

## GEN. FORSYTHE AT THE ARRICKAREE.

A THRILLING STORY OF INDIAN WARFARE.



GENERAL FORSYTHE.

**I** WAS sitting in my office at Fort Har-ker on a warm evening in the latter part of September, 1868, musing over a pipeful of "Long Jack," upon the possible extent of the impending Indian war, which had already been planned by Gen. Sheridan, in the seclusion of my own quarters, only the night before. It was rapidly

growing dark; the somber line of the twilight curve had almost met the western horizon, and only the faintest tinge of purple beneath marked

the intermedium between the gloaming and the rayless sky.

Nothing disturbed my reverie as I wandered in my imagination over the bleak expanse of the Arkansas, Cimarron and Canadian rivers, so soon to be the scene of active operations, except the monotonous clicking of the relay in the window of the next room, where the Government night operator was on duty, who was also meditating in the darkness.

The terrible massacres on Spillman creek, only a few weeks before, still furnished food for vengeful thoughts that would not down, as images of the murdered women and little ones rose in horrible visions upon the thick night before me.

The dismal howl of a hungry wolf borne upon the still air from the timbered recesses of the Smoky added to the weird aspect that my surroundings were rapidly assuming, and there seemed some portentous and indescribable thing bearing down upon the place.

Suddenly the operator—while the clicking of the instruments became more nervous and varied from their monotone of the whole evening—exclaimed, "My God! Major, what's this?"

"What is what?" said I, jumping from my chair and rushing to his side. Quickly lighting

his little lamp and seizing his pencil, he wrote upon a blank as I looked over his shoulder and read—while the clicking grew more convulsive still—these words:

"Gen. Forsythe surrounded by Indians on the Republican. Lieut. Beecher, the doctor, and many of the scouts killed; nearly the entire command, including the general, wounded. Stillwell, one of the scouts, ran the gauntlet of the savages, and brings report. Col. Carpenter, Tenth Cavalry, and his command, leave immediately to relieve them."

This was a fragment of the whole dispatch going over the wires from Fort Hays to Fort Leavenworth and Washington. We had taken enough of it to know that a terrible disaster had befallen the gallant Forsythe, of Sheridan's staff, and his plucky band of scouts, who were all civilians and Kansans.

The headquarters of Gen. Sheridan, who was at the date of this narrative in command of the Department of the Missouri, were temporarily established at Fort Harker. He was consummating his arrangements for a winter campaign against the hostile tribes, and the idea suggested itself that a body of carefully selected men, composed of the

best material to be found on the frontier, under the leadership of an experienced officer, could effect excellent results.

These scouts, as they were to be termed, were to go anywhere, and act entirely independent of the regularly organized troops about to take the field.

Generals Custer and Sully, the next in rank to Sheridan, both already famous as Indian fighters, coincided with this view of the commanding general; and it was determined to pick fifty equipped frontiersmen at once, commission Forsythe as their leader, who in the incipency of the movement modestly solicited the responsible position.

The fifty-four men were chosen from an aggregate of more than 2,000 employed by the Government at various positions at Forts Harker and Hays. The reader may rest assured that only those were accepted who possessed the essential qualifications of indomitable courage, wonderful endurance, perfect markmanship, and a thorough knowledge of the Indian character.

Gen. Forsythe chose for his lieutenant his particular friend F. H. Beecher, of the Third Infantry, a nephew of the celebrated Brooklyn clergyman.

Some days were occupied at Fort Harker in fitting out the little expedition, but no unneces-

sary equipage or superfluous camp paraphernalia formed any part of the supplies.

There were no tents or wagons. Pack-mules carried the commissary stores, which were of the simplest character, and as the object of the party was war, its impedimenta were reduced to the minimum.

Each man was mounted on an excellent horse, his armament a breech-loading rifle and two revolvers.

This troop of brave men left Harker for Hays in the latter part of August, from which point their arduous duties were commenced.

On the 29th of that month, all the preliminaries for taking the field having been completed and their surgeon joined, they marched out of the fort on their perilous mission. After scouting over a large area for several days without meeting any sign of the Cheyennes, they concluded to go to Wallace to recuperate and refit.

