A History
Nez Perce Campaign 1877

by

Dr. Merrill D. Beal

Part I Chaps 1-16
but unimportant details added. The author seems unable to discriminate between the genuinely significant and the merely colorful. Why else, for example, would she devote so much attention to describing "lavish social life" among slaveholding mixed-bloods in the Indian Territory (already old stuff and, I suspect, considerably over-romanticized) and yet treat the life and basic concerns of the average Cherokee so sketchily? One suspects that a great deal of what remains simply baffling in Cherokee history could be clarified if only more were known of the real currents of tribal life beneath the facade of European-style institutions. Getting at the truth in this way, however, will require far more thorough and sophisticated research than this book demonstrates. And why should any intelligent reader be interested in the details of the mock marriage between "Miss Indian Territory" (a Cherokee) and "Mr. Oklahoma Territory" at the inauguration of Oklahoma's first governor, or of the day-to-day itinerary of the Little Carpenter and other Cherokees taken to England for exhibition at the court of George II? Far too much of the book is on this level, while other areas of vital concern — the role of the Cherokees in the movement for intertribal federation in the 1870's, or the whole complex story of internal tribal politics after the Civil War, or the long and highly-skilled delaying action fought by Cherokee leaders on the White man's own ground against allotment of tribal lands in the 1880's and 1890's and against tribal dissolution at the turn of the century — remain unexplored or merely touched upon. Even the central story of the removal is presented in oversimplified terms of a villainous Andrew Jackson and of noble Red men versus greedy and treacherous Whites. Awkwardly written and resting on inadequate and unimaginative research, this is a poor book from almost every point-of-view. Not even the general reader seeking an introduction to the Cherokees will find it very useful.

East Texas State College                         Ralph W. Goodwin


It is always a disagreeable and distasteful task for a reviewer to have to criticize the work of a fellow historian, es-
especially when the work in question is one upon which a great
deal of time and effort have obviously been expended, and where
the research has been considerable. This could have been an
excellent account of one of the most interesting of our Indian
Wars. That it falls far short of what it could have been is
probably the fault of both author and publisher, since adequate
editing would have eliminated many of the errors.

There are numerous minor errors, many of them due to
nothing but carelessness. On p. 152 reference is made to
Captain Norwood and 50 cavalymen "designated as Company
4 of the Second Infantry, from Fort Ellis ...." When were
companies designated by numbers rather than letters? Actual-
ly this was Company L of the Second Cavalry. In the descrip-
tion of the fight at Camas Meadows, Lieutenant H. M. Benson
is mentioned but there is no explanation of how this infantry
officer happened to be with Norwood's cavalry. On p. 159 he
is said to have been painfully wounded, but the index refers to
him as killed. Also on p. 199 Theodore Goldin is referred to
as a lieutenant of the Seventh Cavalry; actually he was a private.
There are other slips but these illustrate the point.

More serious is a failure to clear up controversial points.
On p. 69 in the account of the Randall Imbroglio, the different
points involved in the controversy between the army officers
and the citizen volunteers could have been presented and eval-
uated. How long was it after the event before Shearer pre-
pared his reminiscences? In this connection also we have a
quotation in which a soldier reminded Shearer that he need not
come to the Seventh Cavalry for assistance. Why the Seventh,
which at the time was on the Yellowstone River? The regiment
in Idaho, with whom Shearer had his troubles, was the First
Cavalry.

On p. 210, in describing the preliminaries of the Bear
Paw battle, the author says that Colonel Miles had six com-
panies of cavalry and six of mounted infantry — actually not
all of the infantry was mounted — and that the entire command
numbered 383 men. But on p. 214, in the description of the
battle, we read that a force of "at least six hundred horses
charged forward with the same speed and precision that had
broken the power of the Sioux and Cheyenne nations." There
is no statement of Colonel Miles having received additional
troops to bring his force to 600 men. Also when and where
had the power of the Sioux and the Cheyennes been broken by a massed cavalry charge? Colonel Miles had had several engagements with hostile Indians along the Yellowstone, but with exception of Muddy Creek these had all been infantry engagements.

In describing the battle of the Bear Paw, the author states that Captain Carter lost one-third of his command. There was no mention of this officer in describing the plan of the attack, nor is he mentioned in the index. He was not a cavalry officer, and since the infantry, all told, lost only four men killed, his command must have been pitifully small to have lost one-third of it. Similarly it is said that Captain Owen Hale's troop, K, of the Seventh Cavalry, was almost annihilated. Troop K did have the highest losses of any army unit involved, eight killed including its two officers, and thirteen wounded, but these hardly amount to annihilation even taking into consideration the reduced strength of the three companies of the Seventh Cavalry involved.

The inclusion of a detailed map of the region traversed by the Nez Perce on their historic retreat would have improved the volume. The bibliography is enormous, but a few items were apparently overlooked. The book also gives some evidence of having been cut down from a longer manuscript, a proceeding in which errors invariably creep in. But this reviewer cannot escape the conclusion that most of the errors are due to carelessness and haste, and should have been caught in the editorial process. Thus the author is not entirely to blame. But regardless of responsibility there is no doubt that the volume could have been immeasurably improved by a more careful scrutiny and checking of facts.

Eastern Washington State College
Edgar I. Stewart


James Sinclair, son of a Hudson's Bay Company factor and a "half-Cree, half-white" mother, was born in 1806 at Oxford House in Rupert's Land. Although raised in the wilds at the Bottom of the Bay, James was conscious of his family ties to the gentry of Scotland. When his father died he was packed off
A HISTORY OF THE NEK PERCE CAMPAIGN 1877

Prepared under the terms of a cooperative agreement between the National Park Service and Idaho State College

by

Merrill D. Beal
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Dr. Sven Liljeblad, Professor of Social Science, Idaho State College, read the entire manuscript and offered much encouragement. My wife Beesy rendered valued assistance in assembling and sifting data, and in typing and proofreading the manuscript.
After many years of yearning for an accurate, documented historical work on the Nez Perce Campaign of 1877, with special reference to the Battle of the Big Hole, in 1958 National Park Service officials took action to that end. Idaho State College was invited to enter a cooperative agreement whereby I should produce the monograph. When the State Board of Education approved this proposal, I proceeded to fulfill the directive of securing "First hand knowledge from... survivors or descendants of those who participated in the action, and make a search of the Library of Congress and National Archives, and contact all historical sources in general."

It was a large order, and a third of the eighteen months specified for the completion of the history was spent in gathering the bulk of data. Mrs. Bessy N. Beal and I visited much of the retreat route and many of the battlegrounds that I would be describing. Of course, we also worked in many libraries and historical societies in Idaho and Montana. Contemporary accounts of the campaign were carefully checked in the hope that some naked truths of battle would therein be disclosed before they were assembled and dressed in uniforms. Hence, artless comments by soldiers or volunteers, thus recorded, have been avidly sought and heavily weighted.

I have carefully examined the reports of the Nez Perces, as recorded during and after the campaign. These sources, however biased, have been valued. Indeed, they have frequently been adduced in a parallel fashion along with the official reports and the newspaper accounts. Otherwise, the history would be not only unbalanced, but untrue. To be sure, there are many sweeping and passionate denunciations of the non-treaty Nez Perces,
to-wit: Scout J. W. Redington's statement that "Chief Joseph and his outfit were murderous marauders." Conversely, historian Jacob P. Dunn held Joseph in high prestige and flatly stated, "The meanest, most contemptible, least justifiable thing the United States was ever guilty of was its treatment of the Lower Nez Perces." Thus, each side has set forth its self-deserving declarations regarding its motives, purposes, and actions.

Both prudence and honesty marked my guide lines between L. V. McWhorter's characterization of the Nez Perces as patriots and General O. O. Howard's references to them as barbarian hostiles.

I have found no startlingly fresh interpretations in respect to the causes, prosecution, and consequences of the campaign. However, some evidence and evaluations will no doubt weaken certain accepted views and strengthen some points less clearly understood.

The role of Indian and white leadership has been placed in perspective. The tribal contribution has been stressed without minimizing the important guardianship of the chiefs. Joseph conforms better to the symbol of protector and diplomat, rather than that of superlative War Chief. The evidence does not support the legend of military genius. In fact, Joseph did not out-rank his colleagues in either the formulation of strategy or execution thereof.

Furthermore, United States military officers were not found deficient in either imagination or energy. In a way, it was a case of diamond scratching diamond, with the arts of wilderness warfare effectively exemplified on each side.

Although I am under no obligation to express my personal opinion concerning the justice of the Nez Perce War, here it is:

I believe that the chiefs, the responsible men of the tribes, and a very large percentage of the non-treaty Nez Perces were opposed to a war in 1877. When General Howard sent troops against them they stood their ground and won
an impressive battle. Thereafter, they gravitated toward a course of retreat
and made a pathetic effort to avoid further conflict with the United States.
In attempting to escape, or bypass, the military they demonstrated exception-
al resourcefulness and pluck. Indeed, they resisted capture so desperately
that they lost their tribal status. Although their great exertions and
heavy casualties won universal admiration, a decent consideration for justice
compels concurrence with the judgment expressed by Secretary Carl Shure:
"This bloody conflict might have been avoided by a more careful regard for
the rights of an Indian tribe whose former conduct had been uniformly
peaceable and friendly."

The valiantly conducted and nobly lost Nez Perce Campaign has had a tre-
mandous appeal. A Nez Perce named William M. Stevens remembered that in his
youth the old warriors were called upon to relate their experiences in tribal
gatherings. These narrations were characterized by dignity and restraint.
Boasting was wholly absent, but sadness was all-pervading. The pathos of
these accounts of flight and exile is still cherished among many Nez Perces.

That a similar influence affected the general public is evidenced by the
manner in which the non-treaty Nez Perces have been honored by the bestowal
of names. Nez Perce, Joseph, and White Bird are applied to creeks, trails,
mountains, passes, towns, drives, a country, and a great dam. Monuments have
been erected, heroic memorials proposed, and a considerable amount of litera-
ture has evolved. I sincerely hope that this account of the Nez Perce Cam-
paign will enlarge understanding and enhance appreciation for our dynamic
western border history.

M. D. B.
Chapter 1

THE NEZ PERCES AT HOME

Many and extensive speculations have been made concerning the origin of the Indian race. Scientists, theologians, and philosophers have offered plausible explanations, but none are considered wholly satisfactory. Indian physical traits and cultural patterns tell much and their legends and traditions tell more, but still too little to establish more than a theory or a faith. As Europeans explored America they discovered natives in all areas. Indeed, their pattern of distribution seemed quite proportionate to the resources as available by the processes of direct appropriation. Whether the earlier migrants originally came from Asia or Asia Minor, all evidence supports the theory that the American aborigines had been around from time immemorial.

Obviously the antiquity of the Nez Perce parallels the ages of other peoples with whom they were identified. They constituted the principal branch of the Shahaptian linguistic family inhabiting the Columbia Plateau. Nez Perce legends imply that tribal claims upon their areas of occupation are hoary.

As stated, the Nez Perce speak a Shahaptian tongue closely related to such languages as the Umatilla, Wallawalla, and Yakima of Oregon and Washington. They referred to themselves variously as Nimipu, Kamuinu, and Tsutpeli, each name signifying "the people." In 1805, Lewis and Clark applied the name Chopunnish to them. Sometime between that date and 1835, French-Canadian traders probably bestowed the name Nez Perce upon a branch of them. According to their own tradition, the name was first applied to the delegates
who reached St. Louis in 1831 in search of the white man's light, truth, or power ("big medicine"). The misnomer has clung to them ever since. Of course the tribesmen accepted the name and pronounced it Nez Perce or Nez Perces (sometimes Nez Percy), both rhyme with nurse. Therefore, the accent mark over the "e" may be omitted.

**Nez Perce Characteristics**

Biologists and geographers have explained the reciprocal relationships between heredity and environment. Hence it is expedient to describe the principal characteristics of these people and their homeland. General agreement exists concerning their salient traits. In body they were tall, stately, well-formed, and energetic. General C. C. Howard said the men were five feet eight or an average, compactly built and graceful of movement. The women were several inches shorter in stature; their faces were bright and comely in appearance. Nez Perce intelligence was of high order, being manifest by personal and group self-reliance, prosperity, and responsibility. Self-respect and personal dignity was fostered by belief in a guardian spirit or Wyakin power. This influence gave the Nez Perce personal direction and a common feeling of destiny.

Meriwether Lewis described them thusly, "The Chopunnish (meaning Nez Perce) are in general, stout, well-formed, active men. They have high noses and many of them on the aequaline order, with cheerful and agreeable countenance." In temperament they were friendly, pleasant, and inclined toward peace. As hunters and warriors they were unexcelled, being skillful, loyal, and brave. Their standards of honor and truthfulness were exceptional.

L. V. McWhorter characterized them as "the wilderness gentry of the Pacific Northwest." In 1877, General Nelson A. Miles expressed the consensus in saying, "They were a very bright and energetic body of Indians; indeed, the most intelligent that I had ever seen. Exceedingly self-reliant, each man
seemed to be able to do his own thinking, and to be purely democratic and independent in his ideas and purposes. Surely that was a strong recommendation for a band of prisoners of war! Perhaps there was something exceptional in the environment that produced these people.

The Nez Perce Homeland

Tradition places the Nez Perce nesting place in the Kamiah Valley. From there they spread both directions along the base of the Bitterroot Range and also westward toward the Columbia River. The most extensive description of their homeland bounds them on the west by the Cascades, the east by the Bitterroots, and by the forty-fourth and forty-sixth parallels respectively. Of course Nez Perce, like other nomads, visited more far-flung areas, as dictated by their needs and feelings of relative security.

Notable trails were developed in pursuing these ends. One led south up the Little Salmon River to the upland meadows; thence down the Weiser River to the Lower Snake River country. The Nez Perce Trail followed the ridges that divide the Clearwater and Salmon rivers, into the lush Selway country. From there it struck eastward across the Bitterroot Range and followed the Nez Perce Fork of the Bitterroot River to its valley. The Lolo Trail, most famous of the three major trails, strikes east from the forks of the Clearwater River. It will be described in detail later on. Several trails gave the people access to the valleys nestled in the northern reaches of the Blue Mountains. To the northwest lay the Palouse prairies open to approach along numerous trails. Although this vast area is quite amorphous in character, it does possess a focal point, namely, the confluence of the Snake and Clearwater rivers. These streams bore the names of Kimenem and Kooskooski, respectively, and their point of union was called Tsceminicoum, meaning meeting place of the Nimipu (elevation 740 feet).

The climate in Nez Perce land varied with the elevations. In general,
Pacific Ocean influences were dominant. However, the ten thousand feet high bitterroots, with from forty to fifty inches of precipitation, divert the cooler continental weather influences along the eastern periphery. The balancing of these forces yields a climate favorable for all forms of life to be found between the latitudes and elevations mentioned.

The flora of the region was lush, beautiful, and valuable. Evergreens, cottonwoods, aspens, maples, and birches grew rank. Service, haws, and huckle berries flowered and ripened upon the slopes. Grasses and sedges flourished everywhere, but fairly carpeted the lowlands. Camas fields abounded, and those at Weippe and Camas were so vast as to be called prairies. The good rich earth yielded a great plenty and fair variety of good substantial food.

In general, the Nez Perce land was an undine province and the waters teemed with fish. The elegant salmon was so plentiful that a river system bears its name. This country of alternating valley, prairie, and mountain, interlaced with streams, provided an ideal habitat for fauna. Therefore, the species were numerous and populations considerable. Elk, deer, sheep, goats, antelope, rabbits, fowl (upland and water), and their respective predators, bear, wolves, foxes, and coyotes, were all available to the hunters. Besides being productive, the Nez Perce country is a region of sheer beauty. Francis Haines has captured something of its grace in this paragraph:

From the first breath of spring until midsummer, the Nez Perce country is a blaze of color. Blue windflowers, purple shooting stars, yellow bells, blue bells, blue and purple penstemon, blue and yellow lupine, yellow sunflowers, and Indian paintbrush in various hues follow one another in wild profusion. Mingled with the flowers are many important food plants, the feathery leaved cowish (cous or kouse), the pink bitterroot, and, above all, the camas, covering the open meadows with blue carpets until at a distance they resemble little lakes.

Another sensitive observer has said, "I am thinking of a scene I would describe, but cannot do it justice--- Summer time in Tséeminicu: the dust,
the purple haze hanging in the canyons, the blue-green background of Craig Mountains, and red Indian summer sun just dropping over the horizon, reflected in Snake River." Remember these descriptions, and be assured that the Nez Perce were fully cognizant of the value of their homeland, and a deep affection for its grandeur was written upon the tablets of their hearts.

Surely Nez Perce land was a natural cornucopia; that is, unless pressed upon too heavily by numbers. However, that does not seem to have been the case. Isaac I. Stevens estimated the population at 3300 in 1855, vis-a-vis a homeland of two hundred square miles. Whereas, Nez Perce Jonathan "Billy" Williams made a large map of the area, in which he placed and named seventy-five villages. These calculations suggest that the ratio of people to resources was very favorable for an abundant life. There was room enough for all, and the various clans found specific regions to suit their respective tastes and lived amiably together. The districts occupied by the bands of five chiefs, who went on the war path in 1877, were as follows: Chief Joseph, the Wallowa and Junaha valleys, Oregon; White Bird, along the Salmon River and its tributaries; Toohoolhoolzote, astride the highlands lying between the Salmon and Snake rivers; Hush-hush-cute, in the big bend country west and south of Snake River; and Looking Glass, upon the Middle Fork of Clearwater River.

The Nez Perce Way of Life

A description of pristine modes and customs should disclose what manner of people they really were. The following descriptions are subject to limitations that always arise in connection with the appraisal of another culture. In this case the monumental labors of L. V. McPhorter have been carefully assessed.

The individual had high status in life. He was never dominated; free agency was understood and observed. He was expected to discover a sense of
destiny and pursue it for the good of all concerned. Family ties were close: relatives lived together, teaching and counseling each other. The principal men often established polygamous family relationships. Usually there were not more than two wives. The family, whether large or small, was basic and cohesive.

The typical family hut was conical in shape, covered with rush mats. For winter use they were erected over excavations several feet deep. There were also large, walled lodges built with much care and which functioned as meeting halls or as dwellings for several families under one roof. These communal buildings or "long houses" had A-shaped roofs of cattail or tule mats, reaching to the ground. Such a house might be a hundred fifty feet in length, contain twenty fireplaces, accommodate a hundred people or more, and, if so, constitute the entire village. These domiciles were well furnished by the craftsmen. Bison robes and other skins provided warmth and decoration. Tule and rush mats were plentiful and utensils of all sorts were woven and shaped from like materials. Basketry was their most important craft and such products were used in trade. The permanent settlements were situated on the rivers, each group forming a single village community. Some villages were permanently occupied, but there were also outlying camps for seasonal occupation. The size of a village population could fluctuate from winter to winter, adherence to a given group by individual families being rather loose. The largest camps were credited with a population of up to three hundred individuals, but mostly they were much smaller, all members being more or less related. A village site was always in close proximity to a good fishing place, which together with the surrounding land, was considered property of the village. There were, probably, some seventy such little communities among the key force at one time, about forty of which are known as to names and exact locations.
Tribal Organization and Procedures

Chieftainship was neither hereditary or permanent for an entire tribe. Each village group might have several chiefs, one of whom was temporarily recognized as leader. Lack of compulsion upon tribesmen put the leaders on their mettle. The prestige of leadership came as a result of many coups. Chieftainship was achieved by merit and held by accomplishment. The time may have been when ten scalps made a chief, but certainly ten successful horse-stealing raids was distinction for a warrior.

Nez Perce apparel and foods were derived from resources at hand. They were fully dressed at all times, except in war. The men wore breechcloth, shirt, leggings, soccasins, and blanket. Women dressed in skins, too, wearing long, loose gowns. They also made inner garments of bark fibers; their millinery consisted of fez-shaped basketry caps.

Food gathering was essentially a family responsibility, and a rough division of labor obtained in securing the same. Men hunted for the large animals and women and children trapped small ones, fished, and gathered the fruits of earth. Communal rabbit drives were conducted and roots and berries were often secured in similar fashion.

The most important root food was the bulbous camas. When not eaten at once, these nutritious bulbs were roasted in pits, then pounded into a mash, made into loaves, cooked again, and stored for future consumption. Other edible roots included kouse, bitterroot, carum, wild carrot, and cow parsnip. The country was rich in berries which, when sun dried, formed an important food reserve. In times of shortage, sunflower seeds, lichens, pine-nuts, and the inner bark of trees were also eaten.

The Nez Perce Stockmen

The failure of American Indians to domesticate any of the native mammals is difficult to understand, in view of their outstanding success as horsemen.
Indians acquired horses from Mexico early in the seventeenth century. By 1690 the Idaho Shoshonis had acquired substantial herds, and shortly thereafter their northern neighbors were "forking" horses. These equestrian marvels flourished upon the ample Nez Perce grazing lands. The tribesmen were more than enthusiastic about horses; they were actually scientific in the management of their herds. Lewis and Clark observed that they were skillful at gelding animals. Their selective practices were with an eye for both type and beauty; indeed, a flair for the exotic is evidenced by marvelous Appaloosa horses they developed. Early traders spoke of this spotted type as "a Falouse horse," and in time a slurred pronunciation became Appaloosa.

Perhaps the Nez Perce were the only Indians to practice selective breeding without lessons from white men. Lewis and Clark found them in possession of thousands. One man is said to have owned 1500. Eighty years later the Indian Agent in Oklahoma Indian Territory confirmed their continuing interest and skill by observing, "The Nez Perces appear to be natural herdsmen, and show more judgment in the management of their stock than any Indians I ever saw." 

Horses thrilled the Nez Perce. Upon them they hunted, fought, raced, and traveled with great zest. Racing courses were found throughout the land, and there the tribesmen foregathered to test and bet upon their favorites. Mouts were trained to appear classy for parading purposes, and the joy of equestrian ownership was widespread. The Indians mounted their steeds from the right and preferred to ride bareback in hunting and fighting; otherwise, they used a buckskin pad stuffed deer hide for a saddle.

This wealth of prime horses made the Nez Perce exceptionally mobile. They could journey to the Snake River Country, trade horses with the Shoshonis, and return with bison robes and other items. Furthermore, they were equipped to make long hunts into the upper Missouri country in quest of bison. Remember the bison, having moved westward beyond the Continental Divide about 1600, were beginning to dwindle there about 1830. These hunting excursions involved
great distances and much time. In fact, the hunts lasted from two to five years. Hence only the most rugged tribesmen undertook the journeys, however well-planned and led.

There were many desirable way stations, such as valleys of the Bitter-root, Sun, Deer Lodge, Milk, Big Hole, Beaverhead, Salmon, and Yellowstone, where living conditions were pleasant in season. Of course such an expedition required able leadership and goodly numbers, because access to the hunting areas involved inter-tribal contention. Hence, they were subject to attack by the Blackfeet and the Crow. However, this prospect did not intimidate the Nez Perce: indeed, the danger inherent in the situation was an impelling factor. They outfought or outran the enemy according to the dictates of prudence. They made enemies and allies depending upon the circumstances.

In any case, the experiences of the long hunts had a mighty impact upon the Nez Perce. Young men made big medicine; great reputations were acquired for skill and bravery. Renowned hunters and warriors evolved in every band, and the tribe as a whole achieved tremendous esprit de corps. Surely, they cultivated the concept that the Nez Perce were the bravest of the brave. These experiences weakened Nez Perce ties with village chiefs and strengthened their allegiance to the hunter-warrior leadership. Still, each tribe had two natures; one consisted of the moderately nomadic element intent upon the profits of husbandry, while the other was far-ranging and adventurous. This duality sometimes created a problem at tribal councils.

Cattle Raising Among the Nez Perces

These Indians were quite as successful in raising cattle as they were in horse culture. The generality of the Nez Perce realized that beef on the prairie was better than dried bison meat dragged a thousand miles on "the crotch", or travois. Hence they acquired cattle from the immigrants. The historian Yellow Wolf suggests the extent of this interest and concomitant
felicity in three lines, "We were raising horses and cattle---fast horses and many cattle. We had fine lodges, good clothes, plenty to eat, enough of everything. We were living well. Then General Howard and Indian Agent Monteith came to bother us."\(^{14}\)

Yellow Wolf failed to mention the fact that crop raising was also a factor in the Nez Perce economy. Indeed, by 1877, it was a basic interest among the mission Indians. Even the non-treaty groups practiced farming on an ancillary basis.

The Nez Perce Religion

Having described the sanguine character of Nez Perce temporal affairs, it is natural to observe that they did not live by bread alone. Their high barbarian status was due to the possession of disciplined spirits. Plateau Indian spiritual concepts and practices have been painstakingly investigated by many scholars. The following interpretation is based upon the research of L. V. McWhorter, Kate C. LoBeth, and Sven Liljeblad. A quotation from Liljeblad's "Indian Peoples in Idaho" presents a salient concept.

The leading motive in the religion of the Plateau Indians was the desire in every individual to receive help and power from the spiritual world. Success and security depended, in their way of thinking, on personal contact with the one spirit fated to become one's guardian through life. This contact was reached through dreams and visions. Training and search for these revelations began early in a person's life. At the age of ten or twelve, every child, whether boy or girl, was sent alone to some desolate place to fast and keep vigil day and night until the desired vision occurred. In this vision or in his troubled dreams, the child met for the first time the supernatural being who would from then on become his guardian spirit, and whose advice and aid he would constantly seek. Whether the apparition was that of an animal, a natural phenomenon, or something else, it taught its protege a sacred song that was made public at the Guardian Spirit dance.\(^{15}\)

This dance was held when the occasion warranted; otherwise dancing ceremonials were roughly calendrical, being incident to the first salmon catch, the first root-digging, or the first berry-picking of the year. These occasions resemble Christian celebrations quite closely, and Nez Perce dances
welcoming the return of a victorious war party bear a close resemblance to civilized practice.

A McWhorter summation of Nez Perce religion states flatly that they believed in immortality of all life. The individual’s relationship to an earth peopled with spirits (powers and principalities) might be intimate indeed. He could invoke them to serve in the role of guide and protector. The key to this relationship was known as Wyakin. Wyakin might be a single force or it might be a combination of mystic forces acting in unison. Missionary Kate C. McBeth observed the use of some flexibility in regards to truth-telling:

"According to their ideas, there was no sin in telling a lie the first time. There was a little sin if told the second time, but the third time, it was unpardonable. Anyone understanding this, and putting the question three times, would be sure to get the truth the third time. This is some of the old teaching of their heathenism."

From what has been written, it is apparent that the Nez Perce were a considerable people. They were well endowed in human resources, and the same may be said of their homeland. They found joy and inspiration in the environment and it was reflected in their bearing and spirit. A prosperous and self-possessed people, aware of their dignity and power, one would imagine that they would cherish the status quo and regard any prospects of modification with a shudder. That they welcomed outsiders and were intrigued by new ideas will now be disclosed.
Chapter 1

The Nez Perces at Home

Footnotes


10. H. J. Spindel, *The Nez Perce Indians* (Memoirs of the American Anthropological Association, Vol. 11, Part 3, Lancaster, Pa., 1903), p. 197. This is the basic work upon Nez Perce culture. It is not only authoritative, but it is artistic in concept and portrayal as well.


12. A Shoshoni Chief named Arimo owned hundreds of horses. Dr. Sven Liljeblad asked his grandson why he had so many. The reply was immediate and conclusive: "To put his brand on!" See Liljeblad, op. cit., pp. 31, 32.


15. Sven Liljeblad, op. cit., pp. 31, 32.

Chapter 2

A GOLDEN AGE OF INDIAN RELATIONS

As a general rule, good relations between white and Indian peoples were of short duration; whereas, favorable conditions prevailed among the Nez Perce and their white neighbors for nearly sixty years. A longer and better record would be quite anomalous. The visitation of the Lewis and Clark Expedition in Nez Perce country was a notable event in the history of both peoples. The explorers emerged from the bitterroots on September 20, 1805. They were weary wayfarers in desperate need of friends. Friendship was generously provided, and Chief Twisted Hair and his associates, Black Eagle, Halvats, Ilp-Ilp, Red Bear, Cut Nose, Broken Arm, and Speaking Eagle, held councils from time to time with the captains as they traveled the territory between the principal forks of the Clearwater and the Columbia rivers. The language barrier was formidable, but it was partly overcome by a complicated procedure involving English, French, Chinonon, Cimmetaree, and Nez Perce. In such fashion the concept of American sovereignty was conveyed by the captains; whereas, the chiefs imparted information concerning the route of travel and nature of the hinterland. Obviously there was plenty room for misunderstanding, but it was a case of the latter killing but the spirit giving light to communication. The expedition horses were left in the care of Chief Twisted Hair and repurchased the following year in apple-pie order. William Clark described this chief as a cheerful, sincere man, and other entries suggest that other chiefs conformed to the same general pattern. The explorers described them as a whole as being a quiet, civil people, tractable in disposition, willing to be
instructed, but also proud and haughty. Although the captains did not exactly say so, one is left with the impression that the Nez Perce Indians were their favorites.

The Religious Influence

Mountain men formed a similar estimate of these people. They noticed that the Nez Perce were religiously inclined. In fact, the trappers thought what they learned about the Nez Perce beliefs, legends, and practices bore a close relationship to Christianity. The Indians in turn discovered that the white man's religion was interesting, and since trappers were such masterful men, it seems logical that the Nez Perce would seek more philosophical knowledge than they could get from that source.

Hence, a delegation set out for Saint Louis in 1831. Their friends the Flatheads joined them in this visionary enterprise, and three of the delegates actually reached their objective. They presented their request for the white man's secret power to William Clark. The visit attracted considerable interest and by 1833, it was translated into "The Macedonian Call" by such church organs as The Christian Advocate and Zion City Herald, March 1, 1833. Indeed, several other Nez Perce and Flathead delegations journeyed to Saint Louis during the same decade with similar objectives. Of course these successive visitations functioned as catalytic agents to mission societies.

Everyone knows the story of Jason Lee's immediate response to the first call for Indian missionaries in the Pacific Northwest. Although the Lee party bypassed the Nez Perce they received a visitor from the American Board Mission in 1835, when Reverend Samuel Parker made a reconnaissance of that mission field. Nez Perce served as his guides during much of his six month's tour, and he felt secure all the while. On July 6, 1836, when Marcus Whitman and Henry Harmon Spalding and their wives arrived at the Rocky Mountain Company rendezvous on a branch of Green River, a strong delegation of Nez
Perce was there to meet them. Whitman and Spalding established their re-
spective missions at Waiilatpu and Lapwai. The latter station was in the
middle of the Nez Perce country and it played a significant role in the
subsequent history of this tribe.

Spalding had gumption enough to recognize that the Christian purpose
would be achieved in proportion to the development of settled community life.
He also realized that white expansion would raise havoc with the old bison
hunting and salmon fishing economy. If the Nez Perce were to become Christian
farmers their chance of survival was good. To that end he served as both
pastor and foreman, and in both roles his bearing was austere. He and his
wife Elisa labored with tremendous zeal, and the fact that the Nez Perce
Christians became the most advanced Indians in the arts of civilized life
is due to the Spaldings. Mrs. Spalding was a gem; she taught reading and
writing in an effortless manner. It is said that a fragrant memory of her
consecration still lingers among the Nez Perces. One reason the Indians
loved her was because "She had a quiet heart, was not excitable, and readily
picked up the language."2

Many Indians responded to Spalding's temporal endeavors. They hoed the
soil, planted crops, tended stock, and helped erect a blacksmith shop and
saw and grist mills. By 1839 a hundred families were engaged in farming and
a second mission station was opened at Kamiah.

However well conceived and salutary, both facets of Spalding's mission
program divided the Nez Perce. Some resented his attacks upon liquor,
gambling, and polygamy; others, or perhaps mainly the same, objected to
farming. Thus, the Nez Perce were divided into Christian and heathen cate-
gories.

The treaty and Christian Indians, and the non-treaty and heathen Indians
were largely, but not entirely, mutually exclusive. Whether one or the other,
there was little difference in their fundamental concepts of truth and morality.

Rivalry between Presbyterian and Roman Catholic missionaries was disconcerting to the natives. Each religion was graphically described by elaborate drawings and diagrams, such as the Catholic Ladder and its Protestant counterpart. Nez Perce mastery of theological tenets was impressive and little trouble developed until about 1846, when Indians from eastern areas gained attention to their accounts of happenings on other frontiers. Joe Lewis and Tom Hill, a Delaware, advised the Indians to forego Christianity and return to their tribal gods. This doctrine played a part in the Whitman Massacre, November 29, 1847. Although the Spaldings were not driven out, Nez Perce restlessness made their position seem untenable. Therefore, the Nez Perce missions were suspended for fourteen years, but many of the converts retained both their faith and farms meanwhile. Spalding and his second wife reopened the missions in 1862. An act of Congress, passed in 1869, parceled out the Indian reservations to different Christian denominations. Under that law the Nez Perce Reservation was awarded to the Presbyterians.

Spalding's return to Lapwai was the occasion of a Nez Perce revival. Hundreds were baptized as a result of his teaching and preaching. The converts were often given Christian names. For example, one convert, by name Tu-ela-kas, was named Joseph; his son, given the same name, became a renowned chief. Several of the men were appointed to offices as deacons and elders. In fact, a few assisted Spalding with the preaching. Among these were Timothy, Archie Lawyer, Enoch Pond, Peter Lindsley, Silas Whitman, Solomon Whitman, Felix Corbett, William Wheeler, and Jonathan "Billy" Williams. The great missionary died on August 3, 1874. He was buried at Spalding, a site properly marked as a State Park in honor of the principal instruments in bringing civilization to the Nez Perce, along with several first in the beginnings of Idaho.

An accurate measurement of the total impact of the mission upon the Nez
Perce nation is impossible. Mission partisans have pointed to their freedom from the usual Indian superstitions concerning natural phenomena. For instance, those in flight through Yellowstone National Park in 1877, paid no heed to the geysers and paint pots. Superintendent P. W. Norris said they had "... acquired sufficient civilization and Christianity to at least overpower their pagan superstitious fear of earthly fire-hole basins and brimstone pits."5

Lieutenant C. A. Woodruff believed their Christian teaching prevented them from engaging in the awful barbarities that usually characterize Indian hostilities. The non-treaty, heathen warriors did not subscribe to this view; they attributed their conduct to the traditions and mores of the tribe. One historian suggests that in the Nez Perces (as in most humans) there was an odd mixture of this world and the next—a love for both adventure and devotion.

The Miners Meet the Nez Perces

The mining frontier advanced upon the Pacific Northwest on a seven-league-boot pace during the latter 1850's. Supported by the military strongly established at Walla Walla, the advance upon Nez Perce land was delayed but not to be denied.

A former California prospector named Elias Davidson Pierce was the discoverer of gold in the Clearwater district on February 20, 1860. Actually, Pierce had been trading with the Nez Perce for three years, and in that capacity he had learned from them that evidence pointed to gold deposits. Upon making the discovery Pierce and associates proposed to exploit the same. However, the Indian Agent, A. J. Cain, objected on the grounds that such a course was illegal and inexpedient. He foresaw the outcome of a gold rush on the Nez Perce. Cain induced Indian scouts to blockade all trails, but the Pierce party stealthily re-entered the reservation and the rush was soon underway. Fortunately, the Nez Perce were peaceful; they believed that miners were evanescent like trappers. That is to say, they would soon pen
the gold from sand bars and be on their way. This was a serious error in judgment, because mining was not a unilateral venture; rather, it involved a considerable economy. There would be transportation, trading, farming and gambling interests to consider.

Agent Cain's position was well taken in Walla Walla; many citizens questioned the propriety of encroaching upon the Nez Perce Reservation. It could be dangerous; it would be better to arrange a new treaty and proceed legally. However, enterprising Nez Perces quickly adjusted to the gold rush. For example, Chief Reuben joined forces with William Craig (squaw-man) in building a ferry and warehouse at Lewiston. Other Nez Perces reaped "a golden harvest in many places" by building bridges and charging tolls. Chiefs Lawyer and Eagle of the Light fumed and threatened as the town of Lewiston sprang up, and as the miners encompassed the entire Nez Perce domain. But having opened the gates of the reservation (to miners only) north of the Clearwater by an agreement on April 11, 1861, it was inevitable that a similar concession would be demanded for admission to the interior Salmon River district. Such an agreement was reached at the Council of Slate Creek on the last day of December.

It has been estimated that a golden harvest approximating fifty million dollars was reaped by the miners from the Nez Perce reservation during the decade. Thousands of white men swarmed over their domain without giving offense that produced hostile retaliation. Surely such a performance is unprecedented in the annals of Indian relations, and it is a tribute to the self-confidence and good will of the natives.

The Settlers Remain

As the Indians expected, most of the miners did leave their reservation in due course, but conditions were never the same. A few remained, by native sufferance, such as ranchers and farmers. Others operated stage stations with the accompanying appurtenances. These people raised hay and livestock
and cut timber. In 1874, when a portion of the Nez Perces foregathered upon the Camas Meadows to dig the bulbs, they found the crop ruined by the farmers' pigs. In their wrath the Indians destroyed some fences, whereupon the settlers demanded military protection during the next root-digging season. Obviously the tensions were mounting between the semi-nomads and the white people of steady habits who resided within the bounds or close upon the peripheries of the Nez Perce reservations. By 1876, the coils of dynamic frontier civilization began squeezing the Nez Perces. Their turn to buckle under had arrived. It is strange that they had not read the signs more clearly.

