

THREE

THE LAST GREAT BUFFALO DRIVE

Tex relates a number of past film experiences in this story, though not the months he and his family spent in California, when he worked in Hollywood as an animal handler, notably on *The Call of the Wild*. From raucous by-play during the shooting of a silent movie and mockery of the Alpine folk costumes (lederhosen in particular) featured in the film through a well-deserved but painful assault on the backside of a pain-in-the-ass assistant director with home-made buckshot, the atmosphere rings true to anyone who has ever had the misfortune to hang around a movie set as an extra or a relative. Tex clearly spent a good deal of time working on movies. His mockery of what directors thought looked real vs. reality is especially fresh and apt. Both the buckshot episode and the unintended killing of a buffalo, then a rare animal in Canada, were, if true, very masculine hi-jinks and would lead to much more serious consequences today. The rough-and-tumble of those days is one point of this story, with the implicit message that one could no longer get away with such macho goings-on (for better or for worse, with the decision left to the reader).

—AG

THE LAST GREAT BUFFALO DRIVE

*When the simple sons of nature make history
in true Hollywood fashion*

By N. Vernon-Wood

JIM BROUGHT OUT A FLOCK of magazines, last time he went in for the mail, and there was some of those moving picture periodicals amongst 'em. They got me to thinking about some of our experiences with the actors and actorines. For a while there was quite a run on these hills for background for he-man stuff.

The first outfit we got tangled up with blew into Lake Louise, it must be all of eighteen years ago, and they were taking a play that was supposed to take place in Switzerland. Our old log bunk house was all dolled up, to represent a Swiss ch[^]alet, and a bunch of the village bums were dressed up in those dinky pants that show all the spavins on an old man's legs, and those Hamburg hats, with tail feathers. It's a good thing this was before the days of talkies because us horse jinglers used to gather on the side line and kid the troops. You should have seen old Pop Denton, in Boy Scout pants, with his galluses all embroidered, and with half a snoot full, atmosphering. When the bunch got to razzing him, the atmosphere was there all right. Blue, mostly it was.

The main squeeze was a little man with a bumper crop of hair. I bet it would of harvested 100 ton to the acre, and we called him Henry Irving,

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right away. What he lacked in beef he made up in words and hair. To hear him, you would have thought that he made the blue prints for the Creator. I found out that since that that's the way a lot of those movie directors feel about themselves.

Tom Gordon was wrangling for me those days. He had gotten into an argument in Nevada, and was sort of vacationing until his opponent either died or didn't. Good man, any place you put him, and one of the kind that women turn round to get another look at, but I don't think he knew it, or would have bothered if he did. There was a bit of a girl in the movie party that did the stunts for the leading lady, and she and Tom got right friendly. She didn't seem to rate very highly with the beauties or Henry, but she was more our kind, and had enough nerve for the bunch and then some.

The story called for the star to be shoved into a crevasse by the villain, then her faithful old hound hits for the village and does his stuff, so that the hero goes back on to the ice with him and pulls the usual rescue. Tom and I packed the cameras and the props up to the Victoria Glacier, and hunted up a crevasse that filled the bill. We had a bunch of old mattresses which we piled in the bottom, where it was about twenty feet deep, and Tom's lady friend is elected to be heaved in. The cameras were all sighted, and Henry gave a lecture on how he wanted it done. Then the girl and the villain put up a battle on the edge, and in she went. It looked like million dollars to us, but Henry says, "Rotten." They do it again, and Henry's verdict is "Rottener if possible." He called the girl down some, and ordered another. The third time he grabbed a double handful of his hair and started to tell the world his private and personal opinions of stunt girls. He got so hopped up, he used the wrong word once. It isn't anymore than out of his face, when Tom shoved it back. When the birdies quit singing for Henry, he sort of looked around and wanted to know if the avalanche had killed many. After he had recovered fully, he opined that the picture would do, so we went back to the ch  let. If he could have got another pair of pack-horse artists we would have gone down the road the hay come up, talking to ourselves.

