

The

CAVALRY JOURNAL

VOL. XXXVII

OCTOBER, 1928

NO. 153

Some Reminiscences, Including the Washita Battle

By Brigadier General E. S. Godfrey

(The following narrative continues the "Reminiscences" of General Godfrey published in the July, 1927, Journal. — Ed.)

DURING our return march to Fort Dodge from General Sully's first expedition, September, 1868, the General would at times relieve his mind by talking of his problems at the headquarters mess and campfires. One of the problems was a commander of his cavalry. For some reason he had come to the conclusion that Major Elliott, then in command of the troops of the 7th Cavalry, had not had sufficient experience to trust him with an independent command¹. He mentioned the various field officers of cavalry within his jurisdiction as district commander and finally eliminated all of them. He several times mentioned the "Triumvirate of S's"—Sherman, Division Commander; Sheridan, Department Commander; and Sully, District Commander²—and seemed perfectly satisfied with the results of the expedition. For future operations he intended to ask for a larger force, operate against the Indians till he chastised them, and then return to winter quarters.

On arrival at Fort Dodge, he asked for recruits and horses and equipments for the troops of the 7th Cavalry to the maximum (then one hundred) and for Lieutenant Colonel Custer to command the regiment.

Plan of Campaign and Preparations

A few days later General Sheridan arrived at the post. The plan of campaign was changed to establish a supply camp of a more permanent nature and to make a winter campaign. The supply cantonment was to be at the junction of the Beaver, or North Fork of the Canadian, and Wolf Creek, where General Sully had abandoned pursuit of the hostiles.

Major Alfred Gibbs with the headquarters and band from Fort Leavenworth joined the 7th cavalry, and, later, the two troops stationed at Fort Harker arrived—eleven troops present. The regiment was sent out to Bluff Creek, about thirty miles southeast of Fort Dodge. General Custer joined the regiment early in October and at once began aggressive operations against the hostiles who had repeatedly attacked the camp.

The troops of the 10th Cavalry were sent north to protect the frontier settlements on the Saline, Solomon and Republican Rivers which the Indians had been raiding since the tenth of August.

General Sheridan established his field headquarters at Fort Hays where he could be in closer touch with communications and energize the forwarding of supplies for the coming campaign.

Finding difficulty in getting transportation to forward supplies from Hays City to Fort Dodge, he ordered Number One Depot Train from Fort Leavenworth. This train was the pride of the Quartermaster's Department. It was composed of selected mules, as for many years the best mules sent to the department had been assigned to this train. That woke up the Quartermaster Department!

While at Fort Dodge, he learned that the commissary of the post had asked the families and officers' messes to estimate the amount of officers' stores they wanted for the coming year. These were tabulated and sent to the Chief Commissary, Department Headquarters, as his annual requisition. When the supplies arrived, these canned goods were apportioned according to estimates, or if the garrison had been increased, according to the number of persons in the several messes. General Sheridan found some of the delicacies quite toothsome and drew on the stores until he was informed that he had his quota. He was surprised that there was a limit and that special requisitions were taboo. He ordered and approved a special requisition, and further ordered that in the future special requisitions be honored. That woke up the Commissary Department!

In the meantime, General Sully was busy with his requisitions for the new cantonment, or Camp Supply. Finding that mules were scarce, he estimated for a number of yokes of oxen, intending to use them to haul the supplies for the buildings at the supply camp, etc., on the army wagons with trailers to the new post; then use them to "snake" the logs for stockades; and subsequently kill them for beef. That horrified both departments! But he got his oxen, or "bulls," as they were called in the parlance of the West.

The outrages on the Kansas frontier settlers and the capture of women aroused the people of that state to appeal for protection. The Congress authorized the organization of the 18th and 19th Kansas Volunteer Cavalry. The Governor, Honorable S. J. Crawford, resigned to accept the colonelcy of the 19th which rendezvoused at Topeka.

General Sheridan's plan for the winter campaign involved the operations of three columns:

Colonel A. W. Evans with six troops of the 3rd Cavalry and two companies of infantry was to march from a base at Fort Bascom, New Mexico, establish a supply depot at Monument Creek, then scout the Canadian and the North Fork of the Red River Valleys as far as the Red River, the boundary of the Department of Missouri.

A column of seven troops of the 5th Cavalry under the command of Lieutenant Colonel E. A. Carr was to march southeast from Fort Lyon, Colorado, unite with Captain Penrose with five troops of cavalry, then on the north fork of the Canadian, and operate toward Antelope Hills on the Canadian.

The third column, at Fort Dodge under General Sully, was to move southward and establish the cantonment at the fork of Beaver Creek and Wolf Creek. This column consisted of eleven troops of the 7th Cavalry and five companies of the 3rd Infantry. The 19th Kansas Volunteer Cavalry was organized at Topeka, Kansas, and was ordered to join this column at Camp Supply.

All these columns were to march November 1st, but owing to the delays of supplies, the time was changed to November 12.

On the 28th of October, the 7th Cavalry went into camp a short distance below Fort Dodge and named the camp "Camp Sandy Forsyth" in honor of Colonel George A. Forsyth, who, with fifty volunteer scouts, had withstood the attack of about seven hundred hostiles on the Arickaree Fork of the Republican. The arrival of about five hundred recruits and the same number of horses filled the organizations to the maximum. All the horses of the regiment were then arranged according to color on one long picket line and each troop commander, according to rank, was given choice of color for his troop. According to color there were: Four troops of bay horses, three sorrel, one each black, brown and gray, the band and trumpeters gray, and the eleventh troop the odds and ends of all

colors, including roans, piebalds, etc. For several years after this, before requisitions for colors were given consideration in purchases, I observed that these ratios obtained.

Drills and target practice were pushed to the limit. Forty of the best shots were selected for a separate organization under the command of Lieutenant Cooke. We youngsters named it the "Corps d'elite" and the name stuck throughout the campaign.

