

## A MASSACRE ON THE FRONTIER.

In obedience to instructions from Major-General Wool, United States Army, about the 1st of May, 1856, a well-equipped command of soldiers under Lieutenant-Colonel Steptoe broke camp at The Dalles, Oregon, and took the line of march for Walla Walla Valley, Washington Territory. This expedition consisted of six companies of the Ninth United States Infantry, one battery of the Third United States Artillery and one troop of the First United States Dragoons. The first named regiment had just reported on the Pacific Coast, being newly created by Act of Congress, 1855. They were armed with the splendid Minnie rifle, and from their proficiency in the light infantry or skirmish drill were dubbed the "Shanghais"—a reference to the huge chicken of that name. The artillery and dragoons were old, seasoned companies, having been stationed in the department for many years, scouting incessantly. To this command were added a small party of Indian allies, under an old chief named Stock Whittly, and a few guides, with old "Cut-Mouth John" in charge. The first day's march, as is usual, was short, a halt being made on Ten-Mile Creek. About midnight an officer from Fort Dalles rode rapidly into camp and delivered an order to our commander, the purport of which was that he should march his troops directly back; that the Indians from the Yakima country and those located at the Cascades had murdered all the whites in the portage. Notwithstanding the lateness of the hour this news was speedily communicated throughout the command, and by the blaze of the quickly replenished fires the soldiers could be seen flitting about in active preparation for the counter-march, and long before the dawn of day the column was clattering along the trail towards the steamboat landing, where the diminutive steamer *Mary Ann* was waiting and sputtering in nervous readiness. This little boat had already enacted a somewhat tragical part in the proceedings now being narrated. She lay tied to the bank at her usual mooring when the Indians attacked the whites. The crew, consisting of Captain Baughman, and two others on shore, endeavored to regain the steamer. The engineer was shot, the two others rapidly cast off the line, and trusting to an effort to raise steam, soon placed themselves in a position to go over the rapids, preferring, I suppose, that means

of destruction to the tomahawk. Fortune favored them, however, and the *Mary Ann* swung broadside against an island on the further side, where she rested securely till due preparation was made, when she started for The Dalles at her highest speed. One of the two aboard was wounded in the final brave attempt to escape.

Colonel George Wright, of the Ninth Infantry, now took command, and what infantry could be stowed away were rushed upon the deck; also the artillery, with two mountain howitzers, were put aboard. A large, leaky scow was made fast alongside, and into this the dragoons, with horses and equipment, were crammed. Thus, in four short hours from the time the courier reached our camp, ten miles away, the little *Mary Ann* was rounding out into the broad Columbia, with the principal part of the force the camp contained. In those days travel was slow by any route in the far West, so at the end of our first day's sail we were yet ten miles from our destination, distant forty-five miles from the point of starting. A bivouac was made in the forest on the bank and the journey renewed in about time to fetch us to the Cascades at daybreak. Eyes were now strained and heads inclined in listening attitude as we approached the shore.

The first attraction was the firing of guns and waving of handkerchiefs from Bradford's store, where some dozen of the whites were held in barricade by the hostiles. This demonstration had hardly greeted us when a volley from the forest-lined shore told us that the redskins were awaiting us, also. Now, as the cavalry were by bad luck on the side nearest the bank, their predicament, mingled as they were among unruly horses, can be imagined. Quickly, however, the little boat's nose was buried in the mud and every man sprang ashore. The infantry, not to be outdone, leaping from the upper deck, a line was soon formed in the timber, which at that date was close at hand. The howitzers were discharged from the steamer, raking the woods far in front. The Indians, gathered to form resistance, were soon driven back, the troops following close upon their heels, the cracking of their rifles was soon drowned by the roar of our own fire, each man rushing on as if to devour the enemy. Soon four of them were picked up, and further on another lying prone beside a half-emptied whiskey barrel. Miserable victim of intemperance, he received no opportunity to take the pledge in this world.

