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William Crawford
and
The Savage Grant



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OHIO VALLEY PIONEERS

By

HARRY EDMUND DANFORD

Principal Enslow, Junior High School, Huntington, West Virginia
Author, "The West Virginian"; "The Trail of the Gray
Dragoon".

Illustrated with Drawings by

WILLIAM WALLACE CLARK, and half-tones
reproduced from photographs, paintings
and old prints.

RAND, McNALLY & COMPANY

New York,

Chicago,

San Francisco.

COLONEL WILLIAM CRAWFORD.

He conducted the third campaign against the Moravian Indians and was burned at the stake on the Sandusky Plains.

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Of all the Indian barbarities recorded in border warfare, none was more cruel than the burning at the stake of Colonel William Crawford. This took place in the summer of 1782, when Crawford was defeated in a third expedition, this time against the Wyandots and Delawares, as well as the Moravians.

While the war Indians of Ohio, had not, for some time, been on friendly terms with the Moravians, yet they deeply resented the Gnadenhutton massacre. The Delawares, especially, were aroused by the cruel treatment of their peaceful tribesmen. Together with their "grandchildren", the Shawnees and their northern neighbors, the Mingoies and Wyandots, they struck back at the scattered settlements in terrible revenge. The blows fell thick and fast all along the border, from Fort Pitt to Kentucky.

The renegade, Simon Girty, took a prominent part in this fearful work. He even led a war party of Wyandots into Western Pennsylvania, his former home region, dealing death and destruction wherever he went.

The settlers believed these raids were inspired, and in many cases, conducted by the Moravians, themselves; or rather, by what was left of their band. So the Fort Pitt authorities decided to wipe them out. It was for that purpose, mainly, that the Crawford expedition was organized. A second purpose of the expedition, however was the punishment of the Wyandots, who were living in the Upper Sandusky country.

It is doubtful whether many of the Christian Indians took part in the raids of which they were accused. True, they had just cause to go on the war path; but it is altogether unlikely that

many of them struck a single blow in return for the unforgivable injuries done them. Among the raiders were some who had lived at the Moravian towns, but they were not converts. The faithful Indians bore their sufferings with Christian fortitude, as the missionaries had taught them.

Unfortunately, the settlers believed the Moravian Indians guilty, and that was enough. They had suffered so much--these men of the frontier--that they had become little better than savages, themselves. Nothing they possessed was safe. Their families, their horses, their cattle, their crops, everything they had, were in constant perial. They had come to the point where they trusted no Indian, peace-professing, or otherwise. The Crawford expedition started out with the purpose of killing every Indian possible. The army was recruited at Mingo Bottom, on the west bank of the Ohio; and when ready to march numbered 480 men. With the exception of one company from Washington County, Pennsylvania, the recruits were all Western Virginia ~~men~~ border men. Mounted on the best horses to be found in the settlements and armed with rifles, tomahawks, and scalping knives they set out on a beautiful day late in the month of May, 1782.

Colonel Crawford was, himself a Virginian, born in 1732 the same year in which Washington was born. He and Washington were close personal friends. Years before Washington had made Crawford's home, in Fayette County, Virginia, a stopping place as he journeyed to and from the West on his surveying expeditions. Crawford had just now come from the east, where he had been fighting with Washington in the Continental Army. Crawford was courageous, kindly of heart, and usually cautious and conservative. Not altogether in sympathy with the expedition, he accepted its

leadership unwillingly. The army had, by ballot, chosen him as leader over Colonel Williamson, who led the former expeditions against the Moravians.

The army proceeded first, to the ^{upper} Moravian towns on the Tuscarawas, hoping to find that by this time the survivors of the Christian band had come back. But they were disappointed; for the villages were still deserted. Everywhere the ruins left by Williamson's late expedition and the earlier British Indian raid were evident. But there still was enough corn left in the devastated fields to feed all the horses; so the troops encamped for the night.

Soon after halting pickets discovered two Indians lurking near by. They fired, but the savages made their escape. The presence of the Indians disturbed Crawford, for he suspected that they were spies sent out to watch his army. Now that they had escaped, the hope of surprising the savages was lost. It is said Crawford had a "strange feeling" that the expedition would fail, and even expressed his fear to some of his officers and men.

The Indians who had been seen were, indeed, spies, as Crawford had ~~expressed~~ suspected. And there were many other spies that had not been seen. The fact that is, every movement had been watched by the Indians from the time the first tents were pitched in the recruiting camp at Mingo Bottom. They knew the exact number of men Crawford had in his command, knew just where he planned to go and what he proposed to do. This information they picked up in the deserted camps, for no sooner had the soldiers left their camps than the Indians stole in. They learned from the marks on trees and from signs picked up in the camps that "no quarter was to be given any Indian, whether man, woman, or child."

