

## BOWIE'S VICTORY

THE following desperate battle, an account of which we are about to relate, was one of the fiercest conflicts of which we have any record in Indian warfare, and considering the number engaged on each side the result was something wonderful. On the second day of November, 1831, General Rezin P. Bowie, James Bowie, David Buchanan, Robert Armstrong, Jesse Wallace, Matthew Doyle, Cephas Hamm, James Coryell, Thomas McCaslin and two servant boys, Charles and Gonzales, started from San Antonio in search of the old silver mines of the San Saba mission. We give the narrative in the language of General Bowie:

Nothing of interest occurred until about ten o'clock a.m. of the nineteenth day, when we were overtaken by two Comanche Indians and a Mexican, who stated that they belonged to Isaonie's party, a chief of the Comanche tribe, whose followers were about sixteen in number, and that they were on their way to San Antonio with a drove of horses they had taken from the Wacos and Tehuacanas, and that they intended to return them to their owners, who were citizens of San Antonio.

After smoking and talking with them about an hour and making them a few presents of tobacco, powder and shot, etc., they returned to their party, who were waiting at the Llano river.

We continued our journey until night closed in upon us, when we camped. The next morning, between daylight and sun rise, this same Mexican came to our camp. His horse was much fatigued. After eating and smoking he stated to us that he had been sent by the Indian chief, Isaonie, to inform us that we were followed by one hundred and twenty-four Tehuacana and Waco Indians, and that forty Caddos had joined them, and that they were determined to have our scalps at all hazards. Isaonie had held a conversation with them the previous evening and had endeavored, without success, to dissuade them from their purpose; that they left him enraged and had gone on our trail.

As a voucher for the truth of his statement the Mexican produced his chief's silver medal, which is common among the natives in such cases. He further stated that his chief requested him to say that he had sixteen men, badly armed and without ammunition, but if we would return and join him he would give us such assistance as he could. Knowing that the enemy lay between us and him we deemed it more prudent to resume our journey and endeavor to reach the old fort on the San Saba river about night, a distance of thirty miles.

The Mexican then went back to his party, and we went on our way. We encountered bad roads, the same being quite rocky, and our horses' feet were considerably worn. We were disappointed in not reaching the fort in the evening, and had some difficulty in finding an advantageous place to camp. We, however, made choice of the best that offered, which was a cluster of live oak trees, some thirty or forty in number, and about the size of a man's body. To the north of them there was a thicket of live oak bushes about ten feet high, forty yards in length and twenty in breadth. To the west, at the distance of thirty or forty yards, ran a stream of water. The surrounding country was an open prairie, interspersed with a few trees, rocks and broken land. The trail that we came by was to the east of our encampment.

After taking the precaution to prepare for our defense by cutting a road inside the thicket of bushes about ten feet from the outer edge all around, and clearing the prickly pears from among the bushes, we hopped our horses and placed sentinels for the night.

We were now distant about six miles from the fort. Nothing occurred through the night, and we lost no time in the morning in making preparation for the continuance of our journey. When in the act of starting, we discovered three Indians on our trail to the east, about two hundred yards distant, and a footman about fifty yards in advance of the main body, with his face to the ground, tracking along on the trail. The cry of "Indians" was sounded, and all hands began to prepare for defense.

We dismounted and fastened both saddle and pack horses to the trees. As soon as they saw we had discovered them they gave the war whoop, halted and commenced stripping preparatory to action. A number of mounted Indians reconnoitered the ground. Among them were a few Caddo Indians, whom we knew by the cut of their hair. These Indians had always claimed to be friendly towards the whites.