Sometime during the second week in September the Indians made a raid on a Government wagon train near Sheridan station, on the Kansas Pacific Railroad, about twelve miles east of Wallace. As soon as the news reached the fort over the wires, Forsythe and his little band of scouts started to intercept the savages on their retreat.

Next morning the little command struck the fresh trail of the Indians, and by forced marches came so close that they compelled them to separate into insignificant detachments, but night coming rapidly on, the General lost the trail. The conclusion was, after a consultation with the best plainsmen among the party, that the Indians would naturally go northward; so it was determined to take that direction in pursuit.

The scouts continued their course for more than a week without the least trifling incident to relieve the wearisome monotony of the march.

Suddenly, on the afternoon of the eighth day, as they were approaching the bluffs of the Republican river, they discovered an immense trail still leading to the north. The signs indicated that a large body of warriors, with pack animals, women and children, and lodges of a big camp, had recently camped there.

It was growing dark, and rather than take the chances of losing this trail in the night, it was determined to bivouac in the vicinity, rest the animals, and continue the pursuit at the first streak of dawn.

It was well that this course was decided upon, or there would have been none left to tell the story of the fight, as the result will show. The

spot selected for the bivouac had some slight strategic value, and was for that reason chosen by the General, after it had been pointed out by two of his men, Tom Murphy and Jack Stillwell; though he had no idea at the time that any benefit would result from their judgment in this particular. It was an elongated low mound of sand (such as are seen at intervals in the Arkansas) which the Arrickaree fork of the Republican at this time embraced (as the Cheyenne does the Black Hills), forming an island.

If this trail had not been struck, it was the intention to have gone back to Wallace for provisions, as only sufficient for one day remained; but upon prospects of a fight, it was unanimously agreed to go, and take the chances of finding something to eat.

In the early gray of the next morning, while the stars were still twinkling and at the hour when sleep oppresses more than at any other time, the sentinels posted on the hills above the island yelled, "Indians!"

In a moment the camp was awake. With rifle in hand, each scout rushed for the lariat to which his horse was picketed, knowing of course that the first effort on the part of the Indians would be to stampede the animals. As it was,

a small party of them dashed in with a horrid whoop, and shaking their buffalo robes, succeeded in running off a small portion of the pack-mules, besides one or two of the horses.

A few shots fired by the most advanced of the scouts scattered the Indians, and quiet reigned again for a few minutes.

Almost immediately, however, before the scouts had completed saddling their horses—which the General had ordered—one of the guides nearest Forsythe happening to look up, could not help giving vent to the expression, "Great heavens! General, see the Indians!"

Well might he be excited. Over the hills, from the west and north, along the river on the opposite bank—everywhere, and in every direction, they made their appearance. Finely mounted, in full war paint, their long scalp-locks braided with eagles' feathers, and with all the paraphernalia of a barbarous war party, with wild and exultant shouts, on they came.

It was a desperate-looking preponderance of brute force and savage subtlety, against the cool and calm judgment of the disciplined plainsmen. But the General, without glancing at the hell in front and all around him, with only the lines of determination in his face a little more marked,

grasping the terrible picture before him, stoically ordered his men to take possession of the sand mound with their horses, and then determined, almost against hope, to accept the wager of battle.

It happened, fortunately, that on this island were growing some stunted shrubs, to which the animals were fastened, their bodies forming a cordon, inside of which the luckless scouts prepared for the demoniacal charge which they knew must come with its terrible uncertainty in a few minutes.

They had scarcely secured their animals, when like the shock of a whirlwind on came the savages, and the awfully unequal battle commenced.

It was just the break of dawn; the Indians, taking advantage of the uncertain light, dismounted from their ponies, and creeping within easy range, poured in a murderous fire upon the scouts.

The Indians were splendidly armed as usual, through the munificence of the Government, by its apathy in preventing renegade white men or traders from supplying them.

When the full morning came, which had been anxiously waited for by the scouts, then they first realized their desperate situation. Appar-

ently as numerous as the sand-grains of their little fortification, the Indians hemmed them in on all sides. More than a thousand hideously painted and screaming warriors surrounded them, with all their hatred of the race depicted on their fiendish countenances, in anticipation of the victory which seemed so certain.

