

Cultural Conflict 1877



**Eyewitness Accounts of
The Nez Perce War**

Big Hole National Battlefield



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

PRELUDE

"I recognize the fact that the Indian must yield to the white man . . . but power is not justice, force is not law!"

Major H. Clay Wood*
Adjutant to General Oliver Otis Howard
Commander, Department of the Columbia



This pamphlet came about as the result of many requests for a handy, printed guide to the Museum quotations featured at Big Hole National Battlefield. It is intended as a supplement to, not a substitute for the brochures and pamphlets already available, and should be used with them to help broaden your understanding of the Nez Perce People and The War of 1877.

The Museum Quotations are reproduced here in their entirety, and are indicated by an asterisk (*) immediately following the author's or speaker's name. Historic drawings, photographs and other quotations were added to furnish additional information and depth, to provide a sense of continuity and a feeling for the human tragedy involved, and to offer many more first-hand, eyewitness accounts of this controversial episode in our Nation's Frontier History.

"I . . . was made not to suffer the bondage of government! I would be as the coyote and the wolf. . . seeking to die in the wild forest alone . . . to be eaten by the wolf's fang or the vulture's beak — instead of the slow dying of bondage!"

Shot-in-the-Head
Nez Perce Warrior

" . . . we as soldiers . . . said it was a shame to kill those people. But we were soldiers and had to do as told."

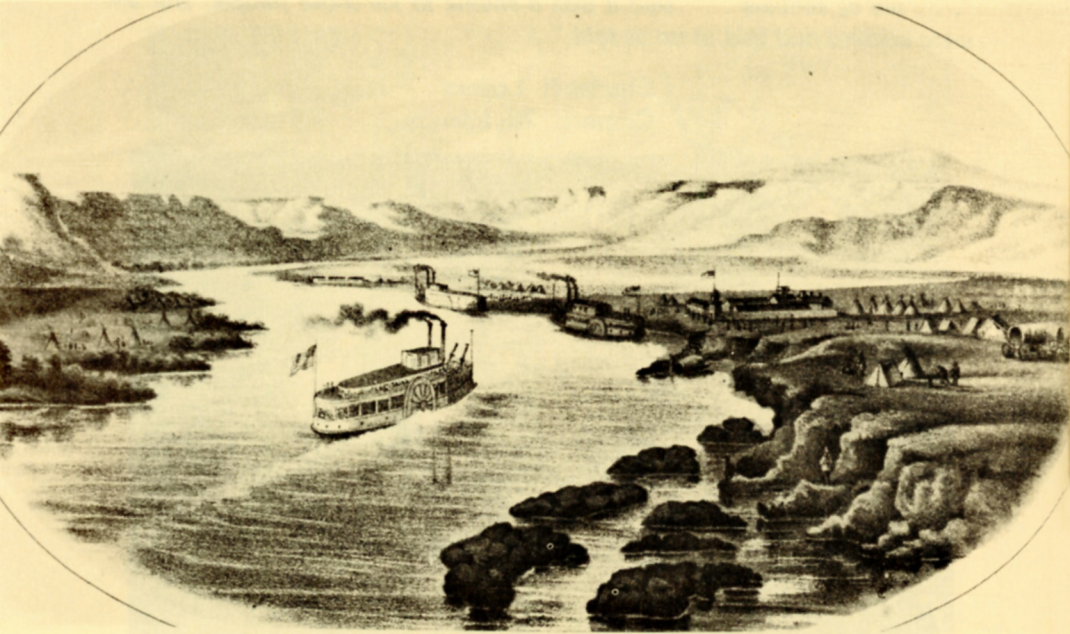
Charles N. Loynes
Corporal, 7th Infantry



Looking Glass
Nez Perce War Chief

History, someone has said, shows that no nation ever wins a war. One side only loses more than the other. In reading through these quotations you are encouraged to thread your own paths through the events described; to search the source materials given at the close, and to judge for yourselves what was lost, and by whom.

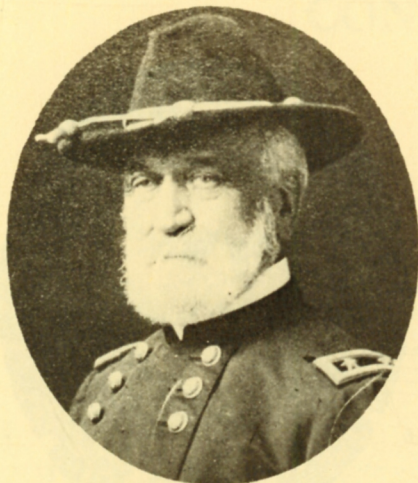
BEGINNINGS



Fort Benton, Montana

We took away their country and their means of support, broke up their mode of living, their habits of life, introduced disease and decay among them and it was for this and against this they made war. Could anyone expect less?

