

INDIAN FIGHTERS

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his ammunition. Unless a very good reason existed for doing otherwise he took every precaution to make every shot count, be it either arrows or bullets he was using, for bullets were hard to get and arrows were hard to make.

The stories that old Indian fighters have told me, and my own observation, indicate that the Indian greatly preferred to depend upon a sly approach, under cover, and accurate shooting at individual targets, rather than upon the more spectacular mounted charge where the greater part of his precious ammunition must be wasted in shooting in the general direction of the enemy, and where he had to trust to luck for any hits that he might make. Experience taught him to put skill ahead of luck when he made his plans.

In fact, the Indian fought pretty much the same as any other trained fighter. He used some forms of mounted attack when the circumstances and object sought indicated its advisability, but generally he approached the enemy under cover, or laid in hiding for him, as seemed best to suit the circumstances. He even demonstrated that he possessed in a large measure the cold, hard nerve required to go against an entrenched position where protection of any sort was entirely lacking.

In the summer of 1886 the Crows and the Assiniboin Sioux were on bad terms with each other and small bands of each tribe had taken to their favorite pastime of raiding their enemies' pony herds.

One afternoon a small band of Sioux attempted to drive off one of the Crow herds. They were seen and pursued.

The pursuit resulted in their being driven to shelter under a cutbank on the Little Big Horn River which, on account of its peculiar formation, afforded them perfect protection from their pursuers, who could not get nearer to them than about two hundred yards except by crossing a level stretch of grass land that afforded no cover at all.

The Crows tried many schemes to get at their enemies, all of which failed. While the fighting was in progress word of it reached the military post, Fort Thompson, and troops were sent to the scene. (My grandfather was a sergeant with the soldiers who came.) The troops arrived just in time to see about fifty Crows leave the shelter from which they had been fighting and start on the run for the Sioux's position. Seven were killed and many more were wounded, but they kept on, not even stopping to fire, and enough of them reached their objective to annihilate the plucky little band of Sioux before the troops interfered. A Crow, White Bear by name, was one of the fortunate ones

who got a Sioux scalp. In taking the scalp he had evidently gone on the principal that if a scalp was a good thing to have the bigger it was the better, for he had taken all the hair the victim had.

The second instance occurred in 1887 and was a mounted attack. All during the summer and fall of that year the Crow Indians had been very much excited over the doings of a medicine man who really appeared to be pulling off stunts that were even stranger than those ascribed to our present-day so-called mind readers and divine healers.

This medicine man was clever enough to avoid doing anything that would bring about his arrest until avarice got the best of his good judgment, when he allowed his desire for riches to lead him into heading a band of young Indian men in a raid upon the pony herd of the Peigans.

This gave a good reason for arresting him, but by this time he had gained such a large following that it was not deemed advisable to attempt an arrest until a large body of troops could be assembled to overawe his followers.

A large force was assembled, but its presence did not entirely prevent trouble, for when the arrest was attempted several hundred young Indians joined him in resisting the troop of cavalry which was sent to make the arrest. The cavalry troop, being greatly out-numbered, dismounted in order to use their most effective weapons, their carbines, and took up a position in a swale which furnished some cover. After a short dismounted action the Indians mounted and charged, for a distance of about 600 yards over the open prairie. They made no effort to conceal themselves, but rode as straight as men ever rode in a charge.

Some of the leaders got within thirty yards of the soldiers before they retreated. They would probably have kept on had it not been for the fact that their medicine man, who had claimed to be invulnerable, was wounded. They lost faith in him then and rode away even faster than they had come. No one was ever able to ascertain their losses. Many were seen to fall during the charge and retreat, and it became known that their casualties were heavy. The medicine man was killed a few minutes later as he was attempting to escape.

In one particular, however, the Indian differed very materially from the white man. He did not feel that he was in any way disgraced when he followed the teaching laid down in the old saying, "He who fights and runs away will live to fight another day."

I have stated above that in this the Indian differed from the white man, but on further thought I doubt that this is an entirely correct statement, for when I recall the histories of our celebrated Indian fighters and the stories I have heard old Indian men tell, it comes to me that they, too, were glad enough to get out of the way when the fight became too hot for them, only, they always spoke of the Indians retreating in such circumstances and of themselves as escaping.

To get back to the original question and answer it. Yes, sometimes the Indian did attack while concealed on the far side of his fast-moving horse, but generally, like any other good soldier, he used the method of fighting best suited to the particular case confronting him.