

P. D. Riley

A DAY WITH THE INDIANS

Remarkable Escape of George H. Greenslit From the
Indians in 1864. He Personally Relates His Experiences
with the Sioux While Crossing the Wide Plains.

On [Sunday,] the 14th of January, 1864, I re-enlisted as a veteran, which entitled me to a veterans furlough for three months' absence to visit my home and friends, who were living in Illinois and York State. The morning of [Monday,] August 8, 1864, found me seated in the coach at the old Planters' house, Denver, ready for a ride across the plains. Major John C. Anderson, now in the First National Bank in Denver, placed in my charge, to deliver to his father's home, a few miles south from the city of Utica, New York, his little brother, who was 7 years of age, but a sharp, shrewd observer of things around him. Consequently he proved an interesting charge to me. Nothing of any special note came under the observation of our little company during our first twelve hours' ride. About sunset of the day's travel brought us to the station of O'Fallon's Bluffs, where was camped about eighty to one hundred Sioux warriors, painted freshly blood red, wearing the express appearance of demons ready for a fill of warm blood, when an occasion might present itself to them. As the country was about that time filled with reports of Indian depredations on the Platte route to the States, some true and some mere exaggerations, and often caused more from fear than facts, we had not yet entertained a thought for a moment that we would likely meet with the savages of the plains, but, to the contrary, each one of us was contemplating a happy result of our trip to the East. However, as far as the thought was concerned, we were doomed to disappointment, judging from the case as it now appeared, as we stood face to face with these blood-thirsty demons. Every Indian was clad in buffalo robes, and all were standing in one group, with eyes staring at us as though they were about to say a few few [sic] words of grace over our bodies before they satisfied their gluttonous appetites. As we rolled on through their camp not one moved from his position, but appeared to be in joint conference concerning the dispositions of their unlucky victims. We passed through them without being molested, and just the truth of their deliberations we never knew, only we escaped them safely. Our

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number, with little Charlie Anderson, was seven souls; number of fire arms, three--myself being unarmed. Our poor Dutchman was scared nearly to death for fear of an attack from the red devils, and held in his hand rather carelessly a pistol, which caused us in front of him more fear than the sight of the Indians. He occupied a middle seat, facing the passengers on the back seat. After an hour's ride he quieted down, and all was safe again for the night. Our driver was a bold, noble and daring driver, and seemed to feel the responsibility of his charge--just the person for the situation, knowing, as well in the night as the day, how far it was to the next station. His four horses understood every word spoken to them by him, seemed also to take in the situation, and away they flew, as fleet as the wind, feeling that their speed and strength was our salvation, probably stimulated with the thought of a good breakfast awaiting them on their arrival at the next station.

About day light of the second day we were abruptly disturbed from our midnight musings by the sight of another band of Indians dashing up the road to meet us as we were nearing Gilman's station, now about two miles distant, the place where we were to change horses. On we sped and on they came, nothing daunting, until we were face to face. Just what to expect from these redskins we did not know. They halted about one minute, peering into the coach, then away they flew again up the road past us, as though we were not the persons they sought. Again a long sigh of relief was drawn by every passenger, seeing that we again had escaped the hand of the ruthless savages. Nevertheless, we had Indian on the brain pretty severely, which was quite natural.

As we were speeding on with the speed of lightning, another scene presented itself before us on our right. A few yards distant from the road we met a band of horses herded along, seemingly, in no great hurry by a band of Indians, seven in number. These made no demonstration to us, and were peacefully inclined, minding their own business. Victory was on our side, and again we were thankful for deliverance from death. Five minutes more and we drew up, with the horses foaming with sweat and panting for breath, each one looking proud as

Lucifer, as much as to say, "It is through our strength and fleetness that you are safely delivered to this place, and not of yourselves." Here was a scene of confusion. Mr. Gilman, the keeper of the station, owned a band of horses, about 120 in number, now in the twinkling of an eye was hoofless. It was the custom of Mr. Gilman to rise about the break of day every morning and turn loose his horses, which were corraled every evening for the night. This morning, as soon as the last horse was out, the Indians suddenly whipped in behind the herd and drove them away, and this was the band that we met in charge of the seven devils up the road about one mile. It was the custom of Mr. Gilman to keep in the stable one saddle pony for riding purposes during the day, but on this eventful morning he had loaned his saddle pony to a man by the name of Gillitt, who had a few days before moved there from Weld county, Colorado. In the family of Mr. Gillitt was himself, wife and two grown sons. They left this country [Colorado] for fear of their lives from a band of Indians known as Old Friday's band, who were all friendly to the settlers of Colorado. Many of the old settlers of the Platte remember him well. This Gillitt family located about three miles below Gilman's station, and were building a hewed log house. The father and his sons would go to their work every day taking with them their dinners, and returning every evening to the station. The evening before this scene, the father returned home early in the afternoon, leaving the two sons at their work on the house. That night the younger Gillitts failed to return home, consequently early on the next morning the father borrows Gilman's pony, and at about day break starts for his place to ascertain why the sons did not return the night before, as was their custom. Just before we drew up at the station, the pony, borrowed by Mr. Gillitt, returned as hard as he could run, riderless.

