



FIGURE 28.—Blackfoot horse raider in winter dress.

WEAPONS

Members of horse-raiding parties carried no shields, lances, or war clubs. Their weapons were bows and arrows, guns, and knives. The knives, carried at the waist in rawhide sheaths, were sharp and heavy enough to cut firewood and timber for temporary shelters. They served as axes as well as knives, useful in skinning and cutting up animals for food, cutting loose picketed horses from the enemy camp, and as weapons for hand-to-hand fighting if necessity required.

THE PACK

Each Blackfoot warrior carried a pack containing: (1) extra moccasins, an awl, and sinew for moccasin repair; (2) one or two rawhide ropes, each about 20 feet or longer, with a honda in one end, for use in catching, riding, and leading enemy horses; (3) a small pipe and tobacco; and (4) the man's personal war medicine. Some men also carried whips in their packs. Scouts carried wolfskins in their packs or wore them over their other clothing. The contents of the pack were wrapped in the top of an old lodge cover, a large piece of rawhide, or a trade blanket, rolled like a blanket roll, tied with rawhide rope and carried on the owner's back by a rawhide strap over his upper arms and chest. (See fig. 27.) Pieces of rawhide wrapping could be cut off for use in moccasin repair as the need arose.³⁰

FOOD

Blackfoot raiders generally carried their food in separate containers rather than in the pack. Many men favored a rectangular, unfringed, rawhide case, carried by a strap over one shoulder or on top of the main pack on the back. Dried meat and pemmican were the favored foods.³¹

THE OUTWARD JOURNEY

W. T. Hamilton (1905, p. 52) writing of the Blackfoot of the period ca. 1842, said they "almost always went to war on foot." Informants said that in their young manhood there were both foot and mounted horse-raiding expeditions. They acknowledged that it was easier for men to conceal themselves from the enemy when afoot than when mounted. However, in the last decade of horse raiding the

³⁰ Horse-raiding parties of other tribes carried their equipment in similar packs. Catlin's painting of a foot war party of an unidentified Upper Missouri tribe (U. S. N. M. No. 386352) shows each member carrying a pack on his back. In the summer of 1833, Maximilian (1906, vol. 23, p. 204) met an Assiniboin war party at Fort Union, the members of which carried "small bundles" on their backs containing meat, moccasins, and tobacco. Mead (1908, p. 106) described the equipment of Pawnee horse raiders of the period ca. 1860: "They went lightly armed, each had a very serviceable bow and quiver of arrows and a knife, a few carried a light gun. Each Indian carried tucked under his belt, from four to six extra pairs of new moccasins and one or more lariats; a pack weighing twenty pounds or more containing dried meat, both fat and lean; some pieces and straps of tanned skins to repair their moccasins and clothing and useful for bridles. The above mentioned articles, with a pipe and tobacco, an occasional light squaw axe, and a few trifles, comprised all that was necessary for a thousand mile journey." Informants stated that Blackfoot raiders not infrequently carried extra moccasins tucked under the belt rather than in the pack. Some Blackfoot men carried 1 or 2 pairs of moccasins under the belt or sewn to the shirt at the back of the shoulders in addition to those in the pack, as a precautionary measure in case their pack might become lost in a surprise attack by the enemy en route.

³¹ Catlin's portrait of Red Thunder, son of a Hidatsa chief, "in the costume of a warrior" depicts a rawhide case like that used by Blackfoot horse raiders hanging at his side from a strap over his shoulder (U. S. N. M. No. 386172).

mounted party gained in popularity, especially in expeditions directed against the Crow. The mounted party could travel much faster and could more easily evade white authorities who at that time were seeking to put an end to intertribal horse raiding. It required 16 to 28 days' travel afoot from the vicinity of the Piegan Old Agency on Badger Creek to the Crow camps south of the Yellowstone; whereas a mounted party could make the journey in 8 to 12 days. Weasel Tail said, "Usually on the eighth day our scouts saw the Crow camp. On the ninth day we took their horses." While foot war parties averaged about 25 miles a day in good weather, mounted parties traveled more than twice that distance in the same time.³²

