are?" "If that is Eagle Mountain, I do, and I am quite sure that it is. The lieutenant was exploring, you know." "You speak good English," Callaghen said. "I went to a good school for five years, and I listen. I was scouting in Texas with Colonel Sibley and Lieutenant Robert E. Lee." They did not talk any more, for their mouths were dry. The water in their canteens would soon be gone, and Eagle Mountain lay far off on the horizon. With the first coolness, they started on. Occasionally the soft sand gave way to harder surface, sometimes to scattered rocks over a hard-packed sand-and-gravel floor. Refreshed by their rest and by the coolness of the air, the men marched well. When an hour had passed and darkness was closing down

on them, some had begun to straggle. The lieutenant paused. "Close up now!" he said. He spoke quietly, but his voice carried. "Keep it closed up." Presently they took a ten-minute break. The stars appeared, and they walked on, guided by them. "The Mohaves are like the Apaches," the Delaware said. "They do not like to fight at night. The Comanches, they like it better at night." Wary of the rock walls now closing in, they made dry camp. The Delaware scouted for water, but found none. They slept fitfully through the night until the sky grew gray. Callaghen was the first man awake, in time to see an Indian ghosting from one rock to another. He touched the lieutenant. "Sir," he said, "they are closing in." The last few stars still hung in the sky, and it was still cool. "We can march," the lieutenant said. "All right, men, let's go." They started, and no shots were fired. Callaghen looked toward the horizon. It was going to be a brutal day. A mile . . . two miles. Ahead of them lay an apparently wide-open area of sand and scattered brush. Occasionally they saw a Joshua tree stretching its weird twisted arms. Another mile . . . Every yard covered was to their advantage, but the Mohaves were out there, and the Mohaves knew how long it was since they had stopped at a waterhole, they knew how little water they must have left, and they would know about the wounded man. The post, if such it could be called, was three days' ride to the southeast. On foot, and under good conditions, it was four to five days, but without adequate water this might stretch from another day to never. When the attack came it was completely unexpected. It came from a cluster of scattered low rocks that seemed to offer no substantial cover. The first shot caught the lieutenant in the chest and he fell to his knees coughing. Automatically every man dropped to one knee and returned the fire. There was no answering fire. The Mohaves had vanished. "Got my canteen," the man named Baldwin said. "Damn it to hell, they split it!" "They nicked mine," the Delaware said. "I think that was what they wanted to do." Callaghen held a canteen to the lieutenant's lips, but he brushed it away. "You will need that, Callaghen. You are in command now." He put a hand out to the Delaware. "I am sorry. I was wrong not to listen to you." Callaghen looked around slowly, studying the terrain. There was nothing he could do for the lieutenant. Even if they had been at the fort, he would have died. He knew by the color of the blood and the froth on his lips. The bullet, of heavy caliber, had gone in under his left arm and through his lungs, cutting an artery in transit. He knew the lieutenant was going to die, and the lieutenant knew it, too. . . . He died quickly. The Delaware crawled up beside Callaghen. "They have gone, I think. They want to kill us all, but they do not want to lose even one of their own." "We have four canteens, five men. We will need water before anything else." They rolled the body of their officer into a shallow place and scooped sand over him. Callaghen mentally took note of what landmarks there were, and they started on. No shot came, no Indian appeared. Callaghen now had the lieutenant's pistol and thirty-two rounds of ammunition. He had also taken his papers, money, and whatever else was of value. These must be returned to the post, not only so that the lieutenant's relatives might have them, but so the Indians might not get them. The sun appeared over the mountains, and already they could feel its heat. Callaghen mentally measured the distance to the mountain toward which he was aiming. It was far, much too far. The surface was firm for a change. There were scattered, fist-sized rocks, and there was more brush, but none of it was more than knee-high. He led the way, holding his stride to easy, measured steps. There was no cover near them now, neither shelter for an enemy nor for themselves. Suddenly he saw two riders off to the left. He recognized his own horse, and swore softly. On the other side were two more riders, who made no attempt to