On November 12th the Fort Dodge column assembled on Mulberry Creek, the 7th Cavalry from Camp Sandy Forsyth on the Arkansas River, and the supply train of nearly four hundred army wagons with its infantry escort from Fort Dodge.

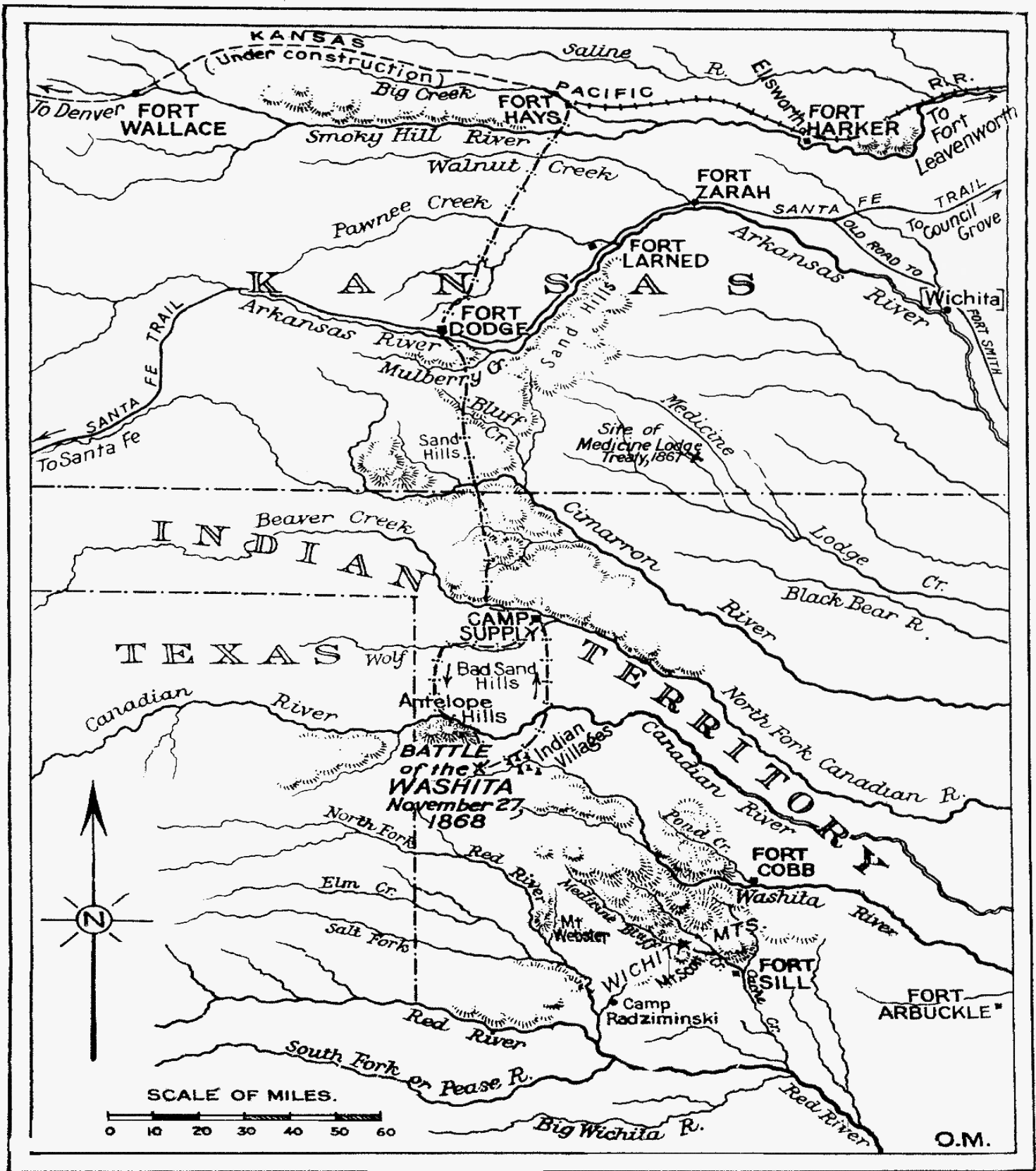
Establishing the Base

The next morning we had one of those tedious jobs of crossing a prairie creek; steep, deep banks, doubling of teams, braking [sic] of coupling poles, amid the shouting and cursing of wagon masters and teamsters. The wagon train was assembled, in columns of fours—two troops of cavalry as advance guard, three troops with flankers on each flank, and two as rear guard. The infantry companies were distributed along the train, and the beef herd along the train inside the flanking troops. The leading troop on the flanks would march to the head of the train, halt and graze until the rear of the train had passed it, thus alternating so as to save dismounting and yet cover the flanks of the train. The advance guard one day would be rear guard the next day. The details were by roster so as to equalize the functions. The slow travel of the "bull" train was a handicap to travel and to arrival in camp on a full day's march. The ensemble made an imposing cavalcade.

The march was without special incident till the last day's march down Beaver Creek, when our Osage Indian trailers discovered the trail of a war party of a hundred or more on their way north to raid the frontier. On arrival in camp, General Custer requested permission to take the cavalry on the back trail of this war party and attack the village whence they came. General Sully disapproved the proposal on the ground that since it was absurd to suppose the hostiles were unaware of our presence in the country, the village could not be surprised but would be on the alert. He was obsessed with the idea that all our operations were under the constant surveillance of hostile scouts who kept the tribes fully informed.

On the sixth day of our march we arrived at the fork of Beaver and Wolf Creeks. At once preparations began for the building of the cantonment on which was bestowed the name of Camp Supply. This isolated post became the abode of many "Winners of the West." It was at this place that General Sully had abandoned the pursuit of the hostiles about two months before.

