

The life and military services of Zebulon M. Pike /

THE LIFE AND MILITARY SERVICES OF ZEBULON M. PIKE.*

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BY THE SECRETARY, WARREN UPHAM.

Every human life is an interesting drama. Grandly so, and truly noble, was the life of Zebulon Montgomery Pike; and it ended with a halo of immortal glory, as a patriot soldier who died for his country.

He was born in Lambertton (now a part of Trenton), N. J., January 5, 1779. His father was a captain in the Revolution, and continued in the federal army service. The son, Zebulon Montgomery, was of slender form in his boyhood, of pale and very fair complexion, with a gentle and retiring disposition, but with a resolute spirit. He received only a scanty common school education. At the age of fifteen years he began service as a cadet in his father's regiment, and was promoted when twenty years old to the rank of first lieutenant.

From Gen. James Wilkinson, in command on the Mississippi, Lieut. Pike received orders in 1805 to conduct an expedition to its upper streams and lakes, for several purposes, as to negotiate treaties with the Indians, to secure a conformity with the laws of the United States by the agents of the Northwest Company and others engaged at the far north in the fur trade, and to extend geographic exploration. Pike started from St. Louis, on this expedition, August 9, 1805, with twenty soldiers, in a keel boat seventy feet long, provisioned for four months.

On the 23rd day of September, 1805, on the island at the mouth of the Minnesota river; since called Pike island, he made a formal purchase by treaty, from chiefs of the Dakotas

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or Sioux, of a large tract reaching from the Minnesota river to the Falls of 303 St. Anthony, and another tract at the mouth of the St. Croix river, these lands passing thus to the ownership of the United States for military purposes.

Proceeding up the Mississippi, Pike and his party were overtaken by early snow and cold, on October 16th, and were obliged to winter at Pike rapids, in what is now Morrison county. The site of his stockaded encampment, or fort, has been identified there, on the west shore of the river, by Hon. Nathan Richardson, of Little Falls. The party relied largely on the abundant game of the region for their sustenance.

In the winter, setting out December 10th, Pike advanced afoot, with a few of his men, to Sandy, Leech, and Cass lakes, attained the objects of his expedition concerning the relations of the fur traders to the United States, and returned to the fort at Pike rapids on the 5th of March. Thence descending the Mississippi, he reached St. Louis on the last day of April, 1806. His very interesting journal gives our earliest detailed description of the upper Mississippi region above the mouth of Elk river, with many names of lakes and streams, and a definite view of the conditions then prevailing at the fur-trading posts.

After a few weeks, Pike was again despatched by General Wilkinson, to treat with the Indian tribes and explore the country west and southwest of St. Louis, to the headwaters of the Arkansas and Red rivers. In this second expedition, on December 3, 1806, he measured the altitude of the very conspicuous mountain in central Colorado which has been since called Pike's Peak. Proceeding southward and unintentionally entering Spanish territory, Pike and his small command encountered Spanish troops, and he was summoned before the governor of Santa Fe, but, after considerable delay, was permitted to return into the United States.

The journals of these expeditions were published by Pike in 1810; in the following year an English edition from his manuscripts was issued in London; and in the years 1812 and 1813 French and Dutch editions were published. In 1889 the English edition was

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reprinted at Denver; and in 1895 an annotated reprint from the original of 1810, with a memoir of Pike, was published by Dr. Elliott Coues, who was aided in geographic notes for Minnesota by the late Alfred J. Hill, of the Minnesota Historical Society.

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Besides reproducing Pike's maps, Dr. Coues added a very elaborate "Historico-Geographical Chart of the Upper Mississippi River," which gives lists of the names applied by successive maps and authors to each of the many streams and lakes above the Falls of St. Anthony.

During the second war with Great Britain, Pike received rapid promotion, and on March 12, 1813, was commissioned as brigadier general. In the attack on York (now Toronto), Canada, he was killed April 27, 1813, with many others, both of the United States and British troops, by the explosion of a British magazine.

No other explorer of Minnesota more deserves recognition and honor. It may well be hoped that his name shall be given to some county yet to be formed adjoining or including Leech lake or Cass lake.

Pike died, like General Wolfe before Quebec, just when his troops had won a very important battle. As Coues wrote: "Each led to the assault; each conquered; each fell in the arms of victory; each is said to have pillowed his head on the stricken colors of the defenders."

The circumstances of General Pike's death enshrined him as a hero and martyr in the hearts of all his countrymen. Coues thus described his last hours:

"The dying general was carried to a boat at the lake side and conveyed to the Pert, whence he was taken aboard the flagship Madison. Some recorded words of his last moments need not be scanned with critical eye. When those who bore their fallen leader reached the boat, the huzza of the troops fell upon his ears. 'What does it mean?' he

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feebly asked. 'Victory!' was the reply; 'the Union Jack is coming down, General,—the Stars and Stripes are going up.' The dying hero's face lighted up with a smile of ecstasy. His spirit lingered a few hours. Before the end came, the British flag was brought to him. He made a sign to place it under his head; and thus he expired."

His life was crowned with a happy and glorious death, the patriot's supreme test and reward. Sweet and beautiful it is to die for the fatherland.