

***Dan 'L Morgan 's
Stripes***

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A Shawano came leaping from cover . . .

DAN'L MORGAN'S STRIPES

by H. BEDFORD-JONES

"So this is sojering!" said Dan'l Morgan. "Sweat, mud and windy bellies!"

Raw-boned, weary beyond words, he sent his horses along. All day he had been putting shoulder to wheel, fairly pushing the heavy wagon and the four horses through the unending hills of southwestern Pennsylvania. He was in sprawling, glittering company: redcoats, ranger buckskin, sailors with cutlasses aswing, and Virginia light horse blue, all moving at two miles a day, the gait of a first class tortoise.

Thank God, thought Morgan, a waggoner didn't march trussed in coats and belts, shoulders weighted by one hundred and twenty-five pounds of musket and knapsack. He viewed the army around and ahead of him with disdain—King George's troops, heading up to drive the French and Injuns out of that Fort Duquesne at the forks of the Ohio.

Dusk was falling, and Dan'l Morgan was in bad humor, when he at last rolled into camp. Muskets were stacked, tents were pitched, mess fires were flickering. He had to park his wagon and unhitch his staggering team before he could fall to and fend for himself, and the prospect was not pleasant.

"Well, what now?" he demanded, as an officer stopped his wagon. A stocky lieutenant in the royal scarlet, with the strut of a ruffling young gobbler.

"Sirrah, you're late into camp! You know the danger of straggling, and the orders bearing upon it. What's your name?"

"I'm Dan'l Morgan, with no time to talk, except to the wagon master. Straggling?" Morgan laughed. "You've a line four mile long; it's all in a straggle. Hell! Move on while I tend to my horses."

"What's this? An insolent provincial talking impudence to a king's officer? Why, damme," exclaimed the officer, "it's time you American hirelings learned discipline! I've a mind to make an example of you!"

Morgan leaned over from the seat.

"No more hireling than you, and I've taken no king's shilling. I own this team and wagon; they're hired to the king's service, but I'm a free man. Now, mister, I've had a hard day. I ain't been trying to kill my horses to suit the like of you. Will you get out of my way?"

The officer cursed hotly. "General Sir Edward Braddock himself shall hear of this—another proof to him that you Americans are unfit for military duties! You're under arrest. Come down off that seat before you're hauled off."

"Quick enough," said Dan'l Morgan. He vaulted from the seat, landed lightly, and fronted the officer. Freckled face in a scowl, ragged shirt parted on his hairy chest, his anger-hot eyes drove into the officer. "I'm off. Want a fight, do you?"

The officer laughed. "Fight a provincial teamster? Take this, fellow—" and he lashed out with his sword. The flat of the blade stung through sweat-wet shirt.

A little crowd had gathered. Voices broke out in the dusk.

"Don't take it, Dan!" "You're as good as he is." "These redcoat rufflers need a puttin' down, they do."

Morgan stood for a moment, then laughed, and his arm swung.

“So, you cock-a-dandy! Your meat-toaster, my hide-tickler—” And his whip-lash smacked home about the scarlet shoulders.

The whip fell again. The officer stood erect, knuckle-white hand gripping sword; he had the courage of outraged pride.

“Two for one,” said Dan’l Morgan. “Maybe that’ll teach you manners.”

“You’ve not struck me, my man,” said the officer quietly. “You’ve struck the king’s uniform. You’ve insulted His Majesty. Here, men!” His voice brought soldiers breaking through the crowd. “Arrest this fellow. Hold him for orders.”

Morgan eyed the soldiers, eyed his team. He had worked hard to buy those good horses; to make a bolt for it would be to lose them. A very practical sort of man was Dan’l Morgan; not being able to fight the whole army, he went to jail.

Others were in the guardhouse tent, soldiers due for sentence or punishment. These redcoats were a roistering, thirsty lot. Questions were piled on him, and he gave angry, sullen reply.

“A damned officer struck me and I paid him in kind. I’m no sojer.”

“Ho, lads, an American! What are ye, man? A teamster?”

“I’m Dan’l Morgan of Virginia, with my own team and wagon. I don’t take a blow from anybody.”

“Gawd! And ye struck a king’s officer? Ye’ll bloody well pay for layin’ hand on that kind o’ uniform!”

“Wasn’t my hand. He used the flat of his sword. I used my whip.”

Laughs, wondering exclamations, curious eyes.

“D’ye know what ye’ll be getting for that?” said one. Morgan shook his head.

“I’m no enlisted sojer. I’m hauling on wages. If I’m to be struck by a whipper-snapper in a red coat, I’ll take my team and go home.”

“Tell that to the gen’ral. Ever hear o’ Braddock discipline? You’re under Gen’ral Braddock now. Struck an officer with a whip—Gawd! If a soldier is caught with a dram too much in him, he gets two hundred lashes; if he borrows to fill his belly, a thousand. How else, says the gen’ral, are we to march through this damned country of nowhere, with bloody savages layin’ in the bushes? And you took whip to an officer?”

“Well,” and Morgan scowled, “what’ll they do to me?”

“A thousand wi’ the cat. It’s discipline makes the British army, me lad, as ye’ll see if them frog-eaters and painted heathen try to stand ag’in us.”