Scattered among these, out of rifle-range, were the squaws and children of the aggregated band, watching with gloating eyes the progress of the battle, while the hills roared their diabolical death-chant and the howling of the medicine-men inspiring the young warriors to deeds of daring.

No one can form the slightest conception of the horrid picture spread before the scouts on the clear gray of that morning, unless he or she has realized it in the hostile encounters with the hostile tribes on the plains. Language is inadequate, and all the attempts at word-painting fall so short of the reality that it were better left wrapped in its terrible incomprehensibility.

The General and his brave men took in their chances at a glance. They saw little hope in the prospect, but they determined, however, never to be taken alive—a thousand deaths by the bullet were preferable to that; so made up their minds

to fight to the bitter end, which would only come when the ammunition was exhausted or themselves killed.

To this end they commenced to intrench as best they could, by scraping holes in the sand with the only implement at their command—their hands. They succeeded in making a sort of rifle-pit of their position, but before the work was completed, two of the scouts were killed outright, and many wounded—among the latter the General himself.

Owing to the dreadful firing of the Indians, who continually charged down upon the island, the doctor was compelled to abandon the care of the wounded and become a combatant; he did excellent work with his rifle, but a bullet soon pierced his brain, and he too fell dead.

In a few seconds after the doctor's death, in the midst of a terrible onslaught by the Indians, the General was again struck—this time near the ankle, the ball perforating the bone as perfectly as if done with an auger.

The firing of the scouts had not all this time been without telling effect upon the Indians—many a painted warrior had bitten the dust before the sun was two hours high. At each successive charge of the redskins, the scouts, cool and

careful, and deliberate, took aim, and when their rifles were discharged each put a savage *hors de combat*—there was no ammunition wasted!

Nor had the besieged escaped from the fearful onset of their enemies: besides the casualties related, nearly all the horses had been killed—in fact, before noon all but one had fallen, and it is told that when he too was killed, one of the warriors exclaimed in English, “There goes the last horse, anyway!”

At this juncture, with all their horses killed or wounded, the Indians determined upon one more grand charge which would settle the unequal contest. So they rallied all their forces and hazarded their reputation upon the aggregated assault.

This charging column was composed of about one hundred and fifty “dog soldiers” and nearly five hundred more of the Brulé, Cheyennes, and Arapahoes, all under the command of the celebrated chief “Roman Nose.”

Superbly mounted, almost naked, although in full war dress, and painted in the most hideous manner, formed with a front of about sixty men, they awaited in the greatest confidence the signal of their chief to charge.

Their leader at first signaled to the dismounted men beyond this line of horsemen to fire into the

scouts, and thus make his contemplated charge more effective. At the moment of the fusillade, seeing the little garrison was stunned by the fire of the dismounted Indians, and rightly judging that now if ever was the proper time to charge, Roman Nose and his band of mounted warriors,



THE CHARGE.

with a wild ringing war-whoop, echoed by the women and children on the hills, started forward.

On they came, presenting even to the brave men awaiting their charge, a most superb sight.

Soon they were within the range of the rifles of their friends, and of course the dismounted Indians had to slacken their fire for fear of hitting their own warriors.

And this was the opportunity for the scouts.

"Now!" shouted Forsythe; and the scouts, springing to their knees, cast their eyes coolly along the barrels of their rifles, and opened upon the advancing savages a deadly fire.

Unchecked, undaunted, on dashed the warriors. Steadily rang the sharp report of the rifles of the frontiersmen. Roman Nose falls dead from his horse; "Medicine Man" is killed; and for an instant the column, now within ten feet of the scouts, hesitates—falters.

A cheer from the scouts, who perceive the effect of their well-directed fire, as the Indians begin to break and scatter in every direction, unwilling to rush into a hand-to-hand struggle. A few more shots, and the Indians are forced back beyond range.

Forsythe inquires anxiously, "Can they do better than that, Grover?"

"I have been on the plains, General, since a boy, and never saw such a charge as that before."

"All right, then; we are good for them."

It was in this grand charge, led in person by their greatest of all warriors, Roman Nose, that Lieut. Beecher was mortally wounded. He suffered intensely, and lingered some hours before his manly spirit was extinguished.

He and I were warmly attached to one another.