Our next splash into the realms of art come near getting us a position making big ones into little ones for His Majesty. The Government used to keep a heard of buffalo in a big pasture just outside the town for tourists and schoolmarms to look at. This was before the Pablo herd was bought and shipped up from Montana and a bison was worth more than ten men. Every year the Stonie Indians camp just outside the pasture, when they pull their annual celebration. They were there the time this happened, and

their camp sure looked slick with the tepees all painted up, and the bucks in their best beads and feathers.

Jim, Buckshot Foster, and me, with two or three more foot-loose ginks , were in the Birdcage, finding out if Johnny Walker was still going strong, when a bird come over where we were at, and said he was willing to pay for another investigation. He told us that him and his partner were taking movies of the mountains and what not, and that he had tried to get the Indians to let him take some camp stuff and the like, but he wasn't successful. "They won't even talk English," he said.

"They don't talk to strangers, and they sure won't let you take photos if you don't sweeten them up," Buckshot told him. I guess the last investigation had made Buckshot kind of good natured, because he offered to go down to the camp with our visitor, and fix things up for him. Having nothing on our minds, Jim and I went along too. Just as we got to the pasture, a bunch of buffalo came tearin' down out of an aspen grove and round the flat.

"What a sight," says our fillum expert. "Boys, I've just had a brain wave, here's a herd of buffalo, and also a bunch of Indians. Do you think it would be possible to stage a buffalo hunt? If you can persuade those Indians to ride into the pasture, all done up in paint and feathers, and pretend to shoot the animals with their bows and arrows, I will buy enough Johnny Walker for you to continue your scientific researches for a week."

Foster figured he could work the Nitchies all right, but wasn't sure how old Adam Galletly, who was caretaker of the herd, would take to the idea.

"You give me a crock of Johnny, as a retainin' fee, and I will reason with Adam," I offered, so we went back to the Birdcage, and had a conference, same as all movie magnets do, and after a while Buck and I started out to arrange our bigger and better production.

It took three quarters of the retaining fee to convince Adam that we weren't up to some deevilment , as he put it. "Ye have tae do it early tomorrow morn, and mind ye, if the soopreentendant hears about it, I ken naethin' o' it."

The Indians were not so easy; we couldn't use the same argument with them but finally, for \$4.00 hard cash and a set of busted harness I owned, half a dozen agreed to star for us. We gave them the layout. Next morning we were to be in the field right soon, and we would gather the herd up in a draw that led out of the pasture. Then we would haze them down hell bent, and just as they come through the aspens, the warriors were to cut in behind, and try to ride up close enough to shoot a few arrows into the ground in front of or under the bulls.

It worked like a charm. We got about twenty bulls coming down that draw like the milltails of hell, and the braves cut in, yelling and coyoteing, feathers streaming and everything just like the story books. The excitement got too much for old Chief Running Horse. I guess the crazy old devil had killed buffalo just this way in his youth, and his years fell off him, and he rode up to a bull, drew his bow darn near double, and socked an arrow in right behind the shoulder, where it would do the most good. In about two jumps the animal gave a most ungodly plunge, turned end over end, and was as dead as King Rufus in two minutes.

“Red-eyed old Jeehosephat,” said Foster. “here’s where you and I head to Montana, with a price on our heads for incitin’ war, rebellion, and killing the King’s pet buffalo. Feller, if this gets out, you and I will be provided for, for the next ninety-nine years.”

We gathered up our warriors, who were just as much scared as us, and told them that if that man Government and the Mounted Police got wise to our morning’s work, the whole reservation would be shipped to Lethbridge, and put to work farming, besides being fined a million ponies. They just oozed out of that field and back to camp.

Our fellow criminals were so disorganized they wanted to bust up the film, but I said, “No, you birds get out of here, on the jump, and if Buckshot and I are hung for this, when you sell the picture of the ‘Last Great Buffalo Drive,’ see that our sorrowing friends get a supply of conversation water, to remember our virtues on. They will need plenty.”

Two minutes later we were alone in the bloody field, and Buckshot wants to know whatinhell we are going to do about it. Me, I’ve been thinking fast, up, down, and in circles, and I explain, “Now, see here, this bull was gored, trampled to death by the rest of the herd, and although you and I did some fancy riding trying to rescue him, we failed. Help me get this blame arrow out of him, and roll him over.” We did just that, then we get a club apiece, and went over the corpse, bumping off some hide here and there, and generally using him up. After that we hazed as many of the buffalo we could gather up in a hurry, and milled them around in the vicinity of the corpus delicti. I beat it for Adam’s shack on the high lope, and told him to get a wiggle on and saddle his old hay burner, as the buffalo were on the prod, and fighting like Kilkenny cats.