Nez Perce Military Service

After all, they had observed the subjugation of several tribes. The Whitman Massacre produced a series of wars; the Cayuse War, 1847-50; the Rogue River War, 1850-56; and the Yakima War, 1855-59. Although these wars did not involve the Nez Perces directly, they had ties with some of them. Actually, Nez Perce scouts assisted the military in the Yakima War. Colonel George Wright mentioned them in dispatches as having rendered effective service as spies, guides, guards, and fighters. When the Colonel asked Lawyer what the chiefs would like as rewards for their people, he replied:

"Peace, plows, and schools." 7

In conclusion, it is evident that if ever a tribe of Indians was worthy of being fostered and protected in their attempt to improve side by side with the white man, it was the Nez Perce. Although anti-belligerent, they were as brave as Marshall Ney. They were well disposed, industrious, and tolerant. Many character certificates could be given, but one by Senator J. W. Nesmith (Oregon) is representative: "I have known the Nez Perce tribe since 1843. They were under my charge as Superintendent of Indian Affairs from June 1857 until July 1859. They are the finest specimens of the aboriginal race upon
this continent, and have been friendly to the whites from the time of Lewis and Clark. It took years of close contact with the white man to bring forth the darker elements in Nez Perce nature. Even then, the negative reaction was not general, nor was it as fierce and barbaric as many warriors of all races have exhibited.
Chapter 2

The Golden Age of Indian Relations

Footnotes


3. This was a logical choice, because Spalding was a Presbyterian. However, the law certainly voided the principle of religious liberty, Article I of the Amendments to the Constitution of the United States.


6. Years later, Yellow Wolf recognized this fact in saying, "The discovery of gold on our reservation brought thousands of white men. That was the beginning of our trouble." Yellow Wolf, op. cit., p. 43.


A proper understanding of the Indian problem encountered at mid-nineteenth century in the Pacific Northwest requires a review of American Indian policies from the colonial era forward. Every student is aware of the oft-repeated cycle governing white and Indian relations: A council was held and a treaty made; Indians ceded lands for presents and promised annuities; boundary lines were marked and declared inviolable. Peace lasted a few years, being undone by the encroachment of settlers who crossed the line to hunt, prospect, graze stock, and farm. These invasions brought protests, massacres (if Indian inspired), battles (white action), and ultimately victory to the troops. Then a new treaty was made and the cycle inevitably operated upon the next frontier.

These procedures have been called cynical, dishonorable, wicked, but these terms may not be absolutely true. For one thing, the settlers at any given time and place were quite sincere in respect to the terms. But the passion of Manifest Destiny was burning in the breasts of thousands pressing upon the frontiers. The Canadian boundary was threatened in 1812-1814; and a Spanish boundary (Florida) gave way under the pressure of military invasion and diplomacy in 1818 and 1819, respectively. The Mexican War, in turn, compelled that nation to yield a great domain (Mexican Cession) in 1848. A great nation was evolving and Indian claims to vast regions as tribal hunting grounds were naturally taken with a grain of salt by the frontiersmen. As tensions developed, leading statesmen analyzed the basic issue.

In 1802, John Quincy Adams posed the question arising in these circum-
stances:

The Indian right of possession itself stands, with regard to the greatest part of the country, upon a questionable foundation. Their cultivated fields; their constructed habitations; a space of ample sufficiency for their subsistence, and whatever they had annexed to themselves by personal labor, was undoubtedly by the law of nature theirs. But what is the right of a huntsman to the forest of a thousand miles over which he accidently ranged in quest of prey? Shall the liberal bounties of Providence to the race of man be monopolized by one of ten thousand for whom they were created? Shall the exuberant bosom of the common mother, amply adequate to the nourishment of millions, be claimed exclusively by a few hundreds of her offspring?\footnote{1}

Answering his own questions with a resounding NO, the learned statesman explained that heaven had not designed natural economy upon such untenable moral grounds as were postulated by the natives or the bleeding-heart romanticists who championed their cause. The basic morality of the Adams' attitude is defensible, but the administration of the policy has been full of errors.

A major mistake was made in the very outset, when white negotiators recognized Indian tribes as sovereign nations. Thus, agreements were called treaties, implying some degree of equality between signatories. In most cases this was a complete fiction, because tribes were so decentralized that one or more clans invariably rejected the action. Dignity there was, but stability and unity were not characteristics of Indian "nations." The lesson of independency came easy to the Indians, and they learned it well. Then something would happen concerning interpretation or application of the treaty, and the two parties would be found in disagreement. Finally, the government would be obliged to assume United States jurisdiction and enforce it unilaterally. Of course this was war, and the tribe was subdued. Hence, the constitutional \textit{modus operandi} was improperly conceived and it led to everlasting trouble.

Besides, the American Indian policy was changeable. It fluctuated between two extremes: one viewpoint regarded Indians as predatory wild animals,
entirely lacking any sense of moral responsibility. In 1865, Granville Stuart recorded an old timer's opinion of depravity in the Indian nature: "They are the most on sartainest varmints in all creation, and I reckon thar not mor'n half human, for I never seed a human arter you'd fed and treated him to the best fixin's in your lodge, just turn round and steal all your horses, or any other thing he could lay his hands on. . . ."²

Then there was romantic conception that visualized the Indian as an unspoiled child of nature, simple, magnanimous, and brave—a Noble Redman.

Others took a middle ground, admitting that Indians were barbarians, creatures of reckless habits and uncertain responses, but that it was incumbent upon civilized Christians to exercise great patience toward them. The "Quakers Policy" abhorred the frontiersman practice of taking life for life, horse for horse, and treachery for treachery. These different viewpoints not only produced confusion among the whites, but they also baffled the Indians.

No doubt Indian behavior seemed equally strange and provocative to frontiersmen. In general they regarded all Indians as an encumbrance upon the landscape and a barrier to progress. From every frontier came incessant resolutions, petitions, and recitations relating to the Indian menace. Different programs were administered by changing administrations. Sometimes the policy of pressing the Indian into the white man's mold was in the ascendancy.

Inducements were made to wean the individual away from the tribal clutch, divide lands in severalty, grant citizenship and coax the Indian to adopt the white man's ways. Confronted by great inertia, if not stubborn reluctance, the policy would then revert to the concept of reconstructing their community system upon the old pattern of tribal ownership. Tribal reaction to any given plan was never uniform and their ultimate dissatisfaction with its application was inevitable. And for this attitude they should be forgiven, because the typical Indian agent was not an estimable person; and the licensed Indian trader
was still worse. Both generally conformed to the "carpet bag" type of operator in both tenure and ethics. Actually, the idea of fleecing the Indian could be justified by high authority. In 1803, President Thomas Jefferson wrote the following to William Henry Harrison:

... To promote this disposition to exchange lands which they (Indians) have to spare and we want, for necessaries which we have to spare and they want, we shall be glad to see the good and influential among them in debt, because we observe that when these debts get beyond what the individuals can pay, they become willing to lop them off by a cession of lands.3

After experimenting with bi-racial proposals for four hundred and fifty years, a careful scholar of the subject reached this conclusion, "We still have the problem which faced our first settlers, namely, what shall be done with the Indians?"4

The foregoing account of the Indian problem was designed to condition the reader for what transpired along these lines in the Pacific Northwest. Reference has been made to the restlessness caused by the Whitman Massacre and the wars that trailed in its wake. During the course of these hostilities, Joel Palmer, Oregon Superintendent of Indian Affairs, inaugurated a series of conferences for the purpose of settling the Indians upon reservations. In 1853, Isaac I. Stevens became Governor of Washington Territory, and Superintendent of Indian Affairs. Stevens was a man of large views, coupled with energy and a desire for action. Hence, he devoted nearly all of his time during 1855 in arranging councils among the tribes occupying the Washington Territory. The conference for the Columbia Plateau tribes was scheduled for Walla Walla near mid-May of 1855.

The Walla Walla Council 1855

The council ground was situated on the right bank of Mill Creek, a tributary to the Walla Walla River. It was a beautiful plain, deeply carpeted by grass and flowers. On May 23, Governor Stevens and an entourage of about
one hundred aides and military guards established a camp and had everything
in order for the reception of the Indian delegations. The Nez Perce, some
2500 strong, arrived the next day. They posted an American flag in the middle
of their campground. Hal-hal-tlos-sot, or Lawyer, was head chief; he was their
Solon in both name and deeds. He perceived the trends of the time, trusted
the government and definitely oriented his followers toward peace and civiliza-

Then came the Cayuses, Yakimas, Umatillas, and Walla Wallas, respectively,
led by We-ah-te-na-tee-na-ny, Young Chief, Pu-pu-mox-mox, Yellow Serpent, and
Kam-i-ah-kan. Each tribe had a hierarchy of sub-chiefs, illustrated by the
Nez Perce Looking Glass (the elder), Spotted Eagle, Joseph (the elder), James,
Red Wolf, Timothy, and Eagle-from-the-Light.

When the tribes were all settled, more than five thousand Indians con-
stituted the host. Actually, the Stevens party was in jeopardy and a Cayuse
inspired plot was designed to exploit his precarious situation. At this
juncture, Chief Lawyer moved his lodge into the midst of the government camp,
thereby disclosing to his compatriots the Nez Perce posture in case of trouble.
This and other Nez Perce actions, including their conventional observance of
the Sabbath, were responsible for an entry in Stevens' diary, May 27: "... the Nez Perces have evidently profited much from the labor of Mr. Spalding... their whole deportment throughout the service was devout."

Ample time was taken in preliminary deliberations and the council was not
formally opened until May 29. For the next two weeks the government's case
for reservations was carefully unfolded by Joel Palmer, Governor Stevens,
and others. Each tribe received interpretations and their spokesmen responded
in a pro and con manner. There were to be three reservations---one on the
upper drainage of the Yakima River for the Yakimas, Klikitats, Palouses, and
kindred bands; the other, a tract of three million acres on the north side
of Snake River, embracing both the Clearwater and Salmon rivers on the east of Snake River; also the lower Grande Ronde, Wallowa and Imnaha valleys on the west of the Snake. A third reservation was established upon the headwaters of the Umatilla River in the Blue Mountains for the Umatillas, Cayuses, and Walla Wallas. These reservations were to belong to the Indians, and no white man could come upon them without their consent. An agent, with school teachers, mechanics, and farmers would take charge of each reservation. Instructions would be given, grist and saw mills built, annuities in clothing and tools would be vouchsafed for twenty years. At first the resources were to be used in common, but later lands would be granted in severalty, enough for each family. Besides, the Indians could fish, hunt, pasture and gather roots from vacant lands outside their reservations. Trade could be developed with the white people in surrounding areas, and civilization would be acquired by such means.

Each day the Indians listened in grave silence or debated energetically for a few hours, then they would fare forth to the Nez Perce camp and indulge in horse and foot races. The evenings were devoted to discussions in the different camps.

Debates in general session were presented in dignity and power by men of different tempers. Yellow Serpent exhibited distrust and sarcasm, and yet he hit the nail on the head in saying, "I think you intend to win our country, ... In one day the Americans become as numerous as the grass. ... Suppose you show me goods, shall I run up and take them? That is the way with all of us Indians as you know us. Goods and the earth are not equal. Goods are for using on the earth." A more friendly chief named Steachus understood what was at stake: "My friends, I wish to show you my heart. If your mother were in this country, gave you birth and suckled you, and while you were suckling, some person came and took away your mother and left you alone and sold your
mother, how would you then feel? This is our mother, -- this country, -- as if we drew our living from her...

Nez Perce massive unity and quiet confidence was a large factor in bringing all the tribes into line. Then an upset was threatened as Chief Looking Glass arrived with a hunting expedition from the buffalo country. Rushing into camp, he shouted, "My people, what have you done? While I am gone, you have sold my country. I have come home, and there is not left me a place to pitch my lodge. Go home to your lodges. I will talk with you."

The council was adjourned until the following day, when Looking Glass made many objections and demanded much more land. Whereupon Lawyer abruptly left the council. This act caused the various chiefs to reaffirm their willingness to sign the treaties. The Nez Perce repudiated the extreme position taken by Looking Glass and agreed to sustain Lawyer as their head chief. This course brought Looking Glass into line, and his signature followed Lawyer's and preceded Joseph's on the final treaty which bore the signatures of fifty-six chiefs. Eagle-from-the-Light and other Nez Perce chiefs were satisfied with their reservation of five thousand square miles, plus promises to spend $60,000 for initial improvements and $200,000 in the usual annuities. It was a good treaty and the prospect of peace and prosperity for some 3,600 souls was bright if its provisions could be held inviolate by all of the parties concerned.

Governor Stevens had conducted the negotiations in a democratic way, and as he prepared to journey across the mountains to make similar treaties with the Plains Indians, he discharged his military escort and enlisted a Nez Perce guard. Among the warriors chosen for this duty were Looking Glass and White Bird.

Meanwhile, Old Joseph returned to the Wallowa country and planted poles around that portion of the reservation in order that white men would not inadvertently trespass. He also drew a remarkable parchment map, sixteen by
eighteen inches, upon which the geography was delineated by natural history features. These actions disclosed his suspicion that the preservation of Indian rights required vigilance.

Old Joseph had been baptized by Spalding on November 17, 1839, and he remained faithful to the interests of the mission until it was abandoned eight years later. At that time he had an altercation with a rival chief at Lapwai, so he returned to the Wallowa Valley. One of the missionaries characterized this move as a return to Egypt. His sons, Joseph and Cllkokot, were seven and four respectively, and they had partaken of the mission influence up to that time. Henceforth, traditional tribal ways probably gained ascendancy. In any case, Old Joseph was more on the defensive in regards to white men and civilization. He taught his sons to raise horses and cattle, and eat the native things of the earth. Freedom to live the old ways might be preserved if they never trusted the white man or his red allies.

The love of the Wallowa Valley ran deep in their feelings. They called the place Kalmuenem, namely, a trailing vine that grew along the banks of the Wallowa River. Popularly, the name Wallowa means the valley of winding waters. It is a handsome, alpine-type valley, nestling at the base of the beautiful well-watered Blue Mountains. Guarded by these mountains on the south and west and the deep canyons of the Snake and Grande Ronde on the east and north, the Wallowa is a sequestered region. The Imnaha Valley angling away to the southeast toward the Snake was lower in elevation. Hence, it was an ancient wintering area. Here Joseph’s band of Nez Perce hoped to live their lives and seek happiness in their own way until further notice.

The Pressures Mount

The impact of miners upon the Nez Perce Reservation in the Clearwater area has been described in the preceding chapter. Hence, the foundation for specific grievances has been laid. These consisted of the following:
1) Tardy ratification of the 1855 treaty by the United States Senate. This was not accomplished until 1859. As a result, payments and annuities were not received until 1860. 2) By then gold had been discovered, and within a year more than 10,000 miners were roaming at large on the reservation. Under pressure from the chiefs, Superintendent of Indian Affairs E. R. Geary secured an agreement from the miners not to go south of the Clearwater River. However, they violated this agreement and the treaty at will, stole livestock, or blamed Indians for loss of their own.

Actually, such behavior was bound to occur once the miners were allowed on the reservation. Their aggressive tendencies could not be controlled by anything less than a firm, efficient, impartial system of government, and that was seldom available in the gold fields. Besides, the Indians were easy going, since a profitable commerce had developed. Many were becoming wealthy by exchanging horses, cattle, and food stuffs for gold. Still, tension existed from the outset, and on April 28, 1862, The Oregon Statesman printed a penetrating estimate of the situation as reported by William Purvine:

If open hostilities have not commenced with the Nez Perces, it is not because they have not been outraged to that degree when "forebearance ceases to be a virtue." In return for the continued friendship in time of want, and generous acts of hospitality always so readily extended towards the whites by these Indians, they now reap an abundant harvest of every species of villainy and insult.

The June 21, 1862 issue of The Washington Statesman contains an account of the death of three Indians at the hands of drunken miners. When the Nez Perce chiefs demanded justice their pleas fell upon deaf ears. One reaction from the white majority was wholly unjust. A Lewiston paper, The Golden Age, advised the settlers to help themselves to land regardless of treaty obligations: while a Boise paper made the sinister suggestion that blankets might be infected with smallpox and distributed where they would do the most good. Of course the level-headed citizens rejected such approaches to the problem; instead, they joined the Nez Perce agitation for a council to iron out the
The Treaty of 1863

Naturally the tension increased with the passing of time. Several restless chiefs demanded a council in 1861, but Lawyer was opposed and it was not held. The next year a permanent military garrison was established at Lapwai. This show of strength brought the various chiefs and their escorts to Lapwai for a council in November. However, the reservation officials were not ready to negotiate, so the meeting was postponed until mid-May of 1863. The chiefs left Lapwai in a surly mood in spite of the exertions of William Craig and Robert Newell to pacify them.\(^\text{10}\)

After a winter of nervousness, the chiefs and their delegations assembled at the appointed time and place. Superintendent Calvin H. Hale was in charge of the council. He was flanked by commissioners Charles Hutchings and S. D. Howe. Attendants and supporters included Robert Newell and William Craig, as well as the military officers on the post. When the council opened the Nez Perce insisted upon Perrin B. Whitman as interpreter. This demand delayed the proceedings for two weeks, as he was residing at considerable distance away.

The commissioners started the negotiations with the proposition of reducing the size of the 1855 reservation from 5,000 square miles to five or six hundred square miles along the south side of the South Fork of the Clearwater. No agreement being possible, the commissioners then agreed to double the proposed area and pay an indemnity of $75,000 in the form of material utilities.

At this juncture Lawyer, backed by the more sedentary Lower Christian Nez Perce headmen, proposed that the Upper Nez Perce chiefs should surrender their homelands; and that the government should indemnify the Nez Perce nation in the sum of $262,500 to facilitate the establishment of all concerned upon
the Lapwai reservation. All prior commitments under the Treaty of 1855 in
regards to benefits and annuities to prevail. The Upper Nez Perce denounced
this proposition as a swindle—"the thief treaty." Under such terms they
stood to lose four and a half million acres in return for certain costs of
moving and preparations for a confined life. They stressed the fact that
there were too many people and too much livestock to be so cribbed. But that
was part of the plan; they would be forced to reduce their herds and become
farmers.

Among the fifty-two signatures, all Christians except one, was Henry H.
Spalding's. This was in accord with the educational policy he was then
administering. The missionaries were all in favor of the plan, so on June 9,
1863, the treaty was signed. Old Joseph, White Bird, Looking Glass, Eagle-
from-the-Light, Too-hool-hool-zote, and all their associates rejected the
decision. There and then, the traditional unity of all Nez Perce people was
shattered. Each chief reverted to the more pristine status as an independent
leader in his own village. Thus the treaty of 1863, and its amendments of
1868, did more than reduce the limits of a reservation; it disrupted the
Nez Perce tribe. Hereafter they would be much more vulnerable to white
domination. Although sensing that separatism would render each band naked
before its enemies, Old Joseph tore a copy of the treaty to shreds, destroyed
his long-treasured New Testament, and departed for the Wallowa. These acts
marked his first deviation from the path of loyalty to the government and
devotion to the principles of Christianity. He regarded the treaty proceed-
ings as unjust and hypocritical. This time he really returned to Egypt.

Naturally the commissioners justified their course. It was in keeping
with the interests of the government and the church. Besides, it was also
the handiwork of Chief Lawyer, who was head chief for about half of the Nez
Perce. The commissioners held that the Indians were bound by majorities,
hence Old Joseph and the others should be required to come within the confines of the reduced reservation. In reference to Old Joseph, the case was open and shut. The fact that he signed the Treaty of 1855 implied a surrender of any specific rights to any particular portion of the whole reserve, such as the Wallowa Valley. He only retained an undivided interest in the reservation. There were merits in each viewpoint, but they were poles apart. Statesmanship would have found a middle ground, but no further search was made until tensions increased still more.

Thrown back upon their native powers the chiefs did what they could to consolidate their positions. Old Joseph was determined to hold the Wallowa country against all comers. He made this point clear to his sons Joseph and Ollokot. The land was sacred; it contained the bones of ancestors and provided life and strength to the living. Disillusioned in regard to Christianity, because the Nez Perce Christians and their white allies had repudiated him, Old Joseph and his people found solace in the teachings of the Dreamer cult. This was a cosmic faith that affirmed immortality for all life. The earth was created perfect and complete; therefore it should not be disturbed by man. A Sahaptian medicine man named Smohalla was the high apostle of this credence. Hear him: "My young men shall never work. Men who work can not dream, and wisdom comes to us in dreams. . . . You ask me to plough the ground. Shall I take a knife and tear my mother's bosom? You ask me to dig for stone. Shall I dig under skin for her bones? You ask me to cut the grass and make hay and sell it and be rich like white men. But dare I cut off my mother's hair?"

Given to trances, Smohalla would awaken and utter pronouncements in accord with Nez Perce traditions and dispositions. Bereft of their Christian moorings, the isolated non-treaty Indians responded to this siren song. As might be expected, the distressed Nez Perce believed that a faithful adherence
to this doctrine would open a way for deliverance from their oppressors. For this partial apostasy they were roundly condemned by the Lapwai Nez Perce and their white associates.

When Old Joseph died in 1871, he could be sure that his sons would be faithful to the promise given him—never to sell the Wallowa. The old chief's stern injunction would forever ring in Joseph's ears: "My son, you are now the chief... always remember that your father never sold his country. You must stop your ears whenever you are asked to sign a treaty selling your home. A few more years and white men will be all around you. They have their eyes on this land. My son, never forget my dying words. This country holds your father's body. Never sell the bones of your father and mother." 12

Joseph disclosed the impact of his father's teachings in two sentences. "I buried him in that beautiful valley of the winding waters. I love that land more than all the rest of the world." 13 Here was simple native eloquence equal to Walter Scott's "Breathes there a man with soul so dead, who never to himself hath said, 'This is mine own, my native land...?'" Or to Rudyard Kipling's "God gave all men all earth to love. But since man's heart is small, ordains for each one spot shall prove beloved over all."

Whenever the idea of giving up the Wallowa was proposed the Nez Perce mind swirled with clouds, constellations, mountains, prairies, lakes, rivers, forests, meadows, and all their denizens. He envisioned horse racing, camas digging, berry picking, and camp fires. His ears hummed with the sounds of the wind in the forest and the ripple of waters along the Wallowa.

This intense, all-pervading, never-to-be-lessened affection for their ancestral homeland is not easily condemned. Thenceforth, Joseph was a dedicated man; he had registered an oath in heaven to preserve the Wallowa for his father's people, and his soul gave him the answer to that remorseless question: "How can man die better than facing fearful odds for the ashes of his fathers and the temples of his gods?"
Although only thirty-one, the young chief was not burning for military action. By nature he was more diplomat than warrior; the predominant element in his character and destiny was that of guardian of his people. He would reason with his adversaries from a position of justice and strength. Concerning the Wallowa issue, he employed the following argument:

If we ever owned the land we own it still, for we never sold it. In the treaty councils the commissioners have claimed that our country has been sold to the Government. Suppose a white man should come to me and say, "Joseph, I like your horses, and I want to buy them." I say to him, "No, my horses suit me, I will not sell them." Then he goes to my neighbor, and says to him: "Joseph has some good horses I want to buy them, but he refuses to sell." My neighbor answers, "Pay me the money, and I will sell you Joseph's horses." The white man returns to me and says, "Joseph, I have bought your horses, and you must let me have them." If we sold our lands to the Government this is the way they were bought.

It was a Lincolnesque defense and he never compromised his position.

More Pressures Mount Against Nontreaty Clans

In the meantime racial tensions increased, because the settlers lost patience with the recalcitrant Indians. They wanted their lands, and in the circumstances trouble broke out over almost anything. One historian said most quarrels resulted from stock, women, and liquor, singly or in combination. Add to that covetousness for land and the prospect for friction was compounded.

Since gold was not found in the Wallowa, Joseph's country was bypassed by the miners. Twin guardians in the form of deep canyons and high mountains isolated the area from farmers. But by 1871, white stockmen were poised to grasp the Wallowa meadows. Responsive to this pressure, Oregon officials, such as Governor Leonard A. Grover, and newspapers began agitating the removal of an Indian barrier to progress. Encouraged by this propaganda, bold cattle-men began drifting their herds into the valley. Joseph lodged a protest with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, whereupon T. B. Odeneal, Indian Superintendent of Oregon, and Indian Agent John B. Monteith of Lapwai were appointed to investigate. They held a meeting with the stockmen and Indians in Wallowa
in August, 1872.

Predisposed to recommend the removal of the Nez Perce, these men discovered that the land was not particularly arable, due to high elevation. Late spring and early fall frosts precluded the evolution of a fruited plain under any auspices. Hence, the committee recommended that the upper Wallowa Valley, lake, and adjacent mountains be set aside permanently as an integral hunting reserve for the whole Nez Perce tribe. The report advised that white settlers should be compensated for improvements and removed at government expense. This proposal was in the nature of a compromise. Still, it was real and reasonable in the circumstances. Therefore, the Indian Bureau approved the report and forwarded it to Washington, D. C.

Acting quite promptly, an executive order was signed by President Ulysses S. Grant on June 16, 1873. It reserved a tract of 1,425 square miles, but unfortunately the boundaries of the reserve granted did not conform with those recommended by the committee or claimed by Joseph. All parties involved were dissatisfied with the new reservation. After making every allowance for the lack of accurate maps, the fact remains that the Indian Bureau was responsible for an egregious blunder.

Agent Monteith did his level best to salvage the reserve, but it was not enough. The new boundaries relegated the Nez Perce to a small and less productive part of their country, while confirming the settlers' right to occupy the bottom lands on the Wallowa River. Joseph requested the privilege of taking his case to Washington, but Monteith arbitrarily denied this reasonable request.

Meantime, in June, 1875, the Indian Bureau had the executive order rescinded, thereby restoring the issue to status quo; that is, the Wallowa was again opened to homesteading in spite of the Nez Perce claims. Had Joseph been allowed to present the matter at national headquarters at that time, it is
likely that the Nez Perce would be dwelling in part of the Wallowa today. In that case, the present residents might convincingly capture the traditions and romance for their annual celebration of "Chief Joseph Days." As it is, the attempt to simulate appreciation for the Nez Perce in pageantry rings hollow to all who know the facts.

By rejecting the executive order of 1873, the Nez Perces were the victims of an impasse. Accordingly, under these status quo relations the old homesteaders stood pat and new ones pressed in. Continuing tension in the Wallowa required the presence of military troops to maintain a truce. This provided a market for the settlers' hay, but no advantages for the Indians were visible. After the commission rendered its verdict, the Nez Perces were on the defensive. Any awkward move would be reported to Monteith. The situation was untenable, especially should an incident occur. This happened in the spring of 1877, when two settlers named McNeill and Findley entered a Nez Perce hunting camp and accused one Wilhautyah of stealing their horses. The Indian denied the charge, and when grabbed by McNeill effectively defended himself. For so doing he was shot by Findley. Later the men found their horses, but Monteith failed to redress the Nez Perce grievance.

In September, 1876, tension mounted to such a degree that Joseph mobilized his people, occupied a strategic position on a high bluff, and challenged the aggressors to settle the issue. A forced march of eighty-eight miles in twenty-five hours brought Lieutenant Albert Gallatin Eorse and company to the valley in time to prevent a showdown. Lieutenant Eorse was impressed by the sportsmanship, confidence, and disposition of the Nez Perces. He reported that "Joseph could have fallen upon the settlers in detail, killing them and destroying their property... An enemy could not approach him without being under his fire for the distance of more than a half-mile." The significance of Joseph's tribal guardianship was to be appreciated nine months later.
Although a conflict was averted, the impasse persisted and, because of the imminent danger of hostilities, action was taken in Washington. On October 3, 1876, Zachary Chandler, Secretary of the Interior, appointed a commission to visit the Nez Perces and adjust the difficulties existing between them and the settlers. The members of this committee were D. H. Jerome of Michigan, A. C. Barstow of Rhode Island, William Stickney of Washington, D. C. (the title Esquire followed their names), and the trio was characterized by Mrs. John B. Monteith as "... excellent men... all kings of finance, but with not a speck of Indian sense, experience, or knowledge." The other commissioners were General Oliver O. Howard and Major H. Clay Wood, both well acquainted with the problem. In fact, each was on record in favor of the Nez Perce claim to Wallowa. In the spring of 1876, Major Wood wrote a report, based upon a careful study of the issue, that contained this conclusion: "The non-treaty Nez Perces cannot in law be regarded as bound by the treaty of 1863, and in as far as it attempts to deprive them of the right to occupancy of any land, its provisions are null and void. The Nez Perces, undoubtedly, were at liberty to renounce the treaty of 1855, the government having violated the treaty obligations." General Howard had made it clear that the rescinding of the presidential order of 1873 had been unfair to the Nez Perces. In his report of 1875 he wrote, "I think it is a great mistake to take from Joseph and his band of Nez Perces Indians that valley... and possibly Congress can be induced to let these really peaceable Indians have this poor valley for their own." By mid-November the non-treaty chiefs were at Lapwai to participate in the proceedings. It was soon apparent that the purpose of the council was to bring all non-treaty Indians upon the Lapwai Reservation, lock, stock, and barrel. They were asked to surrender a million acres of land for allotments upon vacant lands in the Lapwai Reservations.
desirable and there were only sixty such of twenty acres each. The chiefs were courteous, dignified, and good natured, but the answer was no. There were too many Indians and too much livestock to be crowded along the Clearwater reserve. As the deliberations progressed, the commissioners came increasingly under the influence of Agent Monteith. He convinced them of the desirability of making dirt farmers and Christians out of the non-treaty hunters and stockmen. Separating them from their livestock, roaming ways, and general independence would be best for all concerned. According to Monteith, the non-treaty Indians ridiculed the steady habits of the reservation folk, and extolled the merits of their more carefree lives.

The commissioners' report contained four recommendations:

1) The Dreamer leaders be brought to the agency forthwith, and their teachings suppressed, upon pain of being removed to the Indian Territory (Oklahoma).

2) The Nez Perce should all be settled upon the reservation. Meantime, military occupancy of the Wallowa was proposed to prevent trouble between the whites and Nez Perce.

3) Unless they should settle quietly within a reasonable time in the judgment of the department, they should then be placed by force upon the Nez Perce Reservation.

4) If these Indians overrun land belonging to the whites, and commit depredations upon their property, disturb the peace by threats or otherwise, or commit any overt act of hostility, the employment of sufficient military force should bring them into submission and to place them upon the Nez Perce Reservation.

The Indian agent at Lapwai should be fully instructed to carry into execution these suggestions, relying at all times on the department commander when necessary.19

In such cavalier manner the commissioners arbitrarily vested the power
to determine the destiny of several thousand souls in the hands of an Indian
agent who had lost the confidence of the non-treaty people. Actually, by
this time the Lapwai Nez Perces were dubious about receiving the non-treaties
among them. They agreed that the reservation would be too crowded.

The Year of Decision

Since the commission had specified a reasonable time, it was assumed that
1877 would be the year of decision. And so it was. Early in January the
Department of Interior issued instructions to effect the removals. General
Howard was directed by General William T. Sherman to occupy the Wallowa,
which had been partially done for three years. Before Howard moved from
Walla Walla he received a request from Joseph for an interview at Walla Walla.
This was granted, and on April 19, Joseph's brother Ollokot and others met
the general. Ollokot, speaking for Joseph, requested another general meeting
at Lapwai in May. Howard agreed to meet all of the non-treaty chiefs in
twelve days, and the Nez Perce delegates went away feeling good.

The final council was convened at Lapwai on May 3, with General Howard
in charge. Others present included Monteith, Whitman, Chiefs Joseph, Ollokot,
White Bird, Toohoolhoolzote, Looking Glass, Hohtalekin, Hush-hush-cute, and
lesser leaders belonging to each band. Each chief came in an attitude of
leisure, answering every salutation in kind and exhibiting good will. They
wanted a repetition of the November hearing, because they felt that their case
had not been properly understood by the commissioners at that council.

But this time Howard had come as a general and not as a commissioner.
Although, in allowing the council to convene, he had obviously granted an
opportunity for the presentation of grievances. Joseph seized every occasion
to present his problem, namely, there were too many people to live in one
place; an Indian should not be penned up on a small spot of earth; his claim
to Wallowa was incontestable. Being a fair, friendly, and eloquent man,
everyone agreed that "the serious and feeling manner in which he uttered these
sentiments was impressive." However, the time for consideration had passed. Hence, a chief of another temper tried a different tack. A medicine man named Toohoolhoolzote challenged Howard's right to enforce the order of removal, or interfere in any way with his clan's way of life. He asked provocative questions about the author of creation, origin of human species, and the right of one to coerce another. Howard described him as a cross-grained old growler and blamed the chiefs for allowing him to speak. Howard's version of a part of the discussion follows:

The agent says very pleasantly: "The law is, you must come to the reservation; the law is made in Washington. We don't make it."

To other similar remarks the old Dreamer replied fiercely: "We never have made any trade. Part of the Indians gave up their land. I never did. The earth is part of my body, and I never gave up the earth."

I replied: "You know very well that the government has set apart a reservation, and that the Indians must go upon it. If an Indian becomes a citizen, like old Timothy of Alpowa, he can have land like any other citizen outside, but he has to leave his tribe, and take land precisely as a white man does. The government has set apart this large reservation for you and your children, that you may live in peace, and prosper."

The rough old fellow, in his most provoking tone, said something in a short sentence, looking fiercely at me.

The interpreter quickly says: "He demands, 'What person pretends to divide the land, and put me on it?'

In the most decided voice I said: "I am the man. I stand here for the President, and there is no spirit good or bad that will hinder me. My orders are plain, and will be executed. I hoped that the Indians had good sense enough to make me their friend, and not their enemy." The altercation mounted, and Howard had the old chief placed in the guard house. In justification he stated: "My conduct was summary, it is true, but I knew that it was hopeless to get the Indians to agree to anything so long as they could keep this old Dreamer on the lead and defy the agents of the government. . . ." The Nez Perce historians had their own interpretation of the incident. Yellow Wolf affirms that Toohoolhoolzote said, "You have brought a rifle to the peace council. If you mean but thirty suns for gathering our stock, yes. We will have to fight."
Still, he was only speaking for himself. None of the chiefs intended to fight. All were in agreement with Joseph's analogy, "We were like deer. They were like grizzly bears. . . If I should fight the whites I would lose all. No man in the world would take all his property and burn it in a fire. So it is with me." They were offended by Howard's haughty tone and the thirty day ultimatum. Actually, several months were needed for the task Howard assigned to them. However, Monteith argued that, "If he (Joseph) is allowed to have his own way at this time, it will only make him more stubborn in the future." Howard was governed by this reasoning, and yet he must have realized a disciplinary course in the circumstances was pregnant with danger.

An Agreement is Reached

Of course the chiefs requested the release of Toohoolhoolzote, and it was granted. They also agreed to examine the vacant lands on the reservation. Howard led the delegation over the areas available, and a plan of distribution was evolved: Joseph would locate his band on the upper Clearwater. White Bird would go on the Clearwater above Kamiah. Hush-hush-cute would locate on the Clearwater just above the agency. Looking Glass would return to his place between the forks of the Clearwater. Toohoolhoolzote missed the tour and he was left to sulk a while. However, he was closely associated with White Bird's band.

After the excursion, the chiefs met for a final interview at the agency on May 14. Meantime Captain Trimble's company of First Cavalry had arrived at Lapwai and reports of the approach of Whipple's and Winters' companies gave Nez Perce acceptance a sense of urgency. Hence, an agreement was reached. It was entered in good faith, but the element of haste made it quite unpalatable. However, their word had been given, and since every chief except Toohoolhoolzote was opposed to war, they returned to their ancestral homelands to prepare to depart therefrom.
Chapter 3

Indian Treaties and Controversies

Footnotes


6. Ibid., p. 46.

7. Ibid., p. 50.

8. Ibid., p. 54.


10. These were both squaw men as well as agency officials.


13. Ibid.

14. Ibid., p. 16.


Footnotes - Chapter 3


22. *Ibid*.

23. James Reuben, *Lewiston Morning Tribune*, March 24, 1877. This item was reprinted in the *Lewiston Morning Tribune*, March 27, 1927.


25. General Howard relates the case of Chief Thomas, who promised to move his clan of fifty on to the Umatilla Reservation by the first of September, and states, "He kept the promise in November." *Nez Perce Joseph*, p. 83. But he came! Chief Joseph said, "I blame General Howard for not giving my people time to get their stock away from Wallowa... Why are you in such a hurry?... Our stock is scattered, and Snake River is very high.... We want time to gather our stock and gather our supplies for the winter." *Chief Joseph's Own Story*, pp. 19, 21.
Chapter 4

ON THE WAR PATH

In the foregoing chapters the general history and essential background of the Nez Perce people has been delineated. The stage has been set for a consideration of the specific causes that produced the imbroglio of 1877. Every war has its major and minor causes. As explained, the chief cause of the Nez Perce War arose from the friction inherent in the quite sudden mixing of two races possessing different cultures. Then, there was the inevitable violation of treaties by miners and others, with government officials supporting the latter. This policy forced the non-treaty Nez Perce into a position which they felt was neither justified by law or morals. They supposed that their record warranted a different course toward them. As noted, they had been uniformly friendly and cooperative; indeed, it has been claimed that they had shed no Caucasian blood before June, 1877. While this claim may not be absolutely true, it is certain that no offense had been committed by a tribe, or even a clan. Considering the tensions that resulted from the invasion of their domain, it is fair to say that their self-restraint and general record was commendable. Conversely, it should be remembered that miners were well-armed, resolute, desperate men. Indeed, many were veterans from other frontiers and the Civil War. Frontiersmen were quite determined to have their own way, and there was no law against killing an Indian.

