

**AN INCIDENT OF THE NEZ PERCE CAMPAIGN.**

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DURING the memorable campaign against the Nez Perce Indians, in the year 1877, there were many stirring incidents that have never been given to the public, and notably among these is the Camas Meadow fight of Capt. Randolph Norwood's Company L, of the 2nd Cavalry. The writer was a member of that company at the time, and will describe it as he saw it. In the early part of the summer we had assisted the 5th Infantry, under Col. Nelson A. Miles, in rounding up and capturing the remnant band of Cheyenne Sioux [sic], under Lame Deer, and bringing them into the cantonment at the mouth of Tongue River. Shortly after arriving there, Gen. W. T. Sherman and staff, and the General's son, Thomas, came up the Yellowstone on a tour of inspection, and we were ordered to escort them to Fort Ellis, which was our home station. Arriving there, a portion of the company was detailed to accompany our distinguished visitors on a trip of sightseeing to the Yellowstone Park. They had scarcely departed when dispatches arrived telling of a disastrous engagement of Col. John Gibbon's troops with the Nez Percés at Big Hole Pass, something like one hundred and sixty miles away; saying he was in desperate circumstances and in danger of annihilation, and ordering us to hasten with all speed to his relief. Our company was depleted, by various details, to about fifty men, and with this force we started within the hour, which was already late in the day. Virginia City, sixty miles, was made on the night of the following day; the next ninety miles were made without halt, except for coffee for the men and short rests for the horses. It was a tedious ride; all day, all night and all day again, the steady plod, plod of the horses, broken at night by the occasional, smothered exclamation or oath of some trooper who had dropped asleep and nearly fallen from his horse. On the second night out from Virginia City we went into camp late, and moved early the following morning, and had not been on the road long before we met a wagon and travois train bringing wounded from the battle-field. They told us that they had been soundly whipped, with great loss, and that the Indians, unable to dislodge them, had, after a three days' siege, departed, taking a south-easterly course and following the main range of the Rocky Mountains. They would, without question, have killed or captured every man of Gibbon's force had not they been apprised of a large force of soldiers coming from the west. This was Gen. O. O. Howard's command, consisting of two companies of the 1st U. S. Cavalry, two or three batteries of the 4th U. S. Artillery and the 21st U. S. Infantry. The artillery was equipped as infantry. This force we joined, and then began a stern chase which proved to be the traditional long chase. Our course was the same as the Indians had taken. But with our heavier impedimenta the

best we could do was to keep from fifteen to twenty miles behind them. We crossed to the south side of the main range, and for seven nights we slept booted and spurred. We were following the trail which, after crossing the mountains, led through a good grazing country, and from the numerous carcasses of cattle which lined the trail we knew the Indians were well sustained. An interesting fact, to those not acquainted with Indian ways, is that these dead steers were disemboweled and the bulk of the internal arrangements had disappeared, while the loins, rump, and, in fact, all choice parts, from a white man's point of view, had not been disturbed. The trail was easily followed, as it was from fifty to one hundred and fifty feet wide, and the vegetation was almost entirely obliterated by the tramping of their several hundred ponies and the dragging of scores of travois poles. At their halting places we found many fresh made graves, showing that their wounded list was rapidly growing smaller. We also noticed, at such resting spots, numbers of conical piles of pony droppings, evidently built by hand, which our scouts told us were constructed by the young bucks, and intended to show their contempt for us. When we struck Camas Creek, General Howard decided to give the men and horses a chance to rest, as our march had been arduous, and the Indians seemed about to strike for the headwaters of Snake River, and from there enter the then almost wholly unexplored Yellowstone Park. We camped on the east bank of Camas Creek, on open ground. Opposite, and above the camp, the creek was fringed with cottonwoods and alders, and below, the banks were clear and the stream flowed over a natural meadow to "The Sink," a few miles below, where it disappeared. The creek was literally alive with trout from twelve to twenty inches long, and offered the finest sport I have ever seen; and with only a small portion of the men fishing, enough were taken to feed the entire command. In the immediate vicinity of that camp ground there is now a company, with a capital of \$200,000, engaged in raising trout for market, and they supply Ogden, Salt Lake City, and even San Francisco; the waters are ideal for the purpose. At night, guards were posted, and a picket post was established some five hundred yards upstream, near the creek and on a rocky knoll, and two at other points. The mule herd was turned loose to graze in the space between the camp and the principal picket post, mentioned above. Some of the men slept under the wagons and others pitched shelter tents; I chose the latter method, and with Private Monaghan for a "bunkie" was soon in a state of "innocuous desuetude." Either our pickets fell asleep or the Indians were very astute, for during the dark half hour that generally precedes daylight, we were awakened by a disconcerting concert of demoniacal yells and a cracking of rifles, while the whizzing of bullets could be heard well overhead. Everyone was out in a minute, and all we could see was a magnified imitation of a swarm of fireflies flitting in the alders, as the rifles spoke; while the tramping of hundreds of hoofs added to the din. We had no sooner sent them a "Roland for their Oliver" than the fireflies ceased winking, and, except the noise we were making ourselves, nothing could be heard but receding hoofbeats and faint yells, as the enemy returned from whence they came, taking with them, as a souvenir, about one hundred and fifty mules, our pack-train. Our company horses had pulled one picket-pin, and had then milled 'round and 'round and twisted themselves into a grotesque puzzle.