This information reached the tribes far in advance of Crawford as his men pushed slowly on, day after day, in the direction of Sandusky. Hour by hour they expected to come upon the Indians.

Nothing happened, however, until the fourth of June, when the frontiersmen were advancing through the tall grass on the Sandusky plains. Here the advance guard was suddenly attacked by Indians and driven back. The battle which followed lasted with more or less fury all afternoon. There was little loss, however, on either side, as the warriors of both armies kept themselves well concealed in the tall, rank grass that covered the plains.

The firing ceased as night came on; and all night long the men of both sides slept on their arms. Crawford expected the Indians to renew the attack in the morning, and waited. He waited all day, and when too late discovered that the plains swarmed with hundreds of savages. By this time the Indians were so numerous that the frontiersmen found themselves confronted on three sides by great odds. To take a stand and fight would mean destruction. Where had all the Indians come from? Was it possible that all the north-western tribes had rallied to revenge the Christian Indians whom the war Indians had seemed to hate as intensely as did the whites? That was exactly what had happened. "Blood is thicker than water" was proved.

Colonel Crawford hastily called his officers to a council of war, and it was decided to retreat in the night. But the Indians sensed the plan, and about dark began a terrific attack on all three sides.

The retreat, therefore, was ordered before the plans were perfected. Unfortunately, the men did not keep together. A

number of small bands broke away from the main body, and set out on different routes of retreat toward the Ohio River. Most of these parties were over-taken by the Indians and many of them were completely wiped out.

Colonel Crawford tried to prevent the breaking up of his ranks, but the panic-stricken troops were beyond control. For a time he rode at their head, doing all that was possible to save his men, and trusting that darkness would make escape possible.

The story on pages 165-71, as told by Dr. Knight, ~~Cypher~~ Surgeon of the army and Crawford's companion in his flight, has become a border-day classic:

"We had not got a quarter of a mile from the scene of action when I heard Colonel Crawford calling for his son, John, his son-in-law, Major Harrison, and Major Rise and William Crawford, his nephews, upon which I came up and told him I believed they were before us.

He asked: "Is that the Doctor?" I told him it was.

He then replied that they were not in front, and begged of me not to leave him; and I promised him I would not. We then waited, and continued calling for these men until the troops had passed ~~on~~ us.

The Colonel told me his horse had almost given out, that he could not keep up with the troops, and wished some of his best friends to remain with him; he then exclaimed against the militia for riding off in such an irregular manner and leaving some of the wounded behind, contrary to his orders. Presently there came two men riding after us, one of them an old man, the other a lad. We inquired if they had seen any of the above persons, and they answered they had not. About daybreak, Colonel Crawford's and the young man's horses gave out, and they left them. We pursued our

journey eastward, and about two o'clock fell in with Captain Biggs, who had carried Lieutenant Ashley from the field dangerously wounded.

We then went on about the space of an hour, when a heavy rain came up. We concluded it was best to encamp, as we were burdened with the wounded officer. We then barked four or five trees, made an encampment and a fire, and remained all night. Next morning we again prosecuted our journey and having gone about three miles, found a deer which had been recently killed. The meat was sliced from the bones and bundled up in the skin, with a tomahawk lying by it. We carried all with us and in advancing ^{about} one mile further, discovered the smoke of a fire. We then gave the wounded officer into the charge of the young man, and desired him to stay behind, whilst the Colonel, the Captain and myself walked up towards the fire. When we came to it we concluded from several circumstances some of our people had encamped there the previous night.

We then went about roasting the venison, and when just about to march observed one of our young men coming upon our tracks. He seemed at first very shy; but, having called to him he came up and told us he was the person who had killed the deer; but upon hearing us come up he was afraid of Indians, hid in the thicket and made off. Upon this, we gave him some bread and roasted venison proceeded together upon our journey, and about two o'clock came upon the paths by which we had gone out.

Captain Biggs and myself did not think it safe to keep the road, but the Colonel said the Indians would not follow the troops farther than the plains, which we were then considerably past.

As the wounded officer rode Captain Bigg's horse, I gave the Colonel mine. The Colonel and myself went about one hundred yards in front, the captain and the wounded officer in the center, and the young man behind. After we had traveled about one mile and a half several Indians started up within fifteen or twenty steps of the colonel and me. As we at first discovered only three I immediately got behind a large, black oak, made ready my piece and raised it up to take sight when the Colonel called to me twice not to fire; upon that, one of the Indians ran up and took the Colonel by the hand. They were Delaware Indians. Captain Biggs fired among them, but did no execution. They then told us to call those people and make them come there; else they would go and kill them. The Colonel called, but the little party got off and escaped for the time.

The Colonel and I were then taken to the ~~XXXX~~ Indian camp, which was about half a mile from the place where we were captured. On Sunday evening five Delawares, who had posted themselves at some distance farther on the road, brought back to the camp where we lay, the scalps of Captain Biggs and Lieutenant Ashley, together with an Indian scalp which Captain Biggs had taken in the field of action. They also brought in Biggs' horse and mine, and told us the other men had got away from them.