Their number being so much greater than ours, one hundred and sixty-four to eleven, it was agreed that Rezin P. Bowie should be sent out to talk with them, and endeavor to compromise with them rather than attempt a fight. He accordingly started, accompanied by David Buchanan, and walked up to within about forty yards of where they had halted, and requested them, in their own tongue, to send forward their chief, as he wanted to talk with him. Their answer was, "howde do, howde do," in English, and a discharge of twelve shots, one of which broke Buchanan's leg. Bowie returned their salutation with the contents of a double barreled gun and a pistol. He then took Buchanan on his shoulder and started back to the encampment. As he did so, they opened a heavy fire on them, which wounded Buchanan in two other places, slightly piercing Bowie's hunting shirt in several places, but did him no injury. Seeing the shots did not bring Bowie down, eight Indians on foot took after him with their tomahawks; and when they had gotten close to him, the rest of Bowie's party rushed to his assistance and brought down four of the Indians and the other four retreated to the main body. We then returned to our position, and all was still for about five minutes, when we discovered that a hill northeast of us, and about sixty yards distant, was covered with Indians. They opened a heavy fire on us, accompanied with loud yells. We could hear their chief as in a loud and audible voice, he urged them to charge us. He was walking his horse and appeared perfectly composed. When we first discovered him, our guns were all empty with the exception of Mr. Hamm's. James Bowie cried out, "Whose gun is loaded?" Mr. Hamm answered "Mine is." He was then told to shoot that Indian on horseback. He did so, breaking his leg and killing his horse. We now discovered him hopping around his horse with his shield on his arm to keep off the balls. At this time four of our party having their guns loaded, all fired at him at once, and all the balls took effect through his shield. He fell and was immediately surrounded by his warriors, who picked him up and bore him off. Several of these were shot while carrying away their dead chief. The whole party then, with the exception of a few, retreated over the hill out of sight. There were a few that dodged about from tree to tree to avoid our shots.

The Indians soon covered the hill the second time, bringing up their bow men who had not before been in action, and began a heavy fire with bows and arrows, which we returned with a well directed fire from our rifles. At this instant another chief appeared on horseback near the spot where the first had fallen, and again the question was asked, "whose gun is loaded?" and the answer was, "nobody's;" when little Charles, the mulatto servant, came running up with Buchanan's rifle, which had not been discharged since he was wounded, and handed it to James Bowie, who instantly fired and brought the chief from his horse. He also was surrounded by six or eight of his men, as was the first, and borne off under our fire.

While we were thus defending ourselves from the Indians on the hill, some fifteen or twenty of the Caddos succeeded in getting under the bank in our rear, and about forty yards distant. From this cover they opened fire on us, wounding Matthew Doyle, the ball entering the left breast and coming out at the back. As soon as he cried out that he was wounded Thomas McCaslin hastened to the spot where he fell and called out, "Where is the Indian that shot Doyle?" He was told by a more experienced hand not to venture there, as from the reports of their guns they must be riflemen. At that instant they discovered an

Indian, and when in the act of raising his gun he was shot through the center of the body and instantly expired. Robert Armstrong exclaimed, "Damn the Indian that shot McCaslin, where is he?" He was told not to venture there, as they must be riflemen; but he discovered an Indian and just as he was raising his gun to shoot him he was fired at, the ball cutting off a portion of the stock of his gun and lodging in the barrel.

During this time the enemy had formed a complete circle around us, occupying the points of rocks, scattering trees and bushes. The firing then became general from all quarters. Finding our situation too much exposed among the trees, we were obliged to leave them and take to the bushes. The first thing necessary was to dislodge the riflemen from under the bank of the creek, who were now within close shooting distance. We soon succeeded in doing this, as we had the advantage of seeing them when they could not see us. The road we had cut around the thicket the night previous gave us great advantage over the enemy, as we had a fair view of them in the prairie, while we were completely hid.

We baffled their shots by moving six or eight feet the moment we fired, as their only mark was the smoke of our guns. They would put as many as twenty holes in a place the size of a pocket handkerchief where they had seen the smoke. In this manner we fought them for two hours and had one man wounded, James Coryell, who was shot through the arm, and the ball lodged in his side, the ball having first struck a small bush, which prevented it from penetrating deeper than the size of it.

They now discovered that we were not to be dislodged from our position. They suffered very much from the fire of our rifles, which brought down a half dozen at every round. They now resorted to the stratagem of firing the dry grass for the double purpose of routing us from our position and, under cover of the smoke, to carry off their dead and wounded, which lay near us. The wind was now blowing from the west, and they placed the fire in that quarter. It burnt all the grass down to the creek, and then bore off to the right, leaving a space of about five acres around us untouched by the fire.