The next day activities began in locating and laying out the cantonment; digging trenches for the stockade and for the quarters and barracks to house the personnel, and digging wells for water supply. Outside parties, guarded by mounted troops, were sent to gather supplies and material for the post. The hum of the mowing machines was accompanied by the ring of the axe, punctuated by the crash of the falling timber. With axes and saws these trees were made into usable parts which the bull teams "snaked" to convenient sites to load in wagons. The mule-whackers hauled them to the cantonment where they were sorted for various uses, as palisades, upright walls for buildings, rafters, etc., etc. What a contrast these pioneer activities were to the centuries of quiet, wild life, yet to the participants it was all in the day's work.



Portions of Kansas, Indian Territory and Texas In 1868

Showing principal topography, forts, site of the Medicine Lodge Treaty of 1867, and the route of the forces taking part in the Battle of the Washita.

The 19th Kansas Volunteer Cavalry had been ordered to proceed from its rendezvous at Topeka on November 5th. Two troops had gone to Fort Dodge to escort General Sheridan and it was expected that the other eight troops would meet us at the fork of the Beaver and Wolf Creeks. Their absence created much concern.

On the 15th of November, General Sheridan left Fort Hays to join the Fort Dodge column. He relates:

"The first night out a blizzard struck us and carried away our tents; and, as the gale was so violent that they could not be put up again, the rain and snow drenched us to the skin. Shivering from the wet and cold, I took refuge under a wagon, and there spent such a miserable night that, when at last morning came, the gloomy predictions of Old Man Bridger and others rose up before me with greatly increased force." (Bridger had endeavored to dissuade him from making a winter campaign.) "As we took the road the sleet and snow were still falling, but we labored on to Dodge that day in spite of the fact that many mules played out on the way. We stayed only one night at Dodge, and then on the 17th, escorted by a troop of cavalry and Forsyth's scouts, now under the command of Lieutenant Pepon (10th Cavalry), crossed the Arkansas and camped the night of the 18th at Bluff Creek, where the two troops of the 19th Kansas, previously detailed as my escort were awaiting our coming. As we were approaching this camp some suspicious looking objects were seen moving off at a long distance to the east of us, but as the scouts confidently pronounced them buffalo, we were unaware of their true character till next morning, when we became satisfied what we had seen were Indians, for immediately after crossing Beaver Creek, we struck a trail leading to the northeast of a war party that evidently came up from the headwaters of the Washita River. The evening of November 21st we arrived at the Camp Supply depot, having traveled all day in another snow storm that did not end till twenty-four hours later."

Hearing of the near approach of General Sheridan, General Custer mounted his horse and rode out to meet him.

The arrival of General Sheridan with two troops of the 19th Kansas Volunteers gave rise to an occurrence not mentioned by either General Sheridan or General Custer in their published writings of this campaign. At that time the Rules and Articles of War provided that when troops of the regular army and volunteers came together, brevet rank took effect. Both Sully and Custer were lieutenant colonels. Colonel Crawford of the 19th Kansas was the senior in rank. General Sully issued an order assuming command of the troops by virtue of his brevet rank of brigadier general, U. S. A. When this order reached General Custer, he issued an order assuming command by virtue of his brevet rank of major general, U. S. A. Sully contended that as between officers of the regular army this should not obtain. General Sheridan decided in favor of General Custer. General Sully was relieved from duty with the expedition and ordered to Fort Harker to command the District of the Upper Arkansas. I heard General Custer say that had the question not been raised he would not have taken his stand and would have been perfectly satisfied to have served under Colonel Crawford. During the balance of the campaign General Custer exercised the immediate control of the troops.

"November 22nd, 1868—The morning is cold; it snowed all night and is still snowing. Cleared up at noon and got warmer. We took our horses out to graze at noon and let them pick all they can this Sunday . . . Still it snows. . . . " (From the diary of Blacksmith W. S. Harvey, Troop K, 7th Cavalry, now living at Belle Vernon, Pennsylvania.)

We were grazing the horses in the sand hills on that day when, in the afternoon, orders came to return to camp at once and prepare for thirty days' campaign. It is my recollection that three wagons were assigned to each troop, this for convenience for picket line—one for troop mess, etc., one for officers' mess, extra ammunition, etc., and one for forage. Baggage was limited to necessities.

Finding the Trail

November 23rd—Reveille at 3 o'clock. Snowed all night and still snowing very heavily. The darkness and heavy snowfall made the packing of the wagons very difficult, but at dawn the wagons were assembled in the train and daylight found us on the march, the band playing "The Girl I Left Behind Me," but there was no woman there to interpret its significance. The snow was falling so heavily that vision was limited to a few rods. All landmarks were invisible and the trails were lost. "We didn't know where we were going, but we were on the way." Then General Custer, with compass in hand, took the lead and became our guide.

As the day wore on the weather became warmer and I have never seen the snowflakes as large or fall so lazily as those that fell that day. Fortunately there was no wind to drift the snow to add to our discomfort. They melted on the clothing so that every living thing was wet to the skin. The snow balled on the feet of our shod animals causing much floundering and adding to the fatigue of travel. About two o'clock we came to Wolf Creek, crossed to the right side of the valley, and continued to march till we came to a clump of fallen timbers and there went into camp with our wagon train far behind. As soon as the horses were unsaddled everyone except the horse holders was gathering fuel for fires. The valley was alive with rabbits and all messes were supplied with rabbit stew. Our rawhide covered saddles were soaked. The unequal drying warped the saddle trees which subsequently caused that bane of cavalry—many sore backs. Snow, eighteen inches "on the level"; distance marched, about fifteen miles.

The snowfall ceased during the night. The sun rose on the 24th with clear skies and with warmer weather. The snow melted rapidly. The glare of the bright sunshine caused much discomfort and a number of cases of snowblindness. Some buffalo were killed and many rabbits. Some deer were seen. We camped on Wolf Creek. Distance marched, about 18 miles.