In the initial stages of the outward journey, when danger of encountering the enemy was at a minimum, raiding parties usually traveled by day, moving at a steady pace, in no particular order, and stopping occasionally to rest and smoke. But as they neared the enemy country they moved more cautiously, traveling at night and hiding out during the daylight hours. A party nearing enemy country halted to kill game for food enough to subsist them for the remainder of their journey. They built one or more war lodges in a heavily timbered bottom or on a thickly wooded height. The war lodge usually had a framework of fallen or cut timbers covered with brush or bark, set in a conical form with an angular covered entranceway. (See Ewers, 1944 a, pp. 183-186 and plate.) It served a five-fold purpose, as a protection against the enemy (concealing the fire from view and serving as a fort in case of surprise attack), as protection from the weather (especially in winter or rainy weather), as a base for scouting operations, as a supply base, and as an information center to which members of homeward-bound parties could return and leave pictographic messages to others of their party telling of their actions and movements (*ibid.*, pp. 189-190).³³

From the war lodge the leader sent ahead a small number of picked men as scouts to locate the enemy camp. Wearing wolfskins, they moved cautiously, fearful of encountering enemy war or hunting parties. From high ground they surveyed the surrounding territory, concealed by their wolfskins, before advancing. They were suspicious of any sudden movements of game, and they examined burned-

³² Lieutenant Carleton (1943, p. 276) reported that Teton Dakota parties customarily went on foot against the Crow and Blackfoot in 1845. Denig (1930, p. 545) claimed it was usual for horse raiders of all the Upper Missouri tribes to leave camp afoot in the period ante-1854. This was the common practice among the Cheyenne (Grinnell, 1923, vol. 2, p. 7), Pawnee (Dunbar, 1880, p. 335), and Jicarilla Apache (Opler, 1936, p. 210). However, the Comanche even as early as 1820, appear to have preferred mounted raids for horses (Burnet, 1851, p. 236). Alice Marriott has informed me that Kiowa parties frequently rode in quest of enemy horses, but if the group was composed largely of poor young men seeking to obtain animals to start their own herds, they walked.

³³ War lodges also were constructed by Plains Cree, Crow, Teton, Gros Ventres, Assiniboin, and Cheyenne horse raiders (*ibid.*, p. 190).

out fires and tracks made by horses, travois, and footmen and noted their relative recency and direction of movement.

While the scouts were gone members of the party left at the war lodge hunted for buffalo, deer, elk, or other game, killing only enough to provide dried meat for the remainder of their journey. They dried the meat and filled the provision bags. Sometimes they made up additional packets of meat for each member. These were small, skin or rawhide containers that could be carried at the belt holding quantities of meat sufficient only for an occasional quick lunch on horseback while hastening homeward with captured horses.

When the scouts located the enemy camp they watched it from a concealed position long and closely enough to determine its size, and numbers of men, horses, etc. Then they returned to the war lodge as rapidly as possible. As they came in sight of their fellows they approached in a zigzag course, indicating they had found the enemy. While their leader went out to meet the scouts, the other members of the party set up a pile of sticks near the war lodge. Returning with the scouts the leader kicked over the pile of sticks and all party members scrambled for them. Each stick a member retrieved was an augury of a horse he would take from the enemy.

Guided by the scouts, the whole party moved cautiously, traveling only by night and hiding out by day, until they reached a well concealed position overlooking or in sight of the enemy camp. After the leader had an opportunity to observe the camp, he outlined his plan of attack to the other members of his party.

THE ATTACK

Shortly before the time of attack arrived, the party members opened their packs, took out their personal war medicines, sang their sacred war songs, prayed for success, painted and donned their medicine gear. Usually the rush for horses was made at daybreak. Generally the leader selected only a few of the bravest and most experienced men to enter the enemy camp with him, and cut loose the picketed horses and lead them out. Usually they carried no weapons other than their knives as they stealthily entered the enemy village. They sought out the picketed horses previously spotted as the most likely looking ones. When each man cut picket lines and led horses away he was careful to stay close to the horse he believed to be the fastest so he could jump on it and make a quick getaway should someone in the camp become aware of the theft and rouse the enemy. Sometimes these men left picketed horses with the younger, inexperienced party members outside the camp and returned again for more of the choice animals. At other times the men outside the camp drove off some of the range herds while the leader and his assistants

took the picketed animals. It was a common practice for men who went after the picketed horses to rub cottonwood sap on their bodies and hands. The cottonwood odor would tend to quiet the horses and make them willing to follow the strangers who led them away.