The Nez Perce Round-up

Upon the adjournment of the Lapwai sessions in mid-May, the non-treaty Indians returned to their respective "reservations" to gather their livestock, pull ancestral stakes, and move to the Lapwai Reservation. One can only
imagine their feelings as they moved over their domains in unaccustomed haste. Their search for livestock took them upon the higher parks of the Wallowas. Their more-than-half-wild animals, long associated with an open range, were extremely elusive, and hundreds escaped the round-up net. As the Nez Perces thrashed about the range they observed the curious snow brands upon familiar side hills. Blossoms of choke, elder, and huckleberries scented the lower ravines and the valley proper was carpeted with grass and flowers. Their nostalgia was intensified as they passed seasonal camp grounds and the graves of the departed ones.

Limited to what pack animals and travois could carry required abandonment of much household and ranch-hand equipment, along with all permanent improvements. How the chiefs induced their respective tribesmen to yield to these matters can only be surmised. Remember that the right of each individual to pursue his own course was inviolable. The chiefs could not coerce a person, and yet the clansmen went along with the moving. Upon reaching Snake River, a watery ordeal confronted them. The mighty Snake was at flood-tide, meaning rods deep and two hundred yards wide. The Salmon River was smaller, less treacherous, but still formidable. It would be possible to give a detailed description of the crossings. Suffice to say, skins were used in the construction of tight rafts which, when loaded, four horsemen towed across the raging waters. In that way the helpless people and much duffle were ferried over. Able bodied men and women fended for themselves and no lives were lost. The behavior of the range horses was proof of this formidable undertaking; they were literally forced into the stream, but hundreds stampeded back to the old ranges and were never recovered by the Indians.

The Chiefs Make A Fatal Pause

In early June the various clans had crossed their rivers-of-no-return
and made rendezvous upon an ancient spot called Tepahlewam at the head of Rocky Canyon near Tolo Lake. Here the people basked in the sun, curried and adorned their favorite horses, and gaily paraded them about the encampment. At night there were spirited discussions by the elders, and recreational dancing for the youth. Preparations for the final move were also being made. For example, Joseph and Olleokot were on the opposite side of Salmon River butchering cattle, while women were gathering and drying konse. The wife of one Haymoon Moxmox, meaning Yellow Grizzly Bear, had her supply on a canvas when a mishap occurred. A procession of parading horsemen came by, and the last in line, double-ridden by two young men, got out of hand and stepped on the bulbs. For this they were rebuked by her liege lord in grizzly bear fashion: "See what you do! Playing brave, you ride over my woman's hard-worked food! If you so brave, why you not go kill the white man who killed your father, Eagle Robe?" This barbed taunt struck Wahlitits to the core. Forgetting his promise to his dying father not to avenge his death, he answered Grizzly Bear's sarcasm so, "You will be sorry for your words."

Grizzly Bear had goaded a superb runner, swimmer, and horseman. Wahlitits possessed indomitable courage and skill. In fact, he was an idol to many Nez Perce youth.

After brooding over the insult and reflecting upon his grievances, Wahlitits hearkened to dark counsel and decided to give his passions reign. At dawn the next day, June 13, he and his cousins, Sarpais Ilppilp and Swan Necklace, left the camp. The latter youth was practically kidnapped, since he did not know the purpose of the mission. In fact, it was intended that he should be the horse-holder. Wahlitits and Sarpais went raiding upon their own responsibility, as by Nez Perce custom they had a right to do. Their destination was the scene of Eagle Robe's murder on Salmon River; their intended victim one Larry Ott, the murderer. "But that worthy, taking alarm,
had fled to the Florence mines where he later was seen garbed as a Chinaman and panning gold with them. Balking thus of their prey, they determined to pay their respects to Richard Devine. This settler's name was not in accord with his nature, a part of which was dedicated to implacable hatred of Indians. He had wantonly killed a cripple named DaKoopen, and this deed rankled many Nez Perce spirits. The trio surprised him in his house and shot him. They appropriated his rifle, ammunition, and a fine horse. On the morning of June 14, they slew another Indian hater named Henry Elfers. Their next victims were Robert Bland and Henry Beckrage. Samuel Benedict, who had slain a drunken Indian in 1875, was wounded. Other ranches and a store were terrorized before the grudge-sated trio returned toward camp. Actually, only Swan Necklace entered the camp and informed the people of the crimes. The two hotspurs held aloof at a point called Round Willows to avoid casting guilt upon the tribe as a whole. They reasoned that if recruits joined them at a distance, that was another matter.

As noted, the elders had been holding informal councils since the Tepahlewan campsite was occupied on June 3. In fact, a session was in progress when Swan Necklace returned from the Wahltits-Sarpeis raid on the night of June 14. The council lacked representation, since the best warriors were not there and Joseph and Ollekot were still absent. They were discussing the usual question, should they fight or not fight? Old Rainbow advised against war: "A small bunch of Indians yourselves, you are hardly strong enough to put up a war against the whites. You cannot make any kind of fight with only rifles against so many whites with big guns. Wait until summer comes... Then we shall have a big council of all the tribes. We shall then find out what to do."*4

At this juncture someone shouted, "You poor people are holding council for nothing. Three young men have come... bringing horses belonging to a
white settler they killed yesterday sun. It will have to be war.5

Mid-June Madness

Reactions were various; Chief White Bird kept his own counsel; but he was against any demonstration in their behalf. However, it is said that Big Dawn and Two Moons were elated, and rode through the camp appealing for able-bodied supporters to rally round the avengers. Their appeals were not in vain. On the morning of June 16, sixteen young men and Yellow Bull, the father of Sarpsis, joined the two avengers at Round Willows. These men were all burning for action, and a second foray was launched. Any restraints they may have had evaporated after they secured a barrel of whisky at Benedict's Store-Saloon on lower White Bird Creek. The details of another dozen atrocities committed during the next two days are horrible. Names of those murdered only need to be mentioned here: Harry Mason, for blacksnake whipping two unarmed Indians; Samuel Benedict (wounded on the 14th), for killing an Indian, wounding two more, cheating, and selling whisky to Indians; no reasons are recorded for the killing of August Bacon. J. J. Manuel was wounded and his wife probably died in their home which was set afire. Others known to have died as a result of this raid were James Baker, William Osborne, French Frank, and P. Price.

Estimates vary concerning the number of victims who fell before the raiders. General Howard lists fourteen, while James W. Poe makes the count fifteen, and Arthur Chapman says there were twenty-two. McWhorter has stressed the point that the carnage wrought should be balanced against twenty-four years of murdering and thieving by gold seekers and cattlemen.

It was a crimson trail and no extenuation can be offered, except over the special frenzy introduced by whisky. They were primitive expeditions and the angry men lost much discrimination by reason of heavy drinking. The avengers had gone forth remembering thirty Nez Perce murders committed by
white men, as recorded by tribal historians. Their minds befuddled by alcohol suggested a life for a life, and unfortunately, there was only limited relationship between what they attempted in one fell swoop and personal justice. Sober reflection would have persuaded them that they were taking a course which would array all men against them and might bring inevitable ruin to the entire tribe.

Surely the willful raiders deserve to be censured, but they should also be understood. They were disconsolate, homeless, and desperate. From the beginning of time, angry, distraught men have attempted to solve complex problems by recourse to summary acts. It was done in Boston, Texas, Kansas, Missouri, Illinois, Harper's Ferry, and Charleston Harbor. These Nez Perce youths were not degenerates; men of their fire are called patriots when their causes succeed. The point is, when a combination of pressures and influences bring the status of a liberty-loving people into jeopardy, an explosive situation evolves. In this circumstance, motivations toward escape arise in human beings, be they savage, high barbarian, or civilized.

The Tribesmen Waver

As noted, neither of the White Bird Canyon raids stemmed from action taken in the Tepahlewam camp. They were not inspired by tribal councils, but rather the acts of free lancers. All but one were members of White Bird's band, and they sought revenge upon settlers who had injured them. After the second raid the avengers entered White Bird's camp and made this type of presentation: "General Howard spoke of the rifle in a peace council. He made a prisoner of our speaker, Chief Toohoelholste. We will stir up a fight for him."

General Howard states that horses and other trophies of the raids were displayed and an impression was created that there was plenty of booty for everyone if courage and effort were put forth.
Chief Joseph's Dilemma

Remember that when the avenging parties were at work, Joseph and Ollokot were beyond Salmon River butchering beef. Later, when the camp was in turmoil over the bad news, Joseph was preoccupied by the birth of a child in his family. Since his wife was separated from the main camp, the full impact of events bypassed him.

When he learned what had happened, the tribesmen were in motion. Some headed for the Clearwater, their erstwhile objective. Hasty consultations among the chiefs brought agreement to assemble at a camp called Sapacheap (also Lahmotta), situated at the bottom of White Bird Canyon. This place offered security from surprise attack. By this time, reports of atrocities had spread over the countryside. Several well-meaning white friends were bold enough to enter the Tepahlewam camp. J. M. Crooks was one of them, and after assessing the temper of the Indians he felt fortunate in escaping, and his report added tempo to the alarm. On the evening of June 14, a Mount Idaho settler named Lew Day volunteered to ride to Lapwai for military aid. He warned all homesteaders enroute to seek protection in the settlements. In so doing some of them encountered belligerent Indians. Four of them were killed, including Day, and several were wounded.

After June 14, the non-treaty Nez Perces were destined to have no rest for many moons. Joseph's clan, slower to respond to the excitement, was fired upon by fleeting visitors that night. The next morning, Joseph decided to join the others. Had he been like Chief Lawyer, he would have hastened to Lapwai and placed the blame on a score of heads and one tribe, and pled for a military escort to his assigned place on the reservation. Instead, he led his people to White Bird Creek and waited with the other clans. The initiative now rested in other hands. Would General Howard send an embassy or troops? Not knowing, the chiefs were in a welter of indecision; none
wanted war.

In 1879, Joseph described his own dilemma:

I would have given my own life if I could have undone the killing of white men by my people. I blame my young men and I blame the white men. . . . My friends among the white men have blamed me for the war. I am not to blame. When my young men began the killing my heart was hurt. Although I did not justify them, I remembered all the insults I had endured, and my blood was on fire. Still I would have taken my people to the buffalo country without fighting, if possible.

I could see no other way to avoid war. We moved over to White Bird Creek, sixteen miles away, and there encamped, intending to collect our stock before leaving; but the soldiers attacked us and the first battle was fought.?

Only an embassy from Lapwai could have prevented war. In Howard's view, Joseph, by his posture and past attitude of independence, had become the principal antagonist. Still, if he had courted war, it would have taken place in the Wallowas, not at White Bird. This was the wrong place, the victims were not known to him, the despoilers of his band were triumphant in Wallowa Valley. The whole project was in conflict with his agreement and judgment. The situation only met two of three essential tests for a revolt. Their grievances were heavy indeed, and they had exhausted all means for an equitable settlement; they had no friends in court, but the chance of successful resistance against the United States was nil. These things Joseph understood; however, his band was now an integral part of the Nez Perce host. Hence, he and the other chiefs were caught in the coils of an Indian uprising. They seemed no more able to disassociate themselves from this affair than Robert E. Lee and his compatriots could repudiate the secession of their respective states.

Of course there is a point of view that puts a different interpretation upon the behavior of the chiefs. A local historian affirms that all of the promises made at Lapwai were insincere and that every subsequent move was "... marked by treason, treachery, and murder." This interpretation rules out the fact that events transpire in the affairs of all societies that are
not on schedule. It also casts the chiefs in the role of foolish men.

The camp at the base of White Bird Canyon was well chosen for defense. Backed by the Salmon River, it was flanked by ample ridges and ravines. Buttes served as outposts on higher elevations. The physical conformation made an admirable disposition of limited manpower possible. The environment mutely stated "... if they mean to have a war, let it begin here." A trap had been set for invaders.

The Military Takes the Field

Arriving at Lapwai on June 14, General Howard awaited reports of the arrival of the non-treaty Indians at their respective stations on the reservation. Instead, at 4:30 p.m. he received news from reliable Nez Perce and white sources of the first outrages committed upon White Bird settlers. As reports multiplied and rumors spread, Howard dismissed all thought of an embassy. By 8:00 p.m. he had mounted two companies and started them toward White Bird Canyon. The forces consisted of Companies F and H, First Cavalry, comprising ninety-nine men, under command of Captain David Perry. Howard described him as an elegantly appearing soldier, competent and confident. Other officers included Captain Joel G. Trimble and lieutenants Edward R. Theller and W. R. Parnell, "... four resolute young (married) men."

When the ninety troopers wheeled into formation, General Howard saluted Captain Perry and said: "Good-bye, Colonel (brevet). You must not get whipped." "There is no danger of that, Sir."9 ... and so it seemed.

Perry's Long Hard March

After slushing through muddy trails all night, the command paused for breakfast at Cottonwood. By evening the command reached Grangeville, where they planned to rest, having traveled seventy miles in twenty-four hours. But the aroused citizenry, impatient to see the Indians punished, demanded
sustained effort. Perry unwisely succumbed to their pressure, expecting heavy volunteer support. When the march resumed at 9:00 p.m., only eleven volunteers were on hand.

Shortly after midnight, the command reached the plateau ridge that overlooked White Bird Creek.\(^{10}\) Here the men rested until the dawn of June 17 would facilitate their descent upon the hidden camp 3000 feet below. Perfect quiet prevailed, but the lighting of a pipe produced a coyote cry which reverberated among the hills. Thereby the Nez Perces were alerted. Thereafter, black piercing eyes, aided by a pair of field glasses, searched the ravines for a glimpse of the invaders.

Before 3:00 a.m., the troops were in motion and within the hour, as they emerged from the draw that fanned out toward the bottom of the canyon, a group of six Indians was observed advancing under a white flag. The military record is ominously silent about this gesture; whereas, all Nez Perce historians stress the fact, and Yellow Wolf named Wettiwetti (known to the whites as John Boyd) as leader of the truce team. He also remembered that Wettiwetti shouted: "What do you people want?"\(^{11}\)
Chapter 4
On the War Path

Footnotes

1. The Nez Perce claim that Wallowa settlers took advantage of the opportunities incident to this migration to stampede horses and steal them.

2. Hear Me, My Chiefs, p. 190.

3. Ibid., p. 191.


5. Ibid.

6. Yellow Wolf, p. 44, 45.

7. Ibid., p. 46.

8. Chief Joseph's Own Story, p. 22. At this time, 1879, Joseph thought of himself as guardian of all non-treaty Nez Perces; hence, he referred to members of White Bird's band as "my young men."


10. Howard, O. O., Nez Perce Joseph, p. 99. At this place Mrs. Samuel Benedict, whose husband had been killed by the avengers, with a daughter of six and a babe in arms, emerged from hiding. Two volunteers escorted them to Mount Idaho.

Chapter 5

THE BATTLE OF WHITE BIRD CANYON

When Captain David Perry's column debouched from the ravine upon a benchland, he deployed his troops. Trimble directed the right flank while Theller's force constituted the skirmish line, with the citizens forming on the left. Captain Perry moved forward with an advance patrol, including Scout Arthur Chapman and Trumpeter John Jones. When this unit was hailed by the Indian truce party there was a moment of surprise. Then Chapman fired two shots. Wettiwetti and company backed away unhurt; waiting Nez Perce marksmen returned the fire and Trumpeter Jones was killed by a lucky shot from the first volley.

Nez Perce warriors, generally estimated at about seventy, were distributed along the ridges and buttes that protected the camp. Hence, in the outset they fired from concealed positions. Their marksmanship proved deadly accurate. Within minutes a dozen soldiers were knocked out of their saddles. Frightened, riderless horses caused others to lose control of their plunging mounts. Meantime, the warriors advanced on foot and horseback as conditions warranted. Their advantages became increasingly apparent as pressure was applied to the confused troops. The death of the second trumpeter disrupted communication of orders and both of Perry's flanks were soon turned.

General Howard has described the break-up: "Two of the citizens at the butte were wounded; then their companions gave way and began to fly. Some of the cavalrmen, too, had already taken the trail to the rear at a run. Companies were badly broken. Colonel (brevet) Perry endeavored to close all together for mutual protection. . . . Retreat was ordered, and was commenced in pretty good shape."
The Nez Perce marksmen, exulting in triumph, threaded bobbing courses along the ridges and among the rocks. Careful of their own lives, they shot to kill the enemy.

Far up the ravine, brave Lieutenant Theller and eighteen men were slain in one place; Theller's watch stopped at 9:00 a.m. Captain Perry and Lieutenant Parnell lived to tell what happened. Perry's descriptions of the events are unequivocal: "The men on the left, seeing the citizens in full retreat and the Indians occupying their places, and the right falling back in obedience to orders, were seized with a panic that was uncontrollable, and then the whole right of the line, seeing the mad rush for horses on the left, also gave way and the panic became general."²

Perry made tremendous efforts to reform his troops as they scrambled up the ravines, but organized fighting was impossible. At times a given squad would halt and fight until they were flanked out of position. In such fashion the plateau was finally reached, but the Nez Perces persisted. At the end of the day, and of the retreat, Perry wrote this statement: "It was only by the most strenuous efforts of Colonel (brevet) Parnell and myself in organizing a party of twenty-two men that a single officer or man reached camp. The Indians fought us to within four miles of Mount Idaho, and only gave it up on seeing we would not be driven any farther, except at our own gait."³

Lieutenant Parnell's report corresponds quite closely with Perry's. However, he mentioned an interesting tactic: "... In the meantime, the Indians had driven a large herd of loose ponies through our line, and scattered among the ponies were some sixty or seventy warriors who immediately attacked us in the rear, demoralizing the troop, many of whom were recruits..."⁴

Criticism of Perry's Tactics

Lieutenant Parnell, a veteran of some experience, implies that he expected Perry to resist the assault more effectively. Upon another point
his criticism was wholly forthright: "It was bad judgment and certainly not tactical to put the entire command on the line, leaving no reserves whatever in either troop, and, to increase the danger of such a fatal error, the men were in the saddle in an exposed position, while the Indians were on foot, taking cover in the grass and rocks."5

Was Soldier Training Adequate?

Some students of the battle have stressed the mediocrity of military leadership and poor training of the troops. Perhaps this angle has been overdrawn. As Parnell stated in another part of his report: "When the officers and enlisted men of our little regular army go out on a campaign, they go in obedience to orders. They go for business strictly, and not a picnic. They go to protect the lives and properties of our sturdy pioneers on our frontier against the most bloodthirsty and relentless foe of our race."6

Actually, the commanders of frontier posts gave their recruits rigorous training. Following is a description of the routine that occurs in a report sent from Fort Ellis by Major James S. Bristin on October 26, 1877, to the Assistant Adjutant General of the Department of Dakota, Saint Paul, Minnesota:

On the 18th of October 1876 I returned to this Post, bringing with me one hundred and sixty three recruits and one hundred and sixty five horses for the Cavalry. The recruits and animals were at once assigned to Companies, and the work of setting up the men and training the horses began, exercises were had almost daily, until late in the season, and by January the men were pretty well up in the school of the soldier, Company and Battalion drill. Target practice and drills were often held in extremely cold weather, because I believed the services of the Battalion would be required early in the spring, and because soldiers should be taught to ride and shoot at all seasons of the year.

This viewpoint was confirmed by Captain E. S. Farrow in his memorandum on the battle of White Bird Canyon. He described the magnificent coolness of Perry and the quick cooperation of his good officers, but recognized that the troops had entered a trap which was sprung by skillful and wily foes.
As already noted, the troops entered White Bird Canyon at a disadvantage, and everything that happened kept them off balance. An artless statement from a soldier told the story: "The Indians were prepared for us and anticipated our arrival, for as we got into the canyon they had us flanked on all sides and we were completely routed. It seemed to be a race of 'God for us all and the devil take the hindmost.'" 

The warriors pursued the fleeing troops to a point within sight of Mount Idaho. Then they returned to the battlefield, where they despoiled the slain of their arms and ammunition. They thereby added thirty-six rifles and a number of revolvers to their arsenal. The Cavalry was equipped with U. S. Carbine (Springfield) Rifles, Model 1873, of .45 caliber, using center fire metallic cartridges. The bodies of thirty-four dead soldiers were found. Two wounded soldiers and two wounded volunteers escaped with the command. Contrary to Indian custom, the dead were not stripped, scalped, or mutilated. In fact, no scalps were taken by the Nez Perces at any time during the war, although Howard's Indian scouts did not observe this code. 

Battle Casualties

Two Nez Perce warriors, named Chellooyeen and Espouyes, were wounded and none killed at White Bird. Of course these slender casualties support the conclusion that Indian maneuvering and marksmanship were excellent and that, conversely, the cavalrymen's performance in these respects was poor on this occasion. Perry's forces were not outnumbered, nor were the Indians any better armed. Indeed, a number of the seventy warriors who participated in the battle acquired their only weapons from fallen soldiers. 

The Battle of White Bird Canyon has been classed with the Little Big Horn as a Waterloo of white troops before Indians. Actually, the two battles are similar only in respect to an absence of military caution and accessible reserves. Otherwise, the manpower advantages were equally balanced at White
Bird.

The burial of the thirty-four soldiers was not attended to until June 27th, ten days after the battle. Each was interred where he fell, so the burial ground is far-flung. In 1927, the remains of an Unknown Soldier were inadvertently uncovered by road builders. Early in September a group of Idaho County citizens established an appropriate monument near the site, upon which appears this inscription:

"Before you to the westward lies the historic White Bird battle ground of the Nez Perce Indian War in which 34 men gave their lives in service for their country June 17, 1877.

"Beneath this shaft lies one of these men who rests where he fell."
Footnotes

1. Howard, Nez Perce Joseph, p. 116. The General described the battle as "...a kind of Bull Run on a small scale."


4. Brady, Northwestern Fighters, p. 102. Parnell's estimate of the number of Indians filtering to the rear approximates the total number involved in the battle.

5. Ibid., p. 102.

6. Ibid., p. 95.


8. Some writers have stated that scalps were taken and bodies otherwise mutilated at White Bird, but it seems that deformations were due to days of exposure before burial.


Chapter 6
AFTERMATHS, SKIRMISHES, AND REPERCUSSIONS

The reports of the White Bird Battle that stemmed from Mount Idaho on the evening of June 17 dwarfed the alarms arising from the raids of the three preceding days. Unmitigated accounts were spread by couriers, motivated by both courage and fear, to Kamiah, Florence, Cottonwood, and Lapwai. From the latter station, General Howard telegraphed the facts and his estimate of the troops needed to many cantonments. The response was immediate, and scattered fragments of the army converged upon the battle area as fast as wings of steam could bear them forward. General Howard cogently summarized the mobilization:

Troops were in motion from Walla Walla, Wallula, Vancouver, Stevens, Canby, Townsend, Klamath, ... Soon Lapwai, or Lewiston, draws like a lodestone; not only these but the artillerymen, on the wing from Alaska, hurried on to the field without stopping to breathe; and further help from California and Arizona; and Boise draws its accessions from all the forts within the range of three hundred miles, yes, even from the harbor of San Francisco. So, afterwards, Lewiston calls loud enough to be heard in Georgia, and the companies of the Second Infantry came flocking together, ..."

In addition to regular troops, companies of volunteers were organized in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. Some of them quickly arrived in the field from each of these places. Meantime, the settlers on Camas Prairie and its environs were hastening toward Grangeville, Mount Idaho, Lapwai, or Lewiston. An exceptional service was performed by a friendly Nez Perce woman named Tolo, who rode the twenty-six miles from Grangeville to Florence and returned with twenty-five volunteers. Of course the impetus to a general territorial mobilization was supplied by Governor Mason Brayman.
Governor Brayman's Role in the War

Having served as a captain in the Civil War, the Governor issued General Orders No. 1, on June 19, designating himself as Commander in Chief, John Hailey as Ordnance Officer and Quartermaster, and defining the terms governing the organization and operation of volunteer companies. The response was enthusiastic and companies were organized in Boise, Idaho City, Silver City, Rocky Bar, Salubria, Emmett, Salmon City, Mount Idaho, Grangeville, and Lewiston. Only the latter three were ever to be in the war theater, but that fact was not perceived by the Governor, and as a result his conduct of affairs became rather ludicrous. Offers of militia and arms were received from the governors of Oregon and Washington. Non-resident citizens also proffered their services as volunteers. Idaho did not have a militia law and this lack made the Governor extremely cautious about assuming the responsibilities inherent in a war situation. Hence, arms were issued with much deliberation and only to the companies nearest Boise. Appeals from the north were referred to General Howard. As a result, A. B. Leland, editor of the Lewiston Teller, expressed the hope that Howard would drive the hostiles toward Boise "... so as to give Milton Kelly and Brayman opportunity to employ our territorial arms, and show their bravery."^2

Notwithstanding the lack of arms and ammunition, the volunteers in the north accepted their responsibilities, armed themselves, and faithfully reported their activities to the Governor. By July 7, the Mount Idaho, Grangeville, and Lewiston companies had formed a Regimental organization officered by Colonel Edward McConville, Lieutenant Colonel George Hunter (Dayton, Washington), Major George Shearer, and Adjutant B. F. Morris.^3

In late July, when it was apparent that there was no danger in the south, the Governor sent Lieutenant Wilson and twenty Bannock scouts north with rifles and ammunition. Perhaps Brayman is the only governor who ever
specifically armed one band of Indians to protect settlers against another
tribe. 4 However, The Avant Courier, June 28, 1877, Bozeman, Montana, carried
an interesting proposal along that line from Captain C. E. S. McDonald. His
plan called for 20,000 Indian troops from various tribes to be used in deal-
ing with any Indian problem. It should be noted that the Governor secured
pledges of neutrality from Paiute, Bannock, and Shoshoni chiefs when the
first word was received of the Nez Perce uprising. Although Brayman's
course was criticized in the north, it was praised in the south. Actually,
the citizens of these two sections seldom saw eye to eye on anything, because
of Idaho geography.

Affairs in the Nez Perce Camp

Although the Nez Perces had won a notable victory at White Bird Canyon,
it did little toward settling their minds upon a course of action. A
realistic conception of the forces their victory at White Bird was bound to
release upon them would have filled them with dismay. They supposed that
their enemies would only consist of such troops as Howard had close at hand.
Hence, if they could elude or defeat him, if need be, they could leave his
military department and find an asylum in the buffalo country on the
Missouri. Even so, time was of the essence, and wisdom would have decreed a
quick departure. Instead, they stayed in camp for ten days. Remember that
although the hostiles were almost universally referred to as Chief Joseph's
Band, the White Bird battle did not effectuate a consolidated body, nor did
any subsequent engagement produce that status. It was a confederated group
governed by a council, which might choose different leaders to act as war
chiefs from time to time. The war chief was always controlled by the
council; and a band might sever its connections at will. The warriors did
not agree to any military discipline, although the war chief's wish was
generally accepted as a command. The management of a sustained campaign in these circumstances was extremely democratic, and the procedures more bumbling than dictatorial.

Having this point in mind, it is expedient to state that Chief Joseph's role in the campaign may be most accurately described as guardian of the entire tribe. Like generals Washington and Lee, he became the symbol of unity; the man of character and prestige; the superlative representative of the cause.

Albeit, Joseph was considered to be the dominant leader by every officer and civilian who reported the progress of the campaign. General Howard obviously believed that Joseph was war chief; hence, his memoranda and reports all carried that implication. Besides, it was much easier to mention one name than to list a half-dozen. Newspaper accounts perpetuated this representation and the more difficult names of his compatriots were neglected. Then, too, the distance, difficulties, and duration of the campaign provided an aura for romance, heroism, and legend. Finally, the fortunes of war removed other chiefs from the surrender scene. Thus, Chief Joseph stood forth upon that historic occasion in all of the majesty of a red eagle among a common flock.

Surely the decision of the chiefs to cross the Salmon River at Horseshoe Bend and await the arrival of General Howard was in line with Joseph's reluctance to leave the Nez Perce homeland. Yellow Wolf gave the great warriors Five Wounds and Rainbow credit for the river crossing trick. Thus, the chiefs gave orders: "We will give them the road. Do not bother them. Let them come across the Salmon. We do not have to cross to them. We are not after them. They are after us. If they come to our side, we can fight them if we want."

The manner in which the Nez Perces crossed rivers has been described. Once over, they established camps, rehearsed their
retreat plans, and awaited Howard’s arrival, keen-eyed and alert. The plan was to decoy Howard across the river and retreat into the baffling mountains to the south. This posture could suggest three alternatives: a trap for Howard in the Seven Devils region, flight to the Weiser River and lower Snake River country, or a recrossing of the Snake into the Wallowa country. The latter course would have strengthened Joseph’s defensive case and posture. Actually, the plan was to elude Howard in the mountains, circle back and cross the Salmon at Craig’s. Then, while his floundering forces were days behind, the tribe could dash across the Camas Prairie and perhaps leave Idaho and Howard’s department via Lolo Trail.

General Howard Enters the Campaign

Reference has been made to Howard’s general mobilization of forces by telegraph. However, he decided to enter the field with the forces at hand on June 21. In addition to the Perry command of some sixty, the General had assembled eight new companies of regular troops and a small company of volunteers from Walla Walla. His entire force consisted of four hundred soldiers and one hundred volunteers and packers.

On June 27, Howard’s command reached Salmon River and established a camp opposite that of the hostiles located several miles upstream from White Bird Creek. Captain Tom Page and his Walla Walla volunteers were discharged at this point, but their place was taken by a veteran mountain man named Colonel George Hunter and his company of volunteers from Dayton, Washington. Howard considered his forces equal to the challenge, but he was at a loss as to procedure.

Nez Perce braves could be seen across the river; indeed, they taunted the soldiers with remarks about coming over for a fight and by flourishing red blankets as an insult to the military emblems. At least that was the interpretation the officers placed upon such gestures, and they were burning
for action. But the roaring Salmon presented a formidable barrier and while ropes, rafts, and boats were assembled, Colonel Hunter and two companions swam the river to reconnoiter. They discovered that since the main body had moved into the mountains, a crossing could be made without danger of interference. In a letter to his wife on June 30, a Lapwai Agency official named Francis M. Redfield recorded a significant judgment of the situation: "I do not think the Inds (sic) will stand a fight---think they will retreat and cross Snake River. There is a prospect that he (Joseph) will not be captured for the next three months."8

Howard’s forces managed to cross the plunging Salmon on July 1. Lieutenant H. L. Bailey described the hazard involved: "This morning a number of horses and mules were made to swim the river and a famous swim they made of it. Some of them were turned over and over, and others carried away down stream, but I think all got over."9

After spending a full day in the crossing, Howard was to discover that the Indians had broken camp, threaded a devious course among the hills, and reached Craig’s Ferry twenty-five miles down stream. The following dawn found them recrossing the Salmon, and by evening they were camped at a place called Aipadass, enroute to Camas Prairie. On July 5, Howard arrived at Craig’s Ferry, where he learned that the wily foe had gained two days in their hide-and-seek strategy. Howard’s account of his attempt to cross the Salmon at this point is revealing: "... the river here a perfect torrent, lost us our raft, which tumbled down the rapids at a swift rate with all on board, for three or four miles."10 Despairing of a successful crossing at Craig’s, the command returned to the mouth of White Bird Creek for that purpose.

This river experience must have reminded the General that the chiefs had pleaded for an extension of time beyond the June 15 deadline, because of flood
water conditions. On July 8, Howard's command reached Grangeville.

An objective appraisal of Howard's Salmon River expedition would pronounce it as a complete failure. Meantime, what fortunes had attended the forces Howard had left upon the prairie? Recall the account of the excitement created by the White Bird raids and battle; also Howard's response in bringing five hundred men across the prairie in pursuit of the hostiles.

Before descending into the canyon he provided for the security of the settlers by posting small units of troops and volunteers at Cottonwood, Mount Idaho, and Grangeville. As a special precaution he ordered Captain Whipple to bring Chief Looking Glass and his band over to Grangeville for safe-keeping. Recollection of the volcanic character of racial feelings will facilitate an understanding of the series of skirmishes to follow.

The Attack on the Looking Glass Band

Since Looking Glass’s ancestral home was on the Middle Fork of Clearwater River, his band was not involved in the affair at White Bird Canyon. Of course he had opposed the 1863 reduction of the original reservation and was classed as a malcontent. However, after visiting with the migrating Nez Perces at Tepahlewam for several days, he and his associates had returned to their homes on the Clearwater before the White Bird raids took place. Looking Glass and his tribesmen were driven into an alignment with the hostiles in this fashion: General Howard, distrusting the neutral posture of Looking Glass, ordered Captain Whipple to take two companies and Gatling guns, surprise and arrest the chief and control his Indians.

Whipple's command arrived at the edge of the sylvan Nez Perce village at dawn on July 1. A volunteer scout named Dutch Holmes, a squaw man, called for a parley in Nez Perce. Chief Looking Glass sent Peopeo Tholeskt to see what was wanted. The soldiers demanded Looking Glass, whereupon Peopeo returned for instructions. The surprised chief directed Peopeo to
return with an old man named Kalowet, and tell the white men to go away:
"Leave us alone. We are living here peacefully and want no trouble. ... 
Do not cross to our side. We ran away from the war."11

While the demand for Looking Glass was being renewed, scout Holmes shot an Indian named Red Heart in the thigh. Other rifles were discharged from the hillside, killing a youth named Black Raven and wounding Peopec Tholekt and Tahkoopen. The parley, whether with or without the presence of Looking Glass, had lasted long enough to put the suspicious Indians on the alert and they mounted their horses and fled through the woods. The village, not being defended, was burned and pillaged and the garden plots laid in waste by trampling horses. A squaw and papoose were killed or drowned when riding a swimming horse across the Clearwater River. The troops captured between six and seven hundred horses. In reporting this raid, Howard ruefully stated: "Of course we thus stirred up a new hornet’s nest, and did not get Looking Glass and his treacherous companions into custody."12

Looking Glass and his band, having taken an honest stand for peace, were rewarded by an attack that left them naked before their enemies. Naturally, the members of this band, with few exceptions, hastened to join forces with the belligerents when they reached the Clearwater. Within a few days, Captain Whipple was destined to feel the mounting wrath of Nez Perce warriors for the Looking Glass affair.

The Attack on the Rains Party

After raiding the Looking Glass village, Captain Whipple returned to the Prairie and entrenched his troops near the Norton house, now Cottonwood. On July 3, he dispatched civilians William Foster and Charles Blewett to scout the Mahoney Creek area for roaming Indians. They encountered an advance guard of the main band just emerging from Salmon River. Indian rifles
cracked and young Blewett's horse bolted and he was shot. Foster escaped and returned to Cottonwood on his fast steed. Upon receiving this report, a high-spirited lieutenant named Sevier M. Rains set out with a select detail of ten soldiers and Billy Foster. Their objective was to rescue Blewett, if alive, and ascertain the number and disposition of the foe.

When the Rains reconnoitering party was observed by a band of Indians under the leadership of Five Wounds, the warriors gave chase and the Rains detail was subjected to withering fire. Several were struck down in flight and the horses of the rest became wind-blown. Dismounting, the soldiers sought protection behind some rocks. The more numerous foemen ended their resistance by a couple of volleys, and finally annihilated them. The numerous shells found upon the defense site were spent ineffectually, as not an Indian was struck in this engagement.13

When the sad fate of the Rains party reached Whipple, he organized his command and prepared to leave Cottonwood house, having learned that the main Nez Perce force had just returned from its decoy journey south of Salmon River. Since Whipple expected Perry to arrive from Lapwai with supplies and ammunition, he went out to meet him on the morning of July 4. By mid-afternoon, these two officers and their slender forces, including a score of scouts and volunteers, were all reassembled at Cottonwood house. Scouts evidently informed them that while there were still warriors in the area the principal band had gone by.

Fearful of a sustained attack, the forces were deployed along lines extending north and south of the house. Rifle pits were constructed at several points. Desultory firing and gestures of attack were made by the warriors, while the tail end of the Indian column wended away at a distance.

The Randall Party Imbroglio

A more serious foray took place near noon on July 5, when two horsemen
were observed approaching Cottonwood house from Mount Idaho. Some of the Indians who had been pinning the Cottonwood forces down attempted to intercept these two men. Outrunning their foes, the horsemen arrived at the Norton House and called attention to a party of seventeen volunteers, led by D. B. Randall, behind them. By this time Nez Perce fire was concentrating on this detail and the situation began to resemble the one Rains was caught in on July 3. Whereupon, citizen volunteers exhibited great apprehension and appealed to the captains for a rescue force. But in the eyes of the volunteers, those worthies, calculating the risks, were more cautious than brave.

Hence, the initiative of leadership fell to volunteer George M. Shearer, who, mounting his horse, shouted that "... it was a shame and an outrage to allow those men to remain there and perish without an effort being made to save them." After Shearer dashed away, Captain Whipple deployed a line of footmen as skirmishers and started for the group one and one-half miles away. This move galvanized Lieutenant Shelton and a troop of cavalry into the action. As the combined forces, numbering nearly a hundred, approached the Indians withdrew from the field. Randall's party was spared extermination by stopping to make a fight of it; and by the valor of Shearer in producing action. However, D. B. Randall and Ben F. Evans were killed, and A. B. Leland, D. H. Houser, and Charley Johnson were wounded. Mr. Shearer vented his wrath upon the officers because of their tardy arrival. In support of Shearer's position, a soldier's voice chimed from the ranks: "Shearer, you need not come to the 7th Cavalry for assistance, as you will not get any." The remark was intended as an additional rebuke to the officers. It was obvious that although the prospect of running roughshod over the Nez Perces had thrown many kinds of men together, they had some difficulty in developing esprit de corps. In this skirmish the Nez Perces
suffered their first fatality of the war in the death of Owyeen.

Although the volunteers had given a good account of themselves, it was a mournful and distraught cavalcade that entered Mount Idaho the next day. In 1931, a monument was erected near Cottonwood in honor of the "Valiant Seventeen."

