THE GLORY ROAD*

Ewing L. Rafferty

Ligonier 1758

John Forbes, you're off on your last campaign,
Some fifty miles in the wintry rain,
Your body twisted in mortal pain,
Unable to grasp a bridle rein,
Leaving behind you the wagon-train,
Scorning its tents and bags of grain,
Trading its comforts for miles of gain
With pride in the Briton's bull-dog strain
And firm intent in that iron brain
To break a link in the Frenchman's chain;
Efface the blemish on Braddock's slain
And the martyrs left on a hilltop plain;
Regain for your king his lost domain,
End forever the Gallic reign.

What will you find at the journey's end?
What does the hideous past portend?
What do you find as you hew your way?—
Burnt-out cabins and blood-drenched clay.
What is the lure of this cursed land
Firm in the grasp of a savage hand,
Locked in the chill November fog,
Its icy landscape of hill and bog,
What do you seek in this coming brawl?
What is the reason behind it all?
You know, John Forbes, but you do not say;

Mr. Rafferty, now a resident of New York, was born in Pittsburgh of an early and well known family. Much of his time since college days has been devoted to writing. Mr. Rafferty has long been a student of Western Pennsylvania history and has incorporated much factual material in his epic verse on General Forbes.—Ed.

* "The Glory Road" is a short excerpt from a larger book-length trilogy on Braddock, Forbes, and Bouquet. As a general rule we do not publish poetry. An exception is made for "The Glory Road" as it is a ballad of sound history and of good quality.—Ed.
Your men don't know. It is best that way,
Best to dwell on the ancient theme,
England's glory, its arms supreme.

The pride of empire! You don't infer
It's the same old motive, simply—fur.
In this, John Forbes, you've little pride.
Hardly your fault—but a thought to hide.
And wars are made of curious things—
The souls of men or the greed of kings,
A rival god or a woman's smile,
A holy tomb or a desert isle,
A despot's humor, a treasure-hoard,
The constant itch of the vagrant sword.
The soldier's creed not to reason why
But simply to march and fight—and die.

More will pass over your road, John Forbes,
Than ever your dreams have seen;
More than ermine for profligate kings
Or mink for a useless queen:
The road that the Scot Sinclair had cut
With whiskey and spade and axe,
With sweat and blood and profanity,
Strewed deep in its rutted tracks;
The road that became the beaten path
Of a million pioneers
To a lusty empire mainly built
Of courage and brawn and tears;
An empire spelt in ten thousand names
That mirror humor and pluck—
Kentucky, Wyoming, Poodletown,
Molly's Bottom and Keokuk,
Missouri, Wisconsin, Pimple Peak,
Cheyenne, Tombstone, Muleshoe Creek,
Dakota, Michigan, Henscratch Flat,
Lousy Level, Maumee, and Platte,
Republican River, Tennessee,
Yellowstone and Skilligallee,
Steamboat Rapids and Frozen Toes,
Indiana and Smutty Nose.*

Men from Rhode Island will come that way;
Men from New Hampshire and Maine;
Trading their homelands for chancier ones
On mountain, river, and plain,
Men in homespun powdered with dust
Shouting a motto, "Pike's Peak or bust."
Men with their women, oxen, cows;
Carts with their kettles, bedsteads, plows;
Men with their names writ lightly in sand,—
Names they'll write later large on the land.
All with the courage to dare the unknown,
Wrest from its rigors their share of its own:—
The end of their rainbow no mountain of gold,
Only their birthright to have and to hold.
The end of the trail no castle in Spain:—
A clearing, a cabin, a planting of grain.

Valley of Decision

They stumbled through the nightlike, virgin forest:
A foe to be fought as men are fought—with violence.
Its pitchpines and redwood cedars, its hardwoods—
The oaks, the hickories, the walnut, ash and elm—
Long since destroyed in the endless waste of man.
Their birthplaces scarred with the ugliness of man's works.