Gen. Philip H. Sheridan



General O.O. Howard

"It is my conviction that the main cause of the bloody Nez Perce war lay back of ideas of legal ownership. It rested in the natural and persistent resistance of independent nations to the authority of other nations"

General Oliver O. Howard*
Department of the Columbia

"If we ever owned the land we own it still, for we never sold it. . . 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."

Heinmot Tooyalakekt
Chief Joseph

"A great many lies have been told us. They say I want to fight, which is not true. I have a wife and children, cattle and horses. I have eyes and a heart and I can see and understand that if we fight we have to leave all and go to the mountains."

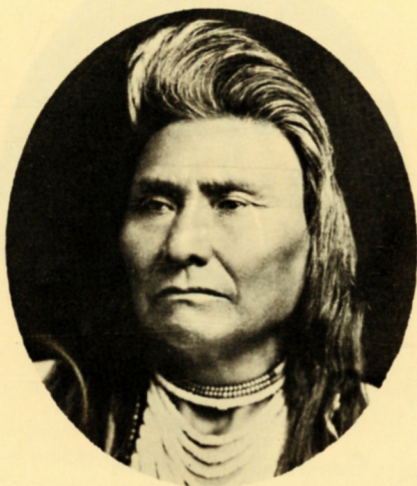
Chief Ollicot*
Joseph's Brother

"You asked what right we had to go into the fight when the Nez Perces passed through our valleys peaceably: we answer, 'To avenge the wrongs they had committed on the early settlers at Mount Idaho.' "

Captain John B. Catlin
Commander, Civilian Volunteers

"Let me be a free man—free to travel, free to stop, free to work, free to trade where I choose, free to choose my own teachers, free to follow the religion of my fathers, free to talk and think and act for myself — and I will obey every law, or submit to the penalty."

Chief Joseph*



Chief Joseph

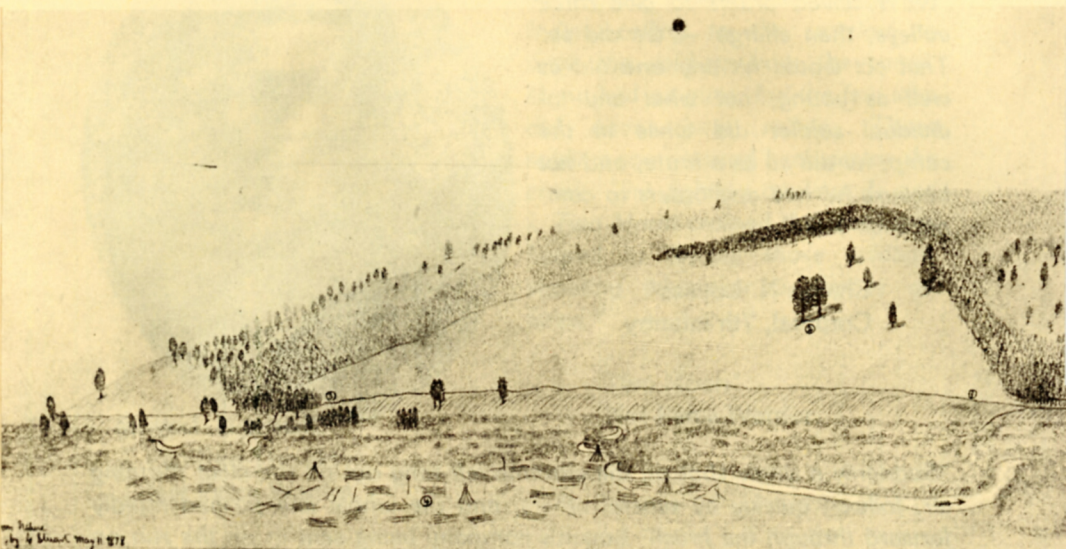
"In all this trouble with the Indians — it is to be remembered — the officers are subject to the 'Higher Ups' in Washington. If the Indians are off their reservations, the military is sent to put them back — now if the Indians object, you have an Indian War on your hands."

Charles N. Loynes*
Corporal, 7th Infantry

"The army has had no part in making or breaking the long list of treaties; was not responsible for the constant crowding of the Indian by the onward march of the settler and miner; nor can the oppression of the weaker race by the stronger be charged against the army."

Lieutenant Charles A. Woodruff
Acting Battalion Adjutant, 7th Infantry

CONFLICT



on picture
by A. Gibbon May 1878

View of the Battle Ground of Big Hole, looking north.