November 25th we marched some distance up Wolf Creek and then turned in a southerly direction toward the Canadian. As we approached the summit of the divide, the peaks of the Antelope Hills loomed up and became our marker for the rest of the day. We made camp late that evening on a small stream about a mile from the Canadian. The day's march had been tedious. The melting snows balled on our shod

animals during the long pull to the divide. A number of horses and mules gave out, but were brought in late that night. Wood was very scarce, but usually the quartermaster sergeants would load some wood in the cook wagon when packing and they usually were on the lookout for fuel on the march.

At daybreak, November 26th, Major Elliott, with troops G, H, and M, some white scouts and Osage trailers, started up the north side of the Canadian to scout for a possible trail of war parties. The remainder of the command and the wagon train marched to the Canadian to cross to the south side. To "California Joe" had been given the task of finding a ford. The river was high and rising, current swift and full of floating snow and slush ice. After much floundering he found a practical ford. The cavalry crossed first and assembled on the plain. Owing to the quicksand bottom, each wagon was double teamed and rushed through without halting. A mounted man preceded each team and other mounted men were alongside to "whoop 'em up."

While this tedious crossing and parking was going on, General Custer and a number of officers went to the tops of the hills to view the country. The highest peak was about three hundred feet above the plain. Suddenly we were enveloped in a cloud of frozen mist. Looking at the sun we were astonished to see it surrounded by three ellipses with rainbow tints, the axes marked by sundogs, except the lower part of the third or outer ellipse which seemingly was below the horizon, eleven sundogs. This phenomenon was not visible to those on the plain below.

As the last of the wagons had crossed and the rear guard was floundering in crossing, someone of our group on the hills called out, "Hello, here comes somebody." But General Custer had already seen him and had focused his field glasses on the galloping scout, but he said nothing. It was a tense moment when Jack Corbin rode up and began his report.

Major Elliott had marched up the Canadian about twelve miles when he came to the abandoned camp of a war party of about one hundred and fifty; he had crossed the river and was following the trail which was not over twenty-four hours old, and asked for instructions. Corbin was given a fresh horse to return to Major Elliott with instructions to follow the trail till dark, then halt till the command joined him.

Officers' call was sounded and when assembled we were told the news and ordered to be prepared to move as soon as possible. One wagon was assigned to each squadron (two troops), one to Troop G and the teamsters, and one to headquarters; seven in all, and one ambulance under the quartermaster, Lieutenant James M. Bell. These were to carry light supplies and extra ammunition. I cannot recall of just what the limited supplies consisted. Each trooper was ordered to carry one hundred rounds of ammunition on his person. (They were armed with the Spencer magazine carbine and Colt revolver, paper cartridges and caps.) The main train guarded by about eighty men under the command of the officer of the day was to follow as rapidly as possible. For this guard men with weak horses were selected. Captain Louis M. Hamilton, a grandson of Alexander Hamilton, was officer of the day. He was greatly distressed because this duty fell to him and begged to go along to command his squadron, but was

refused unless he could get some officer to exchange with him. Lieutenant E. G. Mathey, who was snowblind, agreed to take his place.

Soon the regiment was ready to move and we struck in a direction to intercept the trail of Elliott's advance. We pushed along almost without rest till about 9 P. M. before we came to Elliott's halting place. There we had coffee made, care being taken to conceal the fires as much as possible. Horses were unsaddled and fed. At 10 P. M. we were again in the saddle with instructions to make as little noise as possible,—no loud talking, no matches were to be lighted. Tobacco users were obliged to console themselves with the quid. Little Beaver, Osage Chief, with one of his warriors, had the lead dismounted as trailers; then followed the other Indian and white scouts with whom General Custer rode to be near the advance. The cavalry followed at a distance of about a half mile. The snow had melted during the day but at night the weather had turned cold and the crunching noise could be heard for a considerable distance.

After a couple of hours' march, the trailers hurried back for the command to halt. General Custer rode up to investigate when Little Beaver informed him that he "smelled smoke." Cautious investigation disclosed the embers of a fire which the guides decided from conditions had been made by the boy herders while grazing the pony herds and from this deduced that the village could not be far distant. The moon had risen and there was little difficulty in following the trail and General Custer rode behind the trailers to watch the developments. On nearing the crest of any rise, the trailer would crawl to the crest to reconnoiter, but seeing Little Beaver exercise greater caution than usual and then shading his eyes from the moon, the General felt there was something unusual. On his return the General asked, "What is it?" and Little Beaver replied, "Heap Injuns down there." Dismounting and advancing with the same caution as the guide, he made his personal investigation, but could only see what appeared to be a herd of animals. Asking why he thought there were Indians down there. Little Beaver replied, "Me heard dog bark." Listening intently they not only heard the bark of a dog, but the tinkling of a bell, indicating a pony herd, and then the cry of an infant.

The Plan of Battle

Satisfied that a village had been located, the General returned to the command, assembled the officers, and, after removing sabres, took us all to the crest where the situation was explained or rather conjectured. The barking of the dogs and the occasional cry of infants located the direction of the village and the tinkling of the bells gave the direction of the herds. Returning and resuming our sabres, the General explained his plans and assigned squadron commanders their duties and places. Major Elliott, with Troops G, H and M, was to march well to our left and approach the village from the northeast or easterly direction as determined by the ground, etc. Captain Thompson, with B and F, was to march well to our right so as to approach from the southeast, connecting with Elliott. Captain Myers, with E and I, was to move by the right so as to approach from a southerly direction. The wagons under Lieutenant Bell

and Captain Benteen's squadron – H and M – had been halted about two or three miles on the trail to await the outcome of the investigations.

