

YAKIMA INDIAN WAR DIARY

Isaac I. Stevens, Governor and Superintendent of Indian Affairs in Washington Territory, after concluding three Indian treaties at the Great Council in the Walla Walla Valley in June, 1855, continued eastward to treat with the Blackfeet. Washington Territory then extended from the Pacific Ocean to the Rocky Mountains. Before the Blackfeet signed their treaty Kamiakin of the Yakimas and Piupiumoxmox of the Walla Wallas had begun hostilities in violation of the treaties so recently signed. Governor Stevens and his small party of treaty-makers would meet danger on their return trip.

Major General John E. Wool, in command of the Department of the Pacific, in the midst of the trouble took a surprising position of antagonism and ordered the regular troops withdrawn. This threw responsibilities on the volunteers. Governor George L. Curry of Oregon Territory responded promptly and cordially as did Secretary Charles H. Mason, who was Acting Governor of Washington Territory during Governor Stevens's absence from Olympia. Governor Curry sent four companies of Oregon Volunteers under Colonel James W. Nesmith into the hostile Yakima country. One of those companies, known as the Yamhill County Company was commanded by Captain A. J. Hembree, whose nephew Waman C. Hembree was a soldier in the same company.

Waman C. Hembree kept a diary in a small, leather-bound pocketbook. The pages, $2\frac{3}{4}$ by $4\frac{3}{4}$ inches, were each divided into three portions carrying dates for the year 1855. Part of the entries are in ink, the others in pencil. The little book has been cherished as a precious heirloom. Walter L. Hembree, of McMinnville, Oregon, son of the diarist has loaned the original for reproduction in the *Washington Historical Quarterly*.

For those who may seek further particulars of the actions referred to in the diary citations are made to Hubert Howe Bancroft's *History of Washington, Idaho and Montana*, Chapter IV., beginning at page 108; Hazard Stevens, *Life of General Isaac I. Stevens*, Volume II., Chapters XXXIV. to XXXVII.; Isaac I. Stevens, *Message and Correspondence*, published in Olympia 1857; Theodore N. Haller, "Life and Public Services of Colonel Gran-

ville O. Haller, Soldier, Citizen and Pioneer," in *The Washington Historian*, Volume I., beginning at page 102; Clinton A. Snowden, *History of Washington*, Volumes III. and IV., embracing Chapters XLIV. to XLIX.; Meany's *History of Washington*, Chapters XIX-XX.

Although the records in the diary are painfully meager, it is valuable as one of the rare human interest documents written in the field during that unfortunate epoch in Northwestern history. A few essential footnotes are added.—EDITOR.

The Hembree Diary

Tuesday, October 16, 1855.

Met at the Town of Lafayette and organized by electing our Lawful officers. A. J. Hembree¹ Capt. John Hibler First Lieut Wm Wright second Lieutenant Joseph Griffin third Lieut. &c. This day marched to Twalatin River and encamped for the night.

Wednesday, October 17.

Marched and encamped on the east bank of the Wallamette River oposite Portland.

Thursday, October 18.

Remained at the same encampment in the evening was mustord in to service.

Friday, October 19.

Remained at the same encampment.

Saturday, October 20.

Remained at the same encampment The 19th & 20th was spent in getting our horses shod.

Sunday, October 21

Marched on Board the Gazelle & was towed by the Fashion and Multinoma some 12 miles above Fort Vancouver & the fog got so dense that we were obliged to cast anker untill Daylight.

¹ Captain A. J. Hembree was a substantial and highly respected character in Oregon pioneer history. He was elected in 1846 as a member of the Legislature, from Yamhill County, in the Provisional Government of Oregon. The same County elected him again in 1848 although the session was suspended on account of the gold rush to California. He was one of the eighteen members of the last Provisional Legislature which was convened at Oregon City on February 5, 1849. The first Territorial Legislature, under the Act of Congress August 14, 1848, consisting of nine Councilmen and eighteen Representatives, met at Oregon City on July 16, 1849. A. J. Hembree was a Representative and continued in that office to the time of his death. In the session of 1851-1852 the Oregon Academy was incorporated at Lafayette. Among the nine prominent citizens named as Trustees was A. J. Hembree.

Monday, October 22.

Towed within five miles of the Cascades and landed & encamped for the night.

Tuesday, October 23.

The Capt and half of the company marched to the ferry 15 miles above the Cascades & about midnight crossed over the River. The other half of the company remained at the same camp.

Wednesday, October 24.

The Remainder of the company marched to the ferry and about one o'clock at night crossed the River & encamped all of the company together.

Thursday, October 25.

Marched and encamped 12 miles below the Dalls on the Columbia River. Saw a great many Indians. All claimed to be friendly.