I knew full well the generous impulses of his warm young heart, and his perfect unselfishness. He was brave, the very soul of honor, and a favorite in all garrisons.

Before night closed in on the terrible tragedy of that day, the Indians charged on the weary and beleagured scouts again and again, but were as often driven back by the dreadful accuracy of the rifles of the besieged, with an increasing loss each time.

The darkness which had been earnestly looked for at last brought the welcome respite, and it was made possible for the unfortunate men to steal a moment's rest, that was needed, oh, how much!

Hungry, exhausted, with an empty commissariat, every animal dead, their comrades lying stark upon the dreary sand, and a great number writhing in all the agony of torturing wounds; a relentless enemy ever watching; no skilled hand to alleviate the sufferings of the dying, and the only hope of help that might never come, more than a hundred miles away.

Think of that; grasp it if you can!

Later, while the night yet thickened, preparations were made to meet the events that were sure to come with the morning's light, and the little

fort—for it had certainly now reached the dignity of that title—was made still stronger. For gabions, the swollen carcasses of the dead horses were used, and huge slices were cut from their thighs for food. Thank God, the torturings of thirst were not added to their other sufferings, for water was easily obtained by digging a short distance.

Thus strengthened, a midnight council of war was held in whisperings, and it was determined to send two of their number to Fort Wallace, as desperate as the undertaking was. A mere boy, Stillwell, and another, Truedell, expressed their willingness to make the attempt.

The brave men crawled from the "island" to run the gauntlet of the watchful savages, ever on the alert to take advantage of the least unfavorable demonstration on the part of their prey, as they fully believed them.

We will leave them making their way cautiously but hopefully in the darkness, for it is not the purpose of the writer at this time to tell of the noble efforts of these brave messengers in their hairbreadth escapes on their lonesome and perilous journey; but let us turn to the worn-out and wounded band of heroes again, to learn how they fared during the long days before help could

possibly reach them, even were Stillwell and his companion able to reach Wallace.

The sun rose in all the splendor of a Kansas autumn morning, but the landscape bore the same horrid features of the day before. All through the weary hours the Indians kept up an incessant firing, though no serious charge was attempted—they had had more than they had anticipated, in their efforts in that direction yesterday. The scouts, now pretty effectually intrenched, suffered but little from the wild firing of their besiegers, but it was annoying, and kept the brave men ever prepared for a possible charge, the result of which might not be so fortunate as former ones.

Night again came to throw its mantle of rest upon the little band, and shortly after dark two more scouts were sent out to reach Fort Wallace, if possible; but they failed to get beyond the line of watchful savages, and were compelled to abandon the idea.

This unsuccessful attempt to go for help cast a gloom over the little command, for it could not yet be known what had been the fate of the other two who had gone out the night previously.

The next day the state of affairs assumed a more cheerful aspect—if that could be possible. The squaws and children had disappeared, indi-

eating a retreat upon the part of the Indians, although they still kept up their firing at intervals: perhaps they, too, were getting short of ammunition and provisions.

In the afternoon the savages hoisted a white rag upon a pole and expressed a desire to talk, but our heroes were too wary to be caught with such chaff as that, for with Indians a flag of truce means a massacre, half the time.

That night two more men were sent out, and these carried that famous dispatch of Forsythe's, which should hold its place in history with that other memorable one of Grant's: "I intend to fight it out on this line if it takes all summer." Forsythe's read:

"I am on a little island, and have still plenty of ammunition left. We are living on mule- and horse-meat, and are entirely out of rations. If it were not for so many wounded I would come on and take the chance of whipping them if attacked. They are evidently sick of their bargain. I can hold out six days longer if absolutely necessary; but lose no time."

The morning of the fourth day, on the now historic island, broke somewhat more cheerful still. The Indians could be seen moving rapidly away,

only a few comparatively remaining in sight, to wait till exhaustion and starvation should place the scouts in their power. They little knew the metal of the men lying behind those breastworks of rotten carcasses, or they too would have gone with the old men, women and children of the tribe.

A few shots were fired by the scouts in response to the occasional random fusillade of the Indians: they contented themselves with saving their ammunition for a possible last grand act in the drama, only shooting when an Indian came within certain range, when he was sure to be sent to the "happy hunting-grounds."