THE HOMEWARD JOURNEY

Whether or not the enemy became aware of the actions of the raiding party, a quick getaway was important in order to get as much head start on their pursuers as possible. It was not unusual for a successful Blackfoot raiding party to take as many as 40 to 60 horses on a single raid. However, the great majority of my informants who had participated in horse raids denied that any Blackfoot party returned home with as many as 100 animals. They acknowledged that over 100 horses had been run off on raids known to them, but stated that the difficulty of driving that number of animals homeward at a fast pace, over uneven country, through timber and across streams for hundreds of miles resulted in the loss through straying or abandonment of some of the animals. It was unsafe to be too greedy. The enemy might overtake the captors of many horses, whose homeward progress was slowed by the necessity for driving an unwieldy herd in front of them.³⁴

On the first portion of the homeward journey the raiders generally rode without breechcloths, to prevent blistering of their skin from the steady friction of their horses' backs in riding over rough, uneven ground at a fast clip. Yet sometimes men became so sore and blistered during this part of the journey they had to dismount and walk. This not only slowed their progress but increased the danger of being overtaken by the enemy.

The return journey was made at a much faster pace than the outward one. Rides-at-the-Door said that 4 days and nights after he took horses from the Crow south of the Yellowstone he was home (i. e., in the vicinity of the present Blackfeet Reservation, Montana). For the first 2 or 3 days and nights raiders rode steadily, switching from one mount to another as their horses tired. If a horse played out so that it could not keep up with the rest, it was usually turned loose. If it was a very good horse, the raiders might shoot it, to prevent the enemy from retaking it. Usually a party returning from the Crow reached the vicinity of present Belt, Mont., 200 miles north of the Yellowstone River, on the second night or third day. There they

³⁴ The literature mentions raids by southern Plains tribes resulting in the theft of far greater numbers of horses. Gregg (1941, pp. 337-338) told of about 500 Comanche, who, according to Mexican papers of 1841, "were then driving off about 28,000 head of stock—horses, mules and cattle." This may have referred to a series of carefully organized raids in which the number of Indian participants far exceeded the numbers commonly active in individual raids by the Blackfoot and neighboring Upper Missouri tribes.

stopped to rest, overnight, and continued homeward at a more leisurely pace.

DISTRIBUTION OF CAPTURED HORSES

At the first resting place after leaving the enemy camp the horses taken on the raid were distributed among party members. This distribution was a sore test of the character of the leader and his more experienced men. It was the leaders' responsibility to supervise distribution. Yet the Blackfoot recognized the right of each individual to any picketed horses he had taken from the enemy camp. They also recognized the right of the man or men to range horses they had run off. It often happened that there were party members who had neither captured picketed horses nor run off range stock. Those who had recognized claims to horses were then expected to give up some of them to the less fortunate. After pointing out the animals they wished to retain (usually the best ones), they called upon members of the party who could claim no horses to divide the remaining animals. There was a strong element of enlightened self-interest in this practice. Raiders who had taken horses knew that if they were not liberally inclined toward those who had taken none, the latter would desert the party and would leave them the task of driving all the horses home. It was still more important that the leader of the party should act generously. If he was unfair or stingy in distributing horses, warriors would not follow him in the future.

Nevertheless, informants who had been on numerous raids said that arguments over possession of horses were common, especially among groups of men who had jointly run off range horses. A man might have his heart set on possessing a certain animal that appealed to him. He became angry if another man received that horse in the distribution. The story was told of two men who argued over the possession of a captured horse. In the end the man who did not receive it drew his knife, plunged it into the disputed horse and killed it, saying, "If I can't have that horse, no one will enjoy it."