Under cover of this smoke they succeeded in carrying away a portion of their dead and wounded. In the meantime our party were engaged in scraping away the dry grass and leaves from around our wounded men and baggage to prevent the fire from passing over them. We also gathered together rocks and bushes and made a breastwork of them.

They now discovered that they had made a failure in routing us by fire, as they anticipated. They then reoccupied the points of rocks and trees and commenced another attack. The firing continued for some time, when the wind suddenly shifted and blew very hard from the north. We saw that we were in a critical position, if the Indians succeeded in putting fire to the small spot around us. We kept a strict watch all around, and had our servant boys employed in scraping away the dry grass and leaves from around the baggage and in piling rocks around the wounded men. The point from which the wind now blew being favorable to fire our position, one of the Indians succeeded in crawling down the creek and setting fire to the grass that had not been burned; but before he could retreat back to his party, Robert Armstrong shot and killed him.

We saw no hope now of escape. The flames were about ten feet high, and bearing directly to the spot where we were! What was to be done? It seemed that we were compelled either to be burned alive or driven out into the prairie among the savages. This so encouraged the Indians that they fired volley after volley at us, shouting and yelling like so many demons. They fired about twenty shots to the minute.

As soon as the smoke hid us from their view, we collected together and held a consultation as to what was best to be done. Our first impression was that they might charge on us under cover of the smoke, as we could make but one effectual fire, since the sparks were flying about so thickly that no man could open his powder horn without the risk of being blown up. We, however, determined that if they charged us we would give them one fire, then place our backs together, draw our knives and fight them as long as one of us was left alive. We also decided that, if they did not charge us, we would retain our position, every man taking care of himself as best he could, and when the fire arrived at the ring around our baggage and wounded men, that we would smother it with buffalo robes, deer skins, blankets, etc. The Indians not

charging us, we had to carry out the latter proposition, in which we succeeded after a great deal of exertion.

Our thicket was so much burned and scorched that it now afforded but very little shelter. We all got into the ring that was made around our wounded men and baggage and began building our breastworks higher, using the loose rocks from the inside, and the dirt which we dug up with our knives and sticks. During this last fire the Indians had succeeded in removing all their dead and wounded. It was now sundown, and we had been fighting ever since sunrise in the morning. The Indians, seeing us still alive and ready for fight, drew off at a distance of three hundred yards and there camped for the night with their dead and wounded. Our party now commenced the work of raising our breastworks still higher, and by ten o'clock p. m. we had succeeded in building it breast high. We then filled our vessels with water, expecting another attack next morning.

We could distinctly hear the Indians crying nearly all night over their dead, which is one of their customs. At day light they shot one of their wounded chiefs, it being also a custom to shoot any of their tribe that are mortally wounded. They afterwards took their dead and wounded and went to a mountain about a mile distant, where they deposited them in a cave in the side of the mountain. At eight o'clock in the morning two of our party went out from the fortification to the encampment where the Indians had been the night previous, and counted forty-eight bloody spots in the grass where the dead and wounded had lain. Finding ourselves much cut up, having one man killed and three wounded; five horses killed and three wounded, we recommenced strengthening our little fort and continued our labors until one o'clock p. m., when the arrival of thirteen Indians drew us into it again. As soon as they discovered we were fortified and ready for action they left. We after that remained in our fort eight days, when we set out for San Antonio, where we arrived in safety, bringing out wounded, after a journey of twelve days. Up to this time, there had been no encounter between the Indians and whites so protracted and desperate as the one just related. Three tribes had allied, and, counting on their numbers, had expected an easy victory over the handful of whites, but the brave Bowie and his gallant followers taught them the important lesson that, "The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong." The savages lost three of their chiefs killed on the ground, and probably about one-third of their entire number. There is not a single instance in Indian warfare on this continent where more skill and valor were displayed than in the one we have recorded.