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HISTORY'S FORGOTTEN INDIAN WAR- THE GREAT NEZ PERCE WAR

Tom Morgan, LTC (Ret)

Coming just one year after the famous Custer Massacre of the Sioux Indian War in 1876, the Nez Perce War is all but forgotten by comparison. Everyone remembers the US Army's Centennial Campaign against Sitting Bull and the Sioux in the summer of 1876, and the Apache Wars against Geronimo later, but few remember Chief Joseph and his intrepid band of Nez Perce Indians that eluded the combined efforts of many famous Army Indian fighters as they tried to escape being restricted to an Indian reservation in north central Idaho. The Great Nez Perce War lasted longer; ranged over a larger part of the plains and mountains of Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana; and involved more soldiers than any other campaign against hostile Indians. Practicing asymmetric, irregular warfare, the Nez Perce proved themselves to be superb horsemen, excellent marksmen, and brilliant battlefield tacticians. They eluded the best efforts of the US Army in the west for over four months as they trekked and fought across Idaho, Wyoming, and, Montana for 1700 miles in a futile effort to escape capture and seek sanctuary in Canada. The US Army practiced modern conventional warfare as it used the telegraph, modern breech loading, steel canons, railroads, and river steamboats to eventually gain a tactical advantage over the Nez Perce. In the end, the aggressive and ambitious Colonel Nelson Miles ran the Nez Perce to ground just short of the Canadian border and compelled their surrender after

several battles in a snowy storm. It was an epic story.

Old Chief Joseph told his son Young Chief Joseph never to sell Indian lands. However, in the spring of 1877, in the Wallowa Valley of Oregon bowing to pressure from the government, local settlers, and the U.S. Army, Young Chief Joseph agreed to vacate Nez Perce land and move his Wallowa Band of non-treaty Indians onto the small, downsized 1863 Nez Perce Reservation on north central Idaho headquartered at Lapwai and encompassing the Camas and Weippe Prairies. Joseph and other non-treaty Indians rallied at Tolo Lake, a traditional gathering place, near Grangeville, Idaho in early June of 1877 for one last reunion before becoming reservation, treaty Indians.

In this group of non-treaty Indians, Joseph was a leader, but not a war chief. His half-brother Ollokot; and White Bird, Looking Glass, and Toohoolhoolzote were the principal war chiefs. Later Joseph was called the "red Napoleon," but that was just hype. General O.O. Howard and other Army officers inflated Joseph's reputation. Thus, only one year after the terrible Custer Massacre, Joseph's warrior reputation was spread and accepted by the press and the public. Howard perpetuated the myth that Joseph was a military genius so that he and his commanders would not look so bad in the press. The truth was that Joseph was tall

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The *Banner* is printed four times a year and is mailed to all members of The Friends of Fort Lewis Museum. Articles may be submitted to the Editor or left with the Curator of the Fort Lewis Museum. The Friends assume no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts or other materials submitted for publication.

Editor.....Paul Knoop
Assistant Editor.....Don Simpson

President's Report

It appears that Winter is truly over and Spring is indeed here at last! As we look forward to more sunshine, green leaves and blooming flowers that come with the season, it is appropriate that we now can also look forward to the commencement of much needed repairs to the Museum building. The funds for the project, which will involve extensive exterior and interior work on the building, have been allocated to Fort Lewis. The project will be completed in phases under a contract that will be awarded and managed by the Seattle District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Corps of Engineers, the Fort Lewis Directorate of Public Works and the Fort Lewis Directorate of Plans, Training, Mobilization and Security (the Directorate that oversees Museum operations) are coordinating the details for how best to do the work so as to minimize any Museum closure, and protect and secure the Museum galleries and artifacts during construction while doing the least amount of movement of the items. The movement and storage of *The Cannon Shop* inventory is also being determined. Currently, plans call for awarding a contract for the first phase of the project so that work can start in the Fall. As more detailed information becomes available and as the work progresses, we will keep the membership informed through *The Banner* and our brunch meetings. This is a project that will fix existing critical building problems and will do other building repairs that will make this historic asset sound for years to come.

