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The Ute Mode of War
in the Conflict of
1865–68

BY ALBERT WINKLER

The Ute Mode of War has been inadequately treated in studies of the Black Hawk War to date, and much of the large body of helpful reminiscences and letters relating to the war has been overlooked. This article will examine Ute warfare, relying on these little-used sources to better understand why and how the Utes operated as they did.¹ The Paiutes also fought in the war but are not part of this study. These groups were discernible from the Utes because they lived farther south, had far fewer horses, and were unable to strike from horseback with the numbers of the Utes.

The Utes campaigned very effectively in the war. Along with the Paiutes they inflicted heavy damage on the whites. During 1865–67 the Indians caused an estimated $1,500,000 in losses. By that time the

¹ Collections of value include the letters found in the Deseret News, Journal History of the LDS Church, LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City; Utah Militia Records, Utah State Archives, Salt Lake City; and Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824–81, Utah Superintendent, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Other materials of value are found in various repositories in Utah and Washington, D.C. Peter Gottfredson, Indian Depredations in Utah (Salt Lake City, 1919), presents some sources handily in print, but it should be used with caution because of inaccuracies.
whites had abandoned entire sections of southern and central Utah, suffered scores of casualties, and lost hundreds of cows and horses; and much of Utah had been terrorized for nearly three years. This was accomplished by a few score warriors facing an estimated 2,500 militiamen under arms during 1866 alone.²

Contemporaries found much to praise in the Ute mode of war. Following the fight at Diamond Fork up Spanish Fork Canyon on June 26, 1866, Josiah Robertson, a white participant, spoke of the Utes’ “superior discipline of over 1,000 years of practical training in the strictest, unvariable treacherous strategic discipline known to man.” John Wesley Powell and G. W. Ingalls visited the Utes after the war and said they were “well mounted, . . . a wild, daring people, and very skillful in border warfare.”³

The causes of the war influenced the manner in which it was fought. After the war Black Hawk spoke at a number of towns, trying to be reconciled with the whites. At Fillmore he outlined the grievances that had led to hostilities: “The white invaders had taken possession of the hunting and fishing grounds of his ancestors,” some of them were insolent, and there were incidents of “whipping and occasional killing . . . [of] his warriors.” He also said at least one local raid “was forced by the starvation of his people.”⁴ Of these reasons, hunger had the greatest military impact because the main object of most of the raids was to take cattle for food.

On this or another visit to Fillmore, Josiah Rogerson interviewed the chief, speaking in the “Kanosh and ‘PI-EED’ Indian language.” Black Hawk said:

He was a dreamer every night, and Visionary from his boyhood as he repeatedly told me, and that the spirits of his dead ancestors had come to him in his dreams for years, and told him to “Go-ahead-and fight-fight, kill-kill; Mormon cattle his cattle.”⁵

These revelations were certainly attractive to a proud and hungry man.

² Orson F. Whitney, History of Utah, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Cannon & Sons, 1892–1904), 2:209–10. The total militia force in Utah in 1867 was listed as 12,024, including 2,525 cavalry. Whitney cited a report made by Gov. Charles Durkee early in 1868. For the estimate of 2,500 see Gottfredson, Depredations, p. 200.
⁴ Josiah F. Gibbs, “Black Hawk’s Last Raid—1866,” Utah Historical Quarterly 4 (1931): 108. Gibbs was probably at the meeting.
⁵ Josiah Rogerson, “The Ending of the Black Hawk War in Utah,” LDS Church Archives.
Hunger among the Indians was brought about by the severe ecological damage of white settlement and the resulting competition for limited resources, as outlined by Brigham Young at Springville in July 1866:

[We] occupy the land where they used to hunt the rabbit . . . and the antelope were in these valleys in large herds when we first came here. When we came here, they could catch fish in great abundance in the lake in the season thereof, and live upon them pretty much through the summer. But now their game has gone, and they are left to starve.  

This situation was intensified by severe winter weather, as reported by O.H. Irish, superintendent of Indian Affairs for Utah, on April 1, 1865:

we have had a most inclement winter, five months of almost continous [sic] winter storms in the valleys and six in the mountains and no visible prospect of a change for the better yet. Indians that started out about the middle of February on a hunt to see if they could not support themselves were driven back by one of the most severe snow storms that ever occurred in this country and they have not been able to move off yet and have to be assisted here. The settlers have lost at least one half of their cattle and the Indians who were away from the immediate vicinity have lost nearly all of their horses.

On April 28 Irish reported daily storms during the first twenty days of the month and stated some Utes had begun hostilities by stealing cattle and killing whites in Sanpete Valley.  

