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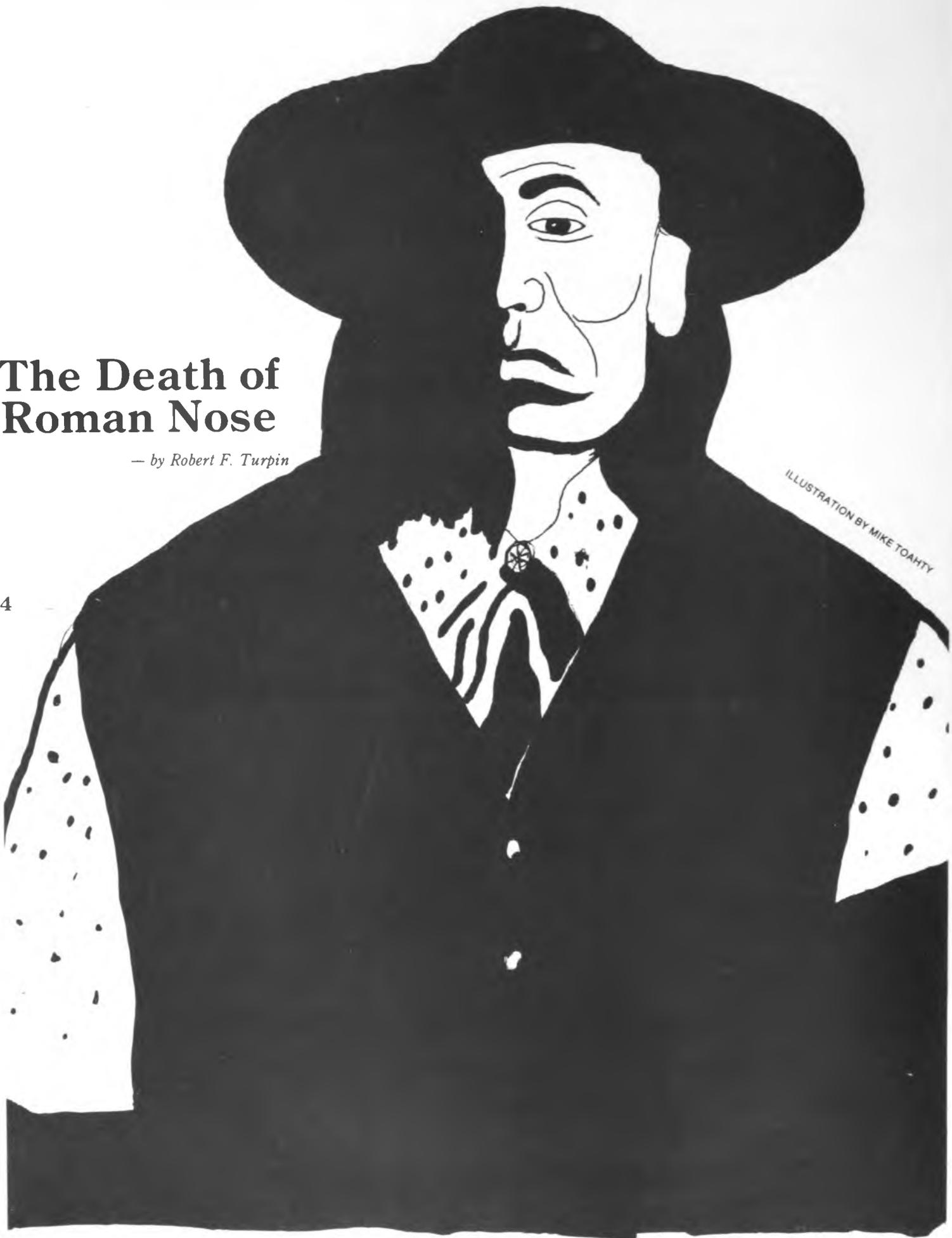


# The Death of Roman Nose

— by Robert F. Turpin

ILLUSTRATION BY MIKE TOAHTY

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Roman Nose was an excellent example of the plains nomad and George E. Hyde in his book, "The Life Of George Bent," best describes him. Roman Nose was tall for an Indian, broad shouldered, deep chested and self contained. Astride his white war pony with his famous war bonnet trailing almost to the ground, he was a picture of unaffected refinement. Although he was never considered a chief by the Cheyenne, he was a born leader and the young warriors, who followed him into battle, believed he could never be killed.

As a boy, Roman Nose was called Sautie (the bat) and it was not until he became a warrior that he was called Woqini or (Hook Nose). When the white interpreters pronounced the name it came out Roman Nose.