On a sad note, *The Friends* lost a long-time member and member of the Board of Directors. COL(R) Jack Hertzog passed away in April. Although unable to participate for the past several years, Jack was an active and valued participant in deliberations of the Board of Directors. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family on his passing. The Board of Directors of *The Friends* also has one less member. COL (R) Carroll Dickson, a long time Board member, has resigned his position so as to be more available for his wife Nancy as she battles cancer. Carroll is a Board member whose experience and opinions are highly valued, and the Board will miss him. Carroll, your contributions as a member of the Board have been many

and significant, and we thank you for all you have done. Our thoughts are with you and Nancy, and we pray that her condition continues to improve.

Our brunch program on 31 May at Patriot's Landing will feature Mr. Joel Manning, Operations Officer for the Western Region Cadet Command at Fort Lewis. Mr. Manning is a retired Army Lieutenant Colonel and former Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) Professor of Military Science. As many of you know, the ROTC program is the largest source of commissioned officers for the services. Fort Lewis operates the only ROTC summer camp in the U.S., hosting hundreds of cadets from all over the country. Mr. Manning will speak to us about the ROTC program in general and in particular how future officers are being trained at Fort Lewis to take on the mantle of leadership. Please join us for an interesting program and fellowship with other members of The Friends!

Ian Larson

Curator's Report

Time flies when you are having fun. Also true when it is busy around the museum. The tour schedule is beginning to pickup, and it promises to be an active summer. As noted in the Presidents report, the museum renovation is in the planning stage and if actually begun will bring some desperately needed up-keep on our historic building. As this project develops we will be able to see what impacts on daily operations might be.

In the meantime, we are moving forward with updating the galleries and freshen up with a new look for summer. The I Corps, Soldiers of the Northwest galleries and lobby area have been painted in new colors. The Gallery of Valor and family gallery are next in line and will be done over the next few weeks. A timely, up dated photo display features the soon to deploy Stryker Brigade training activities at NTC and will regularly be up dated to keep pace with changing events through the summer. As always, Fort Lewis is at the cutting edge of what the Army is doing and we will be showing the public the kind of service and loyalty today's soldiers give to our country.

Gregg Hagge

Membership

If you do not have a membership card enclosed with your newsletter this month, is now time to renew your membership in the Friends, or to join and help support the museum at Fort Lewis. Please send your check now.

ANNUAL FEES

<i>Individual</i>	\$ 10
<i>Family</i>	\$ 15
<i>Sustaining</i>	\$ 25
<i>Benefactor</i>	\$ 50

(Please make checks payable to *The Friends* and send to Fort Lewis Military Museum, P.O. Box 331001, Fort Lewis, WA 98433-1001).

and powerfully built, as well as a great diplomat and spokesman for his tribe. He could hold his own in negotiations with the White man.

At the time of the Tolo Lake gathering, a number of sharp skirmishes took place between Army troops at Fort Lapwai under General Howard and the Nez Perce on the Camas Prairie between Cottonwood and Grangeville, Idaho. They culminated in the battle of White Bird Canyon on 17 June 1877. It was the opening battle of war between the Nez Perce and the U.S. Army. Captain Perry led two troops of cavalry augmented with some civilian volunteers in an early morning attack down the White Bird Canyon against the Nez Perce camped along White Bird Creek. The attack was neither well coordinated nor well executed and the Indians rallied to drive the soldiers back over the White Bird Hill. Thirty-four soldiers were killed and five were wounded. Only three Nez Perce had been wounded. It was a great victory for the Indians who were outnumbered and fought with inferior weapons. Many Army rifles and hundreds of rounds of ammunition were recovered from the battlefield. The Indians used their intuitive fighting skills of superior marksmanship and horsemanship to win this first big battle of the Nez Perce War.



At the base of the hills was the Nez Perce village. This view looks in the direction that the soldiers and volunteers took to attack the village in the valley where they met with disaster.