“I’ll kill the man who lays lash to me,” said Dan’l Morgan. “And your brags—hell! Colonel Washington with three hundred buckskins can l’arn you all how to fight.”

He sat glowering, listening. Discipline! King’s regulars, fourteen hundred of them, showing half as many raw provincials how to fight, and not with enough sense to pick off their wood-ticks every night. And, hours later, thinking of his team and wagon, he dropped off to sleep.



Dan’l Morgan wakened again, a second time, with a flood of cold water dashed into his face. A hideous waking, from a hideous dream. All after that morning rouse-up was like a dream now. He blinked up into the noon sun and remembered it.

Body stripped, wrists triced up to a tree, troops parading; and not a word out of Dan’l Morgan, not a whimper. But he counted. One hundred. Two hundred. Three and four—he lost count there and went to sleep again, until this second waking under the noon sun.

His eyes focused. The corporal who had watered him was striding off with the empty bucket. Over his wet shoulders was flung his own shirt. A man was squatted beside him, rubbing something into his back—a figure in buckskin and gray fox cap, a man he knew. Morgan moved, wrenched around, and sat up.

“Hello, Jack! You, huh? I counted to four hundred. What then?”

Swart Captain Patrick Jack flashed a smile. The Black Rifle, they called him, the Black Hunter, the Injun killer of the border country.

“You got quittance with a short count. Four-fifty.”

“Five hundred, the sentence was,” muttered Morgan. “I’m from Virginia, a free man. And nobody interfered. Not even Washington.”

“He’s behind, sick,” said Captain Jack. “Rubbed in some b’ar’s grease. Do you good. Better keep some on hand. Use it every day.”

Morgan stared. “What are you doin’ here? I heard tell Braddock kicked you out.”

“My men and me, no pay, no discipline; sleep, eat, camp as we pleased.” The dark man grinned and crooked finger at a second man nearby. “Braddock said he had enough undisciplined provincials now. Good day to you. Feller in a red jacket says, who made me a cap’n anyhow? My rifle, I says.”

“And you’re along of the army just the same?”

“Can’t disapp’int this,” and Captain Jack tapped his long rifle. “Cabin burned, wife and young ’uns put to the hatchet. Aye, I’m here. This march will draw Injuns like old meal draws flies. Here’s Scarouady, with talk.”

The second figure, a tall Indian with painted body and buckskin leggings, joined them, produced food and water, and grunted as Morgan grabbed it. Half King was his English name, a carrier of belts, of messages; he had served in the Ohio country with Washington.

“Braddock, a fool,” he said. “No eyes, no ears. Injuns come to help him, leave him quick. He find plenty where he go.”

“Injuns ahead?” Morgan asked quickly. He was trying to forget his burning back, doused down with smarting brine for quicker healing of the ribboned flesh.

“Mohawks with the white coats,” said Half King. “Delawares, Huron dogs. Shawanos, plenty more. Scarouady has ears. A bird tell him Injuns see redcoats march, can shoot men of this foolish redcoat captain like pigeon.”

“They caught the Half King,” Cap’n Jack explained. “Tied him to a tree. He ain’t there no more,” and he chuckled. “Six hundred Injuns, three hundred French, ahead.”

“A fair passel,” said Morgan. “We got eight left—just eight Injuns left to scout with. Hell!”

“You ain’t staying?” said the dark man. “You’re good enough scout for me.”

“Nope.” Morgan’s freckled features held an ugly glint, his voice gave ugly meaning to his words. “Damned turkey gobbler, he was! I said I’d kill the man who had me whipped. By God, I stay! King George owes me fifty lashes. I aim to wipe out the score.”

“You’re a fool. Fighting for Braddock’s credit?”

“Nope. Dan’l Morgan’s credit.” With a wince, Morgan stood up and got into his shirt. He was tough. Four hundred and fifty—it was incredible. “I’m

damned sore. Fifty lashes still due me, huh?”

Another figure who had been listening drew in upon them. It was the stocky lieutenant, the ruffled gobbler, who bent a caustic eye upon the glowering Morgan.

“Come, fellow. You had your choice. Two hundred lashes and a drumming out, or the full five hundred. You took the five hundred.”

“Aye,” said Dan’l Morgan. “You’ll not be rid o’ me so easy, that’s why. I’m not to be cheated. I’ll have my full due, mister. And you remember it.”

The lieutenant frowned thoughtfully after him as he strode off.

The troops had marched, the wagons were forming. Amid the sympathy or rude wit of his companions, responding only with a hitch of his stiffened shoulders, Dan’l Morgan mounted into his wagon seat, glanced at his rifle under it, and fell to work at his horses. Fifty lashes due him, eh? Time enough.



Silent, waiting, patient, Morgan spoke little those next days. Now and again he met the lieutenant, and his eyes glowered. If he spoke little, however, he heard much. News filtered along the line. Teamsters gossiped of what went on ahead.

Someone had talked with an officer’s batman. Washington of Virginia had made the Britishers listen. His courtesy title of captain was offset by his knowledge of these very trails; he had been over them. What with cutting down trees and leveling hills and making roads, said he, Braddock would not get to Duquesne before the snow flew. And it was July now, or would be tomorrow.

So the grudging general had consented to travel light.