Friday, October 26.

Marched and encamped 2 miles south of the Dalls. Two Indian spies of the Yacamaw tribe was caught by N. Olney² & his Indians while crossing the Columbia River. said Indians are now Prisoners at the Dalls.

Saturday, October 27.

Remained at the same encampment.

Sunday, October 28.

Remained at the same encampment. 75 Regulars³ arrived at the Dalls this morning from California for the purpose of engaging in the war now pending.

Monday, October 29.

Remaining at the same encampment.

Tuesday, October 30.

Remaining at the same encampment.

Wednesday, October 31.

Crossed The Columbia river at the Dalls & marched 5 miles N. of the Dalls and encamped on a small spring branch.

² Nathan Olney, Indian Agent at The Dalles.

³ Among the Regulars in that campaign was Lieutenant Philip H. Sheridan, the great cavalry leader of later days. In his *Personal Memoirs*, Volume I., pages 94-95, speaking of dragoons he commanded in the Yakima war he says: "They little thought, when we were in the mountains of California and Oregon,—nor did I myself then dream,—that but a few years were to elapse before it would be my lot to command dragoons, this time in numbers so vast as of themselves to compose almost an army."

Thursday, November 1, 1855.

Remaining at the same encampment.

Friday, November 2.

Remaining at the same encampment.

Saturday, November 3.

Remained at the same encampment.

Sunday, November 4.

Rose at 3 o'clock at night & drove our horses to grass so as to get an early start at sunrise 15 miles to where the Regulars were encamped & encamped with them.

Monday, November 5.

Marched 16 miles and encamped with the Regulars.

Tuesday, November 6.

March 10 miles and encamped 1 mile behind the Regulars. Went out in the evening and killed 5 birds.

Wednesday, November 7.

Marched 20 miles & encamped in the Yacama Valley captured 1 cow & calf drove into camp 80 head of horses caught one and lost two.

Thursday, November 8.

Marched 8 miles and encamped on account of Bish Bagley being sick 75 scouts were sent out a slight battle with the Indians.

Friday, November 9.

Marched 10 miles to the mouth of the canyon had a short action not known how many Indians killed no whites killed two soldiers drowned.⁴

Saturday, November 10.

Marched 25 miles taken 50 horses 15 cattle.

⁴ G. J. Raines, Major, United States Army, and Brigadier General of Washington Territory Volunteers, reported from the field to Acting Governor C. H. Mason concerning this action and the days that followed. His letter was dated "Roman Catholic Mission, Yakima, Camp No. 11, Monday, Nov. 12, 1855." The opening paragraph reads: "Here we are without a battle, except a skirmish four days since, with some forty Indians, who defied us as we approached the Yakima river. We thought at first it was the prelude to the big battle with the whole of their force, and forded the stream to an island with our mounted troops, eighteen dragoons and eight pioneers. Here we commenced the action, firing on the enemy, and ordered up our artillery and infantry to ford the stream. Our troops made a rush into the water, but being on foot, tried again and again to cross the river but failed, the rapid current sweeping away two of our best men, who were thus drowned; whereupon, I sent back to Col. Nesmith for two companies of volunteers, which, with our dragoons, drove headlong into the foaming torrent, and reaching the opposite shore, charged the enemy, who fled away over the hills, one of their balls striking, but fortunately not wounding, Col. Nesmith's horse."—Stevens, *Message and Correspondence*, page 163.

Sunday, November 11.

Marched 20 miles on to the Yacama river and encamped S[n]owed on us all day and about two hours after night.

Monday, November 12.

Marched 5 miles taken two cows & calves 5 head of horses & found two potatoe cashes commenced snowing 1 hour by sun and continued untill 10 oclock.

Tuesday, November 13.

Marched to the Yacama Mission⁵ found 5 potatoe cashes 1 keg of powder 5 head of cattle 5 horses wheat oats peas and ct.

Wednesday, November 14.

Remained at the same encampment 6 Indians seen close to the mission.

Thursday, November 15.

Marched 7 miles South to a small stream on the south side of the Yacama Valley 12 Yacama horses taken.

Friday November 16

Marched 6 miles to the foot of the mountains. The remains of Maj Haller's men 2 of them were buried today in the honors of war a short prayr offered by Major Rains⁶

Saturday November 17.

Marched 12 miles into the mountains and encamped in a small prairie flat 12 head of horses gave out and shot. French prairie is [illegible] Companys came to camp.

Sunday, November 18.

Marched 20 miles towards the Dalls and encamped in the Valley on Hamilton's land claim about 20 horses gave out today 70⁷ horses shot Snow on the mountains 2 ft deep.

