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CHARLES HAMLIN

Miscellany

PAPERS

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IN MEMORY OF GENERAL HUGH
LENDX SCOTT, UNITED STATES
ARMY June 1971

From Mrs N. L. Scott.
March 1937.



IN MEMORY OF
General Hugh Lenox Scott
UNITED STATES ARMY

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*Extract from Sixty-seventh Annual Report of the Association of Graduates of the
United States Military Academy, West Point, N. Y., June 11, 1936.*

HUGH LENOX SCOTT

NO. 2628 CLASS OF 1876

Died April 30, 1934, at Walter Reed Hospital, Washington, D. C.,
aged 80 years.



MAJOR GENERAL HUGH LENOX SCOTT was born at Danville, Kentucky, September 22, 1853, the son of Rev. William McKendry and Mary E. (Hodge) Scott, and great grandson of Benjamin Franklin. Dr. Charles Hodge of Princeton University, and the foremost Theologian of his day, was his grandfather.

At the request of his uncle General David Hunter, a veteran Cavalryman of the old First Dragoons, President Grant appointed him a Cadet, and he entered West Point July 1, 1871. He graduated June 14, 1876, No. 36 in his class of 48 members. Appointed 2nd Lieutenant, 9th Cavalry, June 15th he was, eleven days later, transferred at his own request to the 7th Cavalry, five troops of which had just been wiped out with Custer at the Battle of Little Big Horn.

Shortly after joining the 7th Cavalry Scott set about making himself proficient in the Sioux language. The Post Trader at his Post had a copy of Dr. Riggs Sioux Dictionary, which Scott sought to buy, but the

Trader declining to sell, Scott borrowed it and started to copy by hand the entire dictionary. He had made considerable progress in this when the Trader learning of his painstaking efforts made him a present of it.

The young officer soon discovered however that the Sioux language would enable him to talk only with the Sioux but that the sign language was used everywhere in the buffalo country from the Canadian border to Mexico. It was the court language of the Plains.

Lieutenant Scott thereupon devoted his energies to obtain a working knowledge of the sign language so as to familiarize himself with the customs, manners and history, not only of the Sioux, but of all the various tribes using it.

He studied his enemies and made them his friends. A battle as he saw it, was a last resort only to be considered when diplomacy had been tried to the utmost and had failed. One of his aphorisms was: "It is the people and the politicians who make war and the soldier who makes peace."

Opportunity soon came for putting Scott's familiarity with the sign language and knowledge of Indian Customs to practical use. In 1878 the Cheyennes under Dull Knife and Little Wolf had left their reservation in Indian Territory and headed for the north, plundering, burning, and killing everything enroute. They planned to join Red Cloud who had from 2,000 to 5,000 Sioux warriors in the newly established agency on White Clay Creek, Nebr.

Several troops of the 7th Cavalry under a Major were sent from their camp in the Black Hills to prevent the hostiles from joining Red Cloud who, while not actively hostile was in an ugly mood.

The Major commanding had brought with him neither interpreter nor Indian Scouts, and on approaching Red Cloud's village it became vitally essential to communicate with that noted Chief. Young Scott was sent for and undertook the desperate mission. Entering Red Cloud's lodge he found Red Cloud in a very surly mood.

"What do you come looking for here?" the chief demanded. "My young men don't want you here. If you come here looking for a fight, my young men will fight you. If you don't want to fight, you go home."

The command retired a day's march distance from the Indian camp and Scott was sent back to live in Red Cloud's lodge for three days and nights so as to "keep tab" on what he was doing.

Red Cloud would allow no one to harm Scott so long as he was a guest. It was plain to be seen that the Sioux were not friendly, but largely through the personal efforts of the 28 year old Cavalry lieutenant, a cruel and unnecessary Indian War was prevented. It was the first of his long list of conspicuous services for peace.

Later as a Lieutenant stationed at Fort Sill he repeatedly averted serious Indian troubles and gained the highest commendation of such men as Sheridan, Miles, Schofield, and Merritt.

Scott took great pride in the Indian troop which he commanded for some five years, and which he transformed from a body of blanket Indians into clean, orderly, disciplined soldiers. It was the last Indian troop to be mustered out of service.

During 1894-97 he had charge of Geronimo's band of prisoners at

Fort Sill. He found them in wicky-ups and when he left them they had little farms and a great drove of cattle.

In the Spanish War he was a Major, and later Asst. Adjutant General of Volunteers and Leonard Wood's "right hand man" during the reconstruction days in Cuba. During Wood's prolonged absence on account of illness, Scott was to all intents and purposes Governor of the Island.

