

Primary Source

Narrative account by John Pritchard regarding June 19, 1816

"On the afternoon of the 19th of June," (says Mr. Pritchard in his narrative,) "a man in the watch-house called out, that the Half-breeds were coming. The governor, some other gentlemen, and myself, looked through spy-glasses, and I distinctly saw some armed people on horseback passing along the plains.

A man then called out, they, (meaning the Half-breeds) are making for the settlers; on which the governor said, 'We must go out and meet these people; let twenty men follow me.'

We proceeded by the old road leading down the settlement. As we were going along, we met many of the settlers running to the fort, crying, 'the Half-breeds - the Half-breededs.'

- When we were advanced about three quarters of a mile along the settlement, we saw some people on horseback behind a point of woods. - On our nearer approach, the party seemed more numerous; on which, the governor made a halt, and sent for a field-piece, which, delaying to arrive, he ordered us to advance. -

We had not proceeded far, before the Half-breeds, on horseback, with their faces painted in the most hideous manner, and in the dresses of Indian warriors, came forward, and surrounded us in the form of a half-moon.

We then extended our line, and moved more into the open plain; and as they advanced, we retreated a few steps backwards, and then saw a Canadian, named Boucher, ride up to us waving his hand, and calling out,

'What do you want?' the governor replied, 'What do you want?' To which Boucher answered, 'We want our fort.' - The governor said, 'Go to your fort.' -

They were, by this time, near each other, and consequently spoke too low for me to hear. - Being at some little distance to the right of the governor, I saw him take hold of Boucher's gun, and almost immediately a general discharge of fire-arms took place; but whether it began on our side, or that of the enemy, it was impossible to distinguish: my attention was then directed towards my personal defence.

In a few minutes, almost all our people were either killed or wounded. - Captain Rogers, having fallen, rose up again and came towards me, when not seeing one of our party who was not either killed or disabled, I called out to him, 'For God's sake give yourself up.'

- He ran towards the enemy for that purpose, myself following him. He raised up his hands, and, in English, and broken French, called out for mercy. A Half-breed, (son of Colonel William McKay) shot him through the head, and another cut open his belly with a knife, with the most horrid imprecations.

Fortunately for me, a Canadian (named Lavigne) joining his entreaties to mine, saved me (though with the greatest difficulty) from sharing the fate of my friend at that moment.

After this, I was rescued from death, in the most providential manner, no less than six different times, on my road to, and at, the Frog Plain, (the head-quarters of those cruel murderers.) I there saw that Alexander Murray, and his wife, two of William Bannerman's

children, and Alexander Sutherland, settlers, and likewise Anthony McDonell, a servant, were prisoners, having been taken before the action took place.

With the exception of myself, no quarter was given to any of us. The knife, axe, or ball, put a period to the existence of the wounded; and on the bodies of the dead were practised all those horrible barbarities which characterise the inhuman heart of the savage.

The amiable and mild Mr. Semple, lying on his side (his thigh having been broken), and supporting his head upon his hand, addressed the chief commander of our enemies, by inquiring if he was Mr. Grant; and being answered in the affirmative, 'I am not mortally wounded,' said Mr. Semple; 'and, if you could get me conveyed to the fort, I think I should live.'

- Grant promised he would do so; and immediately left him in the care of a Canadian, who afterwards told, that an Indian of their party came up, and shot Mr. Semple in the breast. - I entreated Grant to procure me the watch, or even the seals, of Mr. Semple, for the purpose of transmitting them to his friends, but I did not succeed.

Our force amounted to twenty-eight persons, of whom twenty-one were killed, and one wounded, the Governor, Captain Rogers, Mr. James White, surgeon, Mr. Alexander McLean, settler, Mr. Wilkinson, private secretary to the governor, and Lieutenant Holt, of the Swedish navy, and fifteen servants were killed*. Mr. J. P. Bourke, storekeeper, was wounded, by saved himself by flight. -

The enemy, I am told, were sixty-two persons, the greater part of whom were the contracted servants and clerks of the North-West Company. - They had one man killed, and one wounded.

- The chiefs, who headed the party of our enemy, were Messrs. Grant, and Fraser, Antoine Hoole, and Bourrassa; the two former clerks, and the two latter interpreters, in the service of the North-West Company.

- On the field I saw six of the North-West Company's Canadian servants; namely, Boucher, Morin, Des Champs, Joseph Hesse, Mageau, and Lavigne."

Author: John Pritchard [of this excerpt]

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