Just after dismissing the officers and as we were separating, General Custer called my name. On reporting, he directed me to take a detail to where Captain Benteen and the wagons were, give his compliments to Captain Benteen and instruct him to rejoin the command, and Lieutenant Bell to hold the wagons where they were till he heard the attack which would be about daybreak. "Tell the Adjutant the number of men you want and he will make the detail. How many do you want?" I replied, "One orderly." He then said, "Why do you say that? You can have all you want." I replied that one was all I wanted—"to take more would increase the chances of accident and delay."

I delivered my messages and returned with Captain Benteen's squadron. The camp guard remained with the wagons.

Upon the arrival of Captain Benteen's squadron, Major Elliott proceeded to take position, also Captain Thompson and later Captain Myers.

Before the first streak of dawn, General Custer's immediate command as quietly as possible moved into place facing nearly east, Lieutenant Cooke's sharpshooters in advance of the left dismounted. General Custer and staff were followed by the band mounted. Captain West's squadron was on the right and Captain Hamilton's on the left, the standard and guard in the center. Troop K (West's) was on the right flank and I had command of the first platoon.

With the dawn we were ordered to remove overcoats and haversacks, leaving one man of each organization in charge with orders to load them in the wagons when Lieutenant Bell came up. Following the General, the command marched over the crest of the ridge and advanced some distance to another lower ridge. Waiting till sunrise we began to feel that the village had been abandoned although the dogs continued their furious barkings. Then "little by little" we advanced. Captain West came to me with orders, to charge through the village but not to stop, to continue through and round up the pony herds.

The Battle

With all quiet in the early dawn, Major Elliott's command had reached a concealed position close to the village, but was waiting for the signal from headquarters. The furious barking of the dogs aroused an Indian who came from his lodge, ran to the bank of the Washita, looked about and fired his rifle. I was told that a trooper had raised his head to take aim and was seen by this Indian. With the alarm thus given, the command opened fire. The trumpeters sounded the charge and the band began to play "Garry Owen," but by the time they played one strain their instruments froze up.

My platoon advanced, as rapidly as the brush and fallen timbers would permit until we reached the Washita which I found with steep, high banks. I marched the platoon by the right flank a short distance, found a "pony crossing," reformed on the

right bank, galloped through the right of the village without contact with a warrior, and then proceeded to round up the pony herds.

As I passed out of the village, Captain Thompson's and Captain Myers' squadrons came over the high ridge to my right. Both had lost their bearings during their night marching and failed to make contacts for the opening attack.

At the opening of the attack, the warriors rushed to the banks of the stream. Those in front of Custer's command were soon forced to retire in among the tepees, and most of them being closely followed retreated to ravines and behind trees and logs, and in depressions, where they maintained their positions till the last one was killed. A few escaped down the valley. This desperate fighting was carried on mostly by sharpshooters, waiting for a head to show. Seventeen Indians were killed in one depression.

Lieutenant Bell, when he heard the firing, rushed his teams to join the command and while loading the overcoats and haversacks was attacked by a superior force and the greater part of them had to be abandoned. His arrival with the reserve ammunition was a welcome reinforcement.

While the fighting was going on, Major Elliott seeing a group of dismounted Indians escaping down the valley called for volunteers to make pursuit. Nineteen men, including Regimental Sergeant Major Kennedy responded. As his detachment moved away, he turned to Lieutenant Hale waved his hand and said: "Here goes for a brevet or a coffin."

After passing through the village, I went in pursuit of pony herds and found them scattered in groups about a mile below the village. I deployed my platoon to make the roundup and took a position for observation. While the roundup was progressing, I observed a group of dismounted Indians escaping down the opposite side of the valley. Completing the roundup, and starting them toward the village, I turned the herd over to Lieutenant Law who had come with the second platoon of the troop and told him to take them to the village, saying that I would take my platoon and go in pursuit of the group I had seen escaping down the valley.

Crossing the stream and striking the trail, I followed it till it came to a wooded draw where there was a large pony herd. Here I found the group had mounted. Taking the trail which was well up on the hillside of the valley and following it about a couple of miles, I discovered a lone tepee, and soon after two Indians circling their ponies. A high promontory and ridge projected into the valley and shut off the view of the valley below the lone tepee. I knew the circling of the warriors meant an alarm and rally, but I wanted to see what was in the valley beyond them. Just then Sergeant Conrad, who had been a captain of Ohio volunteers, and Sergeant Hughes, who had served in the 4th U. S. Cavalry in that country before the Civil War, came to me and warned about the danger of going ahead. I ordered them to halt the platoon and wait till I could go to the ridge to see what was beyond. Arriving at and peering over the ridge, I was amazed to find that as far as I could see down the well wooded, tortuous valley there were tepees – tepees [sic]. Not only could I see tepees, but mounted warriors scurrying in our direction. I hurried back to the platoon and returned at the trot till attacked by the hostiles, when I

halted, opened fire, drove the hostiles to cover, and then deployed the platoon as skirmishers.

The hillsides were cut by rather deep ravines and I planned to retreat from ridge to ridge. Under the cavalry tactics of 1841, the retreat of skirmishers was by the odd and even numbers, alternating in lines to the rear. I instructed the line in retreat to halt on the next ridge and cover the retreat of the advance line. This was successful for the first and second ridges, but at the third I found men had apparently forgotten their numbers and there was some confusion, so I divided the skirmishers into two groups, each under a sergeant, and thereafter had no trouble.³

Finally the hostiles left us and we soon came to the pony herd where the group we had started to pursue had mounted. I had not had a single casualty. During this retreat we heard heavy firing on the opposite side of the valley, but being well up on the side hill we could not see through the trees what was going on. There was a short lull when the firing again became heavy and continued till long after we reached the village, in fact, nearly all day.