The Affair on Misery Hill

While the Rains and Randall scouting parties were being harassed, Perry and Whipple pinned down, and Howard emerging from his trans-Salmon River detour, the Nez Perce bands crossed Camas Prairie via their old trails. Volunteers at Mount Idaho were chafing to pursue them, and on July 10, a company of eighty, under Colonel McConville, set out for the Clearwater country. Scouts warned them against ambushes, and McConville deemed it expedient to move along Doty Ridge. When some Indian sharpshooters disclosed themselves, the command hastened to an eminence where a dark camp was established. Fearing an attack, trenches were dug and the volunteers settled down without sufficient food, water, or fuel. Add to this a night siege levied upon them by Ollokot and his associates, and the meaning of Misery Hill becomes clear. The warriors crept close and fairly singed the defenders' whiskers, but no one was hurt. Several horses were killed and forty-eight fell into the Indians' hands. Of course the volunteers fired valiantly, and one Sam Hardy incessantly. When asked why, he replied, "It's so dark I can't see, but I thought it was a good idea to keep the ark moving."16

Two of the volunteers named Luther P. Wilmot and Ben Penney rode over to Howard's camp, at a place named Walls, to counsel upon a battle plan. It was proposed that Howard should circle and attack from the east of the Clearwater and McConville move in from the west. However, Wilmot got into an altercation with Captain Perry over his management of the White Bird Battle and his reluctance to rescue the Randall party. Tempers flared, the
mission failed, and the volunteers left in high dungeon. Since the fire signal Wilmot and McConville had agreed upon was not observed, the volunteers withdrew from Misery Hill and returned to Mount Idaho.

They were frustrated and disgusted over the failure of the military to effect a fusion of forces and bring the hostiles to heel. The settlers shared their feelings, as an expression by E. B. Whitman attests: "Chief Joseph's magnanimity may save us, and that is all." This and similar items appearing in the Lewiston Teller disclose the low citizen morale.

However, the battle clouds preparing to appear upon the horizon during July 11 and 12 were destined to reflect more silver than shadows.
Chapter 6
Aftermaths, Skirmishes, and Repercussions

Footnotes


3. The names of other valiant volunteer leaders in these companies follow: D. B. Randall, Arthur Chapman, Luther P. Wilmot, James L. Cearley, William B. Bloomer.


5. *Yellow Wolf*, p. 68.


7. Stress was placed upon this and subsequent use of red blankets by the hostiles.


11. *Hear Me, My Chiefs*, p. 266.

12. Howard, *Nez Perce Joseph*, pp. 148-149. General Howard justified this attack upon the basis of reports from his scouts that Looking Glass tribesmen were joining the hostiles. The Nez Perce informants deny the charge. Hence, it is a case of the word of scouts and perhaps some friendly Christian Nez Perces against that of non-treaty warriors. Howard also claims that Looking Glass agreed to surrender, but the Nez Perces affirm the contrary.

13. *Idaho Semi-Weekly World*, August 7, 1877. An appropriate reminder of this skirmish, called the Foster Monument, marks the area of encounter. Whereas, a poem expressed the settlers' feelings for the lieutenant and his men:

   The news has come, and we have read
   That brave Lieutenant Rains is dead;
   Who entered with such fearless zeal
   The wild and dangerous battlefield.
   With courage all unchecked by fear
   He saw the red foe drawing near;
   But not one quiver of his face
   Showed that he feared this death to face...
Before going to the rescue of the Randall party, George Shearer exclaimed: "The man who goes down there is a d----d fool, but he's a d----d coward if he don't."


Chapter 7
THE BATTLE OF CLEARWATER

Since the multiple-banded Nez Perces struck for the Clearwater River on July 5, it seemed obvious that a union with Looking Glass would soon eventuate. Actually, they joined forces upon a campsite just above the confluence of the South and Middle forks. Estimates of the total number of people, and of the warriors separately, vary considerably. Howard placed the figures at seven hundred and three hundred twenty-five, respectively. He attributed the unusual proportion of fighting men over women, oldsters, and children to the presence of numerous renegades from other tribes.1 Historian Francis Haines estimated the warrior strength at one hundred ninety-one, but Chief Joseph stated that there were two hundred fifty warriors in this battle.

The warriors were aware of McConville's volunteers on Misery Hill and gave them as much attention as necessary. They evidently expected Howard to also approach from that quarter. Instead, he crossed the South Fork of Clearwater, well above the camp, and came toward it through the woods from the southeast. Critics affirm that the military stumbled on to the hostiles, but whether by accident or design, the Indians were surprised. However, the command could not rush the camp, because it was at a much lower elevation and there were several transverse ridges and ravines intervening.

Confidently accepting the challenge, the warriors fanned outward and upward to meet and flank the troops. Howard and his officers also had confidence, and his men were ready for action. The command consisted of four hundred regulars and over a hundred scouts, volunteers, and packers. Besides a preponderance of power, Howard's forces were well-balanced. Perry,
Trimble, Wimple, and Winters were in charge of the cavalry units; and reinforcements of the same class were to be brought in later by Captain Jackson. The Twenty-first Infantry troops were commanded by Burton, Mason, Miles, and Miller. The Fourth Artillery, with Gatling guns and howitzers, was commanded by Bancroft, Fletcher, Morris, Otis, and Rodney. Howard referred to both infantry and artillery as battalions. Surely, here was a formidable force, and Major Keeler of General McDowell’s San Francisco staff was on hand to observe the action.

**Battle Events on July 11**

Howard deployed his forces along an arc line in making the descent, and the Nez Perces countered with much the same pattern in Indian fashion. Mobile and stealthy, they darted between rocks and trees until within range of the invaders. This occurred as part of the troops reached a barren plateau. Hence, they entrenched, but the area was without water. Comparable action transpired along other ridges and ravines, so that mobility decreased and the battle became one of position. Sharpshooters on both sides fired from recumbent positions; caution characterized the battle during the afternoon, and no advantage was apparent. In the outset the Jackass battery of artillery was unduly elevated, but after considerable excavating the muzzles were lowered and shot began reaching the village.

A diversion from routine occurred when Lieutenant H. L. Bailey and Scout Frank Parker made a dash to the rear to obtain much needed ammunition. Once the Indians threatened to intercept a pack train, but quick cavalry action saved the goods, if not the lives of two packers. At another time, an alpine spring became a mutual objective, but neither side was able to control it that day. Altogether, the battle ground was hotly contested with occasional demonstrations on both sides in attempts to turn flanks and throw the enemy off balance. Such maneuvers were resisted all along the
line. Thus, night drew on and with it renewed exertions were made on both sides toward better fortifying their respective positions.

Howard's presence and energy along the line, together with the spirited direction of veteran officers, kept the men ready and steady. That was as it should have been, but what kept the warriors under equal control? Instead of one supreme chief, each of five tribes had its own leader. In these circumstances, there was much improvising, less coordination, and more chances for dissention. Obviously warrior discipline was more closely related to the volunteer system than to the regular army. Of course that principle gave flexibility of action to the brave if he had the courage and gumption to exercise it. Yellow Wolf related one of his experiences in this battle. He and others were fighting under Chief Toohoolhoolzote, when they discovered that they were being hemmed in on three sides: "Our chief looked around,... and gave orders that we go. He was last to leave. We crawled a ways, then ran... bullets were singing like bees.... Nobody stopped for horses... then I came to myself. I missed my horse, and I grew hot with mad! I made myself brave! I turned and ran for my horse—many soldiers shooting at me. Why, I did not care what I ran into! I got my horse."

He remembered that his old uncle had said, "If we die in battle it is good. It is good dying for your rights, for your country." All Nez Perce men were not made of such stuff; indeed, a considerable defection set in that very night, and the resulting discord had a bearing upon battle fortunes the next day.

The Second Day, July 12

At daylight Howard had every available man on the line. A cavalry charge, led by Miller and Perry, supported by Otis' howitzer battery and Rodney's company on foot, won the contested spring. Increasing use of artillery heightened military morale. Pressure of numbers and general good
management produced gradual gains. The Indian forces could not match the
solidity of Howard's lines. The warriors attempted to turn the extreme flank,
"... but going so far to the left was the cause of their defeat." Con-
tinuing thrusts and sorties kept the Indians on the defensive, and then, in
mid-afternoon, Jackson's reserve cavalry entered the fray. McConville's
volunteers were also approaching the battlefield, and this knowledge, together
with increasing disaffection in Nez Perce ranks, diminished their morale.
Howard described the tactics of Miller and Rodney as striking across the
terrain at an angle and "rolling up the enemy's line." In the usual attempt
to double back upon their assailants, the hostiles encountered reserves.
Hence, as Howard states, "For a few minutes there was stubborn resistance at
Joseph's barricades; then his whole line gave way. Immediately the pursuit
was taken up by the whole force, infantry and artillery... and cavalry as
soon as they could saddle and mount. The movement was decisive. The Indians
were completely routed. ..."

The Indians Withdraw

Howard described how the warriors went tumbling through the woods, over
rocks, across ridges and ravines, into the river. Oh, the river! It was no
obstacle to Nez Perce man or horse, but "... being too deep and rapid for
the men to ford, they here waited for the cavalry under Perry. The cavalry
worked its way as rapidly as it could... and crossed slowly into the Indian
camp."

Before this precipitous withdrawal from the firing line, Chief Joseph,
assessing the situation, left the battle and dashed away in his role of
guardian of the village. Yellow Wolf described the menace: "The women, not
knowing the warriors were disagreeing, quitting the fight, had no time to
pack the camp. Chief Joseph did not reach them soon enough."

As noted, Perry's action was decisive until he reached the stream, where
he dillydallied. For this he was later censured by Howard. Whether his delay was due to an interpretation of orders or to prudence in reference to the river and the hostile sharpshooters beyond, the respite enabled Joseph to escape. It was only 5 p.m., so the band sifted away down stream to the left and established a safe camp on a bluff beyond the mouth of Cottonwood Creek, near present-day Kamiah. Appraising the new situation, Howard allowed his troops to bivouac near the deserted village. It was in shambles from heavy artillery fire, but the tribal treasures of generations were left behind, a considerable reward to the looters.

Although the hostiles had not been captured, a battle had been won in that they were driven from the field. The final assault of the troops was described as impressive, and Major Keeler sent a wire to General McDowell, reporting the news of "... a most important success, ... nothing can surpass the vigor of General Howard's movements and action." The Major knew how critical McDowell was becoming, because of Howard's failure to fulfill his promise wired to San Francisco on June 15: "Think we shall make short work of it." The General's failure to pursue the enemy with vigor and force, the issue at this juncture, constitutes his most serious mistake during the campaign.

Releases gave Howard's casualties as 13 killed and 22 wounded. He calculated that Indian casualties included 23 killed, about 40 wounded, and 40 that fell into his hands (later explained). Indian denials of the casualties were emphatic. Indeed, they related every detail pertaining to the number, namely, four killed and six wounded.

Mention was made of discord among the warriors on the night of July 11. Roaring Eagle and others testified that some argued, "No use fighting when soldiers are not attacking our camp." These sentiments increased and were repeated in council. That issues were to be settled, there can be no doubt.
Should they fight the next day, surrender, return via the Seven Devils to Wallowa, or seek a new home among the Crows in Montana? The arguments started that night continued informally for three days, and the latter course was finally agreed upon in the council on July 15, at Weippe Prairie. Meantime, the chiefs feinted and improvised.

**Maneuvers Around Kamiah**

By now it should be obvious that the redmen were in no haste to forsake the country. They had waited upon pursuers at White Bird, Salmon, and Clearwater. Now they marked time again, evidently reasoning as Yellow Wolf so quaintly stated, "But we were not whipped. Had we been whipped, we could not have escaped from there (Clearwater) with our lives."12 Surely they took their time in escaping. Beginning here, the hostiles developed an uncanny semaphore signal whereby they allowed Howard's movements to pace them. They laconically called him "General Day After Tomorrow," because of his policy of giving them a two-day lead in the campaign.

Thus, the Nez Perces crossed the Clearwater in their skin boats on July 13, and established camp. Howard surveyed their position and failed to pounce upon them. Perhaps he expected an offer of surrender; but as none came, he ordered McConville's volunteers and Jackson's cavalry to move down the Clearwater, cross at Greer's Ferry, and attempt to blockade Lolo Trail. This movement was launched at daylight, but it did not escape the chief's notice. In fact, the Indians produced a flag of truce. Seeing this, Howard sent an order halting the column.

This gesture toward a parley proved to be a delay stratagem, but before this fact was perceived the camp was struck and the Indian caravan began climbing the mountain toward the Lolo Trail. As the rear guard left the river, it is said that a brave impudently slapped his hand upon his bare buttocks as a gesture of the disdain in which the commanders were held.
On account of the ruse, it was mid-afternoon before Howard's detachment resumed the march to Greer's Ferry. The ferry boat had been cut loose and was on a sandbar on the other side of the river. When Howard was informed of this fact he ordered McConville and Jackson back to Kamiah. On July 13, Howard settled down at Kamiah for a fortnight, attending to dispatches, making plans for the pursuit, and waiting for reinforcements. This exceptional delay was his second mistake and its consequences were destined never to be quite overcome. As the General waited, he reflected upon the state of affairs confronting him. The newspapers had printed inventories of property damage and losses of cattle and horses. Then there were three score and ten fatalities, with nearly as many wounded. It had already become a rough campaign, and the end was not in sight. Still, it was expedient to evaluate the situation, which Howard did in saying, "The Indians had been stopped in their murders, had been resolutely met everywhere, and driven into position and beaten (Clearwater); and ... the vast country (Idaho) was freed from their terrible presence."

Later, in a summary printed in The Portland Daily Bee Supplement, November 11, 1877, the General stated that his success at Clearwater quieted the restlessness among the Cayuses, Spokanes, Coeur d'Alenes, Columbia renegades, and others. "Yet," said he, "the campaign needed to be prolonged, persistent pursuit and final capture to put to rest forever the vain hopes of these dreaming, superstitious nomads." Of course he couldn't know then that in 1878 he would be involved in the Bannock War, which also had considerable proportions.

Meantime, on July 14, the redmen had made a toilsome sixteen-mile journey over the mountain to the Weippe meadows, where they met Chief Red Heart and his band returning from the bison country. This band did not join the fleeing Nez Perces. In fact, a number of the latter returned to Kamiah with Red Heart.
Howard took the combined groups captive, and they constituted the forty he mentioned in his report concerning the battle.

A chiefs' council was held at the Weippe camp, in which a definite long-range plan was reached, namely, the combined tribes agreed to cross the Lolo Trail and continue east to the land of the Crow nation. Chiefs Looking Glass, Toohoolhoolzote, and the great warriors Rainbow and Five Wounds argued most persuasively for this course. They considered the Crows as their brothers, and they argued that their combined strength would be mutually beneficial. Looking Glass, in particular, spoke longingly of the "Old Woman's Country" and extolled the loyalty of his former Crow allies who dwelt there. Howard's big guns could not be taken over the rough mountains. Maybe he would not follow. Looking Glass would lead the way, take command, if the chiefs assented; and they did. Joseph was definitely reluctant; he did not want to take his people among strangers. Besides, what were they fighting for if not their country? He was in favor of crossing the Lolo Trail, but eventually returning when things had settled down. One informant reported that Joseph was chided for his attitude toward the campaign, to which he replied: "This is your fight, not mine. I will conduct the retreat of the women and children. It is your task to keep the soldiers away." Whether this report is true or not, he had already assumed that role and the end of the trail was afar. On the morning of June 16, the non-treaty Nez Perces filed eastward upon one of the roughest adventures in military annals.
Chapter 7
The Battle of Clearwater

Footnotes

   There were 72 tepees in the village, according to Luther P. Wilmot,
   who made a careful count.

2. Yellow Wolf, pp. 88, 89.
   Other sayings Yellow Wolf learned from his uncle were: "If you go to war
   and get shot, do not cry! . . . In wartime man cannot sleep with woman.
   Might get killed if he does. . . Do not think to eat when in dangerous
   places."

3. Albert G. Forse, "Chief Joseph as Commander," Winners of the West,
   Nov. 30, 1936.


5. Ibid., p. 165.


7. Lieutenant Forse states that Howard later censured Perry for not pursuing
   the warriors, but that Perry proved before a Court of Inquiry that he
   followed orders.

8. Colonel H. L. Bailey states that although the order was "Burn everything,"
   the execution did not preclude the acquisition of great plunder, parti-
   cularly by packers and citizens. "It was marvelous how many citizens
   seemed to arrive," he said. See Hear Me, My Chiefs, p. 322.


10. Ibid., p. 133.

11. Yellow Wolf listed the names and others confirmed his record. See
    Hear Me, My Chiefs, p. 323. Later, Howard's count of 22 wounded soldiers
    was raised to 27, two of them fatally.


13. Luther P. Wilmot, "Battle of the Clearwater 1877," MS. Yellowstone
    National Park Library.


15. C. P. Stranahan, The Idaho Statesman, June 18, 1933.
Chapter 8
CROSSING THE LOLO TRAIL

As these mountain Cossacks turned their faces away from the Clearwater country, they also adjusted their minds to the problems before them. They would travel peaceably; no white man would be bothered. Their enemies were only in Idaho. "Montana people are not our enemies. The war we leave here in Idaho."1 Thus YellowWolf recorded their viewpoint and, naive as it seemed, much sorrow and expense might have been spared if this attitude had been understood and accepted by all concerned.

Before striking up the trail, the chiefs assigned five warriors to serve as a rear guard. The precaution proved to be wise, because Howard sent Major Edwin C. Mason and Colonel Edward McConville, with a strong force of cavalry, volunteers, and Indian scouts in hot pursuit. The scouting unit of their command was ambushed in mid-afternoon of July 17. Three of the friendly Nez Perce scouts were hit, one fatally, and one of the wounded died later. This assault stopped the military company and it returned to Kamiah.

Several of Joseph's braves secretly followed the command back to the Clearwater camp and managed to return with several hundred ponies. Many of them belonged to the fleeing warriors and they followed the trail from instinct.

Once again Howard had been given a lesson in the futility of half-measures in dealing with the hostiles. Nothing short of a full effort in strength was likely to bring the chiefs down. This must have been in his mind as he planned his next moves, a procedure that consumed ten days.

Howard Plans the Campaign

The General had two problems to resolve: The Camas Prairie settlements
must be protected and the hostiles captured. His first plan was to leave a small garrison at Kamiah, take the balance and pick up additional reinforcements assembling at Lewiston, then hasten north and head for Missoula via the Mullan Road. It was a sensible plan because wagons could be used in transporting the infantrymen and supplies. Objections were registered by the Camas Prairie settlers, because Colonel John Green, expected from Boise to protect the settlements, had not yet arrived. In the circumstances, the settlers were afraid that the chiefs might return and find them defenseless. Hence, this plan was abandoned. Howard waited until Green arrived, then he added McConville's regiment of volunteers to Green's regulars. Next, he organized his infantry and cavalry into right and left columns. Colonel Frank Wheaton went northward to impress the "Columbia River renegades" who might be thinking of joining the hostiles. There was also a chance that he might beat Joseph to the Bitter Root Valley and thereby shore up the east end of the nutcracker. Meantime, Howard would follow the wily foe across the Lolo Trail. On July 27, several days before he left Kamiah, Howard telegraphed this message to General McDowell in San Francisco: "Can not troops at Missoula or vicinity detain Joseph till I can strike his rear? . . . My troops will push through rapidly."²

As noted, the formulation and preparation of these fine plans consumed ten days. As a result, as the General states, "A fearful newspaper clamor came from the rear, of 'Slow! Slow! No ability; will never catch the Indians!'"³ Thenceforward, these sentiments were taken up by the press of the nation. A field day of fault finding was launched that was destined to last for three months. In effect, Howard was represented as "a friend of the Indian; a talker, not a fighter; lacking energy, who rested on Sunday—the 'Praying General'..."⁴ His sterling character became something to reprove; his excellent record, crowned by heroism at Gettysburg, was forgotten.
Although the General lacked one arm from that battle, he still had two broad shoulders. True and loyal friends issued denials of false charges; details of the records were offered in refutation, but nothing of this sort could stem the tide. The country was upset, the army and the administration were embarrassed, and the attitudes of generals McDowell, Sherman, and Sheridan were not unaffected. At this point, it seems expedient to point out that Howard's force was partially constituted by infantry. That he was attempting to capture a particularly cunning foe has already been demonstrated. Otherwise, let the record speak for itself, not forgetting that the fortunes of war are not always favorable to every leader of armies. Of course, criticism was not limited to Howard; indeed, the army, the Indian agents, and missionaries were all charged with ignorance, incompetence, and dereliction. Perhaps Howard was glad to leave Kamiah and plunge into the wilderness athwart the Lolo Trail.

The column that finally stretched away from Kamiah on July 30 was six miles long. Two days before Howard entered the west end of the Lolo Trail, the Nez Perce caravan of comparable proportions emerged from the east. Before narrating the salient points of each crossing, the character and history of the trail itself should be described.

Description and History of Lolo Trail

The Lolo Trail crosses the Bitter Root Mountains, which separate the Clearwater and Bitter Root water systems. On the western end the trail conforms to the divide which separates the North and Middle (Lochsa) forks of the Clearwater River. Toward the east end, it crosses a north-south divide known as Lolo Pass, elevation over 7000 feet. Strangely enough, the Continental Divide does not conform to the Bitterroot Range, although it is generally higher and more rugged than the Rocky Mountain cordillera itself. The
distance traversed by the Lolo Trail is about two hundred fifty miles. It is a tortuous trail in all respects; it tends to follow ridges that are arranged in tandem fashion, with occasional canyons intervening. For generations before Lewis and Clark, the Lolo was a hunter's trail, and that is the only function it ever served, with the two exceptions herein discussed. No labor was expended upon it in Indian times. It threaded through handsome stands of fir, spruce, cedar, and dense undergrowth of brush. The passage was inevitably dim, narrow, and twisting. Even Indians often were puzzled in their efforts to follow it.5

The Lewis and Clark Crossings

The name Lolo was made known to Americans by Lewis and Clark. They toiled and suffered upon it for three weeks in both going to and returning from the Pacific Ocean. Whether one reads their journals of September, 1805, or June, 1806, the tenor is the same. Clark made the following entries on September 2 and 15, respectively: "This day we passed over emense hils and some of the worst roads that ever horses passed, our horses frequently fell . . . the one (horse) which carried my desk, 7 small trunk TURNED OVER AND ROLLED DOWN A Mountain for 40 yards and lodged against a tree."6

A notation by Meriwether Lewis on June 14, 1806, was in the same vein: "It was with great difficulty that the loaded horses could assend the hills and mountains, the(y) frequently sliped down."7

A trail that hard on horses would be more difficult for men, and Clark's account of their status on September 19, 1805, near Hungary Creek, confirms this fact: "The men are growing weak and losing flesh very fast; several are afflicted with the dysentery, and eruptions of the skin are very common."8

Actually, there was no worse trail in North America than the Lolo. At times it straggled over huge boulders and jagged ravines; again through forests primeval, every foot so encumbered with prostrate trees as to be well-nigh
The trail was not improved with the passing decades. Indeed, a Forest Service highway paralleling it was not completed during the century, and an adequate highway for the general public was not completed until the early nineteen sixties.

The Nez Perce Crossing

Of course, the trail was equally rough for all who crossed it. The only advantage the Indians had lay in their knowledge of the country and how to live on the slender resources it afforded. The Nez Perces traveled efficiently, because each family constituted a self-sufficient unit within its respective tribe. Relatives always stayed together, and they blended easily with other clan-united families. A clear division of labor was operative; hunters, herders, root and berry gatherers, all hands understood their business. The Indians' ability to find and eat roots and bark when game and fish were scarce was also a great advantage. During the course of this crossing, and afterwards, the pursuing soldiers wondered why so many trees were scarred. They did not know that the inner bark and juices between layers were nourishing to man. Indian lodges were raised and struck with precision that came from much practice. Ponies were packed with similar speed and skill. Nez Perce horses were tough and swift, and they were legion. Hence, like Tartars, these fleeing red men always managed to have several remounts per person. Their total horse herd probably exceeded three thousand head. It was a massive remuda. Thus, they crossed the Lolo Trail between July 16 and 27 without any particular haste or hardship.

Upon reaching Lolo Creek at a point within an easy day's travel of its confluence with Bitter Root River, the Indians stopped to rest and hold council. There were hot springs at this place, which they called Nasook Nema (Salmon Creek). It was the place Lewis and Clark had named "Traveler's Rest."
At these springs the Indians found two boys vacationing from their homes in the Bitter Root Valley. Intending to prevent misrepresentation of their peaceful intentions, the Indians took young Pete Matt and William Silverthorn captive, but they escaped that night. Their report created a considerable stir among the citizenry.

Meantime, Nez Perce scouts had discovered the presence of soldiers and volunteers in a log barricade designed to block their egress from the canyon. They did not realize their arrival had been anticipated and that plans and forces had been put in motion to capture them. Since this phase of the campaign is both significant and complicated, it deserves to be treated in a separate chapter. At this point, attention should be given to Howard's crossing of the Lolo Trail.

Howard Crosses the Lolo Trail

Remember, his caravan left Kamiah on July 30, in a hail of criticism and a drenching rain. Although he had made considerable preparation for the crossing, it was not an easy one. In fact, Howard's pack train could not have made this journey if the trail had not been widened in many places. This hard work was efficiently performed by a corps of Idaho frontiersmen, under the command of Captain W. P. Spurgin, Twenty-first Infantry. Before the campaign ended these skilled laborers were dubbed "Spurgin's Skillets" by the troops. Howard's pack train consisted of several strings of mules, each headed by a bell mare. Each mule was trained to keep his place in the procession. Without this pack train of provisions, Howard's men would have been in no condition to either ride, walk, or fight. Howard was satisfied to achieve a daily march of sixteen miles, because so much timber had to be cut away. A few notes from his journal describe the details: "Poor grazing, indeed, here. The only feed consists of dwarf lupine and wire grass."
Several mules were exhausted, and some packs of bacon were abandoned by the way.  

The commanders were vigilant at all times. At night a campsite was carefully chosen, occupied, and posted. A modicum of shelter for the officers, cooks, and the packs was provided by several tents. A common mess and bonfire helped preserve cordial relations among the men. The morning schedule started with reveille at three to four, breakfast at four or five, and march at five or six, according to circumstances. Howard described their reaction to the crossing in one sentence, "None of us will ever forget the now famous Lolo trail, with its sharp-edged, irregular mountains and its endless forests;..."

Then, thinking of its critics, he wrote:

"Didn't the hostile Indians go here?" the reader inquires. Yes; they jammed their ponies through, up the rocks, over, and under, and around the logs, and among the fallen trees, without attempting to cut a limb, leaving blood to mark their path; and abandoned animals, with broken legs, or "played out," or stretched dead by the wayside.

Our guide, Chapman, says, in frontier parlance, "No man living can get so much out of a horse like an Indian can." Had we, for three days, along the Lobo trail, followed closely the hostiles' unmerciful example, we would not then have had ten mules left on their feet fit to carry our sugar, coffee, and hard-bread.

Actually, the Indians appreciated Howard's predicament much better than the public did. They made great fun of the infantrymen, calling them "Walk-a-Heaps" and "Squaw Soldiers." Even the cavalryman was at a disadvantage, because his activity was limited to the speed and endurance of one horse. If his horse faltered and failed him, he found a place with the infantry.

In considering these factors, it appears that Howard did very well in crossing Lolo Trail in nine days. Arriving at Rawn's barricade on August 8, Howard learned that the Nez Perces had bypassed the barrier on July 28. He was then briefed upon the events that had transpired there during the past fortnight.
Chapter 8
Crossing the Lolo Trail

Footnotes

1. Yellow Wolf, p. 112.
2. Yellow Wolf, p. 112.
4. Lieutenant C. E. S. Wood said the cheap talk about Sunday delay for prayers originated among saloon loafers, far from the battlefield. Eastern newspapermen then took up the theme without considering the reasons that made pursuit move slowly.
7. Ibid., p. 402.
11. Ibid., pp. 179-180.
As mentioned, Lolo Creek runs eastward until it unites with the Bitter Root River, which flows north a dozen miles to its point of confluence with the westward-flowing Hellgate River. The united stream, called Clark Fork, flows in a northwesterly direction to the Columbia. A town named Missoula was situated at the junction of the Hellgate and the Bitter Root rivers. Several farming settlements were located up the lovely but narrow Bitter Root Valley. Stevensville, near the site of Fort Owen, was also the site of Saint Mary's Mission. Other towns, located up-stream at relatively equidistant points of about twenty miles or so, were Corvallis and Hamilton. The valley pinches off a short distance above Ross Hole. At that point one trail went due south over the Lewis and Clark Trail of 1805, across a divide (Lost Trail or Gibbons Pass), on to the North Fork of Salmon River; the other trail struck east over the Continental Divide, where it followed Trail Creek into the Big Hole Valley. William Clark and his party followed this course eastward in 1806. Whereas, Captain Lewis and his larger group went to the Missouri via the shorter Hellgate route.

Thus, the Hellgate, so named by the Flatheads because it swung eastward toward the Blackfoot Indian country, was the portal to the principal trails.

Alternative Routes of Travel

Remember the fleeing Indians were headed for the Buffalo Illahee, which was located in the massive plains region lying between the Upper Missouri and the Lower Yellowstone river valleys. From the Bitter Root Valley the
Nez Perces could reach their objective by any of several routes. In the interest of safety, considering King George's country as their goal, the shortest route from Lolo Creek was down the Bitter Root River to its confluence with Hellgate River. This trail crossed the river below Missoula and went directly north across the Flathead Reservation and the Tobacco Plains toward Canada. Some of the more apprehensive warriors, such as White Bird and Red Owl, were in favor of this course. But the chiefs were thinking more about hunting bison than fleeing to Canada from dangers when no man pursueth. The shortest eastern route to the bison country was down to Missoula, thence eastward upstream through Hellgate to the mouth of the Big Blackfoot River. Then the trail followed the Blackfoot to Cadotte's Pass, across a divide leading to the headwaters of Dearborn River, thence to the Sun River, which flowed into the Missouri directly west of the Highwood and Little Belt mountains. A variant from this trail consisted of following the Little Blackfoot River, crossing at Mullan's Pass, thence down the Smith River to the Musselshell and Judith Basin country.

Still another route would start in the same direction, but instead of turning up either the Big or Little Blackfoot rivers, this trail adhered to the Deer Lodge River and led to a valley of the same name. From that lush pasture land branches led away in various directions: northeastward toward Helena; southeastward toward Butte, Pipestone Pass, and the Three Forks area. A disadvantage common to each of these routes, except the first one, was the location of towns and forts within striking distances.

An alternative to all of these was the circuitous Bitter Root-Big Hole route. This one veered far and away to the south, especially when linked with the Snake, Madison, and Clark Fork of the Yellowstone River. Such a trail looped around and came in at the eastern end of the bison country. Although this was the longest and hardest route, it was chosen because the
friendly Crows could be reached without the prospect of encountering hostile Indians or whites.

At this point it is expedient to describe the social complex that obtained in the Montana area under consideration. From this standpoint the resemblance of the Bitter Root Valley to the Clearwater country is surprisingly close. In both places there were reservation and non-reservation Indians and an agency and mission associated. There were also settlements and a military post.

The Indian Situation in Bitter Root Valley

The Bitter Root Valley was part of the ancestral home of the Flatheads. These Indians had a long history of friendly relations with the Nez Perces. As previously mentioned, the 1831 delegation to Saint Louis was a joint undertaking. Nez Perce bison hunters had passed through this district for about forty years. Indeed, they sometimes wintered here. In fact, one Nez Perce clan of six lodges, led by Lean Elk (Poker Joe), temporarily residing in the Bitter Root Valley, had recently joined the fleeing Nez Perces.

The Flathead record in dealing with the white man was comparable to that of the Nez Perce up to the White Bird Battle. In 1855, their great Chief Victor negotiated a treaty with I. I. Stevens, which reserved the Bitter Root Valley above Lolo Creek for his tribe. In 1872, Secretary of Interior James A. Garfield negotiated another treaty exchanging this reservation in favor of one farther north, impinging upon Lake Flathead, named Jocho. Victor's son, Chief Charlot (also Charles and Carlo), refused to either sign the treaty or move. Hence, the commissioner ignored him and his clan, and elevated Chief Arlee to the position of Head Chief.

However, Chief Charlot and his band were not forced on to the reservation; they were regarded as civilized, domesticated Indians. They were not disturbed, being simply allowed to carry on as residents of the valley, subject
to the laws of Montana only. This status prevailed until Charlot signed an agreement on November 3, 1889, and the following year his band moved to Jocho. One wonders if a similar policy of patience would not have succeeded equally well in the case of the non-treaty Nez Perces.

Of course the treaty Flatheads were on their reservation located forty miles to the north. Naturally, everyone was greatly concerned about the attitude of the Flatheads toward the runaway Idaho Indians.

The Posture of the Settlers

Montana settlers in this area had enjoyed peaceful relations with the Flatheads. Their experiences with the Nez Perces were equally satisfactory. As seasonal visitors, they had been well behaved and their trade was welcome. Indeed, many settlers knew various hunters personally and counted them as friends. These sentiments were reciprocated by the Nez Perces, which accounted for the friendly attitude in which they approached the valley. The issue at stake was whether the judgment and justice of the understanding settlers would withstand the alarm and pressure of the poorly informed and less well-disposed citizens in Missoula, Deer Lodge, Butte, Helena, and Virginia City.

The Military Situation in Western Montana

Extensive campaigns against the Dakota and Sioux tribes in eastern Montana had brought a half dozen forts into being in that area. However, the placid character of Indian relations in the west had not required the development of comparable centers of protection. This fact was set forth by the Helena Herald on June 28, 1877, a short time after the news of White Bird Battle arrived: "There is a large scope of country from Walla Walla to Fort Shaw that has been completely ignored by the military arm of the government. It contains as great numbers of Indians as any other part of
Montana and in case of an uprising, such as has frequently occurred among normally peaceful Indians in this country, the inhabitants would be completely at the mercy of the rifle and scalping knife."

It is true, however, that two forts had been established west of the Missouri River. Fort Shaw was erected on Sun River in 1867, and three years later Fort Baker was built eighteen miles north of White Sulphur Springs.

In December, 1875, plans were made for the establishment of a fort near Missoula; and on June 7, 1877, the erection of Fort Missoula was started. Captain Charles C. Rawn and a detachment of the Seventh Regiment United States Infantry from Fort Shaw were assigned to the new post. Construction was well started when Rawn received information that the Idaho hostiles had started toward Montana on the Lolo Trail. Accordingly he directed Lieutenant Francis Woodridge and four enlisted men to reconnoiter the eastern end of the trail and ascertain their position. Two days later, Rawn dispatched Lieutenant C. A. Collage, a soldier and several civilian volunteers to follow and support Woodridge. The two details met on the twenty-second, and Woodridge had not seen the hostiles, although he thought he had penetrated the Clearwater drainage. However, that very day a half-breed Nez Perce, named John Hill, told them that the tribe was indeed moving eastward. This information was sent to Fort Missoula by a courier who arrived late that night.

Captain Rawn telegraphed the news to his superiors and he was ordered to intercept the Indians and prevent them from entering the valley, if possible. Whereupon, he assembled a small force of thirty soldiers and left for Lolo Creek on July 25. The Captain selected a narrow place in Lolo Canyon and erected a breastwork of logs across the canyon. Although few in number, Rawn's command was ready to do its duty.

In addition to the army unit considered, there was the matter of Montana
volunteer activity. However, since as in Idaho, there was not a formal militia system, this important phase of the campaign will be described in motion rather than as an element in an abiding situation, such as the Indians, settlers, and military factors. The role of Colonel John Gibbon's command will also be treated in action. This background of geography, history, and social structure should set the stage for the entrance of the Nez Perce caravan. As represented, they came in peace, but how were the people to know? For five weeks they had been reading about terrible atrocities and bloodthirsty invincible warriors.

Responses to the Nez Perce Entrance

One hesitates to call the Nez Perce entrance into Montana an invasion, but that is the way their arrival was viewed by many. Montana newspapers had been publishing detailed accounts of the Nez Perce uprising from the outset. Indeed, the most complete reports of the war from beginning to end appeared in the following newspapers: Helena Weekly Independent, Helena Daily Herald, Bozeman Times, Butte Miner, New Northwest, and Avant Courier.

Naturally, when the news arrived that the hostiles started east upon the Lolo Trail, a high note of alarm was sounded. The shortage of federal forces in the west and the lack of any state militia was pointed out. Thus, the dangers of a war on the Idaho scale, or greater, were set forth in clarion calls. An appeal for action accompanied every report printed concerning the Nez Perce War. Inevitably, every official charged with responsibility for the public safety went into action. Although measures were taken on several fronts simultaneously, each will be assessed here in detail.

How the Flathead Indians Were Managed

Peter Ronan was the Indian Agent on the Flathead Reservation at Jocho, Montana. Newspaper editorials suggesting that his charges might join the
Nez Perces caused him to take every precaution. He first secured pledges from the reservation chiefs, Arlee, Michelle, and Enos, to keep their young men under firm control. Then he hastened to the Bitter Root Valley and obtained a similar promise from Chief Charlot. Indeed, Ronan reports, "Upon the approach of the Nez Perces, Charlo sent out a band of his warriors to cooperate with the whites, his son commanding."¹ Ronan's measures, together with the peaceable disposition of the chiefs, prevented the Flatheads from giving any aid or comfort to the Nez Perces. The Agent boasted that "Not a single Indian of the above mentioned tribes is in the hostile camp."² Not only did the Flatheads keep their young men under control, they also kept their pony herd intact. A letter to Governor Potts from W. B. Harlan, Stevensville, explains how this was possible: "The Flatheads... are herding their horses close to the mountains, probably as a precaution against a raid of the Nez Perce."³

Of course this strict role of neutrality may not have satisfied anyone. Yellow Wolf expressed both disillusionment and unbelief: "They were helping the soldiers. Always friends before, we now got no help from them, the Flatheads. No help any time."⁴

Actually, Chief Charlot and a delegation of twenty warriors did present themselves to Captain Rawn at Fort Fizzle. But it was understood they would not fight. They wore white turbans on their heads as a mark of identification, in case a mix-up occurred. The Nez Perces knew these white head covers meant "don't hurt me."