Like most famous figures of the frontier, Roman Nose was given credit for many things he had nothing to do with. In the attack on Fetterman's command December, 1860, near Fort Phil Kearny, it was reported that Roman Nose had led the attack. George Bent, a personal friend to Roman Nose, later stated that Roman Nose had no part of it. He claimed that at the time of the attack on Fetterman, Roman Nose was with a band of Dog Soldiers camped south of the Platte River. Roman Nose greatly respected the Dog Soldiers and spent much of his time with them. No doubt, this was because the Dog Soldiers were believed to be the wildest and most fierce fighters on the plains, and closer to his own nature.

Roman Nose had proved himself a fighter, doing battle with the Pawnees, age old enemies of the Cheyenne. In fact, it was in a fight with the Pawnees that he received his one and only wound. It was caused by an arrow but was not serious and he went on to lead his warriors to victory. His medicine was strong and he not only survived many bitter fights with the Pawnees but later with the soldiers, as well. There were the raids along the Platte Road in the summer of 1865 and the Platte Bridge fight. His attack on Colonel Walker's command during Walker's march up the Powder River. His meeting with General Hancock during the General's 1867 campaign in the Powder River country.

According to George Bent, Roman Nose had planned to kill Hancock in front of his men at their meeting and if not for the pleading of his friend, Bull Bear, he would have. Bull Bear feared for the safety of the women and children in the fight which would have occurred if Roman Nose had carried out his threat.

As the hostilities continued on into 1868, Sheridan decided to try to beat the Indians in their own way. To help to carry out his plan he chose Major George A Forsyth. Forsyth was to organize a fast riding, straight shooting company of Frontiersmen to track down the still hostile bands. Forsyth's command consisted of fifty-one men, all armed with new repeating rifles and Colt's revolvers.

In the fall of 1868 Forsyth and his men were at Fort Wallace. While they were there word came that a raiding party of Cheyenne had attacked a party of traders, about thirteen miles east of the fort. Forsyth quickly mounted his men and set out to find the raiding party. Picking up their trail at the scene of the attack he followed it to the Arickaree Fork of the Republican River in northeastern Colorado. Unaware that they were being followed the raiding party headed straight for their camp located near the fork of the Arickaree. The raiders, mostly Dog Soldiers, were led by Tall Bull, Bull Bear and White Horse. There was a few Sioux in the party under Bad Yellow Eyes and old Two Sticks. In all, the camp contained over three hundred warriors.

Forsyth followed the raiding party to within twenty

miles of their village before being seen by a hunting party of Sioux. The Sioux quickly sent word to the Dog Soldiers, telling them about the white men. In the meantime, two Cheyenne hunters had also seen the scouts and were following them. When Forsyth finally stopped to make camp for the night, the Cheyenne hurried to the village to tell the chiefs. Having already received word of the soldiers, the Cheyenne were putting on their medicine paint and looking to their weapons.

When all was ready, they mounted their best war ponies and rode to the place where the scouts were supposed to be camped. They were surprised when they arrived to find the scouts gone. It was late in the day and before they could find them again, it was night. The chiefs gave orders that each warrior would spend the night beside his pony and no one would leave during the night to search for the soldiers. In spite of the orders, two young Cheyennes and six Sioux slipped away after dark to search for the scouts. Searching through the night they finally found the scouts near daybreak, September 17, 1868. The scouts were preparing to break camp, and Starving Elk, leader of the group, decided to try and run off their stock. With wild yells they charged the scouts and succeeded in running off several pack mules. The scouts, all veteran Indian fighters, were quick to get over their surprise and fired on the Indians.

At first light the main body of Indians had continued their search and were only a short distance away. Hearing the sound of shooting they hurried to the scene. At sight of the Indians coming up, Forsyth mounted his men and raced to a small island located in the almost dry bed of the Arickaree Fork. This move later proved to be the only thing which saved him from complete annihilation.

Following close behind, the Indians circled the island firing at the scouts as they frantically tried to throw up some sort of breastworks. In the first few minutes of fighting several of the scouts were wounded and two were killed. Among those wounded was Forsyth himself and Lieutenant Beecher, his second in command. Surgeon Mooers was also badly wounded as he tried to help some of the others.

Now, the Indians massed for a straight charge and Wolf Belly, a half Cheyenne and half Sioux, was to lead it. Forsyth, later, claimed that this man was Roman Nose, for Wolf Belly rode back and forth in front of the scouts taunting them to try and kill him. The scouts tried to oblige him but none of their bullets found their mark. Jack Stillwell, a well known Indian scout with Forsyth said that it was a miracle the man was not killed. The Indians charged but the charge broke apart under heavy fire short of the island.