THE RETREAT and BIG HOLE BATTLE

After more battles on the Camas and Weippe Prairies of Idaho, the Indians retreated up the Clearwater River in Idaho, across the Lolo Trail to Montana, south through the Bitterroot Mountains, and south through the Big Hole Basin. While camping and resting in the Big Hole Basin, the Indians were attacked by Colonel Gibbon's 7th Infantry troops coming from the District of Western Montana. Another battle ensued and the soldiers were repulsed. Gibbon was wounded, his howitzer with 2000 rounds of ammunition captured, and his troops surrounded until relieved by the approach of General Howard's troops who were following the Nez Perce's trail. Militarily the Nez Perce won the Battle of Big Hole, but it was a Pyrrhic victory. Sixty to ninety Indians were killed, many being women and children. Practically every Nez Perce family lost someone at Big Hole. Twenty-five soldiers were killed and 34 wounded. Several civilians and Indian scouts were killed and wounded. Seven enlisted men received Medals of Honor for their exploits and fourteen officers received brevet promotions for bravery in 1890.



The Big Hole Valley with the Big Hole River running through it. The Indians made their camp on the right bank of the river and put the pony herd on the left. Gibbon set up a 12 lb howitzer to shell the camp from the hills above the camp, but the crew was able to fire only two exploding rounds before the howitzer was captured and dismantled by the Indians.

The next major battle was at Camas Meadows as the Indians headed toward Yellowstone Park. It was the first time that the Indians attacked the soldiers first. The Indians knew that Howard and his troops were near so they decided to fall back, attack the soldiers, and steal their horses and pack mules to hinder their pursuit. The war chiefs Looking Glass, Ollokot, and Toohoolhoolzote raided the Army's camp and infiltrated the camp in the dark, early morning by riding up to the camp in columns of four just like the soldiers. The Indians made off with about 175 horses and mules, and Howard gave chase. Major Sanford and Captain Norwood with three companies of cavalry caught up with the Indians and a battle ensued. By the time Howard and the main body caught up with them, the Indians escaped again. Only three soldiers and eight wounded were killed, but no Indians were killed. Howard credited the Indians' effectiveness to Chief Joseph, but it was really the war chiefs who had done it.

After Camas Meadows, Howard's command was in a bad way. He had not prevented the Indians from entering Yellowstone Park. Howard sent a telegram to General Sherman who was then at Fort Shaw, Montana and asked to be relieved of the pursuit because his troops were tired, worn out, and footsore, and it was hard to keep them moving. He wanted to return to his area of operations along the Columbia River. Sherman responded that "...where the Indian can subside, the Army can live." That the country and the government expected Howard to do his duty, that no other troops were near enough to take his place, and that he had to continue the pursuit. He was told that if he was too tired (although one-armed from Civil War wounds, he was only 47 years of age), he could put a younger man in his place and go back to Oregon, but that the troops must go on. Properly chastised, Howard responded that he would do his duty and that neither Generals Sherman nor

McDowell would doubt his pluck and that he was moving in the morning and would "continue to the end."

Now, General Sherman, the Commanding General of the Army who was inspecting western posts and touring Yellowstone Park became more involved. He encouraged all of his subordinate commanders in the west such as Sheridan, Crook, McDowell, Howard, Gibbon, Merritt, Sturgis, and Miles to continue the pursuit of the Nez Perce and to punish them. While these events were occurring, Colonel Nelson Miles received reports of the Indians approaching towards his district in Montana. He sent two strong detachments of troops under Colonel Sturgis and Lieutenant Doane of the 7th Cavalry to intercept them as they as they came out of Yellowstone Park. The Nez Perce by then had retreated over the Rocky Mountains, through Yellowstone Park, down the Clark Fork of the Yellowstone River, and then north to Canada across Montana's Judith Basin.