Orders came quickly, given for the three companies of cavalry to saddle, pursue and try to recapture the pack-train. One company of the 1st Cav. was to make a detour to the right and the other to the left, and our company was to follow the trail. The morning air was extremely chilly and crisp and the horses rank, so that what was an orderly gallop, at first, soon developed into a race. After half an hour of this we approached a ridge, which was the first roll of the foot-hills. The first ones to make the summit of the ridge suddenly stopped and then quickly returned to the foot; as the rest of us came up we soon learned that the Indians had made a stand just over the ridge. We dismounted, and the Number Fours, each holding four horses, being unable to fight, left about thirty-five of us to meet the Indians. Crawling to the top we saw a line of dismounted skirmishers, standing behind their ponies, on open ground and about a thousand yards away. We deployed along the ridge, and for twenty minutes or so exchanged shots with them with but little damage on either side, as the range was long for our Springfields and longer for their Winchesters. Lieutenant Benson of the 7th Infantry, who was attached to our company for the day, standing up for an instant, just at my side, received a bullet which entered at the hip-pocket and went out at the other, having passed entirely through both buttocks; this, while we were facing the enemy, caused us to realize that we had no ordinary Indians to deal with, for while we had been frolicking with the skirmishers in front, Chief Joseph had engineered as neat a double flank movement as could be imagined, and we were exposed to a raking fire coming from right and left. The horses had been withdrawn, more than five hundred yards, to a clump of cottonwoods; and when we turned around there was no sight nor sign of them. For a brief period there was a panic, and then we heard the notes of a bugle blowing "Recall" from the cottonwood thicket. The race to that thicket was something never to be forgotten, for a cavalryman is not trained for a five hundred yard sprint; luck was with us, however, and no man was hit in that mad race for safety. I had a horse's nose-bag slung over my shoulder containing extra cartridges, and a bullet cut the strap and let it fall to the ground. A hero would have stopped, gone back and recovered that bag, but not I. We all reached the horses and found the place an admirable one for defence; it was a sort of basin, an acre or so in extent, with a rim high enough to protect our horses, and filled with young cottonwoods in full leaf. It was oval in shape, and we deployed in all directions around the rim. For two hours it was a sniping game and our casualties were light. The Indians crawled very close, one shooting Harry Trevor in the back at about fifteen feet, as we knew by the moccasin tracks and empty shells found behind a rock after the engagement. Poor Trevor's wound was mortal as was that of Sam Glass, who was shot through the bladder; a bullet hit Sergeant Garland's cartridge-belt and drove two cartridges from it clean through his body; his wound never healed and he blew out his brains a few years later. Will Clark had his shoulder partly torn away by an explosive ball; Sergeant Wilkins, a head wound and Farrier Jones, a "busted" knee; a citizen attaché, a bullet through the foot, and the lieutenant, wounded as told above. This was the amount of damage done to us, and what we did to the Indians we never knew, as they retreated in good order taking their dead or injured with them, after they found they could not dislodge us.

Three dead ponies and some pools of blood were all the records we found of their casualties. The real hero of the occasion was Serg. Hugh McCafferty, who climbed a cottonwood tree, and in short range of every Indian and only concealed by the foliage, kept us posted on their movements by passing the word to a man stationed under the tree. For this act he was given a certificate of merit and a medal, by Congress. It should have been mentioned that we recovered twenty mules that were dropped by the Indians about midway between the camp and battle-ground. The others were never retaken, but were worn out or died before the final surrender of the few survivors to Colonel Miles. We took up the trail the next day, after our wounded had been started for the post, under escort. I could never understand how those two companies of the 1st Cavalry could have missed the Indians and gotten entirely out of touch with us, when we started together and we were fighting within half an hour and kept it up for nearly three hours. More could be told of our chase through forest and canyon, over mountains and across gorges, where wagons had to be let down almost perpendicular walls by hand, for two hundred feet. But that is another story.