“Light!” and the teamsters grinned as they talked of it. Twelve hundred men, wheeled cannon, wagons of baggage, provisions, tools, ammunition. Two washwomen—“bare shanks”—to each company, files of pack animals. Light, huh? That was pretty good. Why, the march stretched out by the mile!

Dan’l Morgan plodded along with the wagons, getting occasional glimpses of the brave array out in front. Swinging in his seat as the wagon lurched, plying whip and lines with his expert wrestler’s arms, hitching his sore shoulder to ease them, he looked at what went on around, and spat in contempt or sucked his pipe while his smoldering eyes sought the figure of that strutting gobbler.

Scotch and Irish sojers to fight Injuns, and Cap'n Jack kicked out! Something to grin about, that was.

Grenadiers stalking along, up ahead, never an enemy of any kind sighted, all the talk of Injuns nothing more than wild words. One thing sure, though. All the friendly Injuns who had advanced with the column had melted away. Eight of them left, by the talk. That looked bad.

At night, outposts of regulars, with grenadier sentinels circled around. No scouts out, no Americans used; these provincials could not be trusted. Braddock was afraid they might melt and disappear, like the Injuns. How the teamsters chuckled over it!

"Tell you what, though," was the usual end-up. "Here's reg'lar sojers. Nothing can't stand afore them. French, Injuns, anybody—these bloody ramrods will just wipe 'em out. We may hate their guts, but they got guts, mind that!"

"Maybe," said Dan'l Morgan, and spat. "I ain't so sure. Me and Cap'n Jack and a dozen Injuns would raise hell with this outfit."

He was laughed to scorn, and rightly. French and Injuns were afraid, afraid of cannon, afraid of the iron discipline that would die and conquer. Plain folks could not hope to fight these troops, with all the imponderable weight of Britain behind them. Scattered Injuns couldn't stand before them. Serried ranks—this was something new on the frontier. Something new and deadly and terrible. Not to mention cannon.

"I ain't so sure," said Dan'l Morgan, glowering around. "Might I'arn different."

He was hooted down. Every man in America knew better. All the colonies knew better. His back should tell him better. Sure, some of these troops would die, but the rest would simply wipe out the French and Injuns.

So went the talk around the wagons, as it went around the taverns and the towns back in the colonies behind the frontier.

July crept in. The hot days crept by. There came a night, with the end of the march in sight. It was the eighth, somebody said. Morgan was not worried about counting days. He was young, and life was long. On the tenth, the word went around, they'd be in Duquesne. There was a good trail to follow, only it had to be widened to suit the engineers.

The evening was hot and sultry, with the Monongahela close ahead.

The camp was merry that evening. In the long lanes between the tents, tongues ran high. Scotch and Irish brogue filled the air. The regulars scoured their uniform buttons, pipe-clayed their belts, greased their queues. Snatches of song drifted up. From the officers' tents rang more song and toasts over the wine, and laughter.

Among the parked wagons ran all kinds of talk. Dan'l Morgan sat hunched for a dose of bear's grease on his back. Itchy by this time, the back was, and healing.

"And what's the doin's to make the redcoats so gay?" asked the man who was rubbing him.

"Parade tomorrow, I heard tell," another said. "They aim to parade for the French and Injuns as they march up. Two more days and we're done."

"God save His Majesty! A sight for them varmints to see. Hey! Is it true that three drunk sojers fell behind today and got scalped?"

"Dunno. Heard some talk about it—hurray! Here comes the Black Rifle ag'in! And Gist's with him. Now we'll get some straight news."



The rail-thin killer came stalking up. With him was Gist, one of the guides from headquarters. A number of men gathered around. Dan'l Morgan stood up, and with a twist of his body got his shirt into place.

"Hi, Dan! Stripes healing up?" grunted Captain Jack. He leaned his rifle against the wagon and folded himself up, squatting on his heels.

"All but the fifty I didn't get," Morgan rejoined sourly.

"My gosh, if you ain't got reg'lar Injun notions! I'd hate to be in that lobster's boots when you finally get your sights lined up on him."

"Never mind that. What's the news?"

"Oh, there's been a council pipe at headquarters. Heap talk. Gist, here, has been right nigh to the fort."

"Gen'ral sent me up to make sure of the trail," said Gist. "Beats hell how these sojers got to have a road! But that's how they'll win, I reckon. Yep, I got within half a mile of the fort. Not much sign o' life around, neither. Got chased and nigh caught by some Injuns, though. The Gen'ral sent out two of our Injuns today and they fetched in a scalp."

"Injun scalp?" queried Morgan.

Captain Jack grinned. “Nope. It’s a good joke. They found a French officer out hunting and nabbed the poor devil.” Then his dark face changed, hardened, snarled. “The Half King’s in mourning tonight. You heard, Dan?”

“Nope. Don’t hear nothing. In mourning, you say? What happened?”

“All hands got Injuns on their minds. A damned outpost party made a mistake and shot the Half King’s son. Aw, this is a mess!” and the Black Killer spat disgustedly.

“It’ll be all cleaned up in two days, now,” said Gist. “There’s to be an advance to open up the way; we got two fords ahead and a plain trail. The main body will come along in formation to make a showing. Boys, you’ll see something tomorrow!”

Captain Jack grunted scornfully.

“Drums beatin’ and fife’s yelling to scare Injuns—huh! I’m scouting my own trail tomorrow, you bet. Say, where’s Washington?”