Hunger persisted in 1866. The new superintendent of Indian Affairs, F. H. Head, reported that the Indians of the “Uinta” reservation had not been fed during the previous harsh winter. They were in a condition of “starvation and nakedness.” Tabby, “the head chief,” told Head he and “all his warriors were on their way to join the hostile Indians” when provisions arrived. Head concluded, “the Indians are extremely poor, and like other people, will steal before they will starve.”  

As expected, culture greatly influenced how the Utes made war. Marvin K. Opler described the Utes as “expedient” warriors who raided for food rather “than any desire . . . to win prestige by rash displays of valor; . . . there were no war honors institutionalized in the culture.” The Utes were careful to avoid casualties and were so “op-
posed to any foolhardy shedding of blood, that a war leader who proved his incompetence by severe loss of men risked a flogging at the hands of resentful warriors.” Opler simply concluded that “standing fights were avoided whenever possible.” These cultural traits, evident throughout the war, help to explain why the Utes were effective warriors who knew how to avoid heavy casualties.

John Wesley Powell visited the Utes during the winter of 1868–69 shortly after the war and at several other times. His observations give contemporary ethnological insights into how the Utes made war. He apparently visited the band led by Black Hawk and called them the “Shib-e-ritchies” on this occasion. Leadership in the Ute “tribes” was provided by an “Executive Chief, and a chief of the Council, and sometimes a War Chief though usually the War Chief and Executive Chief are one.” The executive chief or war chief directed the march of the group and usually organized the hunting parties. At times the group would split up to facilitate better hunting and would later reassemble. The executive chief or war chief had great influence but usually executed the will of the “important” men of the group called the council to which all matters of importance were submitted. After an informal discussion on questions such as movements and hunting, the chief of the council gave his opinion, which was considered the final decision on the matter. Of course the war chief was the man who led the Utes to war:

The War Chief is some man who has signalized himself in battle and often has no authority though revered for his bravery and prowess; but if he is also considered a man of good judgment he is expected to lead the braves in battle, to plan an attack or defense.

The control such leaders had over their men was largely based on “a profound sense of the duty of obedience to leaders and superiors.” This sense of duty was so profound it often allowed for a leader of “ability” to implement disciplinary action, including taking “life at his will.”

Precisely how such cultural traits affected the Utes in the Black Hawk War is uncertain. However, certain assumptions may be made. Black Hawk claimed leadership for the warring Utes when he surren-

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10 John Wesley Powell Papers, Anthropology Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
dered in August 1867, and he clearly acted as their spokesman following the conflict. He probably acted as a war chief for many of the warriors and exercised considerable influence until he was incapacitated by wounds or illness. Presumably, he consulted with the council which, no doubt, affected his decisions, but most of the leadership was likely provided by him. It may also be surmised that cultural factors kept the Indians relatively obedient to authority. It is further likely that when the Utes used such tactics as dividing and reassembling their forces in operations during the war they were simply employing a method commonly used in hunting.

Other cultural traits honed skills that were used in war. Men had shooting matches with bows and arrows. They shot at a target of woven willows thrown into the air, or a ring of peeled willow thrown uphill was shot at as it rolled down. Men also raced each other on foot and on horseback.  

The feats of the Utes can be understood only when their numbers are considered. For 1865 reports of Indian numbers are available only for the October 17 raid on Ephraim. One white observer gave the figure of 16 warriors, another 17. There is some indication Black Hawk visited the Elk Mountain Utes of eastern Utah in the winter of 1865–66 to gain allies or recruits for the war. This may account for their increased numbers in 1866.

11 Smith, Northern Utes, p. 232.
12 An unnamed informant of the town told Martin Kuhre that "sixteen came out of the canyon," cited in Ephraim's First One Hundred Years (Ephraim, Ut.: Centennial Book Committee, 1954), p. 15.
13 Four Utes killed Kuhre's parents. L. C. Larson was with a group attacked by "about thirteen" Indians south of the town, according to his account in Gottfredson, Indian Depredations, pp. 174–75.
14 F. H. Head to D. Cooley, June 21, 1866, Utah Superintendency. Chief Tabby told Head that Black Hawk had secured "recruits" from the Elk Mountain Utes and planned to attack the weaker settlements in Sanpete Valley.
The Ute Mode of War in the Conflict of 1865–68