From 1903 to 1906 he was Governor of Sulu Archipelago and in an engagement with hostile Moros lost a portion of the fingers of both hands.

Although so severely disabled that he had to have his horse led he kept in the field for two months. He was subsequently recommended for the Brevet of Lieutenant Colonel for his gallant and distinguished service in this campaign.

During his administration as Governor slavery was effectually terminated among the Moros.

Under appointment from Theodore Roosevelt he served from 1906 to 1910 as Superintendent at West Point taking much interest in practical field training for Cadets for which purpose he added a pack train for the training equipment. Under his personal supervision a marching shoe for cadets was designed after the Sioux moccasin, and called the "Scott Last".

During his tour as Superintendent an incident occurred which is illustrative of his "backbone" and unquestioned integrity. Several cadets had been tried for hazing and were dismissed. They admitted their guilt, but their friends worked so successfully upon the sympathies of President Theodore Roosevelt and the Secretary of War that the two were inclined to restore the cadets to the Academy. Matters came to a showdown at a conference between the President, the War Secretary and Scott. The President asked why he had sent these young men home.

"Mr. President," Scott answered "that is the law! The law says if you haze new cadets, you 'shall be dismissed!' The boys do not deny their guilt so there is nothing else to do." "Oh yes, yes, I know, I know," the President countered nodding his head to one side and then the other, "Congress passed a hysterical law." "Mr. President," replied Scott "I am not the Supreme Court to pass on these laws, I have got to take them as they come to me from the War Department. I cannot pick and choose among them. I have taken an oath to obey them and so have you, and if you and the Secretary do what you are now contemplating, you will do a greater damage to the discipline of the Military Academy than anybody has done in this generation."

The President wheeled quickly around to the Secretary saying, "Luke we have got to look out here what we are doing!" It barely needs to be added that the cadets were not restored.

A striking instance of his continued selection for these delicate missions occurred at the same time while he was Superintendent of the Military Academy. He was hurried off to Arizona and New Mexico to negotiate certain difficult problems connected with the Navajo and Mexican Kickapoo Indians.

Later when President Wilson wanted someone to settle the Navajo

Indians troubles at Beautiful Mountain in 1913 he selected General Scott knowing, as he expressed it, that Scott was the "right man" to send.

The President closed his warm letter of thanks for this service to General Scott by saying: "You have done a great public service."

In a similar way he was sent to Bluff, Utah in March 1915 to settle certain Piute Indian troubles. He was so successful in the accomplishment of this mission that on April 2, 1915 it called forth from President Wilson the following: ". . . The whole country admires the way in which you handle these difficult matters and I wanted to express to you both personally and officially as President my own feeling of deep appreciation and genuine admiration."

The following from the pen of Frazier Hunt, noted War Correspondent, is descriptive of Scott's mastery of General Pancho Villa when the tension between the United States and Mexico was almost at the breaking point and it fell to Scott to persuade Villa to release \$6,000,000 worth of foreign property in Mexico which this revolutionist and bandit had confiscated.

"It was a black night in the summer of 1914; no moon was shining. At midnight a heavy-set Mexican, of medium height, drove up to the Juarez end of the International Bridge. A number of officers accompanied him and a squad of Mexican soldiers snapped to attention. The bridge was closed, but his motor car moved slowly forward to the middle of the Rio Grande. He was General Francisco Villa—the feared and hated Pancho Villa—bandit, revolutionary leader of northern Mexico.

"At about the same moment a broad shouldered, cavalry-legged man, accompanied by one officer and an orderly, silently walked towards the middle of the bridge from the El Paso end. He was General Hugh L. Scott of the United States Army—and here at midnight, unarmed, and with only one aide and one soldier, he was to meet the notorious Mexican killer in secret conference.

"Buenas noches, Don Francisco," the American General greeted the bandit leader.

"Buenas noches, mi general," General Pancho Villa saluted, bowing the American officer into the back seat of his motor car.

"Coolly, calmly, fearlessly, the American General entered. Only a day or two before, this Mexican bad man had shot to death, with his own hands, a British engineer. He was famous—or infamous—for his uncontrolled temper. He killed first and reasoned afterwards. And at this moment the tension between the United States and Mexico was at the breaking point. Open warfare might come at any hour.

"Don Pancho," the American General said, in an uncompromising tone, "civilized people look upon you as a tiger, or a wolf."