**Governor Potts Calls For Volunteers**

Perhaps the first news received by Governor B. F. Potts concerning the imminent arrival of the Nez Perces over the Lolo Trail was in a telegram from General Irwin McDowell. This message left San Francisco on July 23, and was printed in the *Helena Weekly Independent* on July 26. The Governor
was asked what he could do to help arrest or detain the hostiles. Potts wired McDowell to the effect that he would arm the people to protect their homes, but lacking authority to organize a militia he was unable "... to arrest and detain Joseph."

A man of action, the Governor went to Missoula posthaste, and in response to the excitement of the people and urgency of the situation, he issued a call for volunteers on July 26. The Proclamation declared that Montana was invaded by hostile Indians from Idaho, and that fewer than fifty United States soldiers were on hand to oppose them. Therefore, he called upon the organized volunteer militia of Missoula and Deer Lodge to report to him forthwith at Missoula. He did not pledge either Montana or the United States to pay for supplies. A second appeal, General Order Number 4, issued from Deer Lodge on July 31, specifically called for three hundred volunteers, "... each man to furnish his own horse and such arms and equipment as he can. ... Subsistence will be furnished companies as they report to me until they are disbanded."5

The response to these appeals was enthusiastic both before the Nez Perces entered the Bitter Root Valley and after they departed from there in peace. At first the citizens were stirred up and willing to serve. Actually, several hundred were assembled at the mouth of Lolo Creek when the Nez Perces reached that place on July 28.

Butte Volunteer Activities

At that critical time, Governor Potts sent a telegram to William A. Clark at Deer Lodge, requesting him to go to Butte and organize a company of volunteers. Clark hurried there and succeeded in organizing a battalion, which elected him major. The Butte people expected the Nez Perces to come their way; hence, Clark's volunteers rode over to Deer Lodge to blockade them. There they learned that the Indians had gone up the Bitter Root Valley peacefully, and that Gibbon was in hot pursuit.
At this juncture the volunteers considered riding a hundred miles south to Big Hole Basin. In fact, they went as far as French Gulch, when a message from Governor Potts ordered them back to Butte. Thus, they missed a fair chance to participate in the Big Hole Battle.

Volunteer feelings were mixed concerning this matter. Probably those who were most disappointed were the ones who later joined Clark in going to the relief of Gibbon. However, they must have had some reservations about becoming an integral unit in the campaign, because, according to the Montana Standard of August 10, the volunteers took this oath, "We obey all orders of Governor Potts, and the officers chosen by ourselves, but not to be under command of any United States officer."

Volunteer Organization in Helena

The organization of a volunteer force in Helena was effected at a public meeting in International Hall on July 30. The Governor's call and general necessity for the move were discussed by Martin Maginnis, Robert C. Walker, Wilbur F. Sanders, and W. F. Chadwick. The response was enthusiastic and the nuclei for cavalry, artillery, and mounted infantry companies were formed. These volunteers held themselves in readiness pending the possible movement of hostiles toward the Prickly Pear country.

The Virginia City Volunteers

James E. Callaway and Thomas J. Farrell, officers in the Union and Confederate armies, respectively, took the lead in organizing the Virginia City Volunteers. Although a hundred men joined up, only half the number were willing to leave home and enter the campaign. Most of the latter needed horses, and O. B. Varney and Farrell, joint owners of the V. F. Ranch in Madison Valley, agreed to provide about fifty head. Thus, mounted and equipped, forty-two men elected Callaway and Deimling as colonels and the command
left to join Howard in the Beaverhead Valley by August 17. This was a week after the Big Hole Battle, but they were destined to be on hand for a brush with the warriors at Camas Meadows on August 20.

The Fort Fizzle Affair

Remember that Captain Rawn, assisted by five officers and thirty enlisted men, started the erection of a crude but sturdy barricade eight miles from the mouth of Lolo Canyon on July 25. Within hours, nearly two hundred volunteers arrived and finally a band of Flathead Indians, under Chief Charlot, came into the redoubt.

The Hot Springs Nez Perce camp was only a dozen miles upstream. Hence, the chiefs soon learned of "Captain Rawn's Corral." There is no evidence that this development either frightened or angered them. Instead, they sent word to Rawn that they desired to talk.

Many versions have been given of the parley that eventuated. This is Captain Rawn's official account:

My intentions were... to compel the Indians to surrender their guns and ammunition and to dispute their passage by force of arms into the Bitter Root Valley. On the 27th of July, I had a talk with Chiefs Joseph, White Bird, and Looking Glass, who proposed, if allowed to pass unmolested, to march peaceably through the Bitter Root Valley, but I refused to allow them to pass unless they complied with my stipulations as to the surrender of their arms.

For the purpose of gaining time for General Howard's forces to get up, and for General Gibbon to arrive from Shaw, I appointed a meeting for the 28th, with Looking Glass, accompanied by one Indian, and myself by Delaware Jim (interpreter) - the meeting to take place in open prairie and not within range of the rifles of their whole camp. The meeting was held accordingly, but I submitted to him the same conditions as before, to wit: that if they wished to enter the valley they must disarm and dismount, surrendering all stock. Looking Glass said he would talk to his people and would tell me what they said at 9 A.M. the next day. Distrusting him I would not agree to that hour, but proposed 12 M. We separated without agreement. Nothing satisfactory having resulted from the conference I returned to the breast works expecting to be attacked. In the meantime that portion of the volunteers (some 100 or more) who represented Bitter Root Valley hearing that the Nez Perces promised to pass peaceably through
it determined that no act of hostility on their part should provoke the Indians to a contrary measure, and without leave left in squads of from one to a dozen. On the 28th the Indians moved from the canon to the hills, ascending the sides one-half mile in my front, passed my flank, and went into the Bitter Root Valley. As soon as I found they were passing around me, and hearing that they had attacked a rear guard, I had established to prevent desertions, I abandoned the breastworks, formed skirmish line across the canon with my regulars, and such of the volunteers as I could control, and advanced in direction Indians had gone. They did not accept a fight but retreated again into Bitter Root. At the mouth of Lo Lo and before reaching it all the volunteers had left me, but a dozen or twenty Missoula men, and I was obliged to return to this post (Fort Missoula).

Over this forthright account requires some explanation. Rawn gives very little of what must have been said in two parleys. Neither does he mention the fact that Governor Potts attended the meeting. Did White Bird demand that guarantees for the personal security of the Nez Perces and their property be given? And, was Rawn unable to give any assurance as to what the ultimate terms might be? Did Rawn finally agree to allow the Indians to bypass him without a fight? Finally, Nez Perce informants say there was only one parley.

Conclusive answers to these questions have never been given. It is apparent that the chiefs were sincere diplomats, seeking for solutions befitting their record and strength. They knew Rawn's force could not stop them, and they obviously discovered that he lacked authority to make a satisfactory peace. In these circumstances the chiefs were not about to give up anything. Surrender was out of the question. Rawn confirmed this in a letter on July 27, "They showed disposition to fight." The evidence L. V. McWhorter obtained from Nez Perce informants upon this point seems irrefutable. Thus, while desperate enough to force their way through the canyon, the warriors considered prudence better than valor and exerted themselves to avoid a show of strength.

While the talking was going on, Nez Perce scouts had found a way of
outflanking Rawn's stronghold by climbing up a northward inclined ravine, then following eastward along a series of lateral gulches, and finally going down Sleeman Creek into the Bitter Root Valley. When a volunteer named W. B. Harlan informed Rawn that the Nez Perces were going around him, the Captain rejected the information and remarked that there were too many "God Almighty's" around camp. Of course, the report was correct and while the move was being launched at daybreak on July 28, a few warriors conducted a demonstration in front of Rawn's breastworks. Accounts differ as to the matter of gun play. Some say a few high shots were fired, while others simply state that the fort was rendered impotent without the firing of a single shot. One author, waxing eloquent over the strategem, characterized it as "... the boldest, most fearless, audacious, and confident tactical movement. It surpasses McClellan's flank movement from Chichakomy to James River, or Grant's from Rapidan to Richmond. They moved armies... moving by night. But Joseph moved his entire possessions of effects and families."8

The Indians were not pursued, but they might have been. A native of the valley, who made a study of its history, claims that Nez Perce scouts who preceded the move reassured the settlers behind the lines.9 This view was confirmed by Duncan McDonald, who states that two volunteers named Henry McFarland and Jack Walsh fell into Nez Perce hands during the move. Looking Glass told them to go home and take care of their women and children and affairs generally. Naturally, the message spread and the settlers accepted it at face value. Amos Buck, W. B. Harlan, and other volunteers, who left records of this event, concur in this representation. In any case, the chiefs believed that they had done what they could to prevent trouble in Montana. Chief Joseph later described his understanding of the whole situation in this way:
Here (Lolo Canyon) another body of soldiers came upon us and demanded our surrender. We refused. They said, "You can not get by us." We answered, "We are going by you without fighting if you will let us, but we are going by you anyhow." We then made a treaty with these soldiers. We agreed not to molest any one and they agreed that we might pass through the Bitter Root country in peace. We bought provisions and traded stock with white men there.

We understood that there was to be no war. We intended to go peaceably to the buffalo country, and leave the question of returning to our country to be settled afterward.

Yellow Wolf confirmed this view in saying, "We traveled through the Bitter Root Valley slowly. The white people were friendly. No more fighting! We had left General Howard and his war in Idaho."

These Indian accounts conform with Captain Rawno's report that the volunteers deserted Fort Fizzle in droves. More than a hundred rode away; another two hundred were assembled at Missoula and Stevensville. Still more were organized at Deer Lodge, and yet the unhurried Nez Percé were not attacked during their eight-day sojourn in the Bitter Root Valley.

Citizen Reactions and Opinions

The phenomenal Nez Perce strategem caused much bewilderment in Butte and Helena. On July 30, the Helena Daily Herald explained the development as demonstrating, "... how easy any Indian force, whether seeking pillage or only escape, could pass around, through, and by our untrained troops. So far as infantry goes, except to defend the larger towns or some fortified position, they are as useless as boys with popguns. Even mounted and well-armed soldiers need skillful leadership to be of any account."

This interpretation of the event was too superficial. It minimized the good Nez Perce record, contacts, diplomacy, and armed might. It also failed to understand that the settlers were actuated by much more good will than bad at this particular time and place. They were loath to pick a fight, and the lack of military power at Fort Fizzle did not inspire reckless action anyway. Notwithstanding the fact that volunteers were prone to criticize
regulars, they coveted the shield of federal might.

A letter to Governor Potts, written on July 31, by Chauncy Barbour, editor of the *Weekly Missoulian*, also disclosed a strange mixture of good and poor judgment about the meaning of this affair. He advised the Governor to take command and strike the Nez Perces hip and thigh. In his opinion, they had really hoped to surrender to Rawn. Since that failed, he wrote:

"They camped on an open place with their women and children, exposed themselves to slaughter, and they either thought we were cowards or else they wanted us to oppose them with force so that they might surrender. If you find them hiding away their women and children in some secure place and meeting you defiantly you will know that they are earnestly on the war path."

Then came his bellicose appeal to the Governor: "Wipe out the disgrace that has been put upon us, and never let any regular officer again command Montana Militia."

Three days later, August 3, the Governor received a letter from the same Chauncy Barbour, praising him for his failure to act as advised in the previous letter. "If you had taken command of the militia and precipitated hostilities, you would have merited our unmixed condemnation. It is best as it was, and our people now with one accord congratulate themselves that our welfare was in the hands of discreet men. There were some restless spirits among us... who have nothing to lose, who would have precipitated a fight even at the expense of seeing this country ravaged." Obviously, it was a case of letters from Chauncy drunk and Chaunc sober; and it illustrated the double minded nature of a society under stress. Perhaps it was the weight of second sober thoughts about families and property, rather than pride, prestige, or humanity that impelled the Bitter Root settlers to allow the Indians to pass.

**The Military Position**

However, the Chief's assumption that the war was over was not shared by
the army officers. Howard's persistence in pursuit has been described, and his command reached the Bitter Root Valley on August 8. Rawn returned to Fort Missoula, where he wrote a considerable report in justification of his conduct at Fort Fizzle. The name of his breastworks suggests the ridicule that was heaped upon him by armchair critics and the press. It should be stated that his superiors, including General Sheridan, found no fault with the Captain's actions. Remember that his force was small, the volunteers were double-minded, and the Nez Perces were strong and determined. However, the United States army had other officers and soldiers within striking distance of the Nez Perces, and several elements of the Seventh Infantry were already enroute to Fort Missoula to accomplish what Rawn had failed to do.

On July 25, Captain George L. Browning, two officers, and thirty-two enlisted men left Fort Ellis for Missoula. They reached their destination on July 30, a distance of two hundred forty miles. On July 28, the day the Nez Perces went around Fort Fizzle, Colonel John Gibbon left Fort Shaw with officers and enlisted men assembled there from Forts Baker and Benton. According to a letter the Colonel sent to Governor Potts on July 27, he expected to encounter the hostiles somewhere along the Blackfoot River. But they had deliberately chosen the Bitter Root-Big Hole route to avoid such an eventuality. By traveling along this wilderness thoroughfare they would be able to live on the country Indian-fashion without disturbing the white folks. In taking the southern route they would also avoid Fort Ellis, which was situated on the Three Forks-Bozeman Pass trail, and Fort Shaw, which blocked the Blackfoot River-Cadotte Pass-Sun River approach. Surely their choice of this flight-way would definitely prove that their intentions were peaceful.

Gibbon's command reached Fort Missoula on August 3, a distance from Fort Shaw of one hundred forty-nine miles. There they were organized into a battalion of seventeen officers and one hundred thirty-two men. These officers
and men represented parts of companies "A", "G", "D", "F", "K", and "I" of the 7th Infantry. Their duffle, arms (including trowel bayonets issued at Fort Missoula), and supplies were placed in mule-drawn wagons. This command started up the Bitter Root Valley on the morning of August 4. General Howard would fall in upon the same road five days later. Surely the prosaic lives of the settlers were bound to be disrupted by these exceptional scenes. How many erstwhile neutrals would be tempted to join Gibbon by the prospects of excitement and spoils that appertain to the fortunes of war?
Chapter 9
Affairs at Fort Fizzle and in Montana

Footnotes

1. Peter Ronan to Commissioner J. A. Smith, August 1, 1877. Document 3531 DD 1877, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

2. Ibid.


4. Yellow Wolf, op. cit., p. 107. A volunteer named W. B. Harlan stated that these white cloths were worn to distinguish the Flatheads from the Nez Perces in case of fighting.


8. T. J. Kerttula, The Dillon Examiner, October 23, 1940. A state highway sign upon the barricade site bears this inscription:

   FORT FIZZLE
Here Captain Charles C. Raw 7th Infantry, with four officers and twenty-five enlisted men from Fort Missoula, approximately 150 citizen volunteers, 25 Flathead braves, erected and occupied a redoubt from July 25 to 28th, 1877, to challenge the passage of the hostile nontreaty Nez Perces Indians under Chief Joseph.

On July 28th, the Nez Perces evaded the troops by ascending a gulch on north side of Lolo Creek 1/2 mile above this place and going down Sleeman Creek into the Bitterroot Valley.

A forest fire on Sept. 30th, 1934, destroyed the last visible sector of the old log redoubt which is now marked by five cement piers.


Chapter 10

FROM LOLO CREEK TO BIG HOLE BASIN

Since agreements, good faith, and decent behavior are important in preserving peace, it is expedient to examine the conduct of the Indians, soldiers, and settlers in the Bitter Root Valley. Judge their respective activities in reference to the basic issue of whether there would be war or peace in Montana.

Indian Behavior in Bitter Root Valley

After cutting the mountains by Fort Fizzle, the Nez Perces established camp near Stevensville. As in former times, they visited the town and transacted business. The chiefs and merchants agreed that no liquor should be sold to the Indians. One man violated the agreement, so his supply was locked up by the merchants. An Indian who imbibed too much and acted accordingly was collared by Chief Looking Glass and sent to camp under guard. W. B. Harlan stated that Looking Glass patrolled main street for two days watching that none of the Indians started trouble. Obviously this triumph in avoiding trouble at Fort Fizzle had not made the chiefs arrogant.

The settlers in turn exercised wisdom in matters of accommodation. Many of them sent their families and certain goods to nearby Fort Owen, which they buttressed against the prospect of assault. Otherwise, they pursued their affairs in a nearly normal fashion. Amos Buck expressed their viewpoint in his commentary upon Colonel Gibbon’s subsequent reaction to the Indian trading: "We were utterly surprised and chagrined to note that he severely criticized the people of Bitter Root Valley for giving aid to
Joseph's band by selling them supplies. It is said that a man is not accountable for what he does not know, hence if General Gibbon had been correctly informed of the dire situation here his report would have read quite differently.2

It is probable that if Mr. Buck and his thirty-three compatriots who joined the Colonel's command as volunteers, and the citizens generally, had been more consistent, Gibbon's spirit of vengeance might have been modified. As it was, the Nez Perce caravan moved up the valley at the leisurely rate of about twelve miles per day. Their general demeanor remained the same as at Stevensville, and the pattern of settler reaction was also comparable. As an insurance against misunderstanding the Corvallis settlers constructed a log-sod type of fort a mile north of the village. Bastions were constructed at opposite corners, and J. L. Humble served as captain of the guards. A similar fort was erected near Hamilton, where John B. Catlin had charge.

The warriors were no more than amused by these fortifications. Some of them rode up close, examined them, and conversed with the people inside. In like manner, a few settlers approached the Indian camps, and it is said that they were prevailed upon to leave their ammunition. They were not robbed; in fact, it was reported that cartridges were purchased at a dollar apiece.3

However, some of Toohoolhoolzote's more unruly young braves did enter the home of Myron Lockwood. They helped themselves to flour, coffee, several tools, and articles of clothing. In recompense for this pilfering, Looking Glass compelled them to put Lockwood's brand on seven of their horses and turn them into his pasture. White people found it difficult to understand that Indian ethics permitted a warrior to take food whenever it was needed. Actually, all Bitter Root records and traditions support the fact that these Indians, however unwelcome in the circumstances, behaved at least as well as
regular troops are wont to do with equal leisure to ramble around an inhabited area.

**Notes of Alarm for the Chiefs**

A few miles below Ross' Hole the Indians camped near the famous Medicine Tree. This tree was a symbol of peace and neutrality; but during the night of August 5, a warrior named Lone Bird received strong impressions of imminent danger. Hence, he rode through the camp shouting: "My shaking heart tells me trouble and death will overtake us if we make no hurry through this land! I can not smother, I can not hide what I see. I must speak what is revealed to me. Let us be gone to the buffalo country."4

Several days before, Wahlititis had received and announced a premonition of personal death and tribal doom. But neither of these forecasts, nor yet another to come three days later, aroused the chiefs from their loitering. Remember, Looking Glass was in charge of the trek, and as Yellow Wolf said, "Looking Glass was against anything not first thought of by himself. White Bull always sided with him. They said, No more fighting! War is quit!"5

On the night of August 5, the Indians were camped above Ross' Hole. Eight days had been consumed in leisurely traveling from Lolo Creek to that point—distance one hundred miles.

The following morning they ascended an old buffalo trail that went up a hog's back and over the Continental Divide north of Gibbons Pass. They probably camped mid-way on Trail Creek and reached Big Hole Basin early on August 7. In spite of the warnings concerning dangers ahead, everything indicated that the chiefs intended to stop here for several days. They were proceeding as if conditions were normal, as in other pilgrimages through the country.

**Colonel Gibbon's Pursuit**

Remember, Colonel Gibbon left Fort Missoula on August 4, with a force
of seventeen officers and one hundred forty-six enlisted men. His infantry and supplies were transported in a mule wagon train managed by Hugh Kirkendall and other settlers. At Fort Owen, a mountain howitzer was added to Gibbon’s arsenal of weapons. The Colonel did not receive any orders or hear any reports that inclined him toward thoughts of peace or diplomacy.

He was a fighting man and he had a single purpose, namely, to overtake, punish, and capture the hostiles. A graduate of West Point, he achieved the rank of Brigadier General in the Army of the Potomac. In fact, his regiments were called the Iron Brigade, because of their commendable record. Gibbon had played an active role in the subjugation of several tribes in eastern Montana. During a lull in the campaign of 1872, he accepted an exploring assignment in newly created Yellowstone National Park. He led a company of men up a northern branch of the Madison River and, as a result, the stream was named in his honor.

Bitter Root Citizen Volunteers

When Howard learned that Gibbon’s command consisted of one hundred sixty-three soldiers, he remarked that a hundred more soldiers were needed. But Gibbon entertained no such dubiety. At least he gave the settlers that impression as his cavalcade moved up the valley. At Corvallis, a stockman named Joe Blodgett was employed as a scout and guide, because he had ranged cattle in the Ross Hole and Big Hole country for a decade. Other Corvallis men decided to offer their services to Gibbon, so they requested their fort captain, J. L. Hubble, to be their spokesman and leader. He advised them against entering the campaign, in view of the peaceful way the Nez Perces had conducted themselves. However, he agreed to present their request to Colonel Gibbon and, if accepted, lead them as far as Ross’ Hole, but no farther. Accordingly, he spoke to Gibbon, who at first responded in a surly manner, but later consented to accept the volunteers. Another group of citizens
from Skalkaho took an identical course with John B. Catlin acting as their
captain. In the outset, Catlin was definitely opposed to breaking the truce,
but Lynde C. Elliott and other settlers endeavored to persuade him that the
wrongs committed by the Indians in Idaho should be avenged. In a word,
"This was the time for every good man to answer the call of his country."
Although the argument did not appeal to Catlin, he finally agreed to be their
leader. It is fair to note that many citizens deplored this action, which
accounts for the fact that only thirty-four volunteers actually left the
valley. Captain Hubble turned back at Ross' Hole, and at Sleeping Child, a
volunteer named Johnny Chaffin convinced himself that "These Indians haven't
done me any harm," whereupon he turned back.9

However grudgingly accepted, Gibbon proceeded to make good use of these
volunteers by adding them to Lieutenant Bradley's company of cavalry. As
well he might, because as border settlers they were great horsemen, good
trackers, and fine riflemen.

Any assessment of other motives besides patriotism (without viewing
that as the refuge of scoundrels) would be highly speculative. Some of the
stay-at-homes claimed that Nez Perce horses were uppermost in the minds of
several volunteers. A. J. Noyes, a historian of the volunteers, quoted one
of them to this effect: "Now some have accused us of going out just to steal
the horses; that gives the wrong impression, we did not think of that until
the general made us the offer. He told us that we could have all the horses
except enough to mount the command, if we could whip the Indians..."10
Noyes also claimed that two rustlers, named Alex Matt and Jor Gird, became
camp followers with nothing in mind but horse-stealing. Then, too, the
volunteers knew that the Indians had gold pouches, which also offered an
inducement. The Corvallis Chaffins still tell about William Chaffin's visit
to the Nez Perce camp and his admiration of a highly decorated shirt worn
by a medicine man. Upon returning home, he said, "If I go, I'll get that shirt." Be that as it may, it is probable that sheer adventure was the major motivation. Young Thomas Crittenden Sherrill explained his feelings this way, "I did not realize what General Gibbon's men were up against. But I wanted to go... no matter what the conditions." He was accompanied by an older brother named Millard Fillmore Sherrill, but a younger one named Winfield Scott had to stay home to do the chores! Could anyone deny that the spirit of national pride ran high in the Sherrill family?

Gibbon's command moved twice as fast as the Nez Percé, making thirty miles a day. Hence, on August 7, his men were toiling up the hog's back mentioned before. By then they were only one day's travel behind the Nez Percé. That evening Lieutenant Bradley offered to make a night march with a mixed command of sixty cavalrymen and volunteers. His objective was to reconnoiter the Indian position and, if possible, stampede their horses. By morning Bradley's party reached the upper periphery of the Big Hole Basin. Exercising discretion, Bradley called a halt, hid his troops in an off-trail cove and prepared breakfast. Afterwards, he, Lieutenant Jacobs, and Sergeant Wilson moved forward until they heard the sound of axes in the woods at the base of the mountain. Then, carefully searching for a vantage point, they located a tall pine tree, climbed it, and beheld the Indian village in a meadow a mile to the northeast. A messenger hastened back up the trail to inform Gibbon of the situation.

Having less than a score of miles to travel, the main command arrived at a spot within six miles of the Nez Perce camp by evening. Gibbon ordered a rest at that point until 11:00 p.m., when he hoped to move within a stone's throw of the village. Gibbon's plan called for a swift attack at the crack of dawn.
Howard's Position on August 6

While Gibbon relaxed and courted slumber, he no doubt wished Howard was also within striking distance. However, he assumed that hope was vain, because no reply had reached him from a messenger named Pardee, whom he had dispatched to Howard on August 4. Howard received the message on August 6, two days before he reached the Bitter Root Valley. Hence, he realized that Gibbon might soon overtake and engage the hostiles. Howard selected a trusty sergeant named Owen Sutherland and a Bannock scout to carry this reply to Gibbon: "General Howard is coming on, as fast as possible by forced marches, with two hundred cavalrymen, to give the needed reinforcement." Sutherland was told to push on day and night until he reached Gibbon. Of course, this command implied the use of a horse relay system. Accordingly, the riders secured fresh mounts from ranchers, as needed. In one instance, Sutherland mounted a roan colt which twisted upward and sideways in a rotating motion, then landed so stiff-legged that the cinch broke and he was catapulted against the corral fence. The jolt, combined with sheer fatigue, was enough to send one to bed, but the sergeant rested awhile, then remounted and pressed on, although his suffering was intense. (The Bannock scout had already deserted.) Sutherland reached the perimeter of the Big Hole Battlefield at noon on August 9; by that time, the most dynamic part of the battle was over, and Gibbon's command was in a precarious position. Sutherland wrote his appraisal of the desperate situation and sent it by a messenger to Howard.

Howard's Progress Toward Big Hole Basin

As already stated, Howard's whole command reached Bitter Root Valley on August 8. Of course, he was fully aware of the danger inherent in the military situation. Hence, he sent his cavalry ahead in all haste and made arrangements for mule wagon transportation of the infantry. Overtaking the
cavalry, Howard formed "Camp Gibbon" well up the valley on August 9. That night, obsessed by forebodings, he decided to detach twenty of the fastest mounts and their riders for an express run to overtake Gibbon. Thus, "... as dawn appeared, in a column of twos, we moved out of camp; took a steady, firm trot, and, except in a few instances where the roughness of the trail prevented speed, kept at that gait all day." Gibbon's messenger to Howard, describing his pitiful post-battle plight, chose an alternate route north of Ross' Hole, so he missed Howard but, instead, he met Captain Mason with the balance of Howard's cavalry.

Although he lacked knowledge of the battle, the indefatigable Howard did not stop until he had traveled over fifty miles, including the six mile climb up the hog's back to the Continental Divide. While making camp upon the headwaters of Trail Creek on August 10, seven of the Bitter Root volunteers came in on foot and related their harrowing experiences in the battle of the preceding day.

Sutherland's personal messenger to Howard also unwittingly bypassed the General's camp, but he, too, met the main cavalry on the eleventh. At 10:00 a.m. on that day, Howard reached the beleaguered camp occupied by Gibbon and his men. From him, Howard learned the details of the Battle of the Big Hole.
Chapter 10
From Lolo Creek to Big Hole Basin

Footnotes

1. While it is of little importance, note should be made of the different statements about this vendor of liquor. McWhorter states that he was a blacksmith; Amos Buck states that some liquor was purchased in the stores owned by Jerry Fahy and a Mr. Reeves.


3. Report from James L. Clearly to the Idaho Semi-Weekly World, August 21, 1877. Amos Buck states that some of the settlers who visited a Nez Perce camp saw a white girl about sixteen years old living with them.


5. Ibid., p. 110.


7. A letter by A. Plummer, written to the Editor of Recreation, no date, and published in that magazine July, 1923.


10. A. J. Noyes, "Battle of Big Hole as I Saw it."


12. Ella C. Hathaway, "Battle of the Big Hole as Told by T. C. Sherrill."


Chapter 11
THE BATTLE OF THE BIG HOLE

Remember how Lieutenant Bradley and his aides climbed a tall pine tree situated on a strategic ridge in order to improve their view of the Indian village? If their interest had been focused on beautiful scenery the panorama spread before them would have taken their breath. Envision, if you can, a crescent-shaped alpine valley, elevation 6800 feet, girdled by the Rocky Mountain cordillera on the west and the Pioneer Range on the east. The basin, sixty miles long and fifteen miles wide, is more oasis than prairie. Crystal streams flow in from every canyon, and trace their serpentine courses athwart the meadows. Flowing northeastward, these streams funnel into the north and south forks of the Big Hole River, respectively, and unite before leaving the basin to eventually merge with the Beaverhead to form Jefferson River.

Sagebrush and flowers adorn the valley fringes, and upon the east pine forests press down closely upon the western side of the basin floor. Thick bunch, bison, and other native grasses and sedges grew belly-high from rim to rim. Alternating clusters of lush willows, rose, currant, and gooseberry bushes provided beautiful color tones and a choice habitat for fowl. The streams teemed with trout.

In 1877 the basin was unmodified by man, although several cattlemen had grazed slender herds upon its peripheries since 1874. Otherwise, this natural meadow had served as a summer range for elk, deer, and bison from time out of mind. No one had built a homestead or thought of wintering in this Land of Big Snows. Indeed, Big Hole Basin presented a scene of the utmost tranquility.
The Nez Perce Village

Expecting to rest several days, the Indians had established camp with exceptional pains and some artistry. Actually, this delightful basin constituted a neutral zone between the roving bands to the east and west. Thus, the Nez Perce regarded it as a way-station area, to which they had a hereditary right. Their village was situated in a meadow along the east bank of Big Hole River. Eighty-nine lodges were so arranged as to roughly conform to a concave "V" with the apex upstream. There was a partly open court in the middle.

While Bradley and his friends were looking, they also listened, and the sounds they heard were reassuring. The women were gathering firewood and cutting lodge and travois poles. These would need several days for drying. Men were fishing and hunting to provide food for more than six hundred hungry people. The Nez Perces called this basin Iskumselalik Pah, meaning "Vale of the Squirrel." Although unknown frontiersmen had applied the vulgar name of Big Hole, everything in and around the valley was grand and lovely. Surely there was nothing about the total environment to suggest blood-letting until this mad-dog day of August 9. Perhaps never before, and certainly never since, was a plan of massive slaughter conceived to be executed upon the beautiful "Vale of Squirrels."

A Battle Plan Unfolds

On that fateful morning, three soldiers clinging on a tree-top carefully observed this primeval setting from a military viewpoint. As described, the village was situated in a meadow in juxtaposition to the river. This gentle stream ran in a northeasterly direction, roughly parallel to the mountain on the west. The distance between the two features was only a quarter of a mile or so. Upon the intervening space, dense stands of willows grew, interspersed by an irregular pattern of shallow sloughs (old river courses) and grassy plots. Two-fifths of a mile to the southwest, jutting out a hundred
feet from the regular mountain base, was a little creek-built plateau covered with a thick stand of pines. Indeed, a dozen or so had deployed themselves among the willows in the bottomland close to the stream.

As men of good judgment the soldiers recognized that the Nez Perce village was vulnerable to a surprise attack, providing no guards were posted between the edge of the hill and the camp it skirted. Having formed accurate impressions of the terrain, the reconnoitering detail rejoined their comrades up Trail Creek. Messengers were sent up trail to Gibbon, apprising him of the situation. By sunset the Colonel's command reached Bradley's cove. Food was prepared without fires, the plan of attack formulated, pickets posted, and the balance of the command laid down to rest until 11:00 p.m. After that hour Gibbon proposed to move within a stone's throw of the village without detection, and wait for daylight, then attack.

Official records do not indicate that a no-quarter type of assault was deliberately adopted. However, Tom Sherrill states that as the volunteers were discussing the forthcoming attack it occurred to them that no mention had been made of prisoners. Therefore, they asked Major Catlin about the matter; whereupon, he spoke to Gibbon, who replied, "We don't want any prisoners." In reporting this terse and ominous remark to the volunteers, Catlin said, "Boys, you know what to do now."

Hours later, when the village was dimly perceived, tradition says that an order was passed along the battle line, "Aim low in firing at the lodges." This, combined with the exceptionally ferocious assault that followed, tends to support the allegation.

The Slumbering Indians

Meantime, the Nez Perce were in the arms of Morpheus. Warriors were slumbering in the midst of their families. No precautions against danger of any kind had been taken. Indeed, some of the people had stayed up late on August 8, chanting and dancing, because there was nothing for them to fear.
And yet, on that very morning, a considerable discussion relative to their situation took place among the principal warriors. Several expressed great uneasiness over the lack of any sentinels on the back trail. The refrain of previous warnings was rephrased: "What are we doing here? . . . While I slept, my medicine told me to move on; that death is approaching us. . . . my advice is to speed through this country. If not, there will be tears in our eyes in a short time." These forebodings impelled Sarpsis, Ilppilp, and Seeyakoon Ilppilp to offer their services as back-trail runners. But they made the mistake of conditioning the service upon the loan of some fast horses owned by a wealthy man named Semu (Coals of Fire, also Blacktail Eagle), who refused their request. At this juncture, Five Wounds interceded with Chief Looking Glass and an argument ensued. The chief took the position that sending sentinels would be breaking faith with the Bitter Root settlers. Yielding to the arrogant chief's remonstrances, warrior Five Wounds said, "All right, Looking Glass, you are one of the chiefs! I have no wife, no children to be placed fronting the danger that I feel coming to us. Whatever the gains, whatever the loss, it is yours." Ironically enough, Five Wounds died fighting against the great odds this lack of caution imposed upon the warriors. Since no one was sent to "spy", the chiefs did not know that an armed force was then moving toward them. Their code of ethics did not allow them to imagine that professional military leadership would execute a surprise attack upon a sleep-ridden and defenseless camp.

Colonel Gibbon Flanks the Village

According to plan, at 11:00 p.m. Gibbon organized his command for the business at hand. Seventeen officers, 132 enlisted men, and 34 volunteers were lined up on the trail. The balance, consisting of 14 soldiers, were assigned to bring up the supply wagons and howitzer the next day. A march of five miles brought them to the basin rim, and they followed its sinuosities
along an old trail for a mile until they were directly west of the Indian camp. A band of ponies was grazing above them on this bald hillside, and a bit of neighing posed real danger for a few moments. However, the men passed by cautiously and in single file. The command deserves much credit for this wolf-like entrance upon the enemy's flank. The movement was so stealthily executed that it failed to startle the horses and the camp dogs did not get the exotic scent.

Hence, the command settled down along the trail and bided their time. Gibbon contemplated the prospect of rounding up or stampeding the horses, but trusted guides, H. O. Bostwick from Fort Shaw, and Joe Blodgett from Bitter Root, advised him against this measure. They pointed out that he was about to do battle with the Nez Perces and not the Sioux. Therefore, it would be imperative to keep his command together. Then Bostwick, being half Indian, briefed Gibbon upon precisely what sights and sounds to expect from the campground, assuming that their presence was unknown: "...after a while you will see some fires built up if we are undiscovered." Sure enough, an hour or so before daylight the squaws filed out, replenished their waning fires, visited a few moments, and returned to their slumbering families.

Meantime, Gibbon's men meditated upon their position and orders. The companies of Captains Lawne and Comb were deployed on the extreme left of the skirmish line, Captains Rawn, Williams, and Logan were on the upper right, and Lieutenant Bradley with a unit of eight troopers, combined with Catlin and his volunteers, occupied the central section. The other eleven officers were distributed along the line. The signal for attack was to be the first shot fired upon the instant of Indian discovery.

Assured of the advantages incident to complete surprise, the command was more than eager to launch an attack. Surely the time, place, and circumstance seemed auspicious to the veteran officers and experienced soldiers.
Everything seemed to be in their favor. Thus, as the first streaks of graying light flickered into the valley (about 3:30) the skirmishers moved off the trail on to the bottoms and began threading their way among the willows, laurel, and sloughs, toward the camp. Although dogs were making a lot of noise answering coyote howls, the pounding hearts of the men seemed louder as they worked their way within about two hundred yards of the village. At that juncture, a solitary Indian left his lodge, mounted a pony tethered nearby, and inadvertently rode squarely into the middle of the skirmish line. Lieutenant C. A. Woodruff said, "He leans forward on his horse to try and make out, in the dim light, what is before him." Yellow Wolf identified the rider as Natalekin, a man of dim vision, too old to fight. His hour had come and he was cut down by a volley from the rifles of four volunteers.

The Battle

The skirmishers dashed toward the village, plunged into the river and up the bank loudly cheering and pouring lead into the lodges. As dazed Indians appeared, they bobbed around like a startled covey of quail. The attackers fired at them without discrimination. In such a melee, women and children could not be distinguished from the men. Quick to apprehend the situation, the Indians ran in various directions, mostly toward the attackers, because the willow-lined river separating them afforded protection denied by the meadow on the east. Hence, they jumped in the water, hid behind banks and clumps of bushes. Many, rushing from their lodges without weapons, had to hustle back again. Wives and children assisted in matters of supply. Pandemonium, if not panic, prevailed for a few moments, then strong voices of leadership were heard calling for steadiness and courage. Fear and panic gave way to a fierce desire for self-preservation. Nez Perce tradition and pride kindled a willingness to resist destruction and abasement with every
resource at hand---rifle, club, and hands. Recovering from the shock, experienced Indian sharpshooters gravitated toward strategic positions. Then effective shots came from all directions---from the brush, the creek banks, the open prairie, and even the distant hill.