Gist flicked a thumb over his shoulder.

“Oh, he’s on hand; come up in a wagon, he’s not to miss the fun.” Gist emitted a chuckle. “All they’ll call him is cap’n; the king didn’t make him no colonel. Ain’t that a good one? He wanted to clean out the woods ahead, but Braddock says he ain’t taking no advice from a buckskin officer. Washington’s shed his uniform for buckskin and it’s made the gen’ral sore as hell.”

“Feller was telling me tonight,” spoke up a man, “that some of them high-falutin’ officers is passing around mighty curious talk, about ghosts and such.”

“It’s true,” and Gist nodded. “I heard ’em. Sir Peter Halket, he’s clear in the dumps. Allows he had a dream with his eyes open. Seen himself and his son, that lieutenant, in shrouds pulled up over their chests. No, he wan’t drunk. Them Scotch see things that way. They ain’t right in the head at times, I guess.”

“If he’d been Injun,” grunted Captain Jack, “he’d ha’ seen scalps dancing.”

“What’d Washington make o’ that ghost talk?” put in one of the thronging men. “I’ll bet he didn’t lay no store by it.”

“I asked him about it,” Gist replied. “The colonel sure gets off on the right foot every time, you bet! He says he trusted to smoky buckskins

more'n shrouds. He allows them French are going to put up a fight o' some kind, even if they do get all washed up."

"He's righte'n anybody knows," said Captain Jack. "French may run, but these here Mingos and the rest, they aim to pack home a scalp or two."

A new voice intruded.

"Dan'l Morgan! Where's Waggoner Morgan?"

"What'll it be now?" said Morgan, as he stood up. Then his face changed, his eyes narrowed.

Two men were thrusting through the group. One was his stocky, ruffling lieutenant, who was in the quartermaster's department. With him was the wagon master.

"Morgan, you're to take your best team," said the wagon master, "and report to Major St. Clair in time to march with his working party at four in the morning!"

"And for what?" Dan'l Morgan shot out, his eyes on the lieutenant.

"To help clear the road of felled trees. Take a chain but no wagon."

"Pick on me if you like and be damned to you," said Morgan. "But there'll be more'n trees to clear out'n the way tomorrow, I bet."

The lieutenant looked him up and down.

"Still surly, are you? My man, your horses are rated in good condition. Perhaps you're afraid to join the advance?"

Morgan laughed, without mirth. "Me afraid? Not Dan'l Morgan. The king owes me fifty lashes I aim to wipe out, mister."

The officer sneered. "Oh, you'll be perfectly safe! Colonel Gage takes the van, to hold the road. In case of any attack; the rest of us will come up at the double to protect you."

"And there'll be redder backs than mine was," Morgan said.

The two went on. From somewhere up the lane of tents a grenadier was singing in mellow baritone:

*"Busk ye, busk ye, my bonnie, bonnie bride!
Busk ye, busk ye, my winsome marrow!
Busk ye, busk ye, my bonnie, bonnie bride,
And think nae mair of the Braes of Yarrow."*

One of the teamsters grunted.

“That lingo sounds like a drunken Shawnee talkin’ French. Marrow, huh? No marrow in this camp o’ short half rations, where all the critters are bags o’ dry bones!”

“Hold on, hold on!” spoke up Gist. “There’s a song I’ve heard Washington sing in camp—hark to it!”

Another voice had lifted from another group:

*“.. .. me her promise true.
Gie’d me her promise true,
Which ne’er forgot will be;
And for bonnie Annie Laurie,
I’d lay me down and dee.”*

“Good God! I’ll hear no more o’ that,” and Captain Jack sprang up, strode off and was gone among the trees.

“Thinking of his wife again,” said somebody. “Dan, you’re a fool to go up to the front tomorrow. Ain’t no place for us. We ain’t hired to do fighting —”

“No redcoat’s telling Dan’l Morgan he’s a-feared. Besides. I aim to collect payment o’ that fifty lashes that’s coming to me.”

He crawled under his wagon and stretched out. The others exchanged looks.

“What in hell does he mean by that talk?” muttered one.

“What you or me’d mean, I reckon, if we’d got whipped,” another said. “Keeps his rifle loaded and fresh flinted, don’t he? Wait and see. I could p’int to one redcoat officer who ain’t going to get sculped when he gits a bullet in him.”

Morgan slept, and dreamed no dreams.