Reports by whites in Salina regarding the April 13, 1866, attack enumerated “about 60” and “60 or 65” Indians, and the Deseret News claimed a total of 50 warriors were involved.\(^{14}\) When the militia garrison at Thistle Valley (Indianola) was struck on June 24, H. P. Kimball in Ephraim “received an express from Captn. Dewey in Thistle valley stating that . . . about 25 or thirty Indians attacked.” In his diary Albert Dewey noted that “28 mounted” warriors had struck but indicated another force was present.\(^{15}\) Two participants gave the number of warriors at the June 26 fight at Diamond Fork as “about 36” and “25 to 30.”\(^{16}\) Walter Barney told Lewis Barney he saw 15 to 20 Indians trying to steal cattle near Alma (modern Monroe)—probably in the spring of 1866, and Christian J. Larson said he was chased on August 13 by 15 or 20 Indians.\(^{17}\)

There were several large raids in 1867, but the Utes often attacked in small groups as well. In the March strike on Glenwood, H. Kearns said that “25 Indians” were observed but another group participated unseen by the whites. On June 1 William Henry Adams “saw and counted” 10 Indians in a raid near Fountain Green, while Reddick N. Allred claimed there were 12 Utes in this attack.\(^{18}\) Gunnison was hit on June 2 by “7 or 8 Indians.”\(^{19}\) By examining footprints, settlers figured that John Hay was killed on September 4 by three Indians near Fayette.\(^{20}\) On July 21 Joseph Fish of Parowan helped thwart a night attack by what he believed to be 30 Indians. The next day “saddle horses . . . about 50 in all” were captured but the warriors escaped.\(^{21}\) Assuming one rider per horse, about 50 Utes had participated in that raid.

In August 1867 Black Hawk surrendered at the Uintah Reservation. He came without his men but gave information on those still at

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\(^{14}\) Peter Rasmussen, Jr., “Life Sketch,” LDS Church Archives, said “about 60” were involved; Peter Rasmussen, Sr., as cited in ibid., said “60 or 65”; William McFadden to the Deseret News, printed on April 24, 1866, said “30 mounted Indians and about 20 on foot”; H. H. Kearns, Gunnison, to George A. Smith, April 15, 1866, Journal History, said “30 Indians” were in the attack.

\(^{15}\) H. P. Kimball to Gen. Wells, June 24, 1866, Utah Militia; Albert Dewey, “Journal,” June 24, 1866, LDS Archives.

\(^{16}\) John Robertson as cited in Brimhall, “Autobiography,” said 36; William Creer to Editor, Deseret News, July 1, 1866; Deseret News, July 12, 1866.

\(^{17}\) Lewis Barney, “Autobiography,” Utah State Historical Society Collections, Salt Lake City; Christian J. Larson, “Autobiography,” Special Collections, Brigham Young University Library, Provo. Barney recorded no date for the incident. The context of the account makes the year 1866 most likely.

\(^{18}\) H. Kearns to George A. Smith, March 30, 1867, Journal History; William Henry Adams, “Autobiography,” LDS Church Archives; Reddick N. Allred to Editor, Deseret News, June 12, 1867.

\(^{19}\) H. H. Kearns to Brother Smith, June 9, 1867, Journal History.

\(^{20}\) William B. Pace to D. H. Wells, September 5, 1867, Deseret News, September 11, 1867; Captain W. L. Binder to Major General Burton, September 7, 1867, Deseret News, September 18, 1867.

\(^{21}\) Joseph Fish Diaries, July 21 and 22, 1867, Special Collections, BYU.
large. His statement is a unique Indian account of the number of Utes in the war. According to Superintendent F. H. Head, Black Hawk said he had

28 lodges under his control; and that he . . . [was] assisted by 3 Elk Mountain chiefs who . . . each [had] 10 or 12 lodges with them. . . .

These Indians . . . [were] scattered along the settlements . . . from the north of Sanpete County to the southern settlements, watching opportunities to make raids.22

This roughly corresponds to the report of a federal official who counted 31 lodges of the “Seuv-a-ritos” in 1871.23 Assuming Black Hawk’s report was accurate for the war, there were a total of 58 to 64 warriors if there was one per lodge. Yet the number of combatants was probably higher because teenage boys still living with their fathers could have also participated. It is also possible that other Utes not under Black Hawk’s “control” participated.