On 17 September, a military courier from Colonel Sturgis reported that the Indians had evaded his command and turned his flank, leaving his troops hopelessly behind in their pursuit. General Howard reported the same. Howard and Sturgis joined forces with Howard in command and followed the Indian Trail north into Montana across the Judith Basin where it was lost.

Upon receiving this news, Colonel Miles took to the field with six troops of cavalry, six companies of mounted infantry, and a small body of Indian Scouts. This force was ferried over the Yellowstone River and started a forced march of nearly 200 miles to the northwest to intercept the Nez Perce. Couriers were sent to Fort Peck and Buford on the Missouri River to send a steamer load of supplies up the Missouri for the use of Miles, Sturgis, and Howard.

After a 52 mile forced march, Miles sent Lieutenant Biddle of the 7th Cavalry to the Missouri River in time to hail the last regular steamer going down river that year. Miles used the steamer to transfer one battalion of troops to the north bank of the Missouri. At this time, Miles thought the Nez Perce were about 50 miles south of the Missouri. The steamer then continued its voyage down river and Miles continued westward with the rest of the command.

Shortly after the steamer departed, Miles met three men coming down river in a rowboat reporting that the Nez Perce had crossed the Missouri at a point 40 miles to the west. Quickly one of the Hotchkiss 1.65-inch, breech loading cannons was fired down the Missouri to stop the steamer. Lieutenant Frank Baldwin was on board and knew to send the steamer back. With the steamer back, the rest of the troops were transferred to the river's north side and then renewed the march to intercept and confront the Indians.



Looking westward across the Bear Paw battlefield, Chief Joseph surrendered to Howard and Miles in the center where the people are standing.

THE BEAR PAW BATTLE

On the evening of 20 September, Miles received word from Howard that the Indian trail had scattered and that he had given up the pursuit leaving Sturgis's 7th Cavalry troops as part

of Miles's command. On the morning of 30 September, one of the scouts reported the discovery of the Nez Perce camp near the Canadian border. From the march, Miles's troops formed into a line of battle and attacked at the gallop. Soon they were at the Indian camp. Captain Tyler's battalion of the 2nd Cavalry swept down the valley to stampede the Nez Perce's herd of horse, mules, and ponies to "set them (the Nez Perce) afoot." Captain Hale's battalion of the 7th Cavalry attacked on the other side of the valley in a pincer movement. The cavalry led the charge and were checked by the Indians' accurate rifle fire. Then mounted infantry galloped up close to the camp, threw themselves on the ground, and opened fire. Captain Tyler's battalion soon returned with 800 captured animals, and Captain Brotherton came up with two reserve companies of infantry and an artillery piece. These commands took up positions that established a cordon of troops that surrounded the Indians and Miles had established a siege of the camp

The siege lasted five days. At one time Chief Joseph came up to surrender, but was seized by Miles in violation of a truce. However, he was released when Lieutenant Jerome, who was inspecting the Nez Perce camp, was seized by the Indians in retaliation. Joseph had been exchanged for Jerome. On the morning of October 5, Chief Joseph agreed to surrender, and with much dignity and solemnity, he raised his hand and eyes toward the sky and probably said, "Hear me my chiefs. I am tired; my heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands, I will fight no more forever." This statement was later changed in the Army's report to be a much longer and more eloquent statement for the newspapers.

EPILOGUE

Joseph surrendered 448 of his people. Miles lost 21 soldiers killed (including Captain Hale and Lieutenant Biddle) and wounded along with 15 Indians killed and 3 wounded. The Indians lost their veteran chiefs, Looking Glass and four others. Twenty-five other Indians were killed and 46 wounded. Including noncombatants, about 96 Nez Perce had been killed during the campaign, 36 of them women and children.

Miles made travois for the wounded, buried the dead, and started the march back to his home station at Fort Keogh. The wounded suffered greatly and owing to

to the rugged country passed over, some died en route. On reaching the Missouri River, Miles met two steamers and placed the wounded on them for transport to the nearest hospital. Miles then marched the remainder to Fort Keogh on the Yellowstone River. In spite of his desire to send the Indians back to Idaho, he received orders sending them to Indian Territory in Kansas and then Oklahoma. He was unable to return the Nez Perce to their native lands until 1885.