- ① Trail along which the troops were stationed waiting for daylight. ② Large fir tree in which an Indian Warshooter was concealed. ③ Point of timber in which Gen Gibbon fortified. ④ The Indian village consisting of eighty six lodges & about 250 warriors.

The Big Hole, Montana

"It was the old story of the government. . . sending a handful of soldiers against a host of Indians better armed than ourselves. They rallied from all directions and soon every bush and tree covered an Indian."

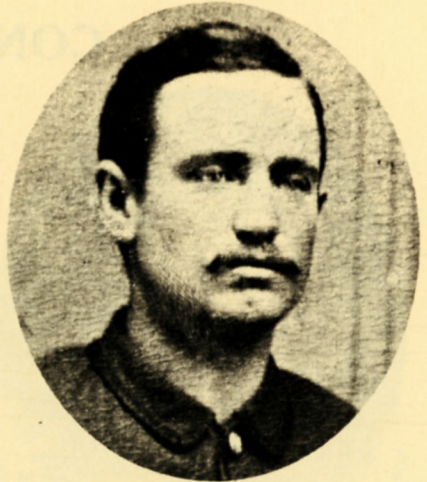
Charles N. Loynes
Corporal, 7th Infantry

"We came to that place in the afternoon, towards evening. We stayed that night and next day. Evening came on again, and it was after sundown — not too late — lots of us children were playing. It was below the camp towards the creek that we . . . boys played the stick or bone game. They were noisy, having lots of fun, and I was with them. We were only having a good time."

White Bird
Nez Perce Child

"We received orders to give three volleys, then charge — we did so. That act would hit any one old as well as young, but what any individual soldier did while in the camp, he did so as a brute, and not because he had any orders to commit such acts."

Charles N. Loynes*
Corporal, 7th Infantry



Charles N. Loynes

"Suddenly a single shot on the extreme left rang out on the clear morning air, follwed quickly by several others, and the whole line pushed rapidly forward through the brush. 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."

Colonel John Gibbon
Commander, 7th Infantry

"We were trapped — sleeping — unarmed. They spied on us across the mountains when we thought not of foes."

Yellow Wolf*
Nez Perce Warrior

"The women, all scared when the soldiers charged the camp, ran into the water, the brush. Any place where they could hide themselves and children. Many were killed as they ran. They had no guns. Those two brave women must have run for shelter, but seeing so many women and children falling, got guns, maybe from dead soldiers, and helped drive the enemies from the camp."

Red Wolf
Nez Perce Warrior

"Why are we retreating? Since the world was made brave men fight for their women and children. Are we going to run to the mountains and let the whites kill our women and children before our eyes? It is better we should be killed fighting. Now is our time. Fight! Shoot them down. We can shoot as well as any of these soldiers."

White Bird*
Nez Perce Chief



Peo-Peo-Tholekt
Nez Perce Warrior

"The soldiers had set fire to some of the tepees. I heard the voice of an Indian calling to the warriors to drive the soldiers from the camp. Many had no guns, but the few who did have them rallied. Those soldiers soon turned back across the creek. The fighting continued, and I, Two Moon crossed the creek and helped in driving those soldiers, shooting whenever a chance offered."

Two Moon*
Nez Perce Warrior

"At this stage of the game our forces . . . were badly whipped. General Gibbon rode up the right bank of the creek and ordered a retreat. Our forces then fell back, one half mile up the creek . . . Here General Gibbon called a halt and told his men that we would make this place our final stand. Our men were mad and desperate."

Captain John B. Catlin
Commander Citizen Volunteers

"The fighting now stopped for a while. The Indians returning to the camp. They all cried when they saw what had been done, so many killed every where. Men, women, and children lay dead among dead soldiers and burned tepees and bedding."

Red Elk
Nez Perce Warrior

". . . we came back . . . to find part of our village in ruins. This tepee here was standing and silent. Inside we found . . . two women lying in their blankets dead. Both had been shot. The mother had her newborn baby in her arms. His head was smashed, as by a gun breech or boot heel . . . Some soldiers acted with crazy minds."

Yellow Wolf
Nez Perce Warrior

"Few of us will forget the wail of mingled grief, rage and horror which rose from the camp when the Indians returned to it and recognized their slaughtered warriors, women, and children."

Colonel John Gibbon*
Commander, 7th Infantry



Colonel John Gibbon

"I was getting pretty hungry and dry. After we had dug in the trenches for a while, three soldiers were detailed to go down to the creek and get water for the wounded. It was pretty risky business, but they got back all right. One of them stopped to ask me to take a swallow of water, which I willingly did. It had been some time since I had had any food or water, and it tasted mighty good."