The system of distribution just described brought the greatest rewards to the men who had taken the greatest risks. They received both the most and the best horses. To avoid trouble and ill-feeling at the time of distribution, party members sometimes agreed in advance upon an equal division of the captured animals. In that case the leader took first choice, then called upon each man in turn to make his selection. If the number of captured horses was not equally divisible by the number of party members the leader decided what was to be done with the horses remaining after each man had made his choice.³⁵

³⁵ Denig (1930, p. 475) described the frequent quarrels among Assiniboin horse raiders over division of their spoils, sometimes resulting in the killing or running off in the night

of cooking, carrying wood and water, and carrying the men's (or at least the leaders') packs. Sometimes they were permitted to hold the horses cut loose from pickets when the warriors brought them out of camp. Sometimes they assisted in running off grazing horses outside the camp. Experienced men took pains to point out to them how the raids should be conducted and why they employed the tactics followed on these expeditions. The boys gained much valuable information by watching the skilled actions of their elders. If a raid was successful the older men might give a horse to a boy who accompanied them. Through this on-the-job training boys learned the arts of war.

FREQUENCY OF HORSE RAIDS

All evidence from the literature and informants indicates that the horse raid was by far the most common type of Blackfoot war expedition. Father De Smet claimed the Blackfoot made 20 horse raids against the Flathead alone in the year preceding February 1842 (De Smet, 1905, vol. 1, p. 363). There may have been years in which the three Blackfoot tribes sent out more than 50 horse-raiding parties. As a rule horse raids were less common during the cold, snowy, winter months. However, Weasel Tail said he used to prefer raiding in winter. If the attack on an enemy camp was made before or during a snow storm the tracks of the fleeing raiders would become covered, making it impossible for them to be closely followed by the enemy.

Participation in these raids differed markedly on the part of individuals. Some young men never joined them. Others made repeated raids. Of my elderly, fullblood, male informants there was none who had not been on several raids, but only one, Weasel Tail, known as a youth of poor family, participated in more than a dozen horse raids. In the generation of the fathers of my elderly informants his record would not have been remarkable. The late White Quiver, of Weasel Tail's own generation, was regarded by my informants as the most active and successful horse raider of whom they had knowledge. White Quiver was the Blackfoot horse thief par excellence.

WHITE QUIVER, THE MOST SUCCESSFUL BLACKFOOT HORSE RAIDER

In 1921 Superintendent Campbell of the Blackfeet Reservation, Mont., wrote, "White Quiver was formerly considered the most successful horse thief among all these Indians" (Campbell, MS., 1921). Not only did my Piegan informants unanimously endorse this statement, but all elderly Blood Indians questioned on the point said their tribe possessed no member whose record as a horse raider compared with that of White Quiver, the Piegan. (See pl. 11, *b*.)

White Quiver, of the Bugs Band, was born about the year 1858. When he was a small boy his father, Trails War Bonnet, was killed by

the Crow. White Quiver vowed vengeance against that tribe. In later years he led many raids on their horse herds. White Quiver started going on war parties while still a boy. He grew to be a tall, strong man of remarkable physical stamina, who could ride 3 days and nights without food while driving captured horses homeward from an enemy camp. Rides-at-the-Door, who went on eight horse raids under White Quiver's leadership, remembered him as a generous, easy-going, fun-loving man. He described White Quiver's appearance as "tall, very dark, and ugly." The Crow Indians, who suffered most from his thievery, dubbed him "the big Negro." Crow mothers are said to have disciplined their crying children by saying, "Keep quiet. The big Negro is out there. He will get you if you don't stop crying."

White Quiver told Rides-at-the-Door he had gone to the enemy 40 times to steal horses, yet his career as a horse raider ended before he was 30 years of age. He raided the Crow more than any other tribe. Superintendent Campbell claimed White Quiver had made 11 trips to the Crow and each time came home with horses. He also took horses from the Gros Ventres, Cree, Assiniboin, and Sioux. White Quiver considered the Flathead his friends. Informants could recall 15 distinct raids led by White Quiver.