Night again came with its relative rest, and then another weary day of watching and waiting, without any special demonstration on the part of the Indians.

New horrors now made their appearance in the shape of gangrened wounds, and suffering for food. The putrid flesh of the dead horses and mules was all that remained to support life, and however revolting, it had to be swallowed. The nauseating effluvia of the rapidly decaying carcasses, too, made the place almost intolerable, and so insufferable did it become that the General told those who were disheartened to go; but all to

a man, to their honor be it recorded, refused, electing to remain with their companions-in-arms—to be rescued, or die with them.

Two more days of torture, and then, on the ridge between them and the golden sunlight gleamed the bright bayonets of Col. Carpenter and his column of "the boys in blue."

Their Havelock had reached this American Lucknow, and cheer after cheer—feeble though they were—went up from the little island, and our story closes with the rescue of these brave men.

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GENERAL FORSYTHE (himself wounded in both legs) gives a very graphic description of the charge of the Indians, and the appearance of their hero and chief, Roman Nose. He says:

"As Roman Nose dashed gallantly forward and swept into the open at the head of his superb command, he was the very *beau-ideal* of an Indian chief. Mounted on a large, clean-limbed chestnut horse, he sat well forward on his bareback charger, his knees passing under a horsehair lariat that twice loosely encircled the animal's body, his horse's bridle grasped in his left hand, which was also closely wound in its flowing mane, and

at the same time clutched his rifle at the guard, the butt of which lay partially across the animal's neck, while its barrel, crossing diagonally in front of his body, rested slightly against the hollow of his left arm, leaving his right free to direct the course of his men. He was a man over six feet three inches in height, beautifully formed, and save for a crimson silk sash knotted around his waist and his moccasins on his feet, perfectly naked. His face was hideously painted in alternate lines of red and black, and his head crowned with a magnificent war-bonnet, from which, just above his temples and curving slightly forward, stood up two short black buffalo horns, while its ample length of eagles' feathers and herons' plumes trailed wildly on the wind behind him; and as he came swiftly on at the head of his charging warriors, in all his barbaric strength and grandeur, he proudly rode that day the most perfect type of a savage warrior it has been my lot to see. Turning his face for an instant toward the women and children of the united tribes, who literally by thousands were watching the fight from the crest of the low bluffs back from the river's bank, he raised his right arm and waved his right hand with a royal gesture, in answer to their wild cries of rage and encouragement as he and his com-

mand swept down upon us; and again, facing squarely towards where we lay, he drew his body to its full height and shook his clenched fist defiantly at us; then, throwing back his head and glancing skyward, he suddenly struck the palm of his hand across his mouth and gave tongue to a war-cry that I have never yet heard equaled in power and intensity. Scarcely had its echoes reached the river's bank when it was caught up by each and every one of the charging warriors with an energy that baffles description, and answered back with blood-curdling yells of exultation and prospective vengeance by the women and children on the river's bluff and by the Indians who lay in ambush around us. On they came at a swinging gallop, rending the air with their wild war-whoops, each individual warrior in all his bravery of war paint and long braided scalp-lock tipped with eagles' feathers, and all stark naked but for their cartridge belts and moccasins, keeping their line almost perfectly, with a front of about sixty men all riding horseback, with only a loose lariat about their horses' bodies, and about a yard apart, and with a depth of six or seven ranks, forming together a compact body of massive fighting strength, and of almost resistless weight. 'Boldly they rode and well,' with their horses' bridles in

their left hands, while with their right they grasped their rifles at the guard and held them squarely in front of themselves, resting lightly upon their horses' necks.

"Riding about five paces in front of the center of the line, and twirling his heavy Springfield rifle about his head as if it were a wisp of straw, Roman Nose recklessly led the charge with a bravery that could only be equaled but not excelled; while their medicine-man, an equally brave yet older chief, rode slightly in advance of the left of the charging column.

"To say that I was surprised at this splendid exhibition of pluck and discipline, is to put it mildly; and to say, further, that for an instant or two I was fairly lost in admiration of the glorious charge, is simply to state the truth—for it was far and away beyond anything I had heard of, read about, or even imagined regarding Indian warfare."