Perhaps this partial recovery from great shock was expedited by a miscalculation on the part of troops on the right wing. These soldiers quickly took over the upper end of the village and, having previous orders to burn it, proceeded to do so. But the damp lodges did not ignite easily, and this diversion of attention, though short, was costly. If, as Yellow Wolf claims, only a score of warriors were armed in the outset, a few moments lull helped them remedy that deficiency. From then on for five hours the battle was touch and go. It was a case of diamond scratching diamond, in respect to energy and courage. The action was desperately fierce and absolutely relentless. All accounts characterize the battle as sharp and furious. Perhaps the term swirl may best describe the character of this engagement of fighting men.

As the troops moved into the camp, the living Nez Perces moved out. Gibbon's description of this action is both candid and graphic:

The Indians being terribly punished in the first attack. Large numbers being killed in their lodges, etc. The Indians who escaped, however, soon rallied, and as our line was insufficient to cover the whole front of the camp, the Indians were able to pass around our flanks and take position in the willows and wooded hills in our rear, from which points they kept up a destructive fire on our men, who were exposed in the field. Every possible effort was made to clear the willows along the river banks of Indians. But as fast as they were driven out in front, others would appear in the rear.

Then cross-fire developed and gradually the warriors began to fight effectively; not in units, but as ones and twos. In Indian fashion they sifted back towards the camp site (never fully deserted), and engaged the troops in close fighting. As Lieutenant Woodruff states, "The village has become the hottest place in the vicinity. . ." And yet, invisible Nez Perce sharpshooters poured on devastating fire from strategic points beyond.
Several who had reached the hillside were soon taking a toll at long range. Soldiers in the camp were exposed to sharpshooters firing from the river banks; those among the thickets encountered muzzle to breast. In this area rifles were sometimes used as clubs, and occasionally tussles, involving fang and claw, occurred. Yellow Wolf described one in this manner:

We now mixed those soldiers badly. We could hit each other with our guns... A tall soldier sprang behind those bushes. Hohots Eloht was back of those willows. Both their guns were empty. They clubbed with their guns, then grabbed each other... Both struggled for their lives. Eloht called twice to his Wyakin (medicine power) for help. Lokocheets Kumin came running. He shot the tall soldier and killed him. The bullet broke one bone in Eloht's arm... We could not well count how many dead soldiers, but we killed a good few...

The soldiers thought the Nez Perces were fighting like savages, and the warriors matched that view in saying, "Some soldiers acted with crazy minds," meaning they shot defenseless women and children.

On both sides there were lively surges and rallies in response to challenges from leaders. Captains Bradley and Logan, having swamped the upper end of the village, proposed to engulf the lower. But they were both killed before this movement was executed. In like manner, several of the greatest Nez Perce warriors were killed early in the struggle. When mighty Rainbow fell, a hush came upon his compatriots. Then his old war-mate, Pahkatos, heard the report and fairly courted death in seeking revenge. Emboldened by these examples of dying heroes, other warriors took heart. Fierce battle cries were given voice by Chiefs White Bird and Looking Glass: "Fight for women and children!... Now is our time. Fight! It is better we should be killed fighting..."

Men of different temper, Chiefs Joseph and Ollokot, knowing their wives had been shot, fought in mute fury. When Wahlitits beheld his fighting wife die from a bullet in the breast, he charged into the midst of a group of soldiers to his death. Whereupon, his battle-mate, Sarpis Ilpilp, dedicated
himself to revenge and death, which he, too, achieved. Angus McDonald states that a third of the warriors were slain in attempting to protect their families. In such cases the braves cried for their Wyakin powers and blew their magic bone whistles, to little avail. Their freedom of action was hampered by the guardian role the surprise attack had imposed upon them.

Meantime, Gibbon was endeavoring to follow these shifting scenes as he moved along the fringe of battle on horseback. However, the ebb and flow of action, its swirling character, did not come within the scope of any one man's vision. After several hours of fighting there was no semblance of a skirmish line or any other formation. Troop movements were kaleidoscopic and confused. Sensing that a fearful counter offensive was forming, Gibbon plunged into the tanglewood, crossed the river, and emerged on the campsite. Thus exposed, his horse was shot and he was wounded in the thigh of his left leg. In fact, both Gibbon and Lieutenant Woodruff were wounded at this juncture in the battle. However, they carried on; still, Gibbon soon observed that half of his officers were killed or wounded and that there was danger of panic. Therefore, at about 8:00 a.m., he reluctantly ordered a retreat toward the little tree-covered plateau less than a mile to the rear. Achievement of that position would remove the men from the line of fire coming from several sharpshooters on the hillside.

Gibbon's Retreat to a Siege Position

The Colonel did not describe the method of retreat, but Tom Sherrill said he heard him shout: "Charge that point and rake the brush with your rifles!" Historian Brady states that Gibbon gathered his men, formed them in two lines, back to back, and ordered them to charge in both directions. If so, they must have moved forward in a wedge-like manner designed to open a corridor to the coveted wooded point.

While thus concentrating, the deadly marksman, wearing a red handker-
chief around his head, armed with a long-range rifle, and stationed behind
one of the famous "Twin Trees," poured a galling fire among them. It was
then that volunteer V. Birch became frightened and shouted, "It's another
Custer Massacre, let's get out of here!" Whereupon, an officer's voice rang
out, "Don't you think of it, you'll all get killed." Having recorded those
reactions, it is proper to stress the fact that the retreat was orderly. All
official reports affirm that discipline, courage, and cooperation prevailed.
Lieutenant J. T. Van Orsdale's report to the Assistant Adjutant General is
typical: "I cannot but express the highest praise of the bravery and cool-
ness of the men. I did not see a single man hesitate or falter, the principal
difficulty being to restrain their ardor and save ammunition." Gibbon
recorded the consummation of the retreat in this way:

This movement was successfully accomplished, such of our
wounded as we could find being carried with us, and the few
Indians who occupied the timber being driven out. Here we took
up our position, and sheltering ourselves behind the trees,
fallen logs, etc., replied to the fire of the sharp-shooters
who gathered around us, occupying the brush below and the timber
above. For a time their fire was very close and deadly, and here
Lieutenant English received a mortal wound. Captain Williams was
struck a second time, and a large number of men killed and wounded.
The Indians crawled up as closely as they dared to come, and with yells
of encouragement, urged each other on; but our men met them with a
bold front, and our fire, as we afterwards learned by the blood and
dead Indians found, punished them severely.

Gibbon's own account provides some justification for an act of indig-
nation, if not insubordination by John B. Catlin. Just before the retreat,
he met Captain Rawn and they mutually agreed that a withdrawal from the
thickets to a benchland southeast of the camp would be expedient. That
position would deny the sharpshooters forest cover at close quarters, and at
the same time cut off their withdrawal to the south. As noted, Gibbon's
choice of the wooded promontory prevailed, but when Catlin arrived at that
place he took in the situation at a glance and ejaculated: "Who in hell called
a halt here?" When told that General Gibbon had ordered it, I replied, "I
don't give a dam, it's a hell of a place to camp." This so amused General
Gibbon that he did not call me to account for my disrespect."  

Catlin's disenchantment with the spot is understandable, however; the place he and Rain had in mind also left much to be desired. Both were devoid of water, but at least Gibbon's afforded logs and shade. Perhaps it was a Hobson's choice. Still, the men made the most of their limited resources. They used logs as barricades, and back of these slender defenses trenches were dug with the trowel bayonets issued to them at Fort Missoula. The results of herculean labors was a refuge that might be called "Vale for Human Squirrels." Partial outlines of these fox holes have been preserved by nature to the present time.

Unfortunately, the warriors did not hold the trenches and occupants in much respect. Still circling around at a distance, they found elevated positions from which an effective bombardment was possible. Some crept close by using trees and logs for cover. One sharpshooter, firing from a hidden position in a tree below "Gibbon's corral," killed several soldiers before he was brought down. Another "... was so securely perched behind a dead log that he killed four men in one rifle pit before he himself was picked off, and then his naked yellow body fell so close to the fortification that his friends did not venture to recover it."  

While thus holed up, the men were considerably immobilized, because vigilant sharpshooters fired upon anyone exposed to view. Enough hits were registered to impel caution. In fact, the position was subjected to a twelve-hour siege. There was no food or water; although Lieutenant Woodruff's horse was conveniently killed within the lines and its flesh was eaten. During the siege several things occurred to provide diversion, if not excitement.

The Howitzer Episode

About noon the men were pleasantly startled by two booms from the
howitzer. Remember, that weapon and the supply train were not brought down
the trail during the night march. When the howitzer appeared on the hillside
it was spied by a group of Nez Perce horsemen. Upon their forward rush, the
cannon was fired twice, but before it could be loaded again the Indians
seized it. In so doing, they killed Corporal Sales and wounded sergeants
Daly and Fredrick. The other six men in this detail escaped with their
wounded. Two privates kept on going until they reached the Bitter Root
settlements, where their exaggerated accounts of the situation created great
alarm. The other men reached the supply wagons and prepared to help stiffen
its defenses against an assault. But none came, either due to the formidable
posture of the men, as Gibbon says, or because the warriors failed to find
its hiding place, as reported by Yellow Wolf. Wagon master Kirkendall had a
close call allright, but the perpetrator was William Woodcuck. He was on
guard duty with a double-barrelled shotgun when Kirkendall made his own late
check. Woodcuck shouted, "Halt", as instructed, but before Kirkendall could
even speak, two shots rang out. The dirt at the wagon master's feet was
torn up! The men had considerable sport in reference to what they called
Woodcuck's amendment to the sentry challenge: "Halt! Who goes there?"
"Bang!"

However, the warriors did come upon a pack mule carrying over two thou-
and rounds of ammunition for Springfield rifles. Since a number of these were
picked up on the battlefield, this proved to be a considerable windfall.

No warrior came forward professing any knowledge concerning the howitzer;
hence, it was dismantled, rolled down hill, and shallow-buried by Pepeo
Tholekt. 21

The grand recovery from a fierce surprise attack seemed to postulate
the power to annihilate the military force driven into close quarters. Why
didn't the chiefs emulate the Sioux on the Little Big Horn and execute another
Custer Massacre? Obviously, the conditions were altogether different, namely,
the Nez Perces were in a terrible plight, both in respect to tribal injury and lack of warriors. Their tribal preservation was in serious jeopardy. Then, too, they were far from friends and safety. Whereas, the enemy was well ensconced in trenches and, though suffering, was still dangerous. Besides, it was now clear that reinforcements and relief would soon arrive. Howard might arrive at any time.

Therefore, the chiefs detailed about thirty warriors to pin Gibbon down until further notice. Having imposed a siege on Gibbon, the balance of the warriors then turned their attention to other urgent matters.

A Mourning People

Most of the many dead Indians were strewn among the village shambles. Perhaps thirty never left its confines, a score more were found along the river banks and in the nearby thickets. The balance were scattered far and wide. All remains of the dear departed were tenderly gathered in, with the exception of several warriors who had fallen within range of Gibbon's fortified riflemen. As families cast up their losses, a great wailing prevailed. Nearly everyone had suffered a personal loss; but in addition, there were the tribal heroes. Then there were the wounded. Where had their Wyakin powers been? How could anyone explain such a tragedy to children? Surely the devastating conflict was over. Gibbon's retreat and the resulting siege had reduced the battle to a stalemate. All concerned were drained of much fighting energy and passion. They were tired, hungry, and disconsolate. The people mourned; they wept with such feeling that the battle-toughened men in the trenches listened and trembled. Years later, Gibbon wrote, "Few of us will soon forget the wail of mingled grief, rage, and horror which came from the camp four or five hundred yards from us when the Indians returned to it and recognized their slaughtered warriors, women, and children."22

As the Indians wept, they also worked; they buried their dead, after a fashion. Having no tools for such purpose, they placed dozens in little
ravines under cutbanks and shoved loose parts of overhanging banks upon them. Tom Sherrill said he "... counted fifty-seven strung out lengthwise under a bank, each wrapped in a buffalo robe, with a chunk of earth caved down on their bodies."23

While these rude and hasty rites were underway, the sorting and discarding of camp materials was in progress. Although their wounded warranted an amplitude of saddles, robes, blankets, and cooking utensils, the necessity of flight made much equipment expendable. Many travois were rigged up and attached to ponies, while the wounded were being strapped on midst groans and sobs. Yellow Wolf's description of this phase is full of pathos, "Wounded children, screaming with pain; women and children crying, wailing for their... dead! The air was heavy with sorrow. I would not want to hear, I would not want to see again."24

Normally, the Nez Perces were an exuberant, carefree people, but when their long cavalcade stretched away to the south leaving a trail of blood, many strong hearts were upon the ground. Battle blows just suffered left them reeling and wondering where this trail of blood and tears would end, if ever. As usual, grave Chief Joseph superintended the moving. Whereas, Hototo, also called Lean Elk and Poker Joe, served as war leader in the place of Looking Glass. The latter chief was temporarily demoted, because of his failure to act upon wise suggestions for more haste and vigilance from great warriors.

Although the chiefs had the main caravan on its way south by mid-afternoon, the siege upon Gibbon's position persisted. A detail of about thirty mounted warriors took over that duty. They established a sort of rendezvous in a tree-circled space of several rods, located near the southwest ridge, a rifle-shot beyond the trenches. From that vantage point they could observe the trail entering the basin and also the points of pressure upon the siege ground. These thirty braves circled back and forth through the woods and shot at Gibbon's men upon occasion. Gibbon's supply of ammunition was shrinking
and greater caution in firing became necessary. The hostiles sensed this fact and their vigilance was never relaxed.

Toward evening the members of the command feared that Nez Percé pressure was being intensified. A volunteer and a soldier, sharing a trench, rose up and shouted, "Here they come boys! Look out! They are going to burn us and massacre all of us!" Gibbon's report describes the development this way, "A strong wind was blowing from the west and, taking advantage of this, the Indians set fire to the grass intending, doubtless, to follow up the fire and make a dash upon us whilst we were blinded by dense smoke. But unfortunately the grass was too green to burn rapidly, and before the fire reached any of the dead timber lying about us, it went out." Lieutenant Woodruff confirmed Gibbon's report and added an ornamental touch:

"And with a whispered fear each strong man sees
That smoke is curling toward us o'er the hills,
And fire is wafted onward by a gentle breeze,
And shouts of triumph the thick air fills."

Both sides were on guard all afternoon and evening. Lack of water, food, blankets, and medicine produced the most lugubrious forebodings. Dismal forecasts and cries of anguish were given utterance. Yellow Wolf described this phase of the siege: "In low places hard to see, we crawled close to those trenches. We heard soldiers talking, swearing, crying. . . . The night grew old, and the firing faded away. Soldiers would not shoot. Would not lift head nor hand above the hiding. . . . We did not charge. If we killed one soldier, a thousand would take his place. If we lost one warrior, there was none to take his place." By that time the Indian patrol had been reduced to less than a dozen under the leadership of Ollokot.

This reduction of guards, together with darkness, gave Gibbon a chance to execute important deeds. A detail of volunteers obtained water from the river and then several messengers were sent out with appeals for aid. Gibbon asked for a volunteer to take a message to Deer Lodge. An Englishman named
William Edwards was the first man to respond. Other citizens, not holding him in high esteem as a frontiersman, then offered to go, but Edwards was selected. Duly impressed by the gravity of his task, Edwards said, "I will risk my life to save you and your men." Gibbon offered him a horse and a few dollars, but there was no food. With a "God bless you" from Gibbon, a rifle in hand, Billy Edwards started out on foot and walked through the siege line. He eventually acquired a horse, reached his destination, and asked for a complete relief party. He also sent this telegram to Governor Potts:

Big Hole, August 9, 1877

Had a hard fight with the Nez Perces, killing a number and losing a number of officers and men. We need a doctor and everything. Send us such relief as you can. John Gibbon, Colonel Commanding.

A short time after Edwards left, Sergeant Wilson was sent up trail to locate the wagons. Gibbon also authorized a Bitter Root volunteer named Billy Ryan to leave for the settlement on the North Fork of Salmon River (later Gibbonsville) and warn the miners that the hostiles were headed up Ruby Creek. These official departures probably had a bearing upon the action of seven Bitter Root volunteers, who left for home without leave.

Remember, they met Howard on the trail near the Continental Divide early on the morning of August 11. However, Sergeant Wilson missed Gibbon's own supply wagons, which were hidden. Actually, these departures were possible, because the Nez Perce warriors had decided that further fighting was futile. Hence, they assembled at their rendezvous above the trenches and waited for daylight. At dawn they heard a horseman approaching and helloing to the soldiers. It was Oliver Sutherland, Howard's messenger. No attempt was made to injure or intercept him, and he entered Gibbon's camp. The warriors correctly interpreted Sutherland's arrival as meaning that reinforcements were on the way. At daybreak, they fired a two-volley salvo and withdrew from the battle area to join the tribe. Therefore, the battle relationship be-
tween whites and Indians on the Big Hole lasted twenty-four hours.

Sutherland had not seen Gibbon's wagon train, so a detail of soldiers went in search, and they found it intact. The supply outfit reached Gibbon's camp toward evening. The first prepared meal in over two days was greatly appreciated by the famished men. Ample blankets, combined with a sense of security, provided much needed rest. The wounded still lacked the services of a physician to minister to their injuries. That great solace was denied them until the 12th, when Howard's command arrived.

Howard Reaches the Battlefield

The General and his advance guard reached the camp at 9:00 a.m. on August 11; whereupon Gibbon greeted him with a cheery hello and Howard replied, "Well, Gibbon, how do you do?"

"Oh, I'm not much hurt; a flesh wound in the thigh."

Gibbon briefed Howard on the salient facts of his part in the campaign. Afterward they rode around the battlefield and observed the fresh graves where the dead soldiers and volunteers had been buried by a detail under the direction of Captain Comba. They also noted the partially covered Indian remains with a shudder. A day later their feelings were much more revolted by the indignities that had been committed upon the bodies of Nez Perces by Howard's Bannock Indian scouts, and by the looting of the village. The latter act was the beginning of the most wanton, persistent, and insatiable vandalism upon a battlefield known in Western America.

Gibbon concluded his narrative of the Big Hole battle, as related to Howard, in these words: "And here you find us, some killed, many wounded, but in no way discouraged. It was a gallant struggle. Who would have believed that those Indians would have rallied after such a surprise and made such a fight?"

An assessment of certain issues involved in the answer to Gibbon's question will be made in part of the following chapter.
Chapter 11
The Battle of the Big Hole

Footnotes

   Sherrill also related this conversation to Will Cave, who quoted it in his account. *Wallace-Press-Times*, September 4, 1921.


4. Ibid.

5. Cyrus T. Brady, *op. cit.*, p. 173. Although no documentary proof has been found, the charge persists that some of Gibbon’s men secretly fortified themselves with liquor against the cold and the impending battle.


7. Ibid.

8. Yellow Wolf, p. 120.

9. Ibid., p. 132.

10. *Hear Me, My Chiefs*, p. 383. A Nez Perce poet wrote a song concerning the Rainbow-Pahkatoe incident:

    Gone is the Rain-bow, my War-time brother,
    Bravest in Battle, kindliest in Peace.
    Falling where the fighting raged,
    Why was I not there?

    By compact, both our fathers died in war,
    And likewise this day their sons.

    Changed as water is my warrior-power,
    And I, "Pah-ka-tas" now yearns for death

    From the Night-trail my "war-mate" calls me,
    And I answer, "YES!"

    Tis well, Better this than bondage;
    For the oppressor’s hand is iron.

    I go, again not to return,
    Sad Brothers, Weeping Sisters, Farewell!
Footnotes - Chapter 11.


14. This information was given to the author on July 11, 1945, by Moses Chaffin in Corvallis, Montana.


18. Colonel Rice invented the trowel bayonet while serving in the Department of Dakota. This rifle attachment was just as effective in battle as the sabre bayonet. Besides, it could be used almost as well as a small shovel in digging rifle pits.

19. Depressions tracing the trench lines constitute an interesting evidence of the siege ground. Trees marked by bullets formerly attracted similar attention, but they have mostly died and been removed.


   T. C. Sherrill concurs with Yellow Wolf in saying, "I could see that they were badly crippled up from the number of wounded they had tied to the horses. The squaws were very busy." A. J. Noyes, *op. cit.*, p. 117.


L. V. McWhorter could not get any information from Nez Perce sources confirming the fire incident. On September 4, 1943, the author received this statement from him: "The 'Death Song', the attempted 'Burning Out', and several other items of that day's fight, was not!" In spite of this positive statement, the author believes that a fire was started. He cannot disregard the statement from several sources.

28. Yellow Wolf, p. 156.

29. Ibid., p. 157.

30. Helena Independent, August 9, 1877.


32. O. O. Howard, op. cit., p. 203.

33. Ibid., p. 206.
Chapter 12

CASUALTIES, EVALUATIONS AND REACTIONS

When the fighting ends, battle casualties are inevitably tabulated. It would be well if arrangements could always be made for an objective count on both sides by impartial observers. Such a procedure would preclude partisan claims and minimize errors resulting from partial surveys and faulty memories.

Estimates of Nez Perce Losses

Colonel Gibbon's report states: "Captain Combs, who had charge of our burial party, reports eighty-three (83) dead Indians found on the field, and six more dead warriors were found in a ravine some distance from the battle-field after the command left there."¹ Of course, that constitutes the most official estimate; however, its accuracy has been questioned by many.

Lieutenant Albert G. Forse stated: "I do not wish to criticize Gen. Gibbon's report, but it certainly gave the public the wrong impression."² Forse based his complaint upon knowledge he received from several officers who were in the fight. They agreed that about seventy women and children were killed; therefore, Gibbon's estimate would reduce the warriors slain to nineteen. According to Forse, these officers believed that many more warriors were killed.

Information from Indian sources fails to bring the problem into clearer focus. Duncan McDonald, who talked with Chief White Bird within a year of the battle, stated that 87 were killed, all told, of whom 33 were warriors. Chief Joseph said, "In the fight with General Gibbon, we lost fifty women and children and thirty fighting men."³ Even that forthright statement
leaves a question, namely, how many non-fighting men died? Yellow Wolf was careful to differentiate between the two in stating that, "Only twelve real fighting men were lost in that battle. But our best were left there."\(^4\) Busis Owyeen tallied the number of dead on his buffalo horn drinking cup, but it was considered incomplete. L. V. McWhorter summarized the results of his painstaking efforts to get an accurate count in this way: "It is impossible at this date to evaluate the figures accurately. Probably between sixty and ninety Indians were killed."\(^5\) Reference has been made to the fact that many wounded were taken from the battlefield on travois. It is definitely known that Olokokot's wife, Fair Land, died at the first camp beyond the battlefield, and two warriors died at the second. How many more lives ebbed away under the rigors of forced travel remains a matter of speculation.

**The Battle Impact on the Nez Perces**

In any case, the battle losses were disastrous to the Nez Perces. Before Big Hole, their losses were insignificant; thereafter, nearly every family was disrupted. Besides, a dozen veteran warriors were struck down, thereby breaking the vital spark of tribal strength. Some like Joseph and Olokokot lost wives, more lost children. The warriors' cold bitterness and reproach upon Gibbon was expressed by Joseph in these words: "The Nez Perce never make war on women and children; we could have killed a great many... while the war lasted, but we would feel ashamed to do so."\(^6\) He thereby defined a standard toward noncombatants that warriors are still unable to uphold.

After Big Hole, the war took on a grimmer aspect among the Nez Perces. From then on their tempers were taut and their teeth on edge. The war had followed them into Montana. Indeed, it had increased in ferocity and tempo. From now on all white men were bound to be their enemies, and yet, their own fighting power had been greatly reduced. Contemplation of these facts would have impelled a lesser people to lose their morale, and surrender. Instead,
these indomitable chiefs were determined to press along upon this circuitous route to safety if it took all summer.

Meantime, the mourning cavalcade reached Swamp Creek after traveling a dozen miles. There they formed a camp called Takseen, meaning the Willows. That night the care of the wounded was the first desideratum, although the people must have been extremely cold and hungry.

Early white visitors to this campsite reported seeing parts of splints and bandages involved in the dressing of wounds. This side of Nez Perce suffering should not be passed without notice. Perhaps Yellow Wolf's cogent summary is adequate: "Traveling was hard on the wounded. So bad that when we reached more safe places, several of them stopped. Remained scattered and hidden away. A few of them were never afterwards heard of." Determined to prevent a surprise attack upon their distraught people at the Swamp Creek hospital camp, the warriors prepared a number of stone rifle pits on the edge of a clearing, athwart the practical approach to the stopping place.9

On the morning of August 10, the siege-warriors rejoined the tribe as it was packing for the second day of travel. Although haste was now imperative, the wounded could not be forced beyond fifteen miles per day. Even so, several people died along the way during the first few days.

J. W. Redington, one of Howard's scouts, found an aged woman in an abandoned camp. She requested death at his hands, and though he refused, Bannock scouts obliged with all the flourishes.10 Howard records a similar instance wherein the same ruthless scouts dispatched an old, ill medicine man named Kapoochas.11 People of this type were no doubt left behind by the Nez Perces at their own request—it was the Indian way.

Gibbon's Casualties

Colonel Gibbon listed his casualties before leaving the battlefield. The accuracy of his report has been verified. There were 29 fatalities and 40
wounded. The civilian volunteer ratios were five and four respectively. Thus, the Bitter Root Volunteers sustained a thirty percentage casualty rate. H. O. Bostwick, Fort Shaw guide, was also killed. Hence, there were 24 soldiers killed and 36 wounded. Of these numbers, two officers were killed and five wounded. Lieutenant William L. English died of his wounds ten days after the battle. The rate of casualties among officers was nearly half. The following is Gibbon’s official report to the Assistant Adjutant General Department of Dakota. This report, dated at Fort Shaw, September 2, 1877, is on file as Document 3595 DD 1877, in the National Archives:

List of killed and wounded at battle of Big Hole, M.T., August 9th, 1877

Killed

Company "A"
Captain William Logan
Private John B. Smith

Company "B"
1st Lieutenant James H. Bradley

Company "D"
Corporal William H. Payne
  " Jacob Eisenhut
  " Musician Francis Gallagher

Company "E"
Private Mathew Butterly

Company "F"
Private William D. Powroy
  " James McGuire

Company "G"
1st Sergeant Robert L. Edgeworth
Sergeant William H. Martin
Corporal Dominick O’Connor
  " Robert E. Sale
Private John O’Brien
  " Gottleib Manz

Company "H"
Private McKindra L. Drake (orderly for Colonel Gibbon)

Company "I"
Sergeant Michael Hogan
Corporal Daniel McCaffrey
Private Herman Broetz

Company "K"
1st Sergeant Frederick Stortz
Musician Thomas Stinebaker
Artificer John Kleis

Second Cavalry
Sergeant Edward Page, Company "L" killed

Wounded
Colonel John Gibbon, 7th Infantry,
(left thigh; severe flesh wound)

Company "A"
1st Lieutenant C. A. Coolidge (both legs above knees, right hand severe)
Private James C. Lehman (right leg serious)
" Charles Alberts (under left breast, serious)
" Lorenzo D. Brown (right shoulder, severe)
" George Leher (scalp slight)

Company "D"
Sergeant Patrick C. Daly (scalp slight)
Corporal John Murphy (right hip, severe)
Musician Timothy Cronan (right shoulder and breast, serious)
Private James Keys (right foot, severe)

Company "E"
Sergeant William Wright (scalp, slight)
" James Bell (right shoulder, severe)

Company "F"
Captain Constant Williams (right side, severe, & scalp slight)
Sergeant William W. Watson (right hip serious) Died Aug. 29, 1877
Corporal Christian Luttman (both legs, severe)
Musician John Erickson (left arm, flesh)
Private Edwin D. Hunter (right hand, severe)
" George Maurer (through both cheeks serious)

Company "G"
Sergeant John W. H. Frederic (left shoulder, flesh)
" Robert Benzinger (right breast, flesh)
Private John J. Connor (right eye, slight)
" George Gaughart (right shoulder, thigh & wrist, severe)
" James Burk (right breast serious)
" Chas. H. Robbecke (left hip, slight)

Company "I"
1st Lieutenant William L. English (through back, serious and scalp slightly) died Aug. 19)
Corporal Richard M. Cunliffe (shoulder and arm flesh)
Private Patrick Fallon (hip and leg, serious)
" William Thompson (left shoulder, flesh)
" Joseph Devoss (ankle and leg, serious)
Company "K"
2nd Lieutenant C. A. Woodruff (both legs above knee and left heel, severe)
Sergeant Howard Clarke (heel, severe)
Private David Heaton (right wrist, severe)
" Mathew Devine (fore-arm, serious)
" Philo O. Hurlburt (left shoulder, flesh)

2nd Cavalry
Company "F"
Private Chas. B. Gould (left side, severe)

Citizen Volunteers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Killed</th>
<th>Wounded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L. C. Elliott</td>
<td>Myron Lockwood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Armstrong</td>
<td>Otto Lyford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davis Morrow</td>
<td>Jacob Baker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alvin Lockwood</td>
<td>William Ryan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campbell Mitchell</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

H. C. Bostwick, Post guide Fort Shaw, killed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Recapitulation:</th>
<th>Wounded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Officers 7th Infantry</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enlisted men 7th Infantry</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enlisted men 2d Cavalry</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers (citizens)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bostwick (citizen)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

September 2d, 1877 (signed) John Gibbon
Colonel 7th Infantry
Command District of Montana

Surely this was a formidable list of casualties for a battle of such short duration. The toll was heavy, because of the exceptional action and passion during every moment of a five-hour fray. After this savage imbroglio, siege conditions prevailed for twenty hours. Gibbon took pains to mention the zeal, courage, and energy of both officers and men. His report says, "I found it out of the question to make any attempt at discrimination, and will simply mention the names of those who were present in the battle."

Gibbon's appreciation of the valor displayed by officers and men was

Upon arriving at Deer Lodge the wounded were placed in St. Joseph's Hospital, where Lieutenant William L. English died. The other wounded soldiers and volunteers remained in Deer Lodge until they were able to return to their respective posts and homes.

**Battle Evaluations**

The basic character of the Big Hole battle was disclosed in the narration of its development. Even so, it seems expedient to make certain evaluations. All who participated in the struggle or viewed the shambles wrought, characterize it as one of the most bitterly fought battles in the annals of warfare. Veterans of the Civil War compared the battle to the action on Little Round Top in Gettysburg. Other students declare that it was a bloodier battle than Waterloo. Will Cave describes it as "... the hardest-fought, most stubbornly-contested, long-drawn withal fiercest conflict in the annals of warfare between settlers or soldiers and American Indians."^15

The terrific intensity of the battle stemmed from the fact that Gibbon's command was smarting under the general criticism of the army. Therefore, the Colonel, although not Custer-like in boldness, was extremely anxious to redeem the honor and prestige of the military. On the other hand, the Nez Perce chiefs saw at once that the fate of their tribe was at stake. Hence, conquer or die was their rally cry. The result was a battle of great ferocity. A facet of this passion involved the killing of women and children. Were they fired upon with deliberation? The answer is, yes and no. Gibbon's report on this matter is indisputable: "Logan's company being sent in on the run on the extreme right, a heavy fire was at once opened along the whole line of
tepees. The startled Indians rushing from them in every direction, and for a few moments no shots were returned. Comba and Sanno first struck the camp at the apex of the V, crossed the main stream, and delibered their fire into the tepees and the Indians as they passed them. Sergeant C. N. Loynes confirmed this report in these words: "... we received order to give three volleys, then charge. We did so." Of course, such a bombardment was bound to kill indiscriminately. After that, much depended upon the temperaments of the soldiers (or volunteers) and the circumstances.

Colonel Gibbon states that he came upon several women bearing children in their arms. Upon seeing him, they held them forward saying, "Only women and children here..." He further states, "The poor, inoffensive women and children... we no way disturbed." John B. Catlin was wholly forthright in his view of this matter: "You may ask why did we kill the women and children. We answer that when we came up on the second charge, we found that the women were using the Winchesters with as much skill, and as bravely, as did the bucks. As to the children, though many were killed, we do not think that a citizen or soldier killed a child on purpose..." G. O. Shields justified indiscriminate slaughter upon the ground that all Nez Perce were blood-thirsty. He records the statement of a scout who was with Bradley, that they spared three squaws huddled in the willows early in the fighting. After the battle all three were found dead; one held a rifle and a revolver was lying near the hand of another. These circumstances were sufficient to convince Shields that women generally took an active part in the battle. Tom Sherrill not only shared this opinion, but he called specific shots: "An Indian and a squaw were near together when the Indian was shot. The woman dropped behind a small clump of brush, catching a revolver from the dying Indian, and as the soldiers approached she rose up from behind the brush and shot pointblank at the nearest, which happened
to be Logan. She was immediately riddled with bullets." Sherrill also observed the shooting of a lone woman in flight; and he mentioned hearing a fellow bragging about killing two women. There was the well-known case of an eighteen-year-old beauty lying wounded, having been struck in the mouth with a rifle butt. The blow knocked her teeth out, but recovering, she was called In-Koho-Lio—meaning girl with broken teeth. After the campaign, she married Andrew Garcia and bore him two sons, before dying at an early age.

McWhorter received slender confirmation from Indian informants that several women did participate in an early stage of the fighting. Red Wolf saw two women help drive soldiers from the camp. Yellow Wolf told how Wahlitits' wife grabbed his gun as he fell, and killed the soldier who dropped him. Then he added, "... I heard she had been wounded before Wahlitits was killed. She was the only woman who did fighting in that battle that I knew about."21

The foregoing accounts of the battle in general, and various facets in detail, still leaves the issue of victory or defeat unanswered.

Who Won the Big Hole Battle?

This is an elusive question. Colonel Gibbon was cognizant of that fact when he wired Governor Potts: "Had a hard fight with the Nez Perces, killing a number and losing a number of officers and men."22 A victory message would have read: "We have met the enemy and they are ours," or something similar. Colonel Nelson A. Miles was destined to achieve such a triumph over the same tribe, and his message was to be exulting in character.

If Gibbon could not report victory, did he suffer a defeat? General Alfred H. Terry, commanding the Dakota Department, expressed the official viewpoint in this telegram to Gibbon: "Your dispatches of the 9th and 11th are received. I beg that you will accept for yourself, your officers, and your men my heartiest congratulations for your most gallant fight and
brilliant success. . . ."23 Terry went on to suggest that Gibbon's hands would be so full in taking care of the wounded that he could very well leave further pursuit of the Nez Perces up to Howard. Obviously Gibbon had failed to check the Nez Perce flight, although he had punished them severely. His command, in turn, had survived though maimed by casualties. Perhaps Howard's arrival saved it from extermination, assuming that the warriors had willed such a fate.

The foregoing view represents both the official and general interpretation of the battle. The press and the public had nothing but kind words for Gibbon and his men. They were all valiant fighters; if they fell short of full triumph, it was only because of disparity in numbers. To be sure, there were some who saw the battle in a different light. Angus McDonald called Big Hole a stunning defeat for the flag, and he denied that the Nez Perces had any advantages. Admittedly there were a few more men on the chief's side, but only a score or so were experienced warriors. Whereas, Gibbon had sixteen officers and a considerable body of battle-trained men. Besides, army men were more disciplined and responsive to orders. Then there was the matter of weapons; Indian arms were not uniformly efficacious. Perhaps a fourth of their guns were not adjusted to accessible munitions. Finally, Gibbon had the advantage of momentum, precision, time, and place.24 In spite of all these factors, the Nez Perces had turned the shield around at great cost and thrown their attackers upon their bellies in a string of fox-holes.

Volunteer Captain John B. Catlin also regarded the battle as a defeat. He said, "We were whipped to a frazzle... but we broke the backbone of the Nez Perce nation. They never rallied again, so to speak."25 Most students of the campaign might agree with Catlin's admission of defeat, but not in respect to Indian rallying power.

These red warriors were nothing if not persistently competent. They
had achieved a signal victory at White Bird, a sort of Bull Run, so to speak. In the Clearwater battle they gave way like the Union forces had done at Fredricksburg, because of superior pressure. Big Hole was a small version of Gettysburg. It was indeed a heavy blow, but they mustered the fortitude to recover and travel a thousand miles. During that perilous trek they survived several formidable efforts to blockade them before their trail ended at the Nez Perce Appomattox in the Bear Paw Mountains on October 4. Surely it was this over-all record that won the Nez Perce warriors so much renown. Standards for determining the fighting qualities of Indians leave much to be desired. However, some students would place the Nez Perces at the very top. Indeed, they hold that their record in the Campaign of 1877 entitled them to be rated among the first warriors of the world. This reputation would be difficult to reconcile with a simple verdict of defeat in the Battle of Big Hole.

Disposition of Gibbon's Able Soldiers

Meantime, various arrangements were made with different parts of Gibbon's command. Captain Browning, with Lieutenants Wright and Van Orsdale and fifty soldiers, volunteered to accompany Howard for several marches before returning to their posts. Therefore, on the morning of August 13, Howard's full command, reinforced by this unit, started south in pursuit of the Nez Perces.

