

LAST ASSAULT OF THE INDIAN UPON NEBRASKA AS TOLD BY

.....DR. FREDERICK RENNER OF OMAHA.....

...AN EYE WITNESS...

Omaha, Jan. 27, 1864 -----

Today in the show window of Herr Offen Hauser, a hair dresser of Noerdlingen, Bavaria, are three historic scalps, gruesome relics of the terrible raid by Indians upon settlers of Nebraska in August, 1864.

These tragic reminders were given to a man in Nebraska City by Dr. Frederick Renner, now a resident of Omaha, who is nearing three score and ten, living at 930 North Twenty-seventh street. The Nebraska City man, not desirous of keeping the reminders of the horrible barbarities inflicted upon the white citizens of Nebraska, sent them to his Bavarian friend.

The last Indian raid in Nebraska, when these scalps were taken, is told vividly by Mr. Renner, who saw the terrible butchery in those bloody pioneer days, he being at that time captain of a company of Nebraska militia. He recites his experience as follows:

"I was living in Nebraska City in 1864, at the time when the Indian uprisings were of frequent occurrence. It was necessary for the settlers to be prepared for an outbreak on the part of the savages at all times.

"Even back in 1861 the depredations of the Indians were being committed and the whites were in a state of terror continually. This state of affairs continued until 1861, on May 18, Governor A. Saunders issued his proclamation, calling all able-bodied men to enroll in companies, as the tocsin of civil war had been sounded.

"Four companies were formed without delay in Nebraska City. Among them was the Nebraska City Rangers, with B. H. Kalkmann as captain. His excessive avoirdupois proving to be an impediment, even on horseback, after the first few drills he resigned and I was elected in his stead.

"Then we changed the name of the company to the Otoe County Reserves. My last commission as captain of the reserves was issued much later by Acting Governor Algernon S. Paddock, June 19, 1862. We kept up our drills, however, as an independent company of the First Nebraska regiment.

"Colonel O. P. Mason was commanding and in an emergency he always called on us. It cannot be gainsaid that the Nebraska territorial militia prepared and sent to the regular or volunteer armies many recruits, and that those of us who were compelled to stay at home braved the dangers of frontier life during the Indian scares and actual troubles.

"This is especially true of the Indian raid and massacre of 1864, which in congress received but little attention, and seemed in comparison of so little importance as scarcely to deserve a place in national history.

"Yet, the military strategy and precision, the secrecy and success, and the cool butchery and cruelty of attack made it as Napoleonic in its design and execution, and should place it on the pages of history alongside the other great and bloody butcheries by savages.

"Without a single note of warning the crisis came. From Denver to Big Sandy, a distance of 600 miles, near the middle of the day, at precisely the same time, *on Sunday August 7* 1864* along the whole distance a simultaneous attack was made upon the ranches, the unsuspecting settlers and the poor "pilgrims" in their emigrant wagons.

"No time was given for couriers, no time for concentration, no time for the erection or strengthening of defenses, but as the eagle swoops down upon its prey the savage warriors attacked the defenseless white men, women and children.

"No principles of military courtesy actuated the breasts of the painted assailants. It mattered little to them that they were in vastly superior numbers, and their opponents had often fed them when they were hungry. All alike were made to feel the cruelty of their lust. No captives were taken except a few women, and death was preferred to the captivity that awaited them.

"Could the eastern philanthropists, who speak so flatteringly of the 'noble red men of the west,' have seen as I did the cruel butchery of unoffending children, the young and old women, who were first horrible mutilated, then scalped and slain, they might be impressed with the true character of hostile Indians on a predatory and slaughtering incursion or excursion.

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"As soon as Colonel Mason received the first information of the sudden outbreak and massacre, he called on me at my office in Nebraska City, then and there bluntly and peremptorily ordering me to take my company and 'forthwith to place myself and men between the terror-stricken settlers and the pursuing Indians of the Big Sandy and the Little Blue.'

"At the same time Colonel Mason took my receipt for twenty-seven muskets, six carbines, 2,500 rounds of buck and ball cartridges (all the available arms in his possession), which was loaded into a wagon.

"The thought never struck me to wait for the arrival of a mustering officer to be assigned for that purpose by the war department. I drummed together twenty courageous men on short order. There was no time for delay, and inside of one hour we were twenty-one men in the saddle, our carbines and revolvers loaded, a blanket and some provisions rolled up and tied to the rear of the saddle.