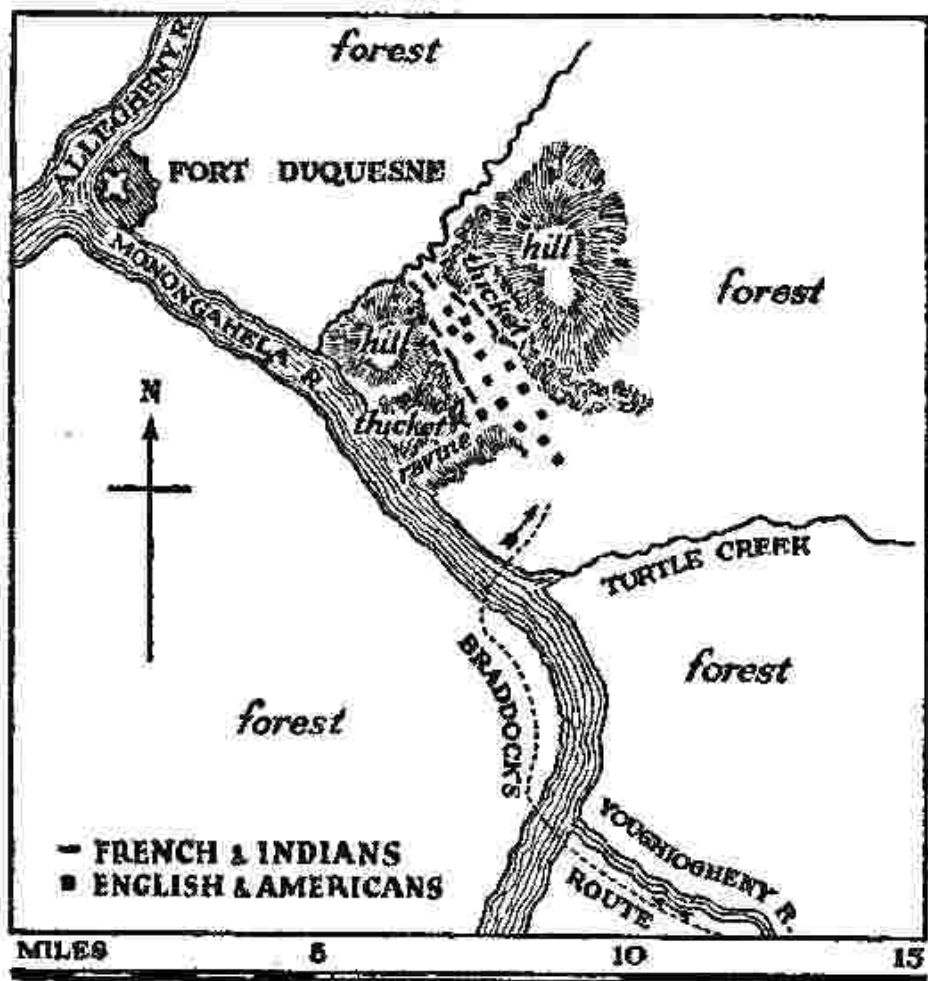
Nearing dawn got him out of his blankets. His best team, his chains, his rifle on shoulder, and he plodded away, munching on a strip of dry beef. The east promised fine July sunlight, and birds were twittering. Here and there a parrakeet, in later times destined to vanish entirely from this country, flashed through the trees.

The party went forward. Two hundred and fifty “carpenters”, as the British called axe-men and the like; tool carts hauled by hand, two brass six-

pounders, soldiers and light horse to guard the flanks. And Dan'l Morgan with his team and a back that carried the royal sign o' the nine claws.

Across the river; banks low, water hip high, bottom hard. The trampled earth showed another party on ahead, to Morgan's eye. True enough; Colonel Gage with two grenadier companies and the New York provincials, and two more brass guns. And pioneers gone ahead to mark the road.

"Four hundred, with four cannon!" Morgan, mounted sideways on one of his horses, eyed the redcoats around him. "Hell! It's a slow march to glory that takes two days to cover six or eight mile, Lord save Dan'l Morgan from being a sojer in cross-belts and britches, marching by rule o' thumb—"



A corporal came shouldering up and spoke with a harsh burr.

"The orders are to get ye off that horse. 'Tis only the officers ride."

"I been promoted with drummer's stripes," and Morgan's eyes slitted. "But as it's time, I'll get off. Not for your orders either."

Trees ahead, axes at work widening the trail; on beyond, in the brightening daylight, the river glinted again. Another ford here. Across, on the rising bottoms, Gage's companies showed, at ease. A young officer came dashing back, his voice shrill.

"All clear, Major! I'm taking word to the general. We routed about thirty Indians out of the bushes here. They won't stand. The fort's ours!"

Dan'l Morgan mounted horse again, cuddled rifle under arm, and rode woman fashion across the ford. The sun was climbing into the blue. Back on the east side of the stream again; a ring of axes upon the high trees, the sounding of voices, of quick orders, of men at work as the road was widened. And from the rear lifted upon the morning stillness a clink, a clatter, a jolting rattle. General Braddock had formed his march.

Spade and shovel men were digging, leveling the river bank. Slow work there. Slow work ahead here in the woods; trees and brush hacked away, fallen timbers lugged off to clear an old pack trail for the grenadiers and the heavy cannon. Twelve feet wide, the engineers had ordered the road.

"You're the man with the team?"

Morgan looked aside, spat, wiped his freckled brow. Another corporal, who wore the red breeches of the New York provincials. All uniform and no rank, by gosh, except Cap'n Gates, who had once been a king's regular.

"Yep, I'm Dan'l Morgan of Virginia with a team, and what of it?"

"You're ordered to go on ahead. Cap'n Gordon's in a smother o' fallen trees, with a big 'un five foot through slap across the road. Your team's needed to haul."

"You'd do better putting your shoulders to it," said Morgan.

"Aye? Us king's sojers are for fighting, not for hand labor. Get busy."

"May the log rot afore I get there," said Morgan. "How fur be it?"

"Acrost the rise, a quarter mile."