Joseph longed to return to his beloved Wallowa Valley where the bones of his parents rested, but that was not to be. Joseph died at Nespelem, Washington on the Colville Indian Reservation in 1904 at the age of 64 and is buried there. Howard was eventually promoted to major general and became the Superintendent of West Point before he died in 1909. Miles continued fighting the Indians, especially the Apaches in the southwest. In 1895, he became Commanding General of the Army, played a prominent role in the Spanish-American War, and was the last officer to hold that position in the grade of lieutenant general before the position transitioned to Chief of Staff of the Army. He died in 1925.

Note: Information for this article comes from: Jerome Greene, *Nez Perce Summer, 1877*; Helena, Montana: Montanan Historical Society Press, 2000; Chief Joseph, *Chief Joseph's Own Story*; originally published in the *North American Review*, April 1879; Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., *Chief Joseph's People and Their War*; Yellowstone Association for National Science, History & Education, Inc., 1964; Bill and Joe Moeller, *Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce – A Photographic History*; Missoula, MT: Mountain Press Publishing Company, 1995; *The Idaho Statesman*, *Nimiipuu – The Story of the Nez Perce*; U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, 2005; Cheryl Wilfong, *Following the Nez Perce Trail*, extract printed by *HistoryAmerica Tours*, 2008; Francis Raines, *The Nez Percés: Tribesmen of the Columbia Plateau*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1955; Guides to the following battlefields: *White Bird, Big Hole, and Pear Paw*; U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service; and tour notes from verbal narration provided by *HistoryAmerica Tours* and historian/guide Ed Bearss.



**FRIENDS OF THE FORT LEWIS MILITARY MUSEUM
GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING
SUNDAY, MAY 31, 2009**

Place: Patriots Landing
Time: 1145-1230 Social Hour
1230-1330 Brunch
1330-1400 Program

Mr. Joel Manning, Operations Officer for the Western Region Cadet Command, will be our guest speaker. He is a retired Army Lieutenant Colonel, former ROTC Professor of Military Science, and will speak to us about the ROTC program in general and in particular how future officers are being trained at Fort Lewis to take on the mantle of leadership. He is very enthusiastic about telling the ROTC story to The Friends.



Please return your reservation form and check by Friday, 29 May 2009. Last minute reservations may be made by calling Paul Knoop at (253) 279-2598

Return this form to LTC (Ret) Donald A Simpson, 6615 79th Street W
Lakewood WA 98499. Make checks payable to "The Friends".
Cost of Brunch for members and Guests: \$16.00 each.

Number of Reservations: _____ Total Amount Enclosed: _____

Name of Member: _____ Telephone Number: _____

Names of Guests: _____

Residents of Patriot's Landing do not need to make payment for the meal, but should make reservations for seating.

Editors Note

In an effort to more efficiently contact readers of the Banner, we would ask that you provide us with your email address so that we can quickly and inexpensively contact you with any new information, changes to dates of activities, and share important happenings at Fort Lewis. We will NOT share this with any other activity!! You may update your contact information by email to pknoop@earthlink.net. Thanks for your prompt attention to this.

**Help Us Defend Our
Military Heritage-
Please Continue to be a
Friend of the Fort Lewis
Military Museum**

[See Membership information on Page 2](#)



Born March 3 1840, Chief Joseph, "Thunder Rolling Down the Mountain" led the Nez Perce during their final flight to escape reservation life. He died of natural causes on September 21, 1904. The complete account of the Nez Perce war is this month's feature article, written by Tom Morgan.

"Hear me, my chiefs! I am tired; my heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands, I will fight no more forever."

Attributed to Chief Joseph at his formal surrender to GEN Miles on Oct 5 1877, after traveling and fighting over 1700 miles through Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming in an attempt to reach Canada with the remnants of his tribe.

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