The scouts, who were doing the most damage, were several who were hiding in a grass covered hole in the river bank. The place was some fifty or sixty feet from the island and the Indians did not see them. White Bear was killed by these men as he rode nearby, and so was Weasel Bear. When White Thunder later went to recover the bodies he, too, was shot and killed. Still the Indians failed to see the men, hidden in the tall grass.

Up to now Roman Nose had not joined the fight and was still at the village several miles away. He was reluctant to take part for he feared his medicine was not strong. The reason for this was that he had unknowingly eaten food prepared for him with a metal fork. He had not learned of it until after he had eaten. This was one of the things he was forbidden to do before a battle, and had great bearing on the medicine of his war bonnet.

The famed war bonnet had been made for him by White Buffalo Bull in 1860. It was one of a kind and was made from a dream Roman Nose had while he was fasting. In the dream he had seen a serpent with a single horn in the middle of its forehead, and a long tail. When White Buffalo Bull had finished with the bonnet, it was a work of art, made without an iron tool of any kind. There was a single horn in the forehead and forty black and red feathers reaching almost to the ground even when Roman Nose was seated on his pony.

As the battle raged, a runner was sent to Roman Nose. He was told that the fight was not going well and that many of his warriors had been killed. They were waiting for him to come and lead them. Some of his friends urged him to go through with the special purification ceremony to restore his medicine before going to the fight, but Roman Nose said there was not time. Putting on his sacred medicine paint he donned his war bonnet and mounted his pony. Riding to a hill overlooking the island he sat looking over the scene. At sight of him his warriors stopped their fighting to see what he was going to do. A good friend, Tangle Hair, and three more of his friends went to meet him. When they arrived they all dismounted and sat down for a talk. Roman Nose told them of his fears and said that he would probably be killed. While they were talking White Contrary rode up. "Here is the great Roman Nose, our fearless leader, the man we depend on. Here he sits safe from the bullets while his warriors die for him."

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At his words Roman Nose laughed. "The old man is right, and I will die here, today." Mounting his pony, he rode down the hill and toward the island. As he rode he was followed by his warriors, some three hundred. As Roman Nose rode near the scouts hidden in the grass, they opened fire and a bullet struck him in the small of his back just above the hips. Mortally wounded, he managed to stay on his pony and ride with his friends back to the village. Here he dismounted and lay down on his back. His friends remained with him and they talked until he died at dawn the next morning. After his death Roman Nose's squaw took down her tepee and used the poles to make a scaffold to hold his body. Wrapping the body in buffalo robes it was lifted to the scaffold and tied there. His personal belongings were placed beside him. With this done his squaw then slashed her wrist in mourning.

The fight continued for two days then a relief column of soldiers were seen coming from Fort Wallace. With the death of their leader Roman Nose they had lost their will to fight and the Cheyenne retreated into the surrounding hills. The timely arrival of the troops was brought about by Jack Stillwell and another scout who had gone for help shortly after the fight began.

Roman Nose was, no doubt, one of the most famous leaders of the Northern Cheyenne and was most noted for the fight at Beecher's Island, of which he had very little to do with. The site of the fight was known as Beecher's Island, named for Lt. Beecher who also died there.



PHOTO BY DIANNE JOHNSON

*Receiving the award from Sentinel Chamber of Commerce Secretary-Treasurer Jane Rogers were Assistant Editor Ted Pyle, SOSU President Dr. Leonard Campbell, Assistant Editor Dr. Christopher Gould, Editor-in-Chief Dr. Robin Montgomery, Staff Writer Donita Lucas Shields, and Managing Editor Dr. Leroy Thomas.*

## Westview Wins Award

WESTVIEW has received one of six certificates of recognition given by the Oklahoma-Kansas Oil and Gas Association for its contributions to public awareness of the state's oil and gas heritage.

Accepting the award were Dr. Robin Montgomery, WESTVIEW's editor-in-chief; Dr. Leroy Thomas, managing editor; Dr. Christopher Gould, assistant editor; Professor Ted Pyle; SOSU President Dr. Leonard Campbell, and Donita Shields, Elk City, who wrote one of the award-winning articles.

The journal, which is published quarterly by SOSU, was nominated for the award by the Sentinel Chamber of Commerce.

Making the presentation was Jane Rogers, secretary-treasurer of Sentinel's chamber.

The competition was an official Diamond Jubilee project.

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