⁵ The Roman Catholic Mission, often referred to as the Ahtanahm Mission. Much sharp criticism was voiced at the finding of a keg of powder there.

⁶ Gold miners were rushing into the Colville country in 1855. The Indians did not relish this, became dissatisfied with their treaties and began hostilities by cutting down prospectors as they passed through the Yakima country. Agent A. J. Bolon, to show his confidence in his Yakimas returned to the reservation alone. He was murdered by the Indians. Agent Nathan Olney sent from The Dalles a Des Chutes Chief to find the facts. This spy brought the news of war. Major Raines ordered 84 men under Major G. O. Haller to move from The Dalles into the Yakima country and there to cooperate with a force to be sent from Fort Steilacoom. Haller's command moved out on October 3, 1855. He was surprised by a superior force of Indians, defeated and forced to retreat to The Dalles. The two men whose burial is here recorded were a portion of the losses sustained by Haller's command. Lieutenant W. A. Slaughter in command of the company sent from Fort Steilacoom through Naches Pass had turned back on hearing of Haller's defeat.—Bancroft, *History of Washington, Idaho and Montana*, pages 111-113.

⁷ The pencil entry is indistinct. The mention of 20 horses giving out and of 70 being shot may possibly be reconciled by the thought of many captured Indian ponies being among those shot.

Monday, November 19.

Marched 3 miles & encamped on a small creek a tributary of Cash Creek.

Tuesday, November 20.

Remained at the same encampment.

Wednesday, November 21.

Remained at the same encampment.

Thursday, November 22.

Remained at the same encampment.

Friday, November 23.

Remained at the same encampment.

Saturday, November 24.

Marched 12 miles and encamped 10 miles above the Dalls.

Sunday, November 25.

At 4 o'clock P. M. Received the order of march & marched across the river at the Dalls and encamped 3 miles S. E. of the Dalls.

Monday, November 26.

Remained at the same encampment Capt A. J. Hembree & about 20 of his volunteers left for home on Furrow.

Tuesday, November 27.

Remained at the same encampment.

Wednesday, November 28.

Remained at the same encampment Raining a little at night.

Thursday, November 29.

Marched 10 miles & encamped on Willer Creek marching for Walla Walla Yam Hill & Washing[ton] companys marching together rain at night.

Friday, November 30.

Marched and encamped 4 miles beyond Desutys⁸ Pretty heavy rain through the day some rain at night
Saturday December 1, 1855.

Marched and encamped on Jon Days River Commenced snowing at daylight Snowed for 2 hours and cleared up.

⁸ Des Chutes.

Sunday December 2.

Marched 5 miles and camped on Rock Creek Snowed a little in the morning pleasant after noon.

Monday December 3

Marched 15 miles to Willer Creek Lovely weather

Tuesday, December 4

Marched to the Sink Spring 20 miles blustry eavning.

Wednesday, December 5

Marched 20 miles to the Agency Snow and rain. W. Andrew burried today killed by the Indians yesterday.

Thursday, December 6.

Remained at the Agency until Dusk and 48 of us marched on a scout up the Umatilla to Wm McCoys house and at night tied our horses up until morning.

Friday, December 7.

Drove in about 60 head of horses drove about 15 down to Fort Henry Etta.⁹ the horses belonged to the hostile Indians.

Saturday, December 8.

Returned to Fort Hery Etta on the Umatilla River with the horses captured.

Sunday, December 9.

This morning recd a message from Colonel Kelly¹⁰ To march for him immediately at Walla Walla.

Monday, December 10.

Reached the Battle ground¹¹ just before sun down but few Indians to be seen on the battle ground in Walla Walla.

Tuesday, December 11.

This morning no Indians to be seen A Party this morning starts in pursuit of them.

⁹ The new fort was named Henrietta in honor of Major G. O. Haller's wife, who, before marriage, was Miss Henrietta M. Cox, of Baltimore.—Bancroft's *Hisory of Washington, Idaho and Montana*, pages 141 and 156.

¹⁰ Lieutenant-Colonel James K. Kelly.

¹¹ It was Major M. A. Chinn who had built and named Fort Henrietta after the Indians had burned the Umatilla Agency buildings. When Lt. Col. Kelly arrived at the new Fort he had 475 men. On the night of Dec. 2 he started for Walla Walla with 339 men. On the way he met Chief Piupiumoxmox with a band of warriors. The Chief rode at the head of his band displaying a white flag. After a conference the Indians were held as prisoners. As they approached Whitman's old station Waillatpui, Indians attacked and the prisoners were put to death. Fighting continued and for a time it was feared that the Indians would get the upper hand. The arrival of the additional forces from Fort Henrletta on December 10th as mentioned in the diary turned the tide. The Indians fled. It is sad to add that after the death of the Indian prisoners the white troops mutilated the body of Chief Piupiumoxmox.