"It was the start. For two hours, this old Indian fighter, General Scott, talked to Villa like—well, like a Dutch uncle—as no one had ever talked to him before—and lived. He told him what he could do and what he couldn't do. He must quit killing Americans and foreigners and looting their property. He must cease fighting on the Mexican side across from American towns. There was no flag waving or shout-

ing. This stocky American with the gray mustache and the glasses and the slow-spoken words, knew what he was talking about. He had a sympathetic understanding of the Mexican revolution and of this strange bandit leader. He knew what it was all about. And Pancho Villa listened—as he might have listened to his own father, and subsequently declared Scott to be “the only honest man north of Mexico.”

“It was two o’clock in the morning when the two generals shook hands and departed. What might have been a war was averted.

“It was just another conference for the old Indian fighter—Hugh L. Scott. Just another triumph for patience and sympathy over the right of might. For almost forty years of active service in the United States Army he had been using just these tactics against red Indians, Mohammedans, Moros, Cuban revolutionists and Mexican bandits and fighters. His patience and sympathetic conciliatory methods had saved thousands of lives and millions of dollars. Force and guns were the last things to be used. He had squatted in tepees and talked the sign language for weeks on end to win stubborn, disillusioned Indians around to his point of view—holding off his own impatient and restless troops with one hand while he won over a bitter and armed band of hostiles with the other. This little affair with the feared Pancho Villa was child’s play to him.

“In many ways he’s the most extraordinary soldier who ever served in the United States—this grizzled old campaigner—this greatest American Indian fighter, who never killed an Indian. And his whole life has been crowded with romantic story-book adventures—Indians, buffalos, Wild West, Sulu Seas, Apaches, Mexicans, Russian Revolutions—what you will.”

At the age of sixty he became a Brigadier General, commanded a Cavalry brigade on the Mexican border, and in 1914 became Chief of Staff. Mexican border troubles, the Punitive Expedition into Mexico, and the World War followed in rapid succession, his most important public service here being the part he played in the adoption of the Selective Service law for which he is given credit in the citation accompanying his Distinguished Service Medal. It reads: “As Chief of Staff in persistently urging the adoption of the Selective Service law, and as Commanding General, Camp Dix, N. J., in organizing and training the divisions and miscellaneous troops committed to his care during the War.”

In 1916 he was ad interim Secretary of War and sat in President Wilson’s Cabinet. He was a member of the Root Commission sent to Russia in 1917 and served with both British and French troops as an observer in the front lines for some time during the same year.

Although retired for age on September 22, 1917, he was immediately recalled into active service and assigned to the command of Camp Dix.

From 1923 to 1933 he was Chairman of the New Jersey Highway Commission, the chief function of which was to see that the large sums of money appropriated were economically expended and that the State got good roads. Both these missions were fulfilled.

For a number of years, from 1919 until it was dissolved, he was a member of the Board of Indian Commissioners.

His lifetime work on the Indian sign language has been made a permanent record in shape of films and a dictionary which he compiled.

A most interesting narrative of his adventurous life will be found in “Some Memories of a Solider” published in 1928.

In addition to his Distinguished Service Medal he was awarded also the Purple Heart for wounds received in action and a Silver Star and Oak Leaf Cluster, for gallantry in action. When a Cadet he had saved a classmate from drowning and but for a technicality would have been awarded the Life Saving Medal.

He was an honorary member of various Indian tribes, a 33rd degree Mason, a member of the American Anthropological Association, Society of Cincinnati; Historical Society of Texas, and Societies of Moro Campaigns, Foreign Wars, and Spanish-American War.

Clubs: Metropolitan and Army and Navy Clubs of Washington, D. C., the Union League and Army and Navy Clubs of N. Y., the Boone and Crockett Club and Ends of the Earth Club.

He was married June 22, 1880 at Standing Rock, Dakota to Mary, daughter of General Lewis Merrill. They had five children; Captain David Hunter (deceased), Mrs. Anna Merrill Stockton; Lewis Merrill, Mary Blanchard and Sarah Houston Scott.

Such in briefest outline is the career of this cultured gentleman, gallant soldier and graduate of whom the Military Academy may well be proud.

He will be mourned, and mourned sincerely by his unusually wide circle of friends both high and low, rich and poor, but outside his own immediate family, his loss will never be as keenly felt as by the Indians for whose rights he persistently fought both in season and out and for whom he poured out his whole mind and soul in preserving peaceful relations between the two races.

“Blessed are the Peacemakers.”

W. C. B.