Morgan gathered his chains, mounted one horse and led the other, unhurried. He passed among the axe-men and rode on, alone now. His eyes

glowered at the trees around, silent and sun-hot. Dan Morgan knew his way around in border country, and he grimaced.

“Danged if I don’t see a sculp hanging to every tree!” he told his horses. “Why should them Injuns have let us cross the river? Waiting to bag the lot, gen’ral and all. Wisht now I’d stuck to Cap’n Jack; no, I’m on my own trail, that’s right. Fifty stripes short—and Dan’l Morgan takes ’em in the face this time, not on the back.”

He came on to the rising ground, cocked his ear to sudden sounds, then drew his team to a halt. He brought out crumbled tobacco, stuffed it into his pipe, and presently had it alight, his eyes fastened on the back trail, down there among the walnut woods, between the two fords.

“If the gen’ral’s in no hurry, Dan’l Morgan ain’t neither,” he said to himself, and grinned. A sight worth seeing, down there.

The nearer ford was clear in the view. The air, warming on toward noon, was faintly tremulous with shrill of fife and beat of drum, with the burr and plod of a column moving. Through the leafy aisles flashed the scarlet and gilt of uniforms, the glitter of bayonets. The column was filing in solid ranks, white cross-belts cutting the vivid scarlet.

The 44th Foot, officers a-horse, swords out and glinting, ranks of bayonets at shoulder. Then the blue trappings of the Virginia Light Horse, the red coats and breeches of the provincials. The workmen had not finished with the ford. The column wheeled, broke, drilled as on parade. Grenadiers, with immense tall hats, cannon and detachments of seamen, the main baggage column still far in rear. Regimental colors hung listless but in brave hues.

“God save the king, the sight’s worth a few stripes on the back!” muttered Dan’l Morgan. “Well, I’ve spent time enough at it.”

He watched the troops parading through the ford, and turned to his horses. Ahead, axes were clanging, trees crashing. Morgan moved on.

Lower ground, now, the head of a dank ravine. Morgan stopped to loop the chains over the backs of his horses. By thunder, the brush was thick! And on ahead it looked worse. And there showed the great log he was ordered to haul aside. A monster log, right in the trail, bridging the clearing at the shallow of another tangled ravine.



Morgan went to work. It took time. The horses strained and crashed in the brush. When at length he had it done, when he wiped his sweating face and unhooked, the Gage advance party was coming. He grunted and swung up to a broad hot back.

“No working party for me, Mister St. Clair,” he muttered. “My time’s my own, and if the redskins are running away, I want a crack at ’em. We’ll see what Cap’n Gordon looks like, up ahead.”

He rode on, up a gentle slope, with the axes at work behind. Ahead showed a glint of crimson, the blue of the Light Horse. Axes at work here, too, boughs crackling, voices echoing. Morgan came up with the men at work, and they stared at this country bumpkin, riding woman fashion, rifle across lap.

“What do you want?” snapped a sergeant.

“No business of yours,” and Morgan grinned. “I’m a-horse and outranking you. Where’s the cap’n?”

“You’ll find him ahead, and gae to the deil with ye!”

“True word,” said Morgan. “The devil and his pack are likely waiting to lift your hair, my rooster.”

He rode on. Horsemen, now. Gist was here, in buckskin, axes at work. A mounted officer swung around at sight of him.

“What do you want?”

“I’m Dan’l Morgan with the team—”

“Moccasins!” the cry burst from Gist. “Look out, Cap’n!”

Morgan gripped his rifle, straightened up. The party of Light Horse peered. A rushing sound, like wind through the forest leaves—and there, close in the upward trail, a slim figure in gay fringed shirt and leggings, rifle in hand and silver gorget dancing on his breast—a Frenchman!

Keen brown features alert, he leaped like a deer, and behind him a running file of redskins like painted hounds.

“By God, there they are!” Gist’s voice again. “Back, back to Gage, Cap’n! We’re between two fires here—”

The Frenchman stopped short, waved his hat, as Morgan gawked at him. The host of dark figures behind him dived to right and left, and in another instant had vanished utterly. Closing the trail, coming on in a semi-circle, was a front of white coats and woodsman buckskin. French!

The Light Horse scampered. Gist was dodging through the woods. The captain was at the gallop downtrail, the axe-men were bolting like rabbits. Morgan slid off as his horse plunged, saw the French muskets leveled, and ducked flat.

“Vive le roi! Vive la France!” came the cheer. The muskets banged and balls swept the shuddering trees. A war-whoop lifted from the silent green depths, as Morgan took to his heels.

He was barely alert enough to duck flat once more, when the British line deployed and the white smoke gushed. Then up and among his own folks, safe enough. Not an Injun to be seen now, but balls whistled. The French muskets volleyed, the white coats surged forward and among the trees.

Now came the two six-pounders, trundled full tilt, wheeling around, the gunners ready. “Boom! Boom!” The grape hissed. The young Frenchman with the silver gorget went rolling. The trees shed twigs and leaves. A swarm of Indians leaped up and scuttled away. The grenadiers cheered, and volleyed the more. But now the French had taken to cover.

Morgan stared around, gaping, seeing things in flashes of amazement. Men were falling, screaming, writhing; the flanking squads were driven in, the whole advance was massed in the road and crowded on the working party behind. Morgan, covered behind a tree, caught a glimpse of Gist close by; the guide was hailing him.