In rounding up the pony herd, I found Captain Barnitz' horse, *General*, saddled but no bridle. On reaching the village I turned over the pony herd and at once reported to General Custer what I had done and seen. When I mentioned the "big village" he exclaimed, "What's that?" and put me through a lot of rapid fire questions. At the conclusion I told him about finding Captain Barnitz' horse and asked what had happened. He told me that Captain Barnitz had been severely and probably mortally wounded.

Leaving the *General* in a "brown study" I went to see my friend and former Captain, Barnitz. I found him under a pile of blankets and buffalo robes, suffering and very quiet. I hunted up Captain Lippincott, Assistant Surgeon, and found him with his hands over his eyes suffering intense pain from snowblindness. He was very pessimistic as to Barnitz' recovery and insisted that I tell him that there was no hope unless he could be kept perfectly quiet for several days as he feared the bullet had passed through the bowels. I went back to Captain Barnitz and approached the momentous opinion of the surgeon as bravely as I could and then blurted it out, when he exclaimed, "Oh hell! they think because my extremities are cold I am going to die, but if I could get warm I'm sure I'll be all right. These blankets and robes are so heavy I can hardly breathe." I informed the first sergeant and the men were soon busy gathering fuel and building fires.

In the midst of this, the *General* sent for me and again questioned me about the big village. At that time many warriors were assembling on the high hills north of the valley overlooking the village and the *General* kept looking in that direction. At the conclusion of his inquiry, I told him that I had heard that Major Elliott had not returned and suggested that possibly the heavy firing I had heard on the opposite side of the valley might have been an attack on Elliott's party. He considered this a bit and said slowly, "I hardly think so, as Captain Myers has been fighting down there all morning and probably would have reported it."

Mopping Up

I left him and a while later he sent for me again, and, on reporting, told me that he had Romeo, the interpreter, make inquiries of the squaw prisoners and they confirmed my report of the lower village. He then ordered me to take Troop K and destroy all property and not allow any looting—but destroy everything.

I allowed the prisoners to get what they wanted. As I watched them, they only went to their own tepees. I began the destruction at the upper end of the village, tearing down tepees and piling several together on the tepee poles, set fire to them. (All tepees were made of tanned buffalo hides.) As the fires made headway, all articles of personal property—buffalo robes, blankets, food, rifles, pistols, bows and arrows, lead and caps, bullet molds, etc.—were thrown in the fires and destroyed. I doubt but that many small curios went into the pockets of men engaged in this work. One man brought to me that which I learned was a bridal gown, a "one piece dress," adorned all over with bead work and elks' teeth on antelope skins as soft as the finest broadcloth. I started to show it to the General and ask to keep it, but as I passed a big fire, I thought, "What's the use, 'orders is orders'" and threw it in the blaze. I have never ceased to regret that destruction. All of the powder found I spilled on the ground and "flashed."

I was present in August, 1868, at Fort Larned, Kansas, when the annuities were issued, promised by the Medicine Lodge Peace Treaties of 1867, and saw the issue of rifles, pistols, powder, caps, lead and bullet molds to these same Cheyennes.

While this destruction was going on, warriors began to assemble on the hill slopes on the left side of the valley facing the village, as if to make an attack. Two squadrons formed near the left bank of the stream and started on the "Charge" when the warriors scattered and fled. Later, a few groups were seen on the hill tops but they made no hostile demonstrations.

As the last of the tepees and property was on fire, the General ordered me to kill all the ponies except those authorized to be used by the prisoners and given to the scouts. We tried to rope them and cut their throats, but the ponies were frantic at the approach of a white man and fought viciously. My men were getting very tired so I called for reinforcements and details from other organizations were sent to complete the destruction of about eight hundred ponies. As the last of the ponies were being shot nearly all the hostiles left. This was probably because they could see our prisoners and realized that any shooting they did might endanger them.

Searching parties were sent to look for dead and wounded of both our own and hostiles. A scout having reported that he had seen Major Elliott and party in pursuit of some escapes [sic] down the right side of the valley, Captain Myers went down the valley about two miles but found no trace.⁴

The Return March

A while before sunset, as the command was forming to march down the valley, the General sent for me to ride with him to show him the place from which we could

see the village below. There was no attempt to conceal our formation or the direction of our march. The command in column of fours, covered by skirmishers, the prisoners in the rear of the advance troops, standard and guidons "to the breeze," the chief trumpeter sounded the advance and we were "on our way," the band playing, "Ain't I Glad to Get Out of the Wilderness." The observing warriors followed our movement till twilight, but made no hostile demonstration. Then as if they had divined our purpose there was a commotion and they departed down the valley.

When we came in sight of the promontory and ridge from which I had discovered the lower villages, I pointed them out to the General. With the departure of the hostiles our march was slowed down till after dark, when the command was halted, the skirmishers were quietly withdrawn to rejoin their troops, the advance counter-marched, joined successively by the organizations in the rear, and we were on our way on our back trail. We marched briskly till long after midnight when we bivouacked till daylight with the exception of one squadron which was detached to hurry on to our supply train, the safety of which caused great anxiety. I was detailed to command the prisoners and special guard.⁵

Aftermath

At daylight the next morning, we were on the march to meet our supply train and encountered it some time that forenoon. We were glad that it was safe, but disappointed that Major Elliott and party had not come in. After supper in the evening, the officers were called together and each one questioned as to the casualties of enemy warriors, locations, etc. Every effort was made to avoid duplications. The total was found to be one hundred and three. General Custer then informed us that he was going to write his report and that couriers would leave that night for Camp Supply and would take mail. I visited Captain Barnitz and wrote a letter and telegram to Mrs. Barnitz that he had been seriously wounded but was improving. California Joe and Jack Corbin started with dispatches and mail after dark.