draw closer. They did not fire, and they remained well beyond shooting range. At ten o'clock Callaghen stopped the men. It was in the middle of a broad, open area, but they were ready to drop with weariness. He nodded off to their right. "See that bunch of rocks?" he said. "We can make them by noon, and we can find shade there, enough to sit out the day." Nobody spoke. Their faces showed their extreme fatigue. Croker, the wounded man, was bearing up well. Callaghen went to him. "Don't worry," Croker said, "when you get there, I'll be with you." After a few minutes Callaghen got them on their feet and started on once more. He held his course straight ahead as if to bypass the rocks, then when not more than two hundred yards from them he suddenly flanked his men. "All right!" he said sharply. "On the double!" He knew they were ready to drop. He also knew that if the Mohaves guessed his intention they would ride to head him off. He could only hope his line of march would deceive them until the last moment. They ran, and for men half-dead from heat, exhaustion, and thirst, they ran well. Each man knew it was his own life that was at stake, his own life for which he ran. Shots rang out, a man stumbled, ran on, then fell. The Delaware was about to stop but Callaghen waved him on. "Into the rocks!" he commanded. He dropped to one knee, aimed at a rider, and fired. The Mohave pulled up sharply and swung his horse, hanging far over. The others veered off, and he walked to the fallen man. It was Baldwin, and he was dead. Stripping him of his ammunition, rifle and almost empty canteen, Callaghen straightened up and began

to walk. The others were just reaching the rocks, where there was shelter. They had found a little shade. The Delaware had crossed to the far side, taking up a half-shaded position from which he could watch. Croker also had found a good firing position. Sweat dripped down Callaghan's face. He was surprised there was so much moisture left in his parched body, for his lips were cracked, and his eyes smarted from sunburned rims. He put a fresh pebble in his mouth, but it produced little saliva in his dry mouth. One by one he studied the men as they rested. That they had come so far was a marvel, but they must still move on. If there was water near Eagle Mountain, as the Delaware believed, they would wait there, refresh themselves, and then set out again. Callaghan knew what he hoped the Indians did not know: that there was no relief. There were no other soldiers to come looking for them; and in all that vast wasteland of the Mohave Desert there was no one from whom they could expect help. At Camp Cady, when they had ridden out on their patrol that was expected to give them some knowledge of the country, but no contact with the enemy there was a captain and four enlisted men. One thing they had that Callaghan and the patrol's survivors did not have. They had water plenty of water. Chapter Two Callaghan considered the odds and found no comfort in them. His men were obviously dehydrated, some in much worse shape than others. He knew the signs. None of the men complained; they were beyond that. From their flushed skin, labored breathing, and sleepiness, he could judge their degree of exhaustion. Walsh was rubbing his arms and legs, and several times Callaghan had seen him shake his head. A tingling of the limbs, dizziness, and difficulty in breathing indicated that he was worse off than the wounded man. These symptoms would be followed by delirium, swollen tongue, and partial deafness. If they could get water tomorrow . . . Walsh emptied his canteen, then made as if to throw it away. "Don't do that, Walsh," Callaghan said. "If we get to water tomorrow, you'll need a canteen." Walsh blinked, then shrugged, but he kept his canteen. It was a long, slow day. The minutes seemed like hours, and the men mostly lay still, but once in a while one moved into a bit of shade, one man to a spot, for nowhere was there enough shade for two. Occasionally a shot splintered rock near them as the Mohaves let them know they were out there, waiting. Presentation de l'diteur Callaghens business is soldiering. For twenty years hed fought all over the world, from China to the deserts of California; now hes a private in the U.S. Cavalry, poorly paid, his enlistment about to run out. Hes ready to move on until he comes across a startling discovery: a treasure map belonging to a dead lieutenant who may not have been all that he seemed. The map points the way to an underground river of gold or does it? To find out, Callaghan will have to fight the toughest war of his life: against a fierce Indian warrior, a vindictive commanding officer, and a ruthless gang of outlaws wholl turn what may be a river of gold into a river of blood. From the Paperback edition.