“Dan! This is hotter’n hell. Those regulars are shooting at nothing.”

“Dummed skittery,” Morgan replied, then uttered a sharp yelp. “Hi, Jack! How about it?”

Captain Jack appeared, gliding out of nowhere, and taking to cover again close by.

“Half King’s somewhere; counted on two of the varmints. There’s hundreds all about. Hello, Gist. Where’s Braddock?”

“Back with the column. Lay low, now—”

No need of that advice. Lead came from everywhere. Muskets were banging away under the low-hanging drift of smoke. Morgan ducked low and hugged the ground. The Injuns, as he could tell by the whoops, were working along to close the rear. Captain Jack, coolly appraising, was sizing things up and biding his time. Morgan was well content to await some word from him.

Regulars, provincials and workers, all in a jostling huddle, were pouring backward along the road. They left behind them the hot cannon, and a trail of red. Not a horse remained alive.

“All right!” burst out Cap’n Jack abruptly. “Come on!”

He broke cover and leaped away from that deathly road. Gist and Morgan, keeping together, followed the Black Rifle. Morgan sighted painted, leaping forms; he caught mere flashes of action, scanty pictures etched on his brain. Cap’n Jack’s sudden pause, butt to shoulder, muzzle spurting; Gage, bawling away unheard, red-faced, flailing with the flat of his sword to turn his men; and the boiling, dying rabble in the road, with the Injun muskets keeping pace unseen.

“Washington!” burst forth Gist.

Here were soldiers flooding up from the first bottom rise. Regulars, yes; but the rangers too, and Washington, by glory! Washington, sending out the rangers to fight fire with fire. Morgan leaped forward, only to stop short. No go! The crazy mob from up the road crashed into the arriving ranks; there was just another jumble of men dying and screaming and firing blind.

The picture came suddenly clear to Morgan. Good God, what a thing it was to see!

Through the smoke loomed Sir Peter Halket, and Braddock himself. Here were the regulars, lined up on parade formation, closing ranks as men died, blazing away with volley on volley—slap into the trees as though the Injuns were squirrels! They choked the road for full thirty rods. French and redskin muskets simply poured lead into the ranks, and no bullet could miss such a target. Morgan saw Braddock’s horse pitch forward, saw the resplendent figure clamber up into another saddle, saw the parade-ground ranks close up as men died.

His own voice shrilled in his ears. He found himself yelling, cursing the damned fools, shouting at them to break ranks and fight like the provincials. Quick shame gripped him and he looked around, but his voice had gone unheard. Then he was aware of eddying movements, of breaking ranks. No discipline could stand this scorcher. The grenadiers were imitating the provincial troops and the rangers, were breaking for the cover of the trees.

Morgan whipped around at a sudden crashing sound and saw a huge Scot, scarlet and buff of the 48th, standing helplessly a dozen feet away.

“Oot wi’ the bagonet!” Morgan caught the gasped words. “The deil’s in the bracken and ne’er a sicht o’ him—”

A whoop, a shot, and the Scot sank down. Another whoop, and a Shawano came leaping from cover, knife bared, not seeing the sheltered Morgan. But Morgan stood up and the long rifle gushed and roared; he crouched again to reload, watching the red man kick and die.

“Out of here! Back to your colors!” Officers came ramping, raging. “Shame to you! Into the ranks!”



Morgan reloaded, moved on. He caught sight of Gist, rifle as smoke, and started for him. A grenadier was taking cover; then came a burly figure, a roar of oaths—Braddock himself, in a towering rage, sword flatting at the poor devil in uniform.

“My God, that I live to see a British soldier skulking like a rabbit in its form! To the colors—”

Morgan slipped up to Gist. “The man’s daft. They’re all daft. Where’s Washington?”

“Everywhere. You saw him? The damned stiff-necked Braddock won’t listen to him. No coward. Had three horses shot under him, someone said.”

“I ain’t being sculped to suit a redcoat,” said Morgan. “There’s a ranger —”

“All the rangers!” exclaimed Gist. “Waggener’s company. Himself. Come on!”

Presently they were with the Virginians, crouching in cover. Morgan nodded to Cap’n Tom Waggener, crawled up beside him.

“Hey! There’s a monster big log I hauled out with my team, laid it along the head of that ravine down beyond. Cover for a regiment, and clear shooting down the ravine if you want to clear out them varmints—”

“By God, that’s a notion!” cried Waggener. “Stephen! Cocke—damn it, what’s this fool doing?”

A redcoat officer striding bolt upright toward them, lifting hoarse voice.

“General Braddock orders that you provincials cease hiding and form up with the colors in the line—”

Morgan recognised the stocky lieutenant; his back twitched, his eyes slitted with hatred.

“Down, you fool!” Waggener dragged at the lieutenant. “Lay low like the rest of us or you won’t see Braddock again to tell him to go to hell.”

“I tell the general that? You dare send—”

“Let him fight his own scrap and be damned. We’ll fight ours.” Waggener’s voice bugled. “Davis! Simms—Hello, Cap’n Jack! Thank God! Get word to the other companies. Rally and follow us. Draw the Injuns’ fire and then leg it. Morgan! You be ready to show the way to that log.”

“You’re not attacking them?” gasped the lieutenant.

“Of course. Fight Injun fashion.”