He took time to get on the telephone and notify the Supe, and chief warden, and all the rest of His Majesty’s representatives. By the time we were in the field, there is a peerade of officials as long as this yarn,

streamin' out of town. Lucky for us the herd is still wooling around the flat, snorting, and throwing dust over their backs. The brains view the sad sight from a safe distance, and tell Adam to skin out the beast when the others have quieted down. We remained in the background, like the modest heroes we are, and tell Adam we will help him when he gets ready. We don't want that canny Scot to get on to the hole behind the shoulder if possible. The officials go back to the office, to start on their reports. "Regrettin' to state," and I head for the Birdcage to collect another retainer, so that when skinning time comes, Adam will be indisposed.

We laid off trying to contribute our mite to the cause of art for quite some time after that.

Our next personal appearance is not quite so exciting for us, but that doesn't make us mad. A company from one of the big studios in Hollywood came up to make a Western thriller. It looked like they were God's gift to trail hands, as it had been a hard old winter, and those of us that weren't broke were badly bent, as is usual in the spring. Five big round dollars a day, with lunch thrown in for being half-breeds, cow-punchers, desperadoes, and otherwise acting about natural, sure listened like the answer to somebody's prayer.

First thing this outfit did was to build a whole village about twenty miles from town, and we all went to work getting out logs, and building shacks. They even imported a flock of hens to scratch around the village, and Jim and I used to figure on about nine eggs a day, until some more of the gang got on to our graft and we had to cut it out. They took us out every morning in cars, and brought us back at night, and somebody in the bunch had brains, because we got our \$5 every day. Prosperity dawned, and the sun shone on both sides the fence. The only fly in the jam was the assistant director, and he was some fly. He kept a pony up at the location, and he galloped hither and yon, yelling orders so fast he had us poor benighted hill-billies all rattled. When he wasn't on the gallop, he sat on top of the cayuse surveying the scene. All he needed was a lick of gold paint to have done for that statue of General Lee that you see up Fifth Avenue as you get up by Central Park in the big city.

We felt kind of sorry for the poor little cayuse. That flying Dutchman was a heavy man, and he sure did make mileage. The bunch did a lot of figuring how we could help out the pony, but there didn't seem much we could do about it, until we heard one morning that everything was set to make a big fight scene. Every one of the atmosphere was issued with a

30.30 and all the blank ammunition he wanted. Right away about four of us had the same flicker of intelligence, and we straightened out the crimping at the end of the blanks. I happened to have a few of the real honest shells in my belt, so we pulled the bullet out of a couple, put a pinch or two of cordite out of them into our blanks, and then filled them with small stones, and anything that was hard and small. We made one or two wooden plugs about the same size as a 30.30 bullet, and then waited to see what would turn up.

The dope was, that the hero and his girl were in bad with the rough-necks, and we were besiegin' them in a shack at the end of the village. We were given a course on how we should stalk up to the shack and fire as we sneaked along, the loving couple in the meantime giving us all the hell they can.

The assistant didn't trust us simple sons of nature to stalk that shack in the true Hollywood fashion, so he mingled with the herd to give instructions, and then the signal went up to commence hostilities. We sure put up a wonderful lookin' scrap. Shoot, and crawl for the next bush or rock. Every once in a while, one of the defenders would drill an enemy, and he would clutch the wound and, laughing to fit to bust, die where the cameras would catch him.

Then through the smoke, I saw our hated enemy, bending down behind a rock, yelling at a breed to put more snap into it. I gave the tip to my fellow-desperadoes, and next minute he jumped forty feet in the air, clutching the seat of his riding breeches, and yelling bloody murder. I bet he was wounded in thirty-nine places. I do know that the pony got plenty rest after, as he done his galloping around on foot for quite a while.

Sometime, I think I will write to one of those movie magazines and spill some on screen shots of my own.

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