Wednesday, December 12

The Indians all are making their way for Snake River.

Thursday, December 13

The principal command still remain on the Battle field.

Friday, December 14

The party returned today no Indians seen except 2 scouts.

Saturday, December 15

Remained at same camp.

Sunday, December 16.

Remained at same camp.

Monday, December 17

Remained at same camp.

Tuesday, December 18

Remained at same camp.

Wednesday, December 19

Put on half rations.

Thursday, December 20

Commenced snowing late in the evening and snowed all night.

Friday, December 21

This morning the snow 8 inches deep.

Saturday, December 22

At night the Thermometer stood 19 Dg below zero.

Sunday, December 23

20 Dg

Monday, December 24.

This morning 21 Dg Below zero last night at 2 o'clock 27 D. G. below zero.

Tuesday, December 25.

16 D. G. Ice on the streams 8 inch Walla Walla River frozen over.

Wednesday, December 26

Removed camp 4 miles above Whitmans old station Raised a small potatoe cash.

Thursday, December 27

Wind from the South. Some snow falling Wether moderated some Governor Stevens and 75 Nez Percies¹² encamped 4 miles above us on the River

Friday, December 28

This morning commenced using red willer for tobacco. Snow still remained 8 inches and freezing weather

Saturday, December 29

Remaining at the same camp.

Sunday, December 30

Remaining at the same camp.

Monday, December 31

Remaining at the same camp Still cold but a little moderated wind shifting first from one point to another

[The diarist had arrived at the end of the printed and dated portions of his book. Instead of turning for January 1st to the front of the book and changing the year to 1856, he contented himself with making occasional entries on pages headed "Memorandum." Not all these added entries are dated. They are given here as found in the book.]

Feby 10th A. D. 1856

Camped in Walla Walla Valley. Pleasant day.

Feby 26th

Snow fell 6 in deep

Feby 29th

fine weather

Mch 1st 1856

Walla Walla Camped on Mill Creek I went alone on a scout 8 miles from Camp at the foot of the Blue Mountains found an Indian Pony with its tail in the middle of a snowball as tall as the animals back Cut its tail off and liberated the animal. The ball of snow had increased in size untill the animal was unable to move it

Captured two Indian spies in the Walla Walla Valley. They were tried by Court martial and one was Hung. The other his

¹² This was the Governor's return from the treaty ground of the Blackfeet. He expressed warm gratitude for the work of the volunteers and the loyalty of his Nez Perce guard.

head was shaven close & turned loose The one having his hair Shorn off appeared to be more affected than the one hung.

Whipsawed the Lumber & built the skifts to cross Snake river after the Indians

Crossed Snake River after the Indians about the 1st of April was in the Palouse country after the Indians about one week. Then crossed the Columbia

April 1st, 1856

fine weather

[Folded into the little diary is a letter from A. J. Hembree to his brother Joel J. Hembree. A. J. Hembree was Captain of the Company E., known as the Yamhill County Company. Eight days after writing the letter the Captain was killed by the Yakima Indians. His body was taken home and buried on his Donation Land Claim near McMinnville, Oregon. For the sake of the chronological sequence it is best to interpolate the letter here before giving the last brief entry of the diary. The letter is reproduced with all its quaint spelling.]

Camp Yackamaw April 2nd. 1856

Dear Brother

I take this oppertunity to let you no what we are dooding in this God forcaken Country. We have bin living for the last 15 days on Horse Beef. Our Horses all very weak and maney of them given out and left we are laying by at presant to recrute our Horses and to git provissions. We have bin cross Snake River and all threw the Peluce country the Indians fled we have run them all out of their country we struck across from the Peluce to Collumbia following a large Boddy of Indians a distance of 80 miles they took good care to keep out of our way we followed till our horses got so much wore down that we had to give up the chase we then came came down Collumbia to the mouth of Yackamaw River 5 companies swam our Horses cross the Collumbia in order to go down the Yackamaw Country we will start as soon as we git supplyes and when we have gone threw that country we will have done all the we can taking every thing into consideration we have drove the Indians from their country Waman & Lafayette are both well and are

with me your step sone is also well give my love to famley in
Hast I remain Yours

A. J. Hembree.

[Without date the diarist made his final entry as follows:]

Into the Yacama country where Capt. A. J. Hembree was
killed by the Indians on the 10th day of April 1856 From this
place we marched to the Dalls & then to Portland & was Dis-
charged

WAMAN C. HEMBREE.