

Two Buttes battle

(Notes from Personal Memoirs of P.H. Sheridan, General, U.S. Army)

Sheridan, of later Civil War Fame, received his promotion to a second lieutenant in the Fourth Infantry which was stationed in California and Oregon, in November, 1854.

Entered military academy, suspended until later for provoking assault with fellow cadet, rejoined academy in August, 1852 and graduated next June. In same class was James B. McPherson, killed in the Atlanta Campaign while commanding the Army of the Tennessee; John M. Schofield, who commanded the Army of the Ohio; Joshua W. Sill killed as a brigadier general in the battle of Stone River. General John B. Hood (later Confederate) a member of the class

Sent to Texas, Fort Duncan in 1853, till sent ~~to~~ West to Fort Reading, before embarking, stationed on Pedloe's Island in command of detachment of recruits. Statue of Liberty is now located on that island. Embarked for Coast in July, 1855. ordered to Ft. Reading and relieved John B. Hood (later Confederate general) and assigned to mounted escort of Lieut R.S. Williamson charged with duty of making railroad surveys connecting Sacramento Valley with Columbia River either through Willamette Valley or by valley of the Des Chutes River.

Camped near Fort Vancouver and at this time, Oct. 1855 war broke out and he was detached from duty with exploring party and required by Maj. Gabriel J. Rains, then commanding the district to join an expedition against the Dakimas.

"The object of the second expedition was to retrieve this (the Haller) disaster.

Composed of a small body of regular troops and a regiment of Oregon mounted volunteers under command of Colonel James W. Nesmith, whole force under command of Rains, Fourth Infantry (he wrote) but volunteers would not agree to this apparently from their communications.

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"We started from the Dalles October 30, under conditions that were not conducive to success. The season was late for operations; and worse still, the command was not in accord with the commanding officer because of general belief in his incompetency.

"... on the second day out I struck a small body of Indians with my detachment but was unable to do them any particular injury beyond getting possession of a large quantity of their winter food, which their hurried departure compelled them to abandon. This food consisted principally of dried salmon--pulverized and packed in sacks made of grass--dried huckleberries, and dried camas..." (Note by Re: possibility here this the origin of the story concerning destruction of non-combatant cache and village. Later references will show but slow progress first few days of march, two or three miles a day only).

"...our objective point was Father Pandoza's (Pandozy) Mission in the Yakima Valley, which could be reached by two different routes, and though celerity of movement was essential, our commanding officer 'strategically' adopted the longer route, and thus the Indians had ample opportunity to get away with their horses, cattle, women and children and the camp property...

"After the encounter which I just now referred to, the command, which had halted to learn the results of my chase, resumed its march to and through the Klikitat canyon and into the lower Yakima Valley in the direction of the Yakima river. I had charge of the head of the column as it passed through the canon, and on entering the valley beyond say in the distance five or six Indian scouts, whom I pressed very closely, until after a run of several miles they escaped across the Yakima river.

"...called a halt until we could discover the direction taken by the principal body of the Indians. We soon learned they had gone up the valley, and looking that way, we discovered a column of alkali

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dust approaching us about a mile distant, interposing between my little detachment and the point where I knew General Rains intended to encamp for the night. After hastily consulting with Lieutenant Edward H. Day of the Third U.S. Artillery, who was with me, we both concluded that the dust was caused by a body of the enemy which had slipped in between us and our main force...no alternative left but to get back to our friends by charging through these Indians. Preparations begun, but approaching party halted and then commenced to retreat. "This calmed the throbbing of our hearts and with a wild cheer we started in hot pursuit that continued for about two miles...found we were driving into 'Rains' camp a squadron of Nesmith's battalion of Oregon volunteers that we had mistaken for Indians and who in turn believed us to be the enemy...

"...next day resumed our march up valley, parallel to the Yakima. About 1 o'clock we saw a large body of Indians on the opposite side of the river, and the general commanding made up his mind to cross and attack them. The stream was cold, deep, and swift, still I succeeded in passing my dragoons over safely, but had hardly got them well on the opposite bank when the Indians swooped down upon us. Dismounting my men we received the savages with a ~~heavy~~ heavy fire which brought them to a halt with some damage and more or less confusion.