Added to the confusion of Gilman's, was Mrs. Gillitt, for the safety of her husband and sons, for ~~xxx~~ by this time she began to believe that her sons had likely been killed by the Indians the night before, which accounted for the reason of their not returning the night before.

After remaining there about half an hour, our driver informed us that he should pursue the remainder of his trip, and for us to be found in our seats by the time the horses were hitched up. [end col.1] We obeyed, hardly knowing whether we were to live or die.

Away we flew again down the road for Fort Kearney, many miles down the Platte, hoping to gain that place of refuge as soon as horse-flesh could transfer us hither.

About a mile and a half below Gilman's our driver drew up all four suddenly, which caused the passengers to inquire the cause why this sudden interruption. He informed that a few rods ahead in the road was the body of a dead man, and for us to get out and see who it was, and if he was dead sure.

We did as was required of us. Here lay before us undoubtedly the dead body of Mr. Gillitt, who, an hour before, left the station to look for his sons. He was lying on his face, with the left shoulder blade protruding through his clothing, leaving exposed the naked blade with all the flesh cleaved from it. A great pool of blood near the head was caused from three bullet holes through the head. Mr. Gillitt borrowed also a pistol at the station as he went in pursuit of his sons, and by this same pistol he lost his life. The pony likely became unmanageable at the sight of the Indians, and threw the rider from his seat with such force as to cause insensibility.

Again our driver admonished us of our long drive before us, and ~~we~~^{to} again to be seated for another start, and likely other scenes as we pursued our journey. Another mile and a half brought us to the new log house belonging to Mr. Gillitt. The house was situated some two or three hundred yards from our left to the north. Seeing no evidence of life about the place, we concluded to visit the place for a short time to satisfy ourselves as to the probably destinies of the younger Gillitts. The house was built of square hewed logs, and was about twelve feet high, and from the appearances the young men had been at work on a log on the north side of the house, placing it to its place, for in the inside corner lay dead one of the men, and at the other corner, on the outside, lay the other young man, both dead and cold. Our conjecture was, that while the men were at work, the Indians crept

up to them and shot them off from the house, and each one was now lying as he fell from the top of the house. They were shot with arrows; from seven to ten arrows were sticking in the bodies of each one. We found no evidence of fire arms having been used. Some of the passengers plucked from these dead bodies arrows, to preserve them in memory of the eventful day.

I called my little charge to pluck one also, that he might retain an evidence of his flight across the plains, but his strength was not equal to the task, and I doubt not but by this day and date he has no remembrance of that day's ride and scenes. Again our driver reminded us of the fact that we had better be going for we none of us knew what awaited us. Here we have an instance, and not the first one, of a family falling into the trap they tried to escape, and all but one losing their lives--running away from supposed danger and falling into real danger.

We all that day were amid scenes of confusion and death. Men and their families seeking refuge from the ruthless hand of their savage foes. Men were shot in their various places of work, some from their mowing machines, others in their fields. We, in course of our day's travel, came to a place owned by a man by the name of Smith, who was not terrified nor in the least intimidated by the presence of the Indians. He placed his wife and only child, a little daughter, in the coach and sent them to Kearney, himself alone remaining. On the morning of this day the Indians made a simultaneous outbreak along the Platte, reaching a distance of two hundred miles, covering the stage route along the Big Sandy towards Atchison, Kansas. Ten o'clock in the evening found us landed safely at Fort Kearney. Here we found about seventy or eighty passengers of the different routes lying over and driven back from their journeys. Nine o'clock the next morning found me and my charge once more seated in our coach for another day's scene. Omaha was our destination, which we reached without seeing or hearing of any Indians. I reported these facts at the headquarters of the commanding officer of the district. The officer's name was Moore, who at one time, I believe, had lived in Denver. My story was discredited and myself suspicioned as a deserter. After my visit to my

friends and the deliverance of my charge to his father and mother, I found myself again seated in a coach at Atchison for a trip across the plains for Denver to once more join my company. I passed through a section of the country made desolate by the Indians on the route from Kearney to Atchison. Our driver was one who passed through the nearly three months troublous times, and very naturally was full of narrations of his hairbreadth escapes from the noble Lo of the plains. This man pointed out to me the houses where the inmates were all burned alive and another place where they took the women prisoners. After these red evils had finished their hellish work of murder and torture, crossed the country to a place called Sand creek, about forty miles or more from Fort Lyon, and asked the protection of the United States flag. Perhaps some people in this country have heard of a place so named. I arrived in Denver on [Monday,] the 17th of October, 1864, safely from all harm from the Indians. On my arrival I found a regiment or two formed for the Indian campaign.

I believe Denver mail for a time came from the East via San Francisco, California, by coach.

Some folks like Indians. Well, they can have all of them they want, for I am satisfied they are not the noble men of the Plains that some think them to be. Peace and plenty ever be the reward of those brave men who protected and defended the settlers of our Frontier borders.

My charge, Mr. Charles Anderson, I learn, is now married and at present lives in Australia. He has become a man of wealth and influence.

I do not care for another day's ride among the Indians with the care of a little one again. I had nearly forgotten to say I saw a company of sticks and posts, called regular soldiers, dressed up in Government clothes, in pursuit of Indians. I failed to see in them the behavior and interest of those who protect the settlers on the Plains. They rode like cowards, for they had lost no Indians.

February 21, 1884.

GOERGE H. GREENSLITT.