"Striking almost a bee line to the southwest and keeping on a fast trot most of the time, we covered thirty-five miles, reaching Vesta about midnight. After a short rest we proceeded and reached Beatrice at 11 o'clock on the morning of August 8. We had gone many a half mile on the lope.

"Before reaching Beatrice we had found along the road many homes vacated. Half cooked meals were still on the stoves. Cattle and horses were still tied in the barns. The news of the massacre to the west had spread somehow with lightning rapidity and resulted in a perfect stampede; many families secured such conveyances as were at hand and took flight toward the Missouri, many never sleeping until they reached the river.

"Terrified settlers were still pouring into Beatrice but the arrival of our 'advance guard of the Nebraska militia,' with good arms and ammunition soon allayed the intense excitement and fear.

"I turned over some arms and ~~ammunition~~ ammunition to Joe Saunders, Jefferson B. Weston and Hiram W. ^{Parker} Walker, who had organized the settlers into a company, and had their wagons circled up, corral-fashion, by the side of a mill, determined to make a bold stand.

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"I could see no immediate danger in this locality, so I declared my intantion to proceed southwest after a short ~~VERY~~ rest to meet the Sioux, who, from all reports, were raiding down the Little Blue, killing every white settler they could overtake.

"Sixteen members of my company declared their willingness to accompany me, the other members being obliged to remain behind because their horses were either lame or exhausted. Eight pioneers from Beatrice and neighborhood, well armed and with fresh horses, joined us of their own accord.

"We gave our horses the spurs and rode all night until we reached Big Sandy, near Meridian, not far from the sixth principal meridian and the boundary between Kansas and Nebraska. Horrible scenes met our gaze. Homes were burned by the savages, men were slaughtered, women had been outraged before being scalped and the most appalling sights imaginable were about us on every hand. *^ Plumes*

"Modesty forbids to go further into detail. However, I am frank in saying that at the point reached by us the raid would have been worse had we not arrived when we did.

"We overtook a mixed band of Indians, mostly Cheyenne Sioux, six miles south of the Little Blue. There were forty-one or forty-two in the band, driving about 300 head of *horses and* cattle, which they had stolen, going in a direct southwestern course toward the Republican river.

"There was a hot chase *arrows* and bullets flew whizzing by us in all directions. However, we knew it was a fight to death and we poured a deadly fire into the band, dropping one after another with our carbines and rifles. Those Indians we did not get took flight, the stock being left behind.

"As we could see no human captive among the few Indians fleeing from us, and our horses being exhausted, we contented ourselves with retrieving the live stock and taking a number of scalps that the dead Indians had taken from the whites.

"Some of these scalps were still wet with gore of white women as the long blonde hair of several had not sufficient time to become thoroughly inspissated. After viewing the scenes in the neighborhood, too hideous to describe, we returned to Beatrice for ammunition and provisions.

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"Upon our arrival at Beatrice we received orders by special messenger from Colonel Mason to return to Nebraska City, as Governor Saunders had called out four companies of mounted men to the public defense and to meet the emergency.

"Without delay eighteen members of the company then joined a new company, while I remained with the rest of the old company, acting in the capacity of surgeon and scout on the staff of General ~~XXX~~ Coe and Colonel Mason until honorably discharged February 12, 1865."

Now, in Nebraska, after these forty-one years, where savagery and slaughter reigned in 1864, there is, as throughout the west, a happy and contented people, from whose farms, factories and firesides, as the late J. Sterling Merton once said, "there ascends the hum of remunerative industry and the songs of domestic tranquility and endearment."

Dr. Renner, as a commander of the territorial militia, on behalf of himself and his comrades, who still live, has long urged that the true status of the territorial troops be established by an act of congress so that men who defended the frontier will be placed on a footing with volunteers of other states and be entitled to pensions.

Twice the Nebraska legislature has memorialized congress, and the Nebraska delegation in Washington is being urged to make an effort to secure the passage of the necessary measure.

Adjutant General Knox, in February, 1865, acknowledged the ~~wr~~ services of the troops, better known as the territorial militia, in an order, saying, in part:

"The battles of Plum creek and Cottonwood attest their bravery. Skirmishes without number bear witness to the hard and perilous duties they had to perform, and testify, also, to the willingness these soldiers manifested."

Dr. Renner was not legally discharged from the military service until a special order was issued on June 21, 1902, by Adjutant General Colby, under authority given by the governor of Nebraska.