"General Rains now became very much excited and alarmed about me and endeavored to ford the swift river with his infantry and artillery but soon had to abandon the attempt, as three or four of ~~the~~ the poor fellows were swept off their feet and drowned. Meantime Nesmith came up with his mounted force, crossed over, and joined me.

"The Indians now fell back to a high ridge on the crest of which they marched and counter-marched, threatening to charge down its face. Most

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of them were naked, and as their persons were painted in gaudy colors and decorated with strips of red flannel, red blankets and gay war bonnets, their appearance presented a scene of picturesque barbarism, ..

As they numbered about six hundred the chance of whipping them did not seem overwhelmingly in our favor, yet Nesmith and I concluded we would give them a ~~fight~~ little fight, provided we could engage them without going beyond the ridge. But our efforts were in vain, for as we advanced they retreated, and as we drew back they reappeared and renewed their parade and noisy demonstrations, all the time beating their drums and yelling lustily. They could not be tempted into a fight where we desired it, however, and as we felt unequal to any pursuit behind the ridge without the assistance of the infantry and artillery we ~~soon~~ recrossed the river and encamped with Rains. It soon became apparent that the noisy demonstrations of the Indians were intended only as a blind to cover the escape of their women and children to a place of safety in the mountains.

Next morning we took up our march without crossing the river; and as our route would lead us by the point on the opposite bank where the Indians had made their picturesque display the day before, they at an early hour came over to our side, and rapidly moved ahead of us to some distant hills, leaving in our pathway some of the more venturesome young braves, who attempted to retard our advance by opening fire at long range from favorable places where they lay concealed. This fire did us little harm, but it had the effect of making our progress so slow that the patience of every one but General Rains was well nigh exhausted.

At 2 o'clock in the afternoon we arrived well up near the base of the range of hills, and though it was growing late we still had time to accomplish something but our commanding officer decided it was best to go into camp and make a systematic attack next morning. I proposed that he let me charge with my dragoons through the narrow

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canon where the river broke through the range, while the infantry should charge up the hill and drive the enemy from the top down on the other side. In this way I thought we might possibly catch some of the fugitives but his extreme caution led him to refuse the suggestion, so we pitched our tents out of range of desultory fire, but near enough to observe their menacing and tantalizing exhibitions of contempt.

"In addition to firing occasionally, they called us all sorts of bad names, made indecent gestures and aggravated us, so that between 3 and 4 o'clock in the afternoon, by an unexplicable concert of action, and with a serious breach of discipline, a large number of the men and many of the officers broke en masse from the camp with loud yells and charged the offending savage. As soon as this mob got within musk et shot they opened fire on the Indians, who ran down the other face of the ridge without making the slightest resistance. The hill was readily taken by this unmilitary proceeding and no one was hurt on either side, but as rains would not permit it to be held, a large bonfire was lighted on the crest in celebration of the victory, and then all hands marched back to camp where they had no sooner arrived and got settled down than the Indians returned to the summit of the ridge, seemingly to enjoy the fire that had been so generously built for their benefit, and with renewed taunts and gestures continued to insult us.

Our camp that night was strongly picketed and when we awoke in the morning the Indians still occupied their position on the hill. At day light we advanced against them, two or three companies of infantry moving forward to drive them from the summit, while our main column passed through the canyon into the upper Yakima valley led by the dragoons, who were not allowed to charge into the gorge as the celerity of such a movement might cause the tactical combination to fail.

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As we passed slowly and cautiously through the canon the Indians ran rapidly away, and when we reached the farther end they had entirely disappeared from our front, except one old fellow, whose lame horse prevented him keeping up with the main body. This presented an opportunity for gaining results which all thought should not be lost so our guide, an Indian named Cut Mouth John seized upon it, and giving hot chase soon overtook the poor creature, ~~to~~ whom he speedily killed without much danger to himself, for the fugitive was armed with only an old Hudson's Bay flint-lock horse pistol which could not be discharged.

"Cut Mouth John's engagement began and ended all fighting that took place on this occasion, and much disappointment and discontent followed, Nesmith's mounted force and my dragoons being particularly disgusted because they had not been given a chance. During the remainder of the day we cautiously followed the retreating foe, and late in the evening went to camp a short distance from Father Pandoza's mission, where we were to await a small column of troops under command of Captain Maurice Maloney, of the Fourth Infantry, that was to join us from Steilicoom by way of the Atchez Pass and from which no tidings had as yet been received..."

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