Monday morning, the tenth of June, we were prepared to march to Sandusky, about thirty-three miles distant. They had eleven prisoners of us and four scalps. The Indians were seventeen in number. Colonel Crawford was very desirous to see a certain Simon Girty, who lived among the Indians, and was on this account permitted to go to town the same night with two warriors to guard him, having orders at the same time to pass by the place where the Colonel had turned out his horse, that they might, if possible, find him. The rest of us were taken as far as the old town, which was within eight

Tuesday morning, the eleventh, Colonel Crawford was brought out to us on purpose, to be marched in with the other prisoners. I asked the Cononel if he had seen Mr.Girty. He told me he had, and that Girty had promised to do everything in his power for him, but that the Indians were very much enraged against the prisoners, particularly Colonel Pipe, one of the chiefs. He likewise told me that Girty had informed him that that his son-in-law, Colonel GMaryison and his nephew, William Crawford, were made prisoners by the Shawanese, but had been pardoned. This Captain Pipe had come from the towns about an hour before Colonel Crawford, , and had painted all the prisoners faces black. As he was painting me he told me I should go to the Shawanese towns and see my friends. When the Colonel arrived he painted him black, also told him he was glad to see him, and that he would have him shaved when he came to see his friends at the Wyandot town. When we marched the Colonel and I were kept between Pipe and Wingenim, the two Delaware chiefs. The other nine prisoners were sent forward with a party of Indians. As we went along we saw four of the prisoners lying by the path tomahawked and scalped; some of them were at the distance of half a mile from each other. When we arrived within half a mile of the place where the Colonel was executed, we overtook the five prisoners that remained alive. The Indians had caused them to sit down on the ground, as they did; also the Colonel and myself, at some distance from them. I was then given in charge to an Indian fellow to be taken to the Shawanese towns. In the place where we were now made to sit down were a number of squaws and boys who fell upon the five prisoners and tomahawked them. The young Indian came often where the Colonel and I were and dashed the scalps in our faces. We were then conducted along towards the

place where the Colonel was afterwards executed. When we came within half a mile of it Simon Girty met us, with several Indians on horseback. He spoke to the Colonel, but as I was about one hundred and fifty yards behind I could not hear what passed between them. Almost every Indian we met struck us either with their sticks or their fists. Girty waited till I was brought up and then asked, "Was that the Doctor?" I answered him, "yes", and went towards him and reached out my hand; but he bid me begone, and called me a cursed rascal, upon which the fellow who had me in charge pulled me along. When we came to the fire the Colonel was stripped ordered to sit down by the fire, and then they beat him with sticks and their fists. Presently after, I was treated in the same manner. They then tied a rope to the foot of a post about fifteen feet high, bound the Colonel's hands behind his back and fastened the rope to a ligature between his wrists. The rope was long enough for him to sit down or to walk around the post once or twice, and return the same way. The Colonel then called to Girty, and asked if they intended to burn him? Girty answered, "Yes". Upon this Captain Pipe made a speech to the Indians, consisting of ~~sk~~ about thirty or forty men, and sixty or seventy squaws and boys. When the speech was finished they all yelled a hideous and hearty assent to what he had said. The Indian men then took up their guns and shot powder into the Colonel's body from his feet as far as his neck. I think, not less than seventy loads were discharged upon his naked body. The fire was about six or seven yards from the post to which the Colonel was tied. It was made of small, hickory poles burnt quite through in the middle, each end of the poles remaining about six feet in length. Three or four Indians by turns,

would take up, individually, one of these burning pieces of wood and apply it to his naked body, already burned black with powder. These tormentors presented themselves on every side of him, so that whichever way he ran around the pole, he was met by burning fagots. Some of the squaws took broad boards upon which they put a quantity of burning coals and hot embers and threw them on him, so that in a short time he had nothing but coals of fire and hot ashes to walk upon. In the midst of these extreme tortures he called upon Simon Girty and begged of him to shoot him. Girty, by way of derision, answered that he had no gun, turning about to an Indian behind him and laughing heartily. Girty then came up to me and told me to prepare for death. He said, however, that I was not to die at that place but would be burnt at the Shawnee towns. Colonel Crawford, at this period of his suffering, besought the Almighty to have mercy on his soul. He spoke very low, and bore his torments with the most manly fortitude. He continued in all the extremities of pain for an hour and three-quarters, or two hours longer, as near as I can judge, when at last, being almost spent he lay down on his face. They then scalped him, and repeatedly threw the scalp in my face, telling me that it was my great Captain's."

Dr. Knight escaped from his Indian captor before they reached the Shawnese towns and made his way back home to Virginia. He was twenty one days making the journey, and during the period lived on roots and bark, arriving almost more dead than alive.