On November 30th, California Joe, Jack Corbin and another scout, rejoined the command with mail and dispatches including General Sheridan's General Field Order No. 6, which embodies the purport of General Custer's official report. The command was formed as it reached camp on Wolf Creek and this order was read :

"Headquarters. Department of the Missouri, in the Field, Depot on the North Canadian, at the Junction of Beaver Creek, Indian Territory,
November 29, 1868.

General Field Orders No. 6.

"The Major General commanding, announces to this command the defeat, by the Seventh regiment of Cavalry, of a large force of Cheyenne Indians, under the celebrated chief, Black Kettle, reenforced by the Arapahoes under Little Raven, and the Kiowas

under Satanta, on the morning of the 27th instant on the Washita River, near the Antelope Hills, Indian Territory, resulting in a loss to the savages of one hundred and three warriors killed, including Black Kettle; the capture of fifty-three squaws and children; eight hundred and seventy-five ponies; eleven hundred and twenty-three buffalo robes and skins; five hundred and thirty-five pounds of powder; one thousand and fifty pounds of lead; four thousand arrows; seven hundred pounds of tobacco; besides rifles, pistols, saddles, bows, lariats, and immense quantities of dried and other winter provisions; the complete destruction of their village, and almost total annihilation of this Indian band.

"The loss to the Seventh Cavalry was two officers killed, Major Joel H. Elliott and Captain Louis McL. Hamilton, and nineteen enlisted men; three officers wounded, Brevet Lieutenant Colonel Albert Barnitz (badly), Brevet Lieutenant Colonel T. W. Custer, and Second Lieutenant T. J. March (slightly) and eleven enlisted men.

The energy and rapidity shown during one of the heaviest snow storms that has visited this section of the country, with the temperature below freezing point, and the gallantry and bravery displayed, resulting in such signal success, reflects the highest credit upon both the officers and enlisted men of the Seventh Cavalry; and the Major General commanding, while regretting the loss of such gallant officers as Major Elliott and Captain Hamilton, who fell while gallantly leading their men, desires to express his thanks to the officers and men engaged in the battle of the Washita and his special congratulations to their distinguished commander, Brevet Major General George A. Custer, for the efficient and gallant services rendered, which have characterized the opening of the campaign against hostile Indians south of the Arkansas.

"By command of

"Major General P. H. Sheridan.

(Signed)

"J. Schuyler Crosby.

"Brevet Lieutenant Colonel.

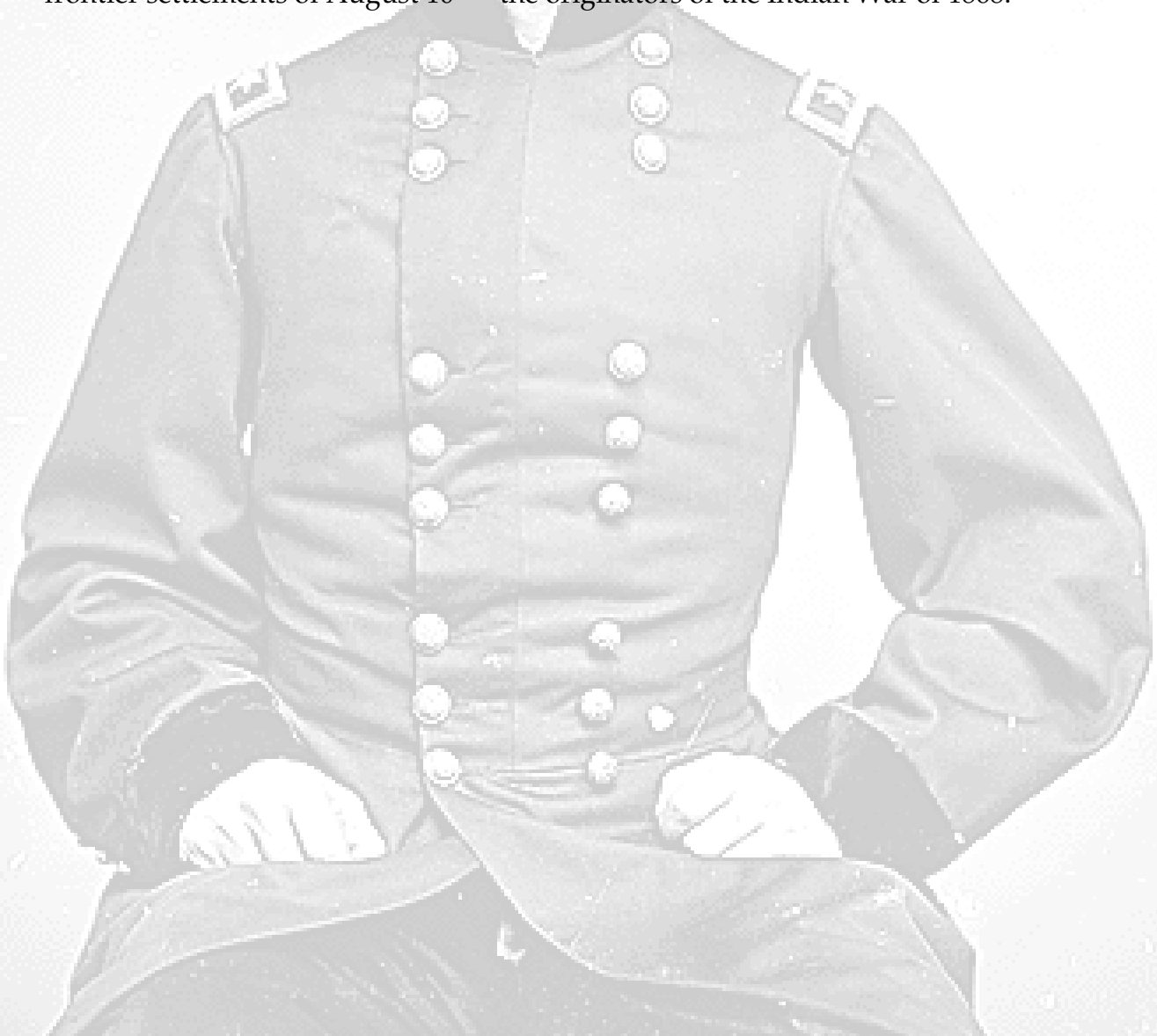
"A. D. C. A. A. A. General."