“Shed your red coat and come along,” and Morgan looked into the officer’s face. “Huh? Scairt Braddock won’t let you?”

“I’ll shed no uniform,” snapped the other. “Go with you? Yes, of course. It’s a shambles out there. If I can do anything—I have my sword—”

Morgan laughed scornfully. Then Waggener’s voice caught him.

“All set, Dan! All together. Duck the balls. On the dodge!”

Lead screamed low and incessant from the green depths on their left; lead screamed and hurtled high from the road, in crashing volleys. Between two fires Morgan slithered and dodged from tree to tree, making for that log of his. It was the only definite, coherent thing his brain could fasten upon.

Suddenly he found the stocky lieutenant, useless sword in hand, pounding and panting beside him as he crouched. He snarled up at the sweating officer.

“Bend your back like the rest of us, you bloody—!”

“I will not—”

Morgan grappled him, brought him down, furiously.

On again. They reached the log. Morgan had swung it into line with other logs and brush. There was a natural breastwork, with the ravine obliquely open beyond, a-swarm with French and painted coppery shapes. Waggener came up, others joined in, eighty or more straggling along the cover. To the rear, the road vomited smoke as the grenadiers volleyed blindly.

The long rifles poked across log and brush. Morgan fixed on a tawny mark. Smoke jetted along the entire line, lead went smashing home. Shouts of delight rippled from the log.

“Hooray! We got ’em proper!”

“Look at ’em—”

Morgan was up, the better to see. The hap-hazard breastwork was rimmed with buckskin, arms plying powder-horn and ramrod while the smoke drifted.

And in this instant, a bellow upon bellow of musket volleys from behind. The grenadiers had something to shoot at now. A tempest of balls drove in with smack and thud. Another volley. Morgan, clutched with horror, felt his mind slipping. Buckskin stretched along the log forever, mowed down by British lead.

After this, for a while, Morgan had no memory whatever. He simply went stark mad like everyone else.

Fighting? There was no more fighting; it was panic. Futile panic, for death lay spitting from every tree and covert along the hewn road. The soldiers were hulking on the run. Morgan had glimpses of them, poor huddled sheep being driven along. His own safety was a matter of blind instinct, spurred by the sight of scalping knives at work.

Suddenly he found a breathing spell, away from that road of wailing, screaming agony. His brain clicked. He was himself—panting, his lungs afire, his face afire, spitting blood and bits of teeth. A ball in at his cheek and out his mouth. And, as by some miracle, the man he hated so virulently beside him.

Morgan stared. Aye, none other! Sword gone now, uniform ragged and blood-smeared and ripped away, a ball through the shoulder and another along the ribs, but still the strutting gobbler with head held high.

“British regulars firing into their own allies—good God!” the lieutenant was gasping. Morgan spat out a last tooth fragment and a curse.

“They had to hit something,” he mumbled. “Pity they choose their betters for a mark. Get your breath.”

“God’s name! You helped me out of it. Get on, get on, and leave me!”

“Not me,” said Dan’l Morgan. “You’ve got one good arm left, and if there’s no drummer for the cat you can have the job. Remember I’m short fifty lashes.”

“Damme, I’ll not have your help!” cried the other wildly. “You’re a brave fellow. Get on with you.”

They were snarling at each other, cursing, talking madly, when worse came upon them. An officer with blood streaming from him, and his eyes the eyes of stark insanity, frenzied words on his lips. His mind had gone. He came stumbling at them and saw them not. "Braddock shot through!" shrilled his voice. "Halket dead, and Jamie his son. The best troops of Britain on the run. Let me pass, let me pass! I must tell His Majesty what a jest it is—"

His shrill mad laughter died as he stumbled on and was lost to sight. Morgan caught the lieutenant by the unhurt arm.

"There's the ford. Buck up, now! We'll make it."

"Zounds! I apologize to you, sir," said the officer. "I'll let my apology be known, for damme if you're not a brave fellow!"

"Don't forget that fifty lashes," grunted Morgan.

"Let the score stand, sir," said the other, grimacing with pain. "It's all in your favor."

Morgan looked at the man curiously, met the unflinching eyes; the two of them crouched in shelter, staring at each other. Morgan's hand met that of the lieutenant, gripped it hard.

"Let's go," said Morgan.

They lifted, stumbled forward to make the next shelter. The first ford was just ahead of them. A remnant of rangers had spread out, from tree to tree, and were fighting off the pursuit, but the torrent of flight and slaughter never slackened. The lieutenant staggered, caught at a tree for support, and Morgan slipped an arm around him.

"Hold on. All safe now. Get your breath, then we'll make it."

The Briton's face was ghastly.

"We should have listened to you provincials," he muttered. "We've learned."

Learned? Dan'l Morgan wiped blood from his chin and grunted.

"Aye. We've l'arned too. Your chin-up, bagonet-bragging sojers can be made to run. Something to remember, that is. Take it easy. We'll let the whole score stand, for another reckoning. Let's go."

And stand it did, until twenty-five years and six months later, at the Cowpens in South Carolina. And then General Daniel Morgan, of Morgan's

riflemen, wrote off his score in five grimly exultant words:

“One Threshing. Paid in Full.”

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *Dan'l Morgan's Stripes* by Henry Bedford-Jones]