The balance of the command accompanied Gibbon to Deer Lodge. From there, Companies A, D, G, and I returned to Missoula. Captain Richard Comba reported that his men in Company D, 7th Infantry, marched five hundred forty-nine miles in going from Camp Baker, on July 24, to Big Hole and back to Fort Missoula. Obviously such a hike had not been much of an excursion, but the man had a great experience to remember.
Renewal of Volunteer Activity

After subtracting the dead, wounded, and absent without leave from the Bitter Root fighters, there were still eighteen volunteers on hand. There is nothing to indicate that any of these men wanted to join Howard in pressing the pursuit. However, Tom Sherrill states that several fresh citizens went on with Howard's scouts "... looking for more Indian trouble, but as General Howard dragged his army slowly behind the Indians, never trying to overtake them, our boys got tired and came back."26

The veteran volunteers started up the mountain for home, and before reaching the summit they met some men from their home valley with "... a wagon load of everything that was good to eat, which had been prepared by the settlers' wives, and with many articles for the wounded." All aspects of war are not precisely as Sherman said.

When William A. Clark and Thomas Stuart reached the battlefield, Howard had departed. These leaders and their men were ready and eager for action, and their combined strength was sixty-two men. There were men from Butte, Deer Lodge, and Sheridan; all were well mounted, equipped, and ready for business. Hence, by making rapid marches they overtook Howard on the 15th.

Clark and Stuart offered their services as scouts to occupy passes and assist in holding actions. They first understood that Howard was pleased with his proposition. But on the 16th, they received word that he desired them to join his main column and protect his right flank in the regular routine. This prosaic assignment was unacceptable to the captains, and they decided to return home "... for the simple reason that they did not believe General Howard, at his rate of progress at that time and previously, would overtake the Indians at all."27 Howard recorded his annoyance over the manner in which some volunteers thronged his tent to offer criticism and advice concerning his management of the campaign.
However, there was a company of Montana volunteers that persisted in its purpose. Remember the Callaway-Farrell led company organized in Virginia City? They joined Howard near Bannock on the 15th, and accepted service on his terms.

Enough has been written to convey the idea that Montanans were no more satisfied with General Howard's record than Idaho people had been. Newspapers naturally reflected the dissatisfaction of the volunteers. On August 23, the Bozeman _Avant Courier_ praised the valor of the volunteers in the Battle of Big Hole, and the eagerness of all Montanans to avenge the blood of the innocent and repel a merciless and insolent foe. The article then denounced the federal government for failing to authorize Governor Potts to provide what was needed to sweep the Indians from the field. The _Helena Herald_ decried the blunders, tardiness, and inability that characterized Howard's role in the campaign. In the same vein, the _Helena Weekly Independent_ complained that "... after laying over a day and two nights at Gibbon's battlefield, Howard only made seventy-two miles in the next three days."28

The _New Northwest_ printed an article by S. F. Dunlap that found fault with everyone but Montanans. "Why were they not vigorously pursued by Gen. Howard? ... We are suffering in the loss of time (volunteers), our hay crop is going to destruction. ... We are spending money for scouts, fortifications, etc., and the rest of the country looks and mocks at our calamity. ..."29

Of course the Big Hole Battle, coming within fourteen months of the Custer Massacre, aroused the whole nation and attracted the attention of the world. Actually, there were rumors to the effect that a general uprising of Indians might result unless the wily Nez Perces were soon captured. Other newspapers reflected the views of Montana editors and added considerable criticism of their own making. The _Idaho Semi-Weekly World_ of August 17, no doubt stated what nearly all of Howard's critics were thinking, "... Of
one thing we feel quite confident, . . . General Howard ought to be relieved and someone else placed in command of the forces. . . . Rapid pursuit and rapid striking is the only way to fight Indians successfully. Following a hundred miles behind with an army and pack or wagon train six miles long is not forcible." Everyone seemed to forget that half of Howard's force consisted of infantry. They all forgot that the Nez Perces had several thousand tough ponies, which allowed frequent changing of mounts.

As if an unsympathetic press was not enough, Howard brought official displeasure upon himself by the contents of a letter he mailed to General Irvin McDowell on August 14, from Bannack City, Montana. After describing the status of the pursuit at the moment, he questioned the expediency of his orders of July 29, "... to follow them up, no matter where they go... regardless of boundary lines," by writing: "Is it worthwhile for me to pursue them further from my department unless General Terry or General Crook will head them off and check their advance? ... Without this cooperation the result will be, as it has been, doubtful." Howard committed a double error by asking for new orders when old ones were so clear, and implying that the Department of Dakota was not fully cooperating. In view of public clamor for more dynamic leadership, it is understandable that McDowell's answer chided Howard for looking to others for help instead of relying upon his own forces. Howard also sent a letter to Governor Potts, in which he admitted that the Nez Perces could beat him running. This letter came to General Sherman's attention, and his stern reaction will be disclosed later. Before resuming the narrative of the Nez Perce flight and Howard's pursuit, a glance should be given the Big Hole Battlefield.

Vandalism on the Battlefield

Both of the belligerents had ample chances to inflict indignities upon
the remains of enemy dead during and after the battle. Although there was talk among the volunteers about taking scalps, there is no proof that any were taken by either side. Thus, Lieutenant Forse was able to make this commentary in reference to the entire campaign: "I did not see all the dead, but from inquiries made at the time I failed to find anyone who had seen a body that had been scalped or mutilated in any way." Although soldiers and volunteers respected the Nez Perce remains, Howard's scouts did not conform to this code of ethics. Howard recorded their despicable behavior: "See these women's bodies disinterred by our own ferocious Bannock scouts! See how they pierce and dishonor their poor, harmless forms, and carry off their scalps! Our officers sadly look upon the scene and then, as by common impulse, deepen their beds and cover them with earth." The Bannocks not only performed such atrocities, but they jubilated over their foul deeds in scalp dances at night. Neither were these slender efforts toward reinterring Indian remains of any value. Visitors to the battlefield recorded the gruesome details of continuing vandalism. Indians were disinterred and shaken from their burial robes and these were carted away. Clothing was searched for gold and parts of apparel were removed. Amede Bassette visited the battlefield on August 30 and found "Many Indian relics such as bead collars, bead-trimmed moccasins, rings... and many other little things, but nothing of any value whatever." About the same time, a newspaper reporter named Parker visited the area, viewed the shambles, and wrote: "The scene was fearful, yet satisfactory." He stated that Toohoolhoolzote's head was cut off and taken away for ethnological purposes. After weeks of these ghoulish acts and observations, cold weather drove some bears to lower elevation and they made excavations for their own reasons. When this fact was reported to Captain Rawn at Fort Missoula, he ordered Lieutenant J. T. Orsdale and six enlisted men to reinter the bodies of their
comrades in arms. The detail left Missoula on September 20, found conditions as represented, and followed their instructions. Years later, these remains were to be officially removed to other places. Whereas, the original inadequacy and continuing neglect of Indian burials left them to the tender mercies of vandals, wild beasts, and recurring floods. In 1938, MoWhorter invited several veterans of the campaign to visit the battlefield. Their expenses were to be paid and they would be feted by the residents of Big Hole Basin. Still they declined. One said, "I might cry when I see where my friends and kindred were killed." Need anyone wonder?
Chapter 12
Casualties, Evaluations and Reactions

Footnotes

7. J. A. Harrington. A report based upon information received from Howard, Stevens, Ed. Cramer, and others. Mr. Harrington gave this data to the author on September 4, 1958. Big Lake Creek camp was located 18 miles from the battlefield and a mile from the mouth of Nez Perce Canyon.
8. Yellow Wolf, op. cit., p. 159.
9. In 1923, when Thorn Christensen visited this area, there were seventy-five stone-pile rifle pits. Twenty years later, the author found thirty-three intact. The author visited the area and took pictures of these stone-pile pits in August, 1945.
11. Ibid. Also Howard, op. cit., p. 251.
   They were Captains Charles C. Rawm, Richard Comba, George L. Browning, J.M.J. Sanno, Constant Williams (wounded twice), and William Logan (killed). First Lieutenants C. A. Coolidge (wounded three times), James H. Bradley (killed), J. W. Jacobs, Regimental Quartermaster, Allen H. Jackson, George H. Wright, and William L. English (mortally wounded); and Second Lieutenants C. A. Woodruff, Acting Adjutant (wounded three times), J. T. Van Orsdale, E. E. Hardin, and Francis Woodbridge.
   A singular fact noted was that all of the officers who were killed or wounded were married.

The Montana Standard, August 10, 1958, stated that Congress awarded Medals of Honor to the following men for distinguished service in the Battle of the Big Hole: Captain James Jackson; Sergeants William D. Edwards and Milden H. Wilson; Privates Wilfred Clark, Lorenzo Brown, and John McLennan.

14. The doctors were Mitchell, Deer Lodge; James W. Wheelock and O. B. Whitford, Butte; and Reese and Steele, Helena.

15. Will Cave, op. cit., Wallace-Press Times, August 14, 1921.


23. The New Northwest, Deer Lodge, August 21, 1877.


27. The Butte Miner, August 21, 1877.

It should be noted that many volunteers were favorably impressed by Howard. The following statement signed by ten men, led by Thomas Stuart, appeared in The New Northwest, August 24, 1877.

"In our intercourse with Gen. Howard, we found him thoroughly kind, courteous and gentlemanly. We regret that any reports should have been circulated to the contrary and trust that this statement may have the effect of preventing any such in the future."


29. The New Northwest, August 17, 1877.


31. Howard to Assistant Adjutant General, Military Division of the Pacific, August 14, 1877.

32. Albert G. Forse, op. cit.


Footnotes - Chapter 12


38. L. V. McWhorter to Mrs. Flora Hershey, November 23, 1938.
Chapter 13

INCIDENTS ENROUTE TO CAMAS MEADOWS

After leaving their Willows Camp on Swamp Creek, the Nez Perces skirted the Big Hole Basin along the edge of the forested foothills. After ascending Pioneer Creek they crossed Skinner Meadows, then traveled over a pass and descended South Bloody Dick Creek to the mouth of Stevenson's Canyon. There they crossed a ridge to the west and entered Horse Prairie, where they camped on August 12. Lean Elk (Poker Joe) was charged with the responsibility for tribal defense at this time, and he rearranged their marching order. The family unit was discarded and the women, children, advanced guards, and horses were pushed forward, leaving a concentration of manpower to guard the rear. This procedure did not give them an aggressive posture, but the people of Bannack City, not knowing their intentions, took steps to defend themselves.

Bannack Prepares for an Attack

Beating drums called all of the citizens together, and plans for the defense, even siege, of the village were presented. Women and children were quartered in Hotel Meade, where extra food, water, clothing, and bedding were quickly assembled. Men hastened to throw up breastworks of dirt and logs on two knolls south of town. John Poindexter volunteered to ride north and urge Howard to send reinforcements, and Melvin Trask led a little expedition to Horse Prairie to warn settlers of the danger. Mrs. Dunk Waddams struck out on horseback for Medicine Lodge Creek in Sheep Basin on a similar mission. Some of her relatives were working there and she was concerned about their
safety. Meantime, the Nez Perces adhered to the base of the western mountains.

Howard arrived at Bannack City on August 14, where he was joined by volunteer forces under the command of William A. Clark and others. Bannack was safe, but misfortune befell some of the settlers on the upper Horse Prairie. An advance guard of scouting Indians came upon the Montague-Winters ranch, where seven men were working. As the scouts approached the house a gun was discharged and the Indians rushed the place. There they killed William Flynn. Then they killed two men in a hay field. One was W. S. Montague, an early settler in the area; the other was James W. Smith. The ranch house was ransacked in searching for bandage material. Five miles above this place the Indians surprised Meyers and Cooper. The latter escaped but Meyers was slain.

A settler named William Farnsworth was also dispatched, but a man of retarded mentality was allowed to carry on. The Holahan home was entered but not damaged, possibly because two pictures of angels were hanging on the wall. Several other men escaped from the scouting party by quickly appraising the situation and hiding. A considerable number of horses were taken from the prairie, including Alex Cruikshank's entire herd.

In the circumstances, their appropriation of horses was justifiable. As Yellow Wolf said: "While we had many horses, it was good to have fresh ones. Best, too, that none be left for soldiers. It was aimed that no horses could be found by soldiers anywhere we passed. The settlers may have been killed by resisting the seizure of their property; still, it was partly a case of wanton slaughter. When the Nez Perces appeared on Horse Prairie their tempers were raw and short from brutal battle. Bitter Root settlers had betrayed their confidence; this fact produced a vast change in their attitude. New commanders and forces continued to enter the field to hound them down. Thenceforth, all whites were likely to be regarded as enemies. Certainly all men directly in their path would be brushed aside. And yet, their behavior was not altogether consistent. One Indian simply said: "They are double-minded..."
some boys are very bad... Remember that the young men ran in tribal factions not easy to control. Even so, it is well to remember that they did not harm women or children, and no men were mutilated at any time.

A Circuitous Route

From Horse Prairie the Nez Perces crossed the Continental Divide via Bannack Pass, down Caneick-Canyon into Idaho. They hoped Howard would think that they intended doubling back toward the Clearwater country and follow them. However, he had several Nez Perce scouts who assured him that Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone River was their true objective. Hence, he refused to make the detour westward, even though a fervent appeal to do so reached him from Colonel George L. Shoup in Salmon City. Instead, Howard hoped to intercept them by following the base line of the arc their route would describe. He aimed to beat them to Dry or Beaver Creek Station near present day Spencer, Idaho. This was the freight and stage route from northern Utah to southwestern Montana towns. Thus, he planned to go by way of Red Rock, Monida Pass, and Beaver Canyon. However, he took still another precaution lest the Indians should outrun him to the point chosen. Lieutenant George Bacon, with a company of forty cavalry men, was ordered to reach Targhee Pass (Continental Divide) above Henrys Lake before the redmen and hold them at bay until Howard came upon their rear. By going up the Centennial Valley, this command was bound to reach Targhee Pass ahead of the hostiles. As usual, Howard's plans were well-conceived and promising. But before describing their execution, it is expedient to give an account of events incident to the Nez Perce detour upon the upper Lemhi River and Birch Creek areas.

Defense Posture in Lemhi Valley

Howard's refusal to pursue the Nez Perces across the Beaverhead Range threw the Salmon River country settlers entirely upon their own resources.
Able leadership, combined with attitudes comparable to those of the Bitter Root settlers, enabled them to cope with the Indians. George L. Shoup had gained large experience as an Indian fighter in the southwest; indeed, he served as a colonel under Colonel J. M. Chivington in the Massacre of Sand Creek, 1864. His associates, C. A. Woods and M. H. Andrews, also had fighting backgrounds. When they learned about the Big Hole Battle these men and others made defense plans in case the Nez Perces came into the Lemhi area. They decided to organize and fortify, but not attack or provoke them. Special care was exercised in securing a pledge from Chief Tendoy that members of his band would remain on the Lemhi Indian Reservation and otherwise cooperate with the volunteers. It was reported that some of the Lemhis timidly hoped for some excitement. Perhaps it was well for them that they confined this impulse to a horse-stealing raid. It was reported that a group of Lemhis, led by Big Body, ran two hundred Nez Perce ponies on to the reservation. Before this horse raid, Chief Tendoy plead with the Nez Perce chiefs to hurry through the country, and he may have sold cartridges to the refugees at black market prices. Thus, these Shoshonis (Tendoy's Lemhi band), like Bannocks, Flatheads, and (later) Crows, found it expedient to turn their backs on the beleaguered Nez Perces.

Although most of the Lemhi Valley settlers went down to Salmon City, some of the Junction men erected a stockade for their protection. It was made of timbers set on end in the ground and stationed in two rows, the space between being filled with earth. Port holes were made at intervals for use in case of attack. Some of the families were sent to Salmon, but a half-dozen remained with the thirteen men who elected to defend the position. A level-headed man named Ed Swan acted as captain and managed to prevent any provocative action when Indians approached the stockade. The Nez Perces arrived at Junction at 10:00 a.m. on the morning of August 13. They set up their noon
camp on the present site of Leadore. A friendly Indian from the Lemhi Agency came to the stockade and he was requested to enter the Nez Perce camp for information. A parley was arranged, and the chiefs assured the delegates that no harm was intended so they could go to their homes. However, they returned to their posts and anxiously awaited developments. At this juncture, a messenger was sent to Salmon with the following letter:

"Junction, Lemhi, Aug. 13, 1877.
Geo. L. Shoup, Salmon City.

The Nez Perce Indians came in here at 10 a.m., about 60 in number with Looking Glass and White Bird. We have had a talk with them; they seem to be friendly disposed toward the citizens. They say for us to go home and attend to our business. They say that Joseph will be here today with 100 men. There are five lodges of Bannacks (sic) that came from Lost river this morning, they want to bring their squaws to our stockade. We shall be on the lookout. If we get in trouble would be pleased to have help.

Very respectfully,
Jacob Yearian."

By mid-afternoon the hostiles were packed and the women and children were departing southward. The alert settlers recognized this as the critical hour, and H. C. McCreery recorded their reactions as he observed the scene from his battle station. A council of chiefs was held, in which there were three spokesmen. Then, every Indian mounted his horse and joined a line fronting the stockade. A charge was ordered and on they came, every man flat on the back of his horse. But it was a mock maneuver; not a rifle was fired as the horsemen broke to the right and left and then circled back to the camp ground. On McCreery's order, "The gate was opened, and our crowd silently filed out and drew a long breath as we saw the line fade away and the sun disappear behind the mountains where they were going."10 They struck south on the Old Mormon Missionary road toward the Birch Creek divide. When the danger had passed, H. C. McCreery found it in his heart to express this sentiment: "We could not help realizing the hardship and suffering, yes, and want that those poor human beings were enduring, all because of man's
inhumanity to man. . . ."11

When the Indians moved southward from Junction, a man named John Clark volunteered to carry the news to Howard at Bannack City. In that way the General's judgment regarding their ultimate destination was confirmed. Al Linderman carried the good news that the chiefs had kept the truce to Colonel Shoup in Salmon City. On the morning of the fourteenth, three other settlers followed the Nez Perce trail to their camp site of the previous night. There they observed prepared positions of defense against attack, but no Indians were lurking about. Although the Nez Perces had all left the area, the Junction settlers remained close to their stockade for several days. However, its efficacy was later doubted when Lieutenant Albert G. Forse reported that it could have been enfiladed from higher ground within range on two sides.12 Nevertheless, between the good management of the settlers and sufferance of the chiefs, no damage was inflicted upon the settlers of the Lemhi area. However, their rejoicing was changed to remorse upon the morning of the seventeenth, when two distraught Chinamen reached Junction with a tale of woe.

The Birch Creek Massacre

These Chinamen experienced great difficulty in describing the harrowing tragedy that their eyes had beheld. All of the details of the Birch Creek Massacre will never be known, but the account given by the Chinamen was later confirmed by Al Lyon who also escaped. These are the facts: On the afternoon of August 15, an eight-wagon, three-team freighting outfit serving Shoup and Woods, driven by Jim Hayden, Al Green, and Dan Combs, entered Birch Creek Canyon. Two unnamed white men and two Chinese were passengers. A lonely horse herder named Albert Lyon saw the freight train from a distance and rode over to join in the companionship of the night camp. These men heard of the Nez Perce retreat, but their conception of the route was vague. While they were preparing their late afternoon meal, an advance guard of Nez Perces
arrived. Salutations were exchanged, and then the Indians demanded guns and supplies. Perhaps rude good humor obtained until the whisky barrels were discovered and rolled out. After that, a wild spirit of horse-play developed. It appears that the Chinamen were required to get down on all fours and run around like horses. The real trouble resulted from an attempt to force the same measure of humiliation upon the white men. Strenuous objections obviously inflamed the drunken passions of the Indians and the five men were slain.

Al Lyon had requested a drink of water and a guard obliged by taking him to the creek. At that crucial moment, the wagons burst into flames and shots rang out. These disconcerting and exciting activities so arrested the guard's attention that Lyon was able to dash into the willow-lined stream and hide.

During the night he emerged from the creek and made his way back to his neglected horse herd. In due course, two of Shoup's cowboys happened along and their ministrations were beneficial. He accompanied them to Salmon City, where he gave his witness to the affair as narrated. The experience more than shook him; for a time some of his faculties were out of perfect balance.13

Tradition holds, and Helen A. Howard also affirms, that these Indian scouts had no intention of committing murder at this time. It is also stated that the chiefs were disgusted with the behavior of the Indians who committed this atrocity.14 No apologies or extenuations can atone for this wanton act. The Nez Perce were at war and war is cruel. Pointing to the factor of drunkenness as a contributing cause, or to Chief Joseph's order to empty the remaining kegs of whisky on the ground does nothing toward refining the crime.

Burial of the Hayden Party

In the afternoon of the day the Chinamen arrived at Junction, Colonel George F. Shoup, accompanied by about forty white men and as many friendly Lemhi Indians, appeared at the stockade. Alex Cruikshank has left an account of the volunteer activities in this instance. He was a Horse Prairie stockman
whose horse herd was swept in by the fleeing Nez Perces, so he became a scout for General Howard and remained with him until they reached the final battle field in the Bear Paw Mountains. Cruikshank contacted Colonel Shoup's forces at Junction. After appraising the situation, the Colonel decided to return his volunteer force to Salmon City, but Chief Tendoy and fifteen Indians, plus William Falkner, joined Cruikshank's scouting detail and proceeded to the scene of the Birch Creek massacre. All evidence as to the circumstances supported the report given by the Chinamen and later confirmed by Al Lyon.

In due time, Colonel Shoup and Dave Wood, who owned the Hayden freighting outfit, and other men from Salmon arrived on the gruesome scene. The remains of the five dead men were interred where found. Later in the fall the remains of the three natives of the Lemhi Valley were removed to Salmon City.

An appropriate monument now marks the spot where the Hayden party was so ruthlessly abused and massacred. The Dubois Lions Club made arrangements for the erection of the memorial.

On to Camas Meadows

From Birch Creek the Nez Perce cavalcade passed around the foothills in a southeastward direction. By the evening of the seventeenth their scouts reached the stage road a mile north of Hole-In-Rock stage station. The station was located on Dry or Beaver Creek four miles above present day Dubois. Myers Kaufman, stage keeper, and other attendants, having been warned of this prospect, hid in a lava cave. But the Indians did not raid the station and the next morning, after Kaufman had made a quick reconnaissance, he assured his associates that "... the danger is past; they went in by night."15

A camp was established on the north edge of Snake River Plain, in a pleasant meadow bisected by Spring and Camas creeks. Yellow Wolf said the Indians called the Dry or Beaver Creek Wewaltolkit Pah, meaning that it sank in the desert. None of the streams that originate in the mountains enclosing
the northeastern periphery of the Snake River Plain reach Snake River. The central part of Camas Meadows was situated about eighteen miles north of Hole-In-Rock station and an equal distance east of the mouth of Beaver Canyon. The Nez Perce name for their camp was Kamisnim Takin, meaning Camas Meadows.

Howard's Race to the Crossing

Howard's forces reached the Montana Trail, or old Corinne-Bannack stage route, at the mouth of Horse Prairie Creek on August 15. Two days later, as he was traveling south, he was overtaken by the Virginia City volunteers under the command of James E. Callaway, who were anxious to join his cavalry. On the same day Captain Randolph Norwood and fifty fresh cavalrymen, designated as Company 4 of the Second Infantry from Fort Ellis, near Bozeman, also overtook Howard's command. Norwood was ordered to join Howard by General W. T. Sherman, who was a visitor at Fort Ellis in mid-August. The General was taken on a tour of Yellowstone National Park during the next week, being escorted by a small detail of troops. Howard arranged to have the infantrymen transported in wagons along the freight road, and all energy was exerted to intercept the Nez Perces in the Dry Creek Station area. Bannock Indian scouts were a day ahead of Howard's cavalry and they observed the Nez Perce rear guard cross the road toward Camas Prairie on the evening of August 18. The closer Howard pressed them, the more determined the "Red Tartars" seemed to beat him running. In fact, Buffalo Horn climbed a hill and had a view of their camp in Camas Meadows.

Perhaps a few shots were exchanged between the two sets of Indian scouts. In any case, the Nez Perces were on the alert and Howard's forces, having strained their nerves to intercept them, were still a day behind. While in camp near the present village of Spencer, Idaho, a settler Howard called "Uncle Mac" Carleton offered to serve as a guide. His services were accepted; he also informed Howard about the Birch Creek Massacre. At this camp one of
Howard’s men stumbled upon two dead Nez Perce women lying in Dry Creek. Obviously wounded unto death at Big Hole, they dropped out of the line of flight in this desolate spot.\textsuperscript{17}

On August 19, Howard’s command traveled the eighteen miles to Camas Meadows and made Camp Callaway between Camas and Spring Creeks. It was a pleasant campsite with ample grass for the horses and mules. The grass stood so thick and lush in these meadows that the stage operators had cut and stacked the yield of many acres. These haystacks were not disturbed as the horses preferred to eat the growing grasses. The environment was so inviting that the men were disposed to relax by swimming, fishing, and hunting for grouse. Indeed, the Virginia Volunteers did not intend to bother about tethering their horses or posting guards; but both Howard and Captain Randolph Norwood gave all of their men orders to take both of these precautions.\textsuperscript{16}

Therefore, Major Edwin C. Mason attended to the confining and picketing of the stock with meticulous care. All of the horses were securely tethered and the bell-mares of the pack trains were hobbled. Sentinels were posted at points that covered every approach to the camp. Within this posted area two hundred mules were grazing at random. Upon receiving the Major’s report that the camp was in order, Howard expressed satisfaction over the situation:

> From my tent I looked back to the parallel streams. Across the first one, the Callaway volunteers encamped. Norwood’s Cavalry and the forty infantry occupied the west side. The other companies of cavalry covered all the approaches to my own, the central position, which was upon a comparatively high lava pile, that, studded with bushes, constituted our castle-like defense. This position was strengthened by knolls and lava rocks on three sides, north, east, and south.

Little wonder that Lieutenant Wood said, “Well, I’ll take off my pants tonight, it is so safe a place.” To this remark, Lieutenant Guy Howard laughingly replied: “I've loaned my pistol to a scout for tonight, so think likely the Indians will come back.”\textsuperscript{15} Whereupon, the officers removed their pants and crawled between the blankets. The quiet, peaceful, starlight night
gave them promise of much needed repose.

On the preceding night a restless wounded warrior, named Black Hair, was disturbed by a dream as he lay upon this identical campsite. He saw himself and his companions escaping with General Howard's horses. The next morning he brought the message of his dream to the attention of the chiefs, and during the day they meditated upon it while their caravan moved fifteen miles to the north, where they camped. The failure of Looking Glass to heed a warrior's dream medicine on the Big Hole made the chiefs susceptible to the horse-stealing suggestion. As a result, twenty-eight volunteers were organized under the leadership of Ollokot, Two Moons, Wottolen, and Peopeo Tholekt. Thus, by midnight, a column of horsemen started for Howard's camp, hoping there would be no sentries on the watch, and that the stock would be grazing at random. In such a case, they could bring off a coup and put their indefatigable pursuer on foot.
Chapter 13
Incidents Enroute to Camas Meadows

Footnotes

1. Bloody Dick Creek was named for an Englishman whose byword was "bloody." Obviously his first name was Dick. Al J. Noyes, who gave this explanation did not mention a surname.

2. T. J. Kerttula, Dillon Examiner, October 23, 1940.


4. Mrs. James Mansfield Sr. related this detail to Merrill D. Beal on August 28, 1945.

5. James Mansfield and Mike Herr eluded the scouts. The latter hid in a beaver dam.


8. Colonel Shoup not only kept in close touch with Howard, he also sent and received messages from Con Brag, Sheriff of Beaverhead County, Bannack City, Montana. Copies of these messages are filed in the Idaho Historical Society, Boise, Idaho.


11. Ibid., p. 5.


13. This account was related to Merrill D. Beal by George F. Shoup on February 26, 1950. Mr. Shoup heard Lyon's report in August, 1877.


15. The New Northwest, Deer Lodge, Montana, August 21, 1877. Also, The Salt Lake Tribune, August 16, 1942.


19. Present-day Sheridan Creek. General Sheridan visited this area on August 30, 1881, and the creek was named in his honor at that time.
Several Nez Perce scouts observed the establishment of peaceful Camp Callaway on the afternoon of August 19. Hours later they reported the exceptional precautions for the defense of life and property to the chiefs, but this did not change their resolution. In keeping with Black Hair's dream, they planned a horse-stealing assault upon Howard's command. They did not project a battle, otherwise the services of more than twenty-eight warriors would have been sought. Tired of Howard's never ending pursuit, they designed to put his forces on foot.

To that end, after dark the band rode forth from their camp on Sheridan Creek toward Camp Callaway. Yellow Wolf described their movements in this way:

We traveled slowly. No talking loud, no smoking. The match must not be seen. We went a good distance and then divided into two parties—one on each side of the creek. . . .

Chiefs Ollokot and Toohoolhoolzote were the outstanding leaders of my company. . . Teeweyounah and Escoowyes lead the other company. . . .

Before reaching the soldier camp, all stopped, and the leaders held council. How make the attack? The older men did this planning. Some wanted to leave the horses and enter the camp on foot. Chief Looking Glass and others thought the horses must not be left out. This last plan was chosen—to go mounted. Chief Joseph was not along.1

The raiders reached the edge of the camp about 3:30 a.m. At that point, several scouts dismounted and crept stealthily among the picketed horses to cut them loose. Then two things happened simultaneously: As a mounted column approached, a sentry shouted, "Who goes there?" At the same moment, a foot scout named Otskai accidentally discharged his gun in the
midst of the camp. Thus, an alarm sounded from two places before many horses
had been released from their picket lines. However, two hundred head of
mules were free, and the Indians concentrated upon stampeding them northward.
This was accomplished by a "... sharp, quick, multitudinous roaring,
followed by the shrill Indian yell." This terrible discordant war-whoop,
accompanied by a circling pattern of action and a lead-off horseman moving
in the proper direction, enabled the raiders to control the loose stock.
In spite of all the shouting, several men thought they heard "the great voice
of Looking Glass" booming out orders. Bullets were flying about and some
of them struck the wagons, but only one man was hit, and his wound was slight.
Darkness, noise, and surprise compounded the confusion; nevertheless, the
cavalry officers and men quickly dressed and mounted, while "Boots and Saddles"
was sounded by Trumpeter Bernard Brooks.

Both Howard and Norwood reported that the Nez Perce horsemen approached
their camp in a column of fours, thereby attempting to simulate the return of
Bacon's absent cavalry. Nez Perce informants refused to take credit for this
clever ruse, stating that Indians did not intentionally ride in such a formation.
Obviously the sentry thought they resembled troopers and, on that account, his
challenge may have been a little slower than otherwise.

General Howard ordered Major Sanford to organize a strong force, pursue the
raiders, and recover the stock. In a few moments three companies of cavalry
were assembled under Captains Norwood, Carr, and Jackson. By dawn nearly a
hundred horsemen were galloping northward in hot pursuit of the raiders, who
had several miles head start. Feeling that Sanford's force could cope with the
situation, Howard ordered breakfast for the reserves and proceeded to organize
them with deliberation. According to his record, Callaway's volunteers needed
plenty of time, because "... not being used to sudden alarms... one takes
another's guns, some get the wrong belts, others drop their percussion caps,
their horses get into a regular stampede and rush in the darkness toward the herd of mules, and all the animals scamper together, while the citizens plunge into water above their knees and cross to the regular troops at a double-quick.4

A newspaper reporter named Tom Baker recorded his observations of their behavior in a more jocular vein:

Our Volunteers

Lay low boys, it is a general attack
Down in the creek or you'll get shot in the back,
I pledge you my word I wish I hadn't come,
And I'll bet you ten to one we'll have to foot it home.
Oh, I am one of the volunteers,
Who marched right home on the tramp, tramp,
When Joseph set the boys afoot,
At the battle of Callaway's camp.5

Yellow Wolf describes the chagrin of the raiders as sunlight enabled them to see the stock: "... Beh! Nothing but mules—-all mules. Only three horses among them. I did not know, did not understand why the Indians could not know the mules. Why they did not get the cavalry horses. That was the object the chiefs had in mind—-why the raid was made."6 Actually, about half of the horses belonging to Virginia City volunteers were missing. It is recorded that they received $150 per head from the government for their mounts.

An advance guard of Sanford's cavalry reached the tail-end of the mule herd and managed to recover a few of them. This pressure produced a diversion in the tactics of the raiding party. Several continued driving the mules on to camp, and the others deployed themselves in a thin skirmish line across the middle of a meadow that filled the narrow valley at this point, eight miles north of Camp Callaway.7 A lava escarpment ten feet high formed a southern boundary five hundred yards from the Nez Perce position. This barrier stopped the progress of Sanford's cavalry, and part of the troopers dismounted and also formed a skirmish line.

The distance between these lines was too great for effective marksman-
ship, although a lucky shot struck Lieutenant Benson in the hip. Actually, he was hit by a sharpshooter from the side. This strike disclosed the fact that the Indians in the meadow were serving as a decoy, while others had been creeping forward on both flanks to enfilade the troops. Hence, Sanford ordered a bugler to call a retreat.

The retreat of those cavalrymen whose horses had been taken to the rear was an occasion of great excitement and confusion. A number were caught up by companions on horseback, which produced some bucking. A horse’s nosebag, filled with cartridges, was knocked out of a cavalryman’s hand. In the confusion, Captain Norwood’s company drifted so far to the east that the other units lost track of him. Thus, they continued retreating another mile or so, where they met General Howard advancing with his reserves. Quickly recognizing the absence of triumph on Sanford’s face, Howard said, “What is the matter, Major?” Sanford then briefed him upon the action. “But where is Norwood?” “That is what I am trying to find out.” “Why, you haven’t left him?” “No, I sent him the order (to draw back) at the same time as to Carr, but it seems that he has stopped.” “Well, let us return to him at once.”

Whereupon, Howard took command and extended his lines as far east as possible. They moved forward through alternating stands of aspens and sagebrush, across a landscape broken by low ridges and small basins. Howard’s description of the terrain is appropriate. “Here on the higher ground, acres upon acres, for ten miles or more, are thrown into curious lava-knolls, each knoll so much like another that you cannot fix your whereabouts by the distant and diverse features around you.”

By mid-afternoon Howard came upon Norwood and his men nestling in their lava rock fox holes located a few rods apart along the top and on the edges of a series of ridges that enclosed a protected area for their horses.
Captain Norwood's Account

Since the principal part of the battle fell upon Norwood's company, his report of the action to Colonel Gibbon is the most satisfactory. He stated that obedience to Sanford's order to continue retreating would have imperiled his company. So he elected to seek cover upon the converging ridges mentioned, and make his stand. The Nez Perce sharpshooters pressed his position closely for four hours, but they could not dislodge him. Norwood praised Lieutenant Benson for his courage and coolness, notwithstanding his painful wound.10

A sergeant named Hugh McCafferty rendered distinguished service by climbing a cottonwood tree, and, being concealed by the foliage, describing the shifting positions of the warriors to a soldier below, thereby contributing to the efficiency of Norwood's defense tactics.11 Even so, he attributed the survival of his company to the arrival of Howard's forces. However, Yellow Wolf implies that the warriors raised the siege on their own volition. Said he, "Indians were on bluff, protected behind rocks. It was a sharp fight for some time. After a while I heard the warriors calling to each other. Chiefs say do no more fighting."12 Whereupon, these remarkable warriors withdrew from the battlefield and returned to their tribal camp without any fear of being followed. Their voluntary withdrawal is evidence that Norwood's position was strong; a fact duly noted and recognized by Howard.

In like fashion, Howard assembled his forces and returned to Camp Callaway, where the battle casualties and raid losses were calculated.

Total Casualties of the Battle

Yellow Wolf states that, "No Indian was bad hurt, only one or two just grazed by bullets."13 Wottolen was wounded in the side, and Peopeo Tholekt's head was creased.

Norwood listed the following casualties among the men in Second Cavalry Company 4:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Injury</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st Lieut. H. M. Benson</td>
<td>wounded, thigh</td>
<td>Died at Pleasant Valley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Sergt. H. Wilkins</td>
<td>&quot; head</td>
<td>Died in Virginia City, Oct. 4, 1877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corpl. H. Garland</td>
<td>&quot; Thigh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacksmith Samuel Glass</td>
<td>mortal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Harry Trevar</td>
<td>&quot; back</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farrier Jones</td>
<td>wounded leg</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private William Clark</td>
<td>&quot; chin and shoulder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bugler Bernard Brooks was killed and his remains were taken back to camp and tenderly interred by his comrades. Mason read the appropriate service, and farewell volleys were fired over a lonely grave among sagebrush and lava beds in the middle of a wilderness.

**The Significance of Camas Meadows**

Although Howard and his men did not realize the fact, their chance of ever overtaking the Nez Perces was buried with Bugler Brooks. That was the significance of the Raid and Battle of Camas Meadows. At the very moment when a burst of energy and speed might have closed the slender fifteen-mile gap that separated him from his coveted prize, the table was turned. No one could state the result better than Yellow Wolf, when he said, "The soldiers did not hurry to follow us. They slowed after losing their pack mules." Surely the edge of Howard's means for hot pursuit had been blunted, and worse still, he would learn within two days that Lieutenant Bacon had failed to fulfill his blockade role at Targhee Pass.

**Camas Meadows Almost Unknown**

It is a probable fact that no other combination of grave, camp ground, and battlefield has been more neglected than Camas Meadows. This is partly due to its isolated location, small numbers involved in the battle, and slender casualties. Although the area is quite attractive, the place has been all but forgotten. A homesteader found enough battle relics to locate the meadow where the Nez Perces stopped to engage the troops. A sheepherder
noticed the fox holes where Norwood's men took shelter. A stone marker was erected over the bugler's grave, but it is hard to find any of these places.