The Twenty-fourth of November, the gorges of Turtle Creek,
That Braddock had deserted to his undoing;
Over on the left the snow-patched hills of the Monongahela—
Its muddied waters swollen with the floods
Bouquet had predicted.
Washington steeled himself as he saw those hills.
Twice had he passed them and come away in defeat.
That night, bivouacked on the wintry ground
They built no fires, nor would they, had the wood been dry.
Midnight. A heavy rumbling over the woods.

* Unusual names are from George R. Stewart's Names on the Land, published by Random House in 1945.
A magazine destroyed? By accident or purpose?
Dawn. A scout with news: the enemy was loading his boats.
Already some were filled and away!

A strong advance led the way, this time the straight way
Through the ravines Braddock had feared, over the hills,
Over the frosted leaves.
The bare boughs that swung in the bleak November wind.
The Highlanders, the leader still in his litter
Swung between two horses;
The Royal Americans, mostly Irish, "Dutch" and Swedes;
To left and right, Bouquet and Washington leading
Winding through the valleys, over the hills:—to the last one
With its carrion burden of Grant's slaughtered warriors,
Their heads on stakes, kilts draped derisively beneath,
A tempest of rage swept through the ranks.
This was the time, the place, for battle
Had the Frenchman dared.

LA BELLE RIVIERE

Down on the left flowed a muddy stream,
Its warmth dissolving in misty steam
Once red with the blood of a beaten host,
Now the haunt of an arrogant ghost,
On the right its sister, already chill',
Its source a spring on a Northland hill.
In the distance a haze of sullen smoke
Hung low on the bare-limbed ash and oak,
While a tongue of flame through the driving sleet
Yellowed the spot where the rivers meet.
On down the left to the flat ahead
A swampy pond and a dozen dead.

Over the race-path Hazlet's horse—
The path of the red man's gauntlet course;
Then silent columns two by two,
Alert for the curdling scalp-halloo;
Next looming ahead on the open plain
The flaming walls of French Duquesne,
Warned by its watchers with quaking knees
Its foes outnumbered the forest trees
Then a handful of redskins, now polite
With tales of the Frenchman's hasty flight
And turncoat mouthings of sham delight
At this final triumph of British might;
While the Frenchman's dreamings died in the glare
That lighted the loss of his Belle Riviere:—
His fur-lined visions, his fortress chain,
Myths in the coals of his own Duquesne.

A City Is Born
By this shattered link in the Frenchman's chain,
They stood in the snow and sleet and rain:—
Washington, Armstrong, Henry Bouquet—
Where the pain-racked Forbes on his litter lay.
Men from the Southland, men from the East,
Half-starved, unsheltered, the great, the least,
Half-clothed, half-frozen, hating the land
Yet proud in conquest, of him in command.
And they nailed their flag to a flame-scarred lance
Where proudly had flown the lilies of France.

The Doubtful Land
As the wild storm-clouds blackened the dusk into night
They shivered; brushed the wet snow from their shoulders;
Sought shelter that didn't exist.
They had won. What?—
A misery-filled land they hated,
A wilderness more formidable than their foes;
And, had they known, a land that after it was won
Must be fought for again and again!
It was accursed, yet some would stick to it.
Others would return.
They would found dynasties, great institutions.
Some would find trouble, despair;
Others riches, happiness, fame;
Yet none of them knew and they hated it.
In the meantime they would find painted death.
In the mist of the swamps, the haze of the hills,
They would fight their king, be called rebels.
They would fight each other—over whiskey,
Over another wilderness.
They would fight each other—over a black man.
Be called damned Yankee scum and Secesh.
They would fight more terrible wars
And they would triumph.
Yet the land underneath, this wilderness of theirs,
They hated.

MEMORIAL

They called you The Man with the Head of Iron.
You were still that, John Forbes,
But the rest of you rust, decay.
They carried you back to Philadelphia.
For forty days they carried you
Through tangled forests, through snow and ice,
Over the still untamed mountains
Back to Philadelphia.
And there grim Death got hold of your breath,
And they buried you under the altar of a church
With merited honors—mostly forgot.
As with Edward Braddock, your homeland did not want you.
The church is gone,
Your bones are lost,
But men still follow the road you hewed.