White Quiver's war medicine was a plume from the medicine pipe bundle owned by Under Bull, and known as the Arapaho pipe. In the 1940's this medicine pipe bundle was owned by my interpreter, Reuben Black Boy (pl. 11, *a*, right). When White Quiver returned with horses he usually gave one or more of them to Under Bull.

White Quiver's tactics were unorthodox but extremely successful. Usually he traveled to the enemy on horseback rather than on foot. (Rides-at-the-Door said every time he accompanied White Quiver on a raid he went mounted.) White Quiver was always the party leader and insisted on taking the greatest risks himself. Often he left the others of his party in a secluded spot some distance from the enemy camp, entered the camp alone, and brought horses out to them. Rather than follow the usual Piegan practice of taking horses at night or at daybreak, White Quiver preferred to boldly walk into the enemy camp at dusk, just as the people were settling down for the night. When he brought horses out he told each member of the party to take a good one to ride. When a stop was made on the return journey, he told each man he might keep the horse he was riding. Then he distributed the driven horses equally among the party members.

White Quiver's war parties generally were small ones. Informants could recall only 2 parties led by him which numbered more than 11 men. One of these raids was against the Sioux, on which 30 men killed all the enemy of 5 lodges and took all their horses. The other, comprising 17 men, was a raid on the Gros Ventres during which the

enemy discovered their presence and only White Quiver got away with a horse. Among his successful raids against the Crow were: 38 horses and 6 mules taken by 11 men; 80 horses taken by 10 men; 48 horses captured by 6 men; 34 horses taken by 4 men; and about 20 horses captured by 4 men. No less than 62 men were named who had been on horse raids under White Quiver's leadership. Several of them accompanied him four or more times. White Quiver's last raid was made at a time when white authorities in both Montana and Alberta were actively trying to put an end to intertribal horse raiding. Leading a party of 8 men to the Crow, White Quiver made off with over 50 horses. On the return journey authorities from Fort Benton apprehended the party and took the stolen horses from them. White Quiver restole the horses from the authorities and drove them to Canada. There the Mounted Police again took the horses from him. But White Quiver managed to recapture at least a part of the herd and succeeded in bringing them to the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana. This was a whirlwind finish to an extraordinary raiding career.

White Quiver preferred the excitement of raiding to the business of building up and managing a large herd of his own. Many of the horses received as his share of the loot he gave away to relatives or poor people after his party reached the home camp. He never became a wealthy horse owner. In the spring of 1921, not long before his death, White Quiver owned but 7 horses. There were many Indians then living in his section of the Blackfeet Reservation, the Heart Butte district, who owned much larger herds.

A complex of factors help to explain White Quiver's preeminence as a horse raider. His father's murder gave him an initial motivation of the strongest kind. His physical strength and stamina enabled him to lead the hyperactive and strenuous life of almost continuous raiding. His unorthodox dusk attacks seem to have caught the enemy off guard time after time. His willingness to perform the most dangerous tasks himself, coupled with his reputation for success and generosity in distribution of captured horses, made him a popular war party leader who never wanted for followers. Finally, his generosity in giving away horses, and his lack of either social or political ambition, made him a popular hero whose deeds have been remembered by the many beneficiaries of his liberality and by their relatives.³⁹

³⁹ If there were Blackfoot men of earlier generations whose achievements as horse raiders equaled or surpassed those of White Quiver, their deeds have been forgotten. However, Thaddeus Culbertson, (1851, p. 122) met a halfbreed Crow Indian at Fort Union in the summer of 1850, whose record approached that of White Quiver. Although not yet 30 years of age this man, Horse Guard, was said to have "engaged in about thirty expeditions, always returning with hair (scalps) or horses, and getting his party back safely." In 1855 Horse Guard was chief of a band of some 50 lodges (McDonnell, 1940, p. 113). In 1874 "Horseguard" was "the head chief of the River Crows," one of the two major divisions of the Crow Indians (Koch, 1944, p. 422).