Onward the skirmishers swept, through the dense brush, over fallen logs, never halting till comrades' voices at the old block-house told us they still "held the fort." This small detachment had been regularly stationed here at the center of the portage for some months, and suffered the first onslaught of the Indians, losing one of their number, but they kept them at bay for thirty hours, although they numbered but six against more than a hundred.

Soon a spirited firing was heard still on towards the larger portage. This proved to be the skirmishers, commanded by Lieutenant Phil Sheridan, who, with his usual energy, was driving the hostiles from that vicinity. The action of the militia from The Dalles above and Fort Vancouver below was simultaneous, so the redskins were compelled to vacate the whole section they had contemplated devastating, and which they had rendered quite undesirable for settlement for some years. A system of scouring the brush by skirmishers was kept up for several days, until the enemy could be no longer found or heard.

Many amusing and some serious mishaps occurred among the raw soldiers, especially at night, when burnt stumps and black boulders were easily clothed with blankets and other savage semblance. A remnant of the war party was captured on an island just below the middle rapids, to which refuge they were traced with much difficulty and danger. The able-bodied bucks, numbering eight, were very promptly hanged by order of the commander, after an examination by a commission of officers. They all met their death stoically, with the exception of one burly fellow, who so excited the ire of an eccentric lieutenant that the latter discharged the contents of his revolver into the body while it was swinging from the scaffold. The dogs were kept constantly busy after the fighting ended in hunting up the victims of the slaughter. All were finally found, numbering about twenty-three.

One poor lady—Mrs. Sinclair—was discovered floating in an eddy of the river, shot through her breast, shorn of her long hair and entirely nude. She was tenderly cared for by soldiers, humane and true, and buried with all due ceremony. Several instances of excessive barbarity were disclosed in our search and traces of desolation were abundant.

I am, however, happy to say that since this trouble the peaceful dwellers under the shadows of those gigantic mountains have not again been disturbed by the savage. The troops remained at the Cascades working amid the rain and mud until two sub-

stantial blockhouses had been erected, and leaving a sufficient garrison, departed for their different stations. The dragoons proceeded to Hood River, where they had the pleasure and pain of meeting the Yakimas, who, in retreating to their own country, had halted at this point on the Columbia about midway between the portage and The Dalles to fire some cabins and drive off some cattle. As they were posted on the northern or opposite bank considerable risk was encountered in crossing and dislodging them, the soldiers having to quit their horses and cross in Chinook canoes, which craft was generally unmanageable in our hands.

After the completion of these affairs, the Yakima expedition was organized by Colonel Wright, which campaign lasted till the snows of winter set in. Several small skirmishes took place, and those Indians were subdued. The command penetrated into the several passes of the Cascade Mountains, where the snow lay at great depth, even in the month of August. Fort Simcoe, in the valley of that name, was established in the midst of the tribes just conquered, and Major Robert Garnett was the first commanding officer. Captain Bowman, Ninth Infantry, having become insane on the expedition, was being conducted to The Dalles, when he escaped from his guard, and roaming alone through the mountains, was devoured by wolves, probably after death had overtaken him.

This narrative may seem prosy in the light of the stupendous events of war and frontier settlement just transpired, but the subject took place at an early period in the isolated Northwest and many years were required to repair the damages and great suffering was entailed thereby.

None who glean their information from the newspaper paragraphs concerning these matters can experience the thrill of horror felt by those who almost immediately witnessed them, and the past emotions can ever be traced in the faces of the settler and his family in the carelessness of everyday vocations or in the severity of old age. Frequently of late years, whilst whirling along in the railroad trains that now graces the great portages of the Columbia, I have been informed by "tourists" of the scenes set forth and shown the old barricade where the gallant Phil withstood the attack of hundreds of painted braves, when bread and water were exhausted and life hung trembling in the balance. No wonder these heroic deeds should be attributed to one who has actually since then passed through so many fiery scenes.

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