Thomas C. Sherrill*
Citizen Volunteer

"The night grew old, and the firing faded away. Soldiers would not shoot. Would not lift head nor hand above their hiding . . . We knew then they were holding cartridges for maybe a charge by us. 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."

Yellow Wolf
Nez Perce Warrior



Yellow Wolf



Thomas C. Sherrill

AFTERMATH



Final Battle Scene
Bear's Paw Mountains

"All along on that trail was crying. Mourning for many left where we thought no war would come. Old people, half-grown boys and girls, mothers, and little babies. I can never forget that day."

Black Eagle
Nez Perce Warrior

"What made Joseph so hostile was the killing of some of their women and children by accident as we were told not to shoot the squaws and I honestly can say it was not done on purpose."

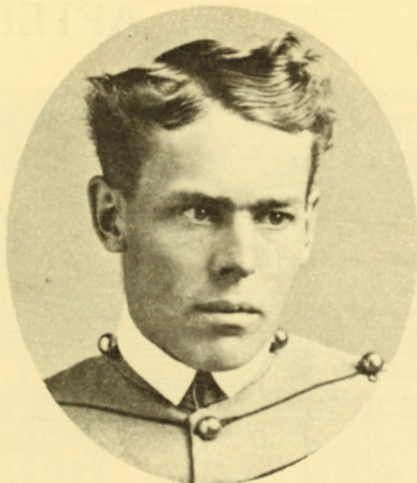
Homer Coon
Private, 7th Infantry

"The Nez Percés never make war on women and children; we could have killed a great many women and children while war lasted, but we would feel ashamed to do so cowardly an act."

Chief Joseph

"After this battle the Indians knew that there was no safety for them in Montana; they fled and led General Howard a lively chase. . ."

Lt. Charles A. Woodruff
Adjutant, 7th Infantry



Lt. Charles A. Woodruff

"Every day was struggling. Fighting and hurrying on. Faint for food; tired with the hard travelling. Many difficulties I cannot explain. Little children, some of them wounded. Women dying of wounds on the trail. Men left to die or be killed by the soldiers and scouts because they were too old to travel further, or shot too badly to ride."

Raven Spy
Nez Perce Warrior

"What sort of man will brag as to how many he killed. There were many killed on both sides."

Charles N. Loynes
Corporal, 7th Infantry

"...General Miles struck across the Missouri, by forced march, with 600 men, intercepted steamboats and made them ferry him across the Missouri, attacked and surrounded Joseph, and after four days of fighting captured hundreds of ponies and compelled the surrender of Joseph and all of his band, except those under White Bird, who escaped through his lines and fled to British America."

Lt. Charles A. Woodruff
Adjutant, 7th Infantry



White Feather

"You know how you feel when you lose kindred and friends through sickness-death. You do not care if you die! With us it was worse! Strong men; well women and little children killed and buried. They had not done wrong to be so killed. We had only asked to be left in our homes; the homes of our ancestors. Our going was with heavy hearts, broken spirits. But we would be free!"

White Feather*
Nez Perce Woman

"The soldier, the big white chief had said: 'My brother, we will no more fight. When you turn back, and I turn back, we make the path clean from blood. Next generation coming will have friendship pure for all. Of course we have hurt on both sides; destroyed on both sides. But all this is now placed back of us.'"

Red Elk*
Nez Perce Warrior

"What I now feel as I sit here, what comes to me, is this: My own blood — our mothers and fathers, our brothers and sisters — if you dig in this ground you will find their bones. It was not our fault, all of that early morning killing. I speak it for the record I recognize to be true. I think of only the few of us left."

White Hawk*
Nez Perce Man

Chief Joseph

"Hear me my Chiefs! My heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands I will fight no more forever."



Chief Joseph's War Drum

EPILOGUE



Chief Joseph

"If the white man wants to live in peace with the Indian he can live in peace. There need be no trouble. Treat all men alike. Give them all the same law. Give them all an even chance to live and grow. . . Whenever the white man treats the Indian as they treat each other, then we shall have no more wars. We shall be . . . brothers of one father and one mother, with one sky above us and one country around us. . . Then the Great Spirit . . . will smile upon this land, and send rain to wash out the bloody spots made by brothers' hands upon the face of the earth. For this time the Indian race are waiting and praying."

Chief Joseph

Joseph and the remainder of his people were brought to the Colville Indian Reservation, Washington State, in May of 1885. There he died, alone before his campfire, on September 21st, 1904. Though less than 500 miles away, he was never permitted to return to his ancestral home along the Wallowa River in Oregon. His remains lie today beneath a weed-choked cemetery in Nespelem, Washington.

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