An Idaho association has designated a road that branches off from 91-191 near Mack's Inn as the Idaho Central. This third-rate, unimproved road attracts very few visitors, although some of the flavor of the Old West may be seen enroute. Along this road sheep and cattle may be seen grazing on the open range. Real cowboys and sheepherders appear in their true roles of herding, wrangling, and trailing stock.

Perhaps highway markers may be placed in such way as to enable the passer-by to locate Norwood's fox holes, Howard's Camp Callaway, and the grave of Bugler Bernard Brooks. Strangely enough, during World War II, the United States Navy conferred the name S. S. Gamas Meadows upon a big tanker.
Chapter 14

The Raid and Battle of Camas Meadows

Footnotes

1. Yellow Wolf, op. cit., p. 166.
8. O. O. Howard, op. cit., p. 228.
9. Ibid., p. 224.
10. R. Norwood, op. cit.
11. Elvin W. Henninger homesteaded the meadow tract in which the battle started. He has done more than anyone else in rescuing this battle situation from near oblivion. He is also the source of a legend that a Nez Perce woman named Ta-ha-ya-ya, although hurtling from a wound received at Big Hole, joined in the battle of Camas Meadows.
13. Ibid.
Chief Joseph, as camp master during the entire flight, must have been confident that the raiders would temporarily immobilize Howard. Accordingly, his people did not break camp on August 20. Undoubtedly they were busy gathering food all that day. Entirely without portable commissary, great exertions were necessary at all times to provide the nourishment they required. The area they were passing through is called Shotgun from the fact that sage grouse were often abounding. No reference has been found to their hunting success. However, they undoubtedly found edible roots and bulbs of various kinds. The soldiers noticed that bark had been stripped from many aspen trees along Camas Creek.

By mid-afternoon, the raiders reached camp with many mules and a few horses. These were distributed according to need; and the chiefs made arrangements for an early start the next morning. The band may have reached the meadow prairie southwest of Henrys Lake on August 21. This lake has an elegant setting, was well-favored with fish and fowl, and the forage for animals was excellent. Although the Indians rested here part of a day, they did not tarry. The next morning they crossed the Continental Divide at Targhee Pass without any interference from Lieutenant Bacon, who had been ordered to blockade them.

Bacon's command had reached the Pass on August 20, but not seeing a Nez Perce camp at Henrys Lake he concluded that they would not come that way after all. Indeed, he decided that the tribe had skirted the northern rim of the Snake River Basin, penetrated the forests east of the Teton Range.
and headed for Two Ocean Pass in the Wind River Mountains. Hence he returned in search of Howard, but his route proved devious and he missed both the oncoming Indians and Howard's advance guard. Thus, his services, however energetic, were unavailing, because he did not lie in wait at Targhee Pass. Actually, Howard had sent him messages of reassurance upon two occasions, but the messengers failed to overtake him. From hindsight, it is obvious that Howard's entire command, or at least most of his cavalry, should have taken Bacon's route. Still, there is no guarantee that the Nez Perces would have blindly entered such an ambuscade.

After crossing Targhee Pass, the Nez Perces trailed down to the Upper Madison River prairie and camped on that fish-laden stream. No doubt their hunger was satisfied on the evening of August 22. From that point (present West Yellowstone, Montana), the Great Bannock Trail to Clarks Fork quartered northeasterly across the Gallatin Range, thence to the forks of the Yellowstone River at present day Tower Junction, up the Lamar River, across the Absaroka Range, and down Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone River. Instead of crossing the Gallatin Range, the chiefs elected to follow the Madison River and thereby add another detour to their hegira. This deviation was made in the hope that Howard would be confused. Of course, Nez Perce scouts "... found each day the way to go." In fact, Yellow Wolf and his cousin Otskai were attending to this scouting duty as they traveled toward Madison Junction, when they heard someone chopping wood. They dismounted and crept toward the source of the sound, and observed an elderly man feeding a camp fire. Moving in closely, they grabbed him. He was a prospector named Shively, enroute from the Black Hills to the Montana gold fields. Apprehending that he knew the Park, the scouts took him to the chiefs. They provided a horse for him (he had lost his), and detained him for scouting purposes. He was treated in a civil and polite manner, and he stayed with them for a week.
the Indians were well oriented a day later, so Shively's services were only needed for a short time. It is probable that he would have been released at any time after August 24, but he stayed with them until the night of the 31st. Shively's observations concerning the number, manner of travel, and general demeanor of the caravan were reported in the newspapers. He had an interesting experience, and he seemed to enjoy it.

On the night of August 23, the Nez Perce camp was located along a stream, since bearing their name, at the point of confluence with the Firehole River. After dark several scouts, who rode a little farther to the southeast, observed the flicker of campfires. Curious, and in need of supplies, they rode close to the camp under cover of darkness. There they waited for daylight in order to better assess the situation. They were on the edge of a visitors' camp in the Lower Geyser Basin. The events that transpired here and elsewhere in Wonderland, under Nez Perce auspices, will be described in the next chapter. Meantime, the narrative dealing with Howard's progress toward Geyserland should be described.

Howard's March to Henry's Lake

Shortly after Howard's command returned to Camp Callaway, following the Battle of Camas Meadows, his infantry division arrived under the command of Captain Miller. They had traveled forty-eight miles in twenty-four hours. Howard's entire command was thereby united again. It consisted of 200 cavalry, 300 infantry, 50 scouts, and 50 Montana volunteers. Long, hard marches had sorely taxed the endurance of the infantrymen, and the early morning horse raid, hot pursuit, and sharp fight had made the rest of the command more than weary. Thus, everyone was in need of rest that night, and it was not interrupted. The loss of nearly 200 mules and many of the Volunteers' horses necessitated a revision of travel procedures. Many
cavalry mounts were pressed into wagon service. The next camp, which was on the Snake River, was named Benson in honor of the wounded lieutenant.

That night Captain S. G. Fisher and a band of thirty Bannock Indian scouts arrived from the Fort Hall Indian Reservation. Remember, a score had joined Howard on the Clearwater, and they had been with him since that time. Their leader Buffalo Horn obtained Howard's permission to hold a dance that night. The enthusiasm the dancing generated impelled the Chief to ask the General for permission to kill his three Nez Perce scouts and herders. Buffalo Horn affirmed that they were spies and traitors. Howard went so far as to secure their denials and have them face their accusers before refusing the bellicose demand. In less than a year Buffalo Horn was being pursued by Howard in what is called the Bannock War of 1878.

On the twenty-second, part of Howard's cavalcade made a long march and bivouacked at Henrys Lake. That evening two days rations were issued to Scout S. G. Fisher and his Bannocks, and at 7:00 a.m. they crossed Targhee Pass. These scouts followed the Nez Perce trail to their smouldering campsite on Madison River before a messenger returned to apprise Howard of the fact that Lieutenant Bacon had failed to contact the Indians. Howard's command, having had an early start, was toiling toward the pass along the creek that now bears his name.

In spite of his great disappointment, the General wanted to press on. He told himself that "They are not far ahead," and issued an order to move. Whereupon, Doctor C. T. Alexander, his chief medical officer, remonstrated: "You can go no farther... your whole command is unfit to take the field again without a long rest." This position was endorsed by the inspector, the aides, the quartermaster, and the officers. Perhaps the best evidence that Howard had done his level best to overtake the Nez Perces is found in the absence of criticism from the Virginia City Volunteers, other Montana
teamsters, and the soldiers themselves. The only expressions of disapproval came from S. G. Fisher and his Bannock Indian scouts, who had joined the campaign just two days before.

The command was really in hard straits. The men lacked food, clothing, shoes, blankets, and medicine. Furthermore, they were short in regards to horses and mules, because of the Camas Meadows raid and the wear and tear of the campaign.

In these circumstances, it was considered expedient to establish a four-day bivouac at Henrys Lake. While others rested, Howard, his son Guy, and an escort made a fast sixty-mile trip to Virginia City to secure the needed horses and supplies. Tom Farrell and several other citizens preceded them at top speed to buy several hundred horses. All other Montana volunteers and teamsters returned to their homes at that time, except Fred K. Kohls. He continued to serve Howard as a scout.

Captains G. R. Norwood and H. C. Cushing were sent to Fort Ellis with two companies of cavalry. They were advised to re-supply their men and plan to resume the campaign in case it circled to the northeast of Yellowstone National Park. These men took Howard's worn-out horses and mules to Fort Ellis, because in October the commanding officer of that post asked the Department Adjutant General for permission to sell "... over one hundred and fifty broken down horses and mules Howard's people left here; about one half of them not worth feeding, ...".

Farrell and his assistants fulfilled their horse-buying assignment in respect to numbers, but when saddles were placed upon the backs of many they proved to be quite unbroken, if not confirmed bucking bronchos.

Howard's Virginia City Telegrams

Howard described the delight of the Virginia City merchants over the purchases he made during his visitation. Of course he made the telegraph
wires hum in placing orders for military supplies at Fort Ellis, and in sending communications to his superior officers. To General W. T. Sherman, Fort Shaw, Montana, he reported the incidents that had transpired since his reports from Bannack City. Then, looking to the future, he said:

What I wish is from some eastern force, the hostiles be headed off before they disaffect the Crow or unite with Sioux. . . .

I heard that Miles, probably Sturgis, is on the Yellowstone, not far from my front. Is that true?

My command is so much worn by over-fatigue and jaded animals that I cannot push it much further. If Miles, or Sturgis, is near by with Norwood's company, just sent to Ellis, and the 50 Indian scouts that I will send thither, or on the heels of the hostiles, I think I may stop near where I am, and in a few days work my way back to Fort Boise slowly, and distribute my troops before snow falls in the mountains. . . .

Howard
Commanding Department

General Sherman's reply of the same date, but delivered at Henry's Lake, was stern and to the point:

Fort Shaw, Mont.
August 24, 1877.

General Howard, Virginia City:

"I don't want to give orders, as this may confuse Sheridan and Terry; but that force of yours should pursue the Nez Perces to the death, lead where they may. Miles is too far off, and I fear Sturgis is too slow. If you are tired, give the command to some young, energetic officer, and let him follow them, go where they may, holding his men well in hand, subsisting them on beef gathered in the country, with coffee, sugar, and salt in packs. For such a stern chase infantry are as good as cavalry. Leave to Sturgis to head them off if he can. I will be at Helena on Tuesday next. No time should be lost. I don't know your officers, but you can select the commander and order accordingly. When the Indians are caught your men can march to the Pacific Railroad and reach their posts by rail and steamboat. They are not needed back in California and Oregon now, but are needed just where they are.

"SHERMAN, General."

"Headquarters Department of the Columbia,
"August 27, 1877.

"To W. T. Sherman,
"General United States Army, Helena, Mont.:

"Yours of the 26th (24th) received. You misunderstood me. I never flag. It was the command, including the most energetic
young officers, that were worn out and weary by a most extraordinary march. You need not fear for the campaign. Neither you nor General McDowell can doubt my pluck and energy. My Indian scouts are on the heels of the enemy. My supplies have just come, and we move in the morning and will continue till the end. I sent Cushing and Norwood, now en route, two days ago to operate from Ellis and Crow agency. Indians captured a party of eight gentlemen and two ladies on Lower Geyser Basin, Friday evening last. Hostiles will probably cross Stinking River about one hundred miles southeast from Crow agency.

"HOWARD,

"Brigadier General, Commanding Department."

Helena, August 28, 1877.

"General O. O. Howard, via Virginia City:

"Just back from Benton. Got your dispatch of 27th. Glad to find you so plucky. Have every possible faith in your intense energy, but thought it probable you were worn out, and I sometimes think men of less age and rank are best for Indian warfare. They have more to make. I think Sturgis will look out for your Indians at Clark's Fork, and that Sheridan will have another party at Camp Brown, and still another at the head of Tongue River. But my idea is that the Nez Perce expect to hide in the Big Horn Mountains, about Stinking Water, trusting to your stopping pursuit. Were your force to return to Idaho now, these Indians would surely return to Montana. I start on Thursday for Missoula and Walla Walla. Will report you all well.

"W. T. SHERMAN, General."

"Fort Shaw, Mont., August 24, 1877.

"General P. H. Sheridan, Chicago, Ill.:"

"Dispatch received. I don't think Howard's troops will catch Joseph, but they will follow, trusting to your troops heading them off when they come out on the east of the mountains. Will be back to Helena next Tuesday.

"W. T. SHERMAN, General."

These telegrams disclose a part of the intricate strategy being contrived by officers in the Department of Dakota for the capture of the elusive Nez Perces. Other documents record the desires, plans, and energies that were conspiring to throw a net around the hostiles. After Norwood and Cushing arrived at Fort Ellis, officials there hustled to secure scouts, supplies, and horses to enter the campaign. Lieutenant Gustavus G. Doane, who was with the party of effective discovery of Yellowstone Wonderland in
1870, hastened toward Mammoth Hot Springs with a company of Second Cavalry. Lieutenant De Rudio, with a company of Seventh Cavalry and a party of Crow Indian scouts, also accompanied Doane. These units left Fort Ellis for the North Entrance of the Park the same day Howard entered the West Gate, namely, August 27. Experienced scouts such as George Hernden, Jack Bean, Alex Anderson, J. R. King, and William Hamilton signed up to seek information in regard to Nez Perce movements. They were expected to keep Howard, Sturgis, and Hart informed of the same. Commands under Sturgis and Hart were marking time astride the eastern exits of Yellowstone National Park.

A letter from Sherman to Howard, from Helena, on August 29, describes the disposition of forces ready to blockade the Nez Perces as they emerged from the Park:

"... General Sturgis, with six companies, was on Clark's Fork. Major Hart, with five companies and a hundred scouts, was on Stinking Water (Shoshoni River). General Merritt, with ten companies was at Camp Brown. Yours as the pursuing force, requires much patience but not much chance of a fight." If Howard needed patience, one wonders what the officers watching the passes required. A letter from Colonel S. D. Sturgis to Governor Potts, written from a position between the mouths of Clarks Fork and Stinking Water rivers on August 23, reveals that he was plagued by doubts and worries. Time would prove that he had reason to be.

Colonel Nelson A. Miles, although far removed from the theater of activity, had a hand in the troop dispositions and movements herein described. One line from his autobiography suggests his anxiety: "For weeks I anxiously watched for information from the West." Such were the ramifications of the plan contrived to end this embarasssing campaign.

The foregoing telegrams, letters, and activities also reveal the tension resulting from what many called Howard's dilatory pursuit. Memoranda from General McDowell to Sherman exhibit a mounting impatience with what he considered to be Howard's alibis. Perhaps these comments and criticisms caused
Sherman to change his mind about releasing Howard from the onerous task of concluding the campaign. The day following his barbed "If you are too tired" telegram, he wrote Howard a friendly letter stating that he could return to his department with perfect propriety. In fact, Sherman authorized him to transfer the command in the field to Colonel C. C. Gilbert and join him in an inspection tour of the Department of Columbia.13

At the same time, Sherman sent Gilbert a letter to that effect and appointed him to take Howard's place. Gilbert and an escort left Fort Ellis on August 31, expecting to meet Howard in Yellowstone National Park. However, the course he followed passed Howard on the west, and although he doubled back and followed diligently he failed to overtake him. From this incident, it would appear that Colonel Gilbert was hardly the man to pursue the Nez Perces. Obviously all of the foregoing telegrams and letters had not reached Howard's headquarters on Henrys Lake by August 27. Still, enough had arrived to produce a salutary effect upon the morale of Howard's people. He described the reaction this way: "But the chafing stern order. . . worked like a charm upon the command. Officers and soldiers, now re-supplied, were ready, to a man, 'We will go with you to the death.' It was worthwhile to bear a little chagrin in order to awaken such a loyal spirit."14

Notwithstanding the diminution of Howard's cavalry resulting from the departure of Norwood and Cushing, the column appeared fine, and moved briskly as it departed from Henrys Lake on the morning of August 27. After four days of rest they would follow the Nez Perce trail with enthusiasm. Upon reaching the west boundary of the Park, the command came upon several men who were actually shaking from the frightening experience they had sustained at the hands of the Indians four days earlier. Since then they had been on foot and without food or bedding. Of course Howard supplied their needs, while they related their harrowing experiences.
Chapter 15
On to Yellowstone National Park

Footnotes

1. Yellow Wolf, op. cit., p. 189.

2. The New Northwest, September 14, 1877.

3. S. G. Fisher, "Chief of Scouts to General Howard During the Nez Perce Campaign." Contributions to the Historical Society of Montana. (Helena, Montana: State Publishing Co., 1896), Vol. 2, p. 270. This pass has been called Tasher, Tagie, Ti-gee, and Targhee. It was named for Bannock Chief Tagi. An Idaho village is also named for him, but it is spelled Tyhee.


5. The Bozeman Times, August 30, 1877.


7. Brisbin, Commanding at Fort Ellis to Assistant Adjutant General Department of Dakota, October 23, 1877. Document 4263 DD 1877, Box 23, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

8. Telegrams from O. O. Howard to W. T. Sherman; also Sherman to P. H. Sheridan. Nez Perce Claims 66, Box 1181, National Archives, Washington, D. C.


10. A letter from Sherman to Howard, Helena, Montana, August 29, 1877. Document 3983 DD 1877, Box 23, National Archives, Washington, D. C.


13. Letter from Sherman to Howard, written in Helena, August 29, 1877. To be delivered to Howard by Colonel Gilbert. Document 3983 DD 1877, Box 23, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

Chapter 16

INDIANS AND SOLDIERS ENCOMPASS THE PARK

Yellowstone National Park was discovered by John Colter in 1807. Thenceforth the area was visited in turn by trappers and miners until, by 1870, its phenomenal scenery finally attracted attention for its own sake. The Washburn-Langford-Doane Expedition of 1870, and the Hayden Expedition of 1871, made recommendations to Congress, which resulted in the establishment of Yellowstone National Park on March 2, 1872. Hence, the Park was in swaddling clothes when the Nez Perce Campaign invaded this peaceful domain. For four years, Nathaniel P. Langford had served as Superintendent without pay, and Philetus W. Norris, his successor in 1877, was serving on the same basis. No funds for any purpose had been made available; therefore, the Park was no better endowed with roads and other facilities than the surrounding wilderness that it crowned.

Notwithstanding the absence of improvements, five hundred people visited Wonderland during the summer of 1873. There were fish in the streams, moose in the swamps, and elk in the meadows. No laws restricted taking them, so it was a case of "slay and eat." People camped wherever they pleased, and otherwise fended for themselves. Seeing the Park in these circumstances was a "hardy man's pie," but the visitors were generally adventurous and resourceful.

Even so, the arrival of the Nez Perces caused great consternation, and they proved to be the most unwelcome visitors in the history of the Park. It was fortunate that only two single individuals and two camping parties were caught in their net as they hastened across Wonderland.
The Nez Perces spent the night of August 23 in camp on the banks of the Firehole River, above the narrows. At daybreak the next morning several Indians appeared in the camp of some visitors from Radersburg, Montana. The personnel of this party were Mr. and Mrs. George F. Cowan; Mrs. Cowan's brother and sister, Frank and Ida Carpenter; Charles Mann; William Dingee; Albert Oldham; A. D. Arnold; and Henry Myers. A prospector, named Harmon, was also associated with the Cowan party at this time.

These people were just preparing to break up the "home" camp located at this terminus of the wagon road. For the past week they had been enjoying themselves on horseback visits to the geyser basins, and several of them had been to the lake and canyon.

Dingee asked the Indians, "What are you?" "Snake Injun," one replied. Later they admitted they were Nez Perces and made a demand for coffee and bacon. Arnold began dealing out these supplies; whereupon, Cowan interfered and refused to give them any. Then, as one who called himself "Charley" attempted to give a signal the stern Cowan peremptorily ordered him to "keep hands down!" Right there a special resentment was engendered toward the "older man." Frank Carpenter asked them if any harm was in store for the party. The spokesman said, "Don't know, maybe so." He gave them to understand that since the Big Hole Battle the Nez Perces were double-minded toward the white man.1

The worried little party held a hasty consultation, and in view of their limited arms and ammunition they decided, with serious misgivings, to make an appeal to the chiefs for their deliverance.

They, therefore, hooked up the team, saddled their horses, and after going two miles they joined the Indian caravan, which turned eastward and journeyed up Nez Perce Creek. After proceeding a couple of miles the wagon was abandon-
oned, its contents rifled, and the spokes knocked out for whip handles. By mid-day the Radersburg case had come to the attention of the chiefs. A council was held at the base of Mary Mountain in which it was decided that the tourists were to be liberated. Poker Joe, also called Lean Elk, spoke for the chiefs: "Some of our people (Looking Glass) knew Mrs. Cowan and her sister at Spokane House. The soldiers killed many Nez Perce women and children on the Big Hole. But we do not hurt Montana people. You may go. Take old horses and do not spy." They were relieved of their saddles, guns, and horses; worn-out animals being substituted for the latter. The white men nodded acceptance of these extraordinary terms. They were glad to part with the tribe and retrace their course. Within a half hour, two of the white men, Arnold and Dingee, abandoned their horses and ducked into the forest. Hidden Indian scouts were obviously expecting just such behavior. A few minutes later a number of braves swooped upon Cowan's party, demanding the missing members. Cowan could only plead ignorance. Whereupon, Charley said, "You will have to come back." The little band again turned eastward with leaden spirits.

Angry Indians were milling around on all sides, each waiting for the other to start an attack. Suddenly Um-till-lilp-cown, one of the three Idaho murderers, fired at Cowan, hitting him in the thigh. At the same time Oldham felt a twinge on both cheeks as a bullet passed through his face. Carpenter saw an Indian aiming at him, and thinking some of the Nez Perces might be Catholics he made the sign of the cross. His act may have disconcerted the warrior for he did not fire. Oldham managed to get away through a thicket, while Cowan was so stunned he fell to the earth. His wife jumped down from her horse and clasped him to her bosom, but they dragged her away. Another shot, from close range, struck him in the forehead. His wounds were considered fatal, and he was left to die. At this juncture Poker Joe arrived from the chiefs, who had got word of the attack, and he stopped the onslaught.
In the shuffle and commotion that ensued, Myers, Harmon, and Mann made their getaway. Mann felt a bullet whiz through his hat as he ran among the trees. Each man went in a different direction and carried the impression that he was the sole survivor.

The unscattered survivors, including Mrs. Cowan, her brother Frank, and sister Ida, were again taken captives. Although their treatment during the next twenty-four hours was considerate, it was a period of great mental anguish for them. They spent the night by Chief Joseph’s campfire, and considering the circumstances their attitude toward him was most interesting.

My brother tried to converse with Chief Joseph, but without avail. The Chief sat by the fire, sombre and silent, foreseeing in his gloomy meditations possibly the unhappy ending of his campaign. The "noble red man" we read of was more nearly impersonated in this Indian than in any I have ever met. Grave and dignified, he looked a chief.

Mrs. Cowan was impressed by Chief Joseph’s dignity and cares, but she also noted that the majority of the Nez Perces were light hearted. She said that the chiefs were aware that Bannock Indian scouts were close upon their heels. On the evening of the twenty-fifth the captives were provided with two horses and released near the Mud Volcano. "They must not go too fast"; therefore no saddle for Ida or horse for Frank were provided. Poker Joe directed them to go down the river "quick." This they did as rapidly as their broken-down ponies would carry them. Burdened with grief and care, they made their way over Mount Washburn and beyond Tower Falls where they came upon a detail of soldiers who supplied their most urgent necessities and found them a ride to Bozeman.

In going down Yellowstone Valley they were the recipients of much sympathy from the settlers. As they entered Bozeman, Lieutenant Doane and a considerable number of Crow Indian scouts and soldiers were leaving for the Park. Carpenter joined Doane’s command, with the intention of returning to the scene of the attack and attending to the burial of his brother-in-law.
In mourning, Mrs. Cowan and her sister continued on to Radersburg.

But Cowan was a sturdy being; he would not die. It was nearly sundown when he regained consciousness. Wounded in thigh and head, he yet pulled himself up from his rocky "grave." Unfortunately an Indian sentinel observed his movement, drew a bead, and fired. Cowan dropped with a fresh wound in his left side. He now felt that they had "fixed" him beyond all hope of recovery. However, he remained conscious and lay motionless until darkness settled.

Then he started a crawling retreat toward Lower Geyser Basin, nine miles away. What an eternity August 24 must have seemed! Were his wife and friends safe? He had little basis for hoping so. Could he make a getaway, and was it worth the effort? About midnight he apprehended motion among the cinquefoil. It was an Indian scout, raised to elbow posture, listening. Cowan remained perfectly quiet until the watchman relaxed; then he circled the danger zone by more than a mile. Onward he dragged his tortured body, alternately resting and crawling. He finally reached the deserted wagon where his bird dog faithfully waited. She growled and menaced until recognition dawnded, then hovered over him like a protecting mother. There was no food anywhere to be found, but he gathered up the sheets of Carpenter's diary. Cowan pressed doggedly on toward the campground in the Lower Geyser Basin. During the third day a band of Indians came by his hiding place. They were friendly Bannocks of Howard's command, but he did not know and took no chance.

On the twenty-seventh he reached the old camp, found matches, and gathered spilled coffee grains and an empty can. These netted him a cup of coffee. He passed the night there. The following day he crawled over by the road, and that effort taxed his strength to the limit. It was enough, as relief came in the form of two of Howard's scouts, Captain S. G. Fisher and J. W. Redington. The latter said, "Who in hell are you?"
"I'm George Cowan of Radersburg."

"You don't say! We've come to bury you."

They rendered first aid, provided food, and left Cowan by a roaring fire with the assurance that the main force would gather him up within two days. Mr. Fee has deftly described the abrupt termination of that hard earned felicity:

Cowan ate enough to keep himself alive and lay down in silent joy to sleep the night through. Towards morning he was awakened by awful heat, and found to his dismay that the vegetable mold he was lying on had taken fire and encircled him with flames. He rose on hands and knees and suffered terribly, crawled across the charred area to safety. His hands and legs were badly burned.\(^5\)

In the meantime his scattered companions were being united. Mr. Harmon was the first to reach General Howard's command. Arnold and Dingee arrived after several days and nights of hardship. Myers and Oldham were encountered by Howard's scouts. The latter was in a pitiful state. His tongue was so swollen, as a result of his wound, that he could not speak. Shock and exposure to the cold nights, together with lack of food for four days, had left its mark upon them all.

Howard reluctantly took the whole delegation along, and on August 29 they joined Cowan in the Lower Geyser Basin. Arnold said Cowan was a "most pitiful looking object. He was covered with blood, which had dried on him, and he was as black as a negro." Here Cowan learned of his wife's safety, and that news, together with his friend Arnold's "unremitting attentions", pulled him through. The army surgeon ministered to the physical wounds of the men but no sympathy was forthcoming. The Radersburg men desired to return home by way of Henrys Lake, but they were bundled along through the Park with the command, over roads that were "... simply horrible and almost impassable for wagons. At times we were compelled to lower them over precipices with ropes, and again we would hitch a rope to a wagon and pull it up the hill by man power."\(^6\)
In the meantime Frank Carpenter, along with Lieutenant Doane's command, pressed toward the Park. They found Henderson's ranch buildings in flames. A band of renegade Nez Perces were spreading terror in their wake. Camp was established there anyway, and a courier arrived, directing Lieutenant Doane to mark time until joined by Colonel Charles C. Gilbert and the Seventh Infantry. Carpenter's plan to return and bury Cowan was again frustrated. A promise to perform that function, given by a frontiersman named George Houston induced Carpenter to return to Bozeman. There he learned that all members of the party were safe and accounted for except Cowan. The news that Cowan was still alive reached him a few days later when he met the two scouts who had found Cowan just a week before. Perhaps no one else could have convinced him his friend was alive.

A telegram to Mrs. Cowan brought her posthaste from Radersburg. She reached Bottler's ranch, a distance of one hundred seventy-five miles, in thirty-one hours. The Cowan reunion was effected on September 24, exactly one month from the date of the attack.

The Helena Visitors

Other Yellowstone visitors were caught in the Nez Perce net as it rolled across the Park. It has been sufficiently indicated that chiefs generally maintained discipline and restraint, but there were unprincipled factions under less responsible leadership which they could not keep under their thumbs. While the main tribe was slowly weaving its course through the Park, some of the reckless young men were foraging far and wide.

On August 25, a man named Irwin was captured by a band of Nez Perces. He had just been discharged from the army at Fort Ellis. In questioning him the Indians learned that a party of Helena tourists were camping in the Hayden Valley area. Irwin escaped from the Nez Perces on the night of September 1. The next day he reached Howard who benefited from his knowledge
concerning the Nez Perce course and situation. Meantime a band of young
bloods encountered the visitors from Helena. There were ten men in this
company: A. J. Weikert, Richard Dietrich, Frederick Pfister, Joseph Roberts,
Charles Kenck, Jack Stewart, August Foller, Leslie Wilkie, L. Duncan, and a
negro cook named Benjamin Stone.

On the morning of August 25 this party was traveling along between Sulphur
Mountain and Mud Volcano when they observed a body of horsemen fording the
river. They correctly apprehended that the mounted men were hostile Nez
Perces. Thereupon, the tourists hastily repaired to the timber near the
forks of Otter Creek and formed camp. It was a well-chosen position and might
have been defended effectively if the natural advantages had been utilized.

However, no harm came to them that day or night. The next morning
Weikert and Wilkie went reconnoitering in the vicinity of Alum Creek where
they encountered a detail of the marauders. The white men retreated speedily,
but Weikert was hit in the shoulder in the exchange of fire.

In the meantime the camp on Otter Creek was raided. Instead of posting
a lookout the campers were huddled together, waiting for dinner, and hoping
they would continue to escape notice. Mr. Kenck's mind was active with
forebodings; addressing the elderly colored cook, he said, "Stone, what
would you do if the Indians should jump us?" Stone laconically replied,
"You all take care ob yourself, and I'll take care ob me." In that instant
the raiders struck. The eight tourists scattered like surprised deer.
Kenck was hit and killed; Stewart was shot, fell, and was overtaken. He
pleaded so earnestly for his life that he charmed their savage impulse and
was spared. Dietrich fell in the creek and remained there for hours.

Ben Stone ran as fast as his old legs would carry him, but in midstream
they gave out, and he lay prone in the water. The raiders left as suddenly
as they came. When Wilkie and Weikert arrived they fell in with some of the
others and started for Mammoth. Joseph Roberts and August Foller had slipped away, and as it later transpired they went west to Madison River and thence to Virginia City and home. The other seven reached Mammoth, where Dietrich and Stone unfortunately decided to remain pending the arrival of Roberts and Foller. Dietrich had promised young Roberts' mother that he would be responsible for his safe return.

On August 31, Weikert and McCartney, the Mammoth "hotel" owner, left for the Otter Creek campground to look for the two missing men and to inter the remains of Mr. Kenck. The latter business accomplished, they were returning when a score of raiders, who had just committed a fresh deed of vengeance at Mammoth, met them at the falls of East Gardner River. A lively skirmish ensued, in which Weikert's horse was killed and the others got away, before a sheltered position was reached. The desperadoes withdrew, and the white men pursued a cautious course to Mammoth.

Upon reaching Mammoth they learned about Dietrich's fate. On August 31 he and Stone saw a band of Indians pass McCartney's place. They were Nez Perces on their way to Henderson's ranch which they ransacked and burned. The next day, when they returned, Ben Stone made a precipitous exit from the cabin and ran up Clematis Gulch. Dietrich, evidently believing the Indians friendly, stood in the doorway. They shot and killed him. Lieutenant Hugh L. Scott, who had accompanied Doane, his company of cavalry, and thirty Crow Indian scouts, was the first man to reach Dietrich. The Helena musician's body was still warm. This situation interrupted Scott's pursuit of the raiders.

At this time word arrived that Roberts and Foller were in Virginia City. The remains of poor Dietrich, who had been sacrificed so unnecessarily, were taken to Helena by Weikert. He also took the remains of Charles Kenck there for final interment.

Naturally these raids caused great excitement in Montana and elsewhere.
Newspapers printed reports of the tourists' adventures. In fact, one reported that nine of the Helena tourists were killed, instead of two. The Helena Herald issued an extra concerning the killing of Dietrich.

These accounts no doubt caused General Sherman and his ten-man escort to rejoice that their tour of the Park was concluded before the Nez Perces reached Wonderland.

The Activities of Howard's Scouts

It has been mentioned that Howard's scouts, Fisher and Redington, with about fifty Bannocks, kept close to the retreating Nez Perces. They followed them over Mary Mountain into Hayden Valley, where they crossed the Yellowstone River near Mud Volcano. From there they went up stream to the Lake, thence northeast up Pelican Creek. On September 5, S. G. Fisher made this entry in his journal: "Madison John and the balance of the boys got in at daylight this morning. I sent an Indian back to the command with a letter to General Howard. We stayed in camp today and rested our horses, cleaned up our guns, etc.; had nothing to eat but beans. . . . I am becoming tired of trying to get the soldiers and the hostiles together. 'Uncle Sam's' boys are too slow for this business." Fisher states that his Bannocks occasionally came within hearing distance of the Nez Perces. Indeed, the hostiles offered them friendship, saying, "We don't want to fight you. Let us talk and smoke together." Then a few shots were exchanged, but distance and timber prevented any serious damage. Actually, Fisher's Fort Hall Bannocks were becoming weary of the chase, and several days later most of them deserted him and started for home. Near Mud Volcano they attempted to steal some of Spurgin's horses. Howard induced several of them to return to Fisher with scout Redington and obtain a fresh report upon the Nez Perce position. Redington made a great ride down the Yellowstone River and up Pelican and Cache creeks, where he located Fisher. Then he returned and overtook Howard
as he ascended the Lamar River Valley.

Howard's Course in the Park

From the West Entrance Howard took the Madison Plateau road to Nez Perce Creek, which he followed to the base of Mary Mountain. He crossed Mary Mountain, followed by Spurgin and his men, who widened the trail into a road for their wagons as they traveled. When Howard reached the Yellowstone River where the Indians crossed, he talked to Irwin and decided not to follow their rough trail; thus leaving to Fisher and his scouts the task of tracking the hostiles across the Pelican-Cache creeks detour toward Clarks Fork. Instead, Howard headed north down the west side of Yellowstone River toward its junction with the Lamar. At that point he could cross the Yellowstone on Baronett Bridge and ascend the Lamar River and Soda Butte Creek to Clarks Fork. This route would save a hundred mile jaunt in a heavily timbered country.

It was a good plan, and by pursuing it he could save both time and distance, but there was no road for his wagons. However, the lack of a road was no obstacle to Captain W. F. Spurgin's Twenty-first Infantry and the corps of fifty Idaho frontiersmen who had helped him bring his pack string over Lolo Trail and take wagons over the Hog's Back from the Bitter Root Valley into Big Hole Basin. These skilled laborers demonstrated amazing energy and resourcefulness in crossing a deep ravine two miles above the Upper Falls of the Yellowstone. A narrow corridor was cut through the timber and the wagons were lowered six hundred feet with ropes wound around successive pairs of trees. The tree turns produced by friction were clearly visible when Park Naturalist Wayne Replogle rediscovered "Spurgin's Beaver Slide" in 1936.

A pathway for the wagons was cleared over Dunraven Pass, across the Washburn Range, down Carmelian Creek, over Tower Creek, into Pleasant Valley to Baronett Bridge. From that point Spurgin took his wagons down the Yellow-
stone River to Fort Ellis, where they were discharged. Tributes have been recorded to the indomitable Spurgin for the will, energy, and work required to bring Howard's pack trains and wagons from the Clearwater River to Fort Ellis, over mountains and plateaus where roads were practically without form and void.

When Howard's command reached Baronett Bridge on September 5, they found it partly burned. This was the work of the Nez Perce raiders who stole horses from Henderson's ranch and killed Dietrich at Mammoth on August 31. Repairs were made and Howard's forces crossed the Yellowstone and rapidly proceeded up the Lamar. At that time the command recruited an excellent guide, named George Houston, from a score of miners who were developing a mine at the head of Soda Butte Creek. This was the natural passage to Clarks Fork, but the miners had not seen the Indians. Tormented by anxiety, Howard sent scouts in quest of information. Were the hostiles headed for either of the military traps, or had his recent great exertions also been in vain?

Thus, Howard's command had reached the east boundary of the Park in pursuit of the elusive hostiles ahead. Thereafter this grand domain of falls, lakes, canyons, and superlative springs would have to rely upon the natural phenomena for excitement.

Here Joseph's scouts reported the presence of miners on the Lamar and Howard's spies in the area. The scouts further noted that Colonel Sturgis and eight troops of the Seventh Cavalry from the Crow Agency on the Little Rosebud were in position astride the regular Absaroka Pass near Hart (Heart) Mountain. Joseph was not cut off between the commands of Howard and Sturgis.
Chapter 16

Indians and Soldiers Encompass the Park

Footnotes


George F. Cowan was born in Ohio in 1842. He was with the first volunteers during the Civil War. He attained the rank of Sergeant. At this time he was one of Montana’s leading attorneys.


George F. Cowan’s experiences were so peculiar that one is puzzled to know whether he was the most lucky or unlucky of men. A train of incidents followed his suffering in the Park. Near Fort Ellis the neck yoke broke, and the Cowan party was thrown out of the carriage. At Bozeman, when Mr. Arnold was dressing Cowan’s wounds in the hotel room, the bedstead gave way and down went the injured man.


8. H. M. Chittenden, Yellowstone National Park, p. 142. Stewart was relieved of $260.00 and a watch.

9. S. G. Fisher, "A Scout for General Howard." This article and Fisher’s diary are in the possession of Mrs. Robert Gregg, Dillon, Montana.