General Sheridan was informed as to the probable time of our arrival at Camp Supply and received us in review. Before we came in sight of the cantonment, the command was formed for the review of triumph. The Osage trailers, painted and in picturesque tribal garb, were at the head of the column, followed by the white scouts in motley frontier dress; then my prisoners blanketed or in buffalo robes. At a distance in the rear came the band, followed by Lieutenant Cooke's sharpshooters, and the regiment in column of platoons, the wagon train in the rear. As we came in sight of the cantonment, the Osages began chanting their war songs and at intervals firing their guns and uttering war whoops with some exhibitions of horsemanship. California Joe and scouts emulated the Osages' exuberance in Western frontier style. The prisoners were awed and silent till the band began playing "Garry Owen" for the review of the regiment when they awakened to conversation.

This pageant and review rivaled and no doubt was the prototype of the modern Wild West Shows. It was the real thing. We camped on the Beaver and that evening buried Captain Hamilton near the camp with all the formalities and solemnity of the military funeral, the Seventh Cavalry and the Third Infantry present in formation. Hamilton had been an officer in the Third Infantry prior to promotion to the Seventh Cavalry and had been its regimental quartermaster. General Sheridan, General Custer, Colonel Crosby, Captain Beebe, and Lieutenant Cooke, Custer and Joseph Hale (3^d Infantry) were the pall bearers.

We soon learned that the campaign was to be extended through the winter and began our preparations. I turned my prisoners over to the garrison. Later they were transferred to Fort Hays where they were held for some months as hostages for the safety of white captives known to be in the villages of some of the tribes and to compel the tribes to go to their agencies.

We had the satisfaction that we had punished Black Kettle's band, whose warriors were the confessed perpetrators of the attacks and outrages on the Kansas frontier settlements of August 10th—the originators of the Indian War of 1868.



Notes

- 1 Major Joel Elliott was younger than all the captains, most of whom had been field officers during the Civil War; some had commanded regiments and brigades. He was younger even than most of his lieutenants. In the Civil War, the highest rank held by him was that of captain and his highest command had been a squadron (two troops) in his volunteer regiment of cavalry. After the war he taught school and at the time he went before the Casey Board of Examiners for a commission, he was superintendent of the public schools of the City of Toledo, Ohio, intending eventually to study and practice law. He passed such a perfect mental examination that the board recommended his appointment as major of cavalry. He had anticipated an appointment as first lieutenant, or, at most, as captain.
- 2 Division, department and district denote geographic jurisdiction of military commands.
- 3 When on the Tactical Board to devise new Drill Regulations (1881-90) this experience was instrumental in adopting the retreat and advance by alternating groups or units instead of by odd and even numbers.
- 4 Headquarters Military Division of the Missouri, Chicago, Illinois, April 28, 1870.
Mr. De B. Randolph Keim. ;

Dear Sir: I have carefully read the proof-sheets sent me of your forthcoming book (Sheridan's Troopers on the Borders), and think well of it.**** "

Very truly yours,

P. H. SHERIDAN.

Lieutenant General.

From "Sheridan's Troopers on the Borders." (Pages 149 and 150)

"Although the fate of Elliott's party would appear as a gross abandonment by Custer, particularly for not even recovering the bodies, or making some effort to learn what had become of them, when found missing, after the fight, the circumstances of the event were of such a character, that while no attempt was made with that view, the conduct of Custer in ordering a withdrawal was justifiable according to the laws of war. He struck the upper flank of a long range of villages, numbering several thousand warriors. His own force was small, and without supplies. In going into the fight the troopers had divested themselves of overcoats and all unnecessary trappings, leaving them near the field. These fell into the hands of the savage allies. The men, consequently, were without the proper protection, while the weather was cold and wintry. The wagon-train containing the subsistence stores and tents of the entire column, which had been left miles away, had not yet come up. The guard consisted of but eighty men. Custer, after the fight commenced, seeing such an extraordinary display of force, felt a natural anxiety to look after his wagons, for their destruction would involve the loss of the entire command, and probably defeat the whole campaign. He therefore set out for the train, and was hastened by experiencing greater opposition than was anticipated. It will be seen that there were reasons, the second, particularly which would warrant the

abandonment of the field, and there being hardly a doubt about the fate of Elliott, when found missing, the safety of the command was certainly more to be considered than the loss of a small fraction of it. The pursuit of the fugitives, by Elliott, was entirely exceptional, as he had his own squadron of attack to look after, this fact has led to the opinion that his horse ran away with him, and seeing him pass, a number of troops not actually engaged in the fight, joined him and were the companions of his sad end. Major Elliott was an efficient and much esteemed officer, and his loss was deeply deplored by his associates.

- 5 One day on the march through a mesquite forest, Mahwissa, who was "go-between" for the prisoners came to me for permission for a squaw to fall out. This I granted and detailed a guard to remain with her. To this she objected and Mahwissa strenuously sustained the objection and assured me it would be all right to let the woman go alone. With great reluctance I consented. At our next halt I was pacing back and forth with anxious looks on the back trail. I was perturbed not only with the prospective loss of a prisoner, but official action in consequence. Mahwissa came to me as if to reassure me, but receiving scant attention, she turned away with a look of disappointment. Soon there was a shout from the prisoners and looking at the back trail to my great relief I saw my prisoner galloping toward us. Her countenance was beaming and as she passed me I saw the black head of a pappoose in the folds of a blanket at her back swaying with the motions of the galloping pony. The prisoners gave her a demonstrative welcome.