The war wound down in 1868 as more Utes stopped raiding, but numbers are available for a few attacks: H. H. Kramer said 25 Indians took part in an April 4 raid, and C. Peterson reported 15 Indians in a July 11 foray on Ephraim.24 Although Black Hawk had surrendered without his men in 1867, by the next year at Fillmore he reportedly had a “dozen or a score of his cannibal Generals” with him.25

The number of warriors certainly fluctuated due to disaffections, enlistments, and casualties. Regarding the latter, contemporary reports of fatalities among warring Indians are unreliable because they were often based on doubtful data. Accounts of Indians lurching, jumping, or otherwise moving when fired upon prove little. Reports of seeing blood on the ground when following a war party or of capturing a Ute pony with blood on its saddle are also unhelpful. Horses and cattle bleed as do men, and sections of butchered animals leave gore on saddles too.26

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22 Deseret News, August 28, 1867.
23 Powell and Ingalls, Ute, Pai-Ute . . . , p. 3.
24 H. H. Kramer to B. Young, April 5, 1868, and C. Peterson to B. Young, July 12, 1868, Journal History.
25 Josiah Rogerson, Sr., “Ending of the Black Hawk War,” LDS Church Archives. The account states this occurred in 1869, but the internal evidence suggests 1868.
26 Eskild C. Petersen as cited in Gottfredson, Indian Depredations, p. 210–11, said that the trail of Utes after the engagement at Thistle Valley was “marked by the blood from their dead and wounded.” He never said how he knew it was not blood from wounded animals. Robertson as cited in Brimhall, “Autobiography,” said blood was found on one of the captured mounts after the fight at Diamond Fork. The whites supposed the horse had been used to transport wounded warriors, but Robertson did not mention why that was believed. His conclusion remains uncertain.
Not all of the Utes reported killed in the war were necessarily engaged in hostilities. In July 1865 a “dozen or more” corpses were found, including women and children, after a skirmish with the Indians. Soon after, several women and children under guard were killed in an apparent escape attempt, and eight or nine Utes were killed when they broke jail on April 12, 1866. Yet it is unclear that the men had taken part in the war, and the women and children were certainly noncombatants.27

Twice in 1866 Superintendent F. H. Head estimated the number of warring Utes killed in battle. He did not state how these tallies of 40 and nearly 50 were reached.28 Since there is no indication the reports were based on solid evidence, such as a count of corpses, they represent guesswork or wishful thinking. Even one of the few reports of actually seeing Ute bodies is vague. After the fight at Diamond Fork, John Robertson stated, “many . . . [Indians] have been found slightly buried on the battlefield.”29 But the sex, age, and when and how these Utes died is uncertain. What he meant by “many” is equally unclear.

The Powell and Ingalls report on the Utes of Utah in 1873, based on visits they made to the groups of that tribe, identified the band that had followed Black Hawk (Nu'-ints) as the “Seuv'-a-rits.” These Utes numbered 144 persons, including 48 males and 40 females aged ten years or older. Had many warriors been killed in the war a higher proportion of women to men would be expected. Also, among the seven Utah groups of Utes listed, totals of 174 males and 167 females ten or older are given, once again presenting no indication of heavy male casualties.30

The evidence indicates a relatively modest number of warriors in 1865 and 1868 when the war was in its beginning and concluding phases. Yet, even during 1866 and 1867 when the war was at its height, Indian forces probably numbered only 60 to 100 men. Due to strategic considerations, such as watching captured cattle or protecting women and children, this full force was seldom if ever used in a single operation. In any given attack the Utes used a few score warriors at most and often far fewer.

28 F.H. Head to D.N. Cooley, April 30 and September 20, 1866, Utah Superintendency.
29 John Robertson as cited in Brimhall, “Autobiography.”
30 Powell and Ingalls, Ute, Pai-Ute . . ., p. 12. According to Powell and Ingalls, the Seuv'-a-rits had recently suffered from “some disease” that had “greatly reduced” their numbers. However, it is doubtful if this scourge significantly changed the sex ratio of the survivors.
The casualties in the Black Hawk War were low on both sides, which was consistent with most Indian wars. The killing of whites by Indians was extensively reported in the Deseret News. From this and other sources a list of 46 whites believed to have been killed by Utes has been compiled. Of these victims 11 were women and children.31

Many Indians apparently remained tranquil during the war and bypassed opportunities to plunder and kill. Early in 1868 when Ute raiders were still operating, Miles Edgar Johnson traveled up Salt Creek Canyon to Sanpete Valley. He stated later, “all I could see was Indians everywhere.” They looked at him, “laughing and jeering,” but, being peaceful, left him unharmed.32

It is unknown how the Utes obtained their weapons, but they possessed various implements of war. The peaceful Indians Johnson observed at the top of the canyon were “armed with guns, tomahawks, and bows and arrows.” As distance weapons, firearms and bows and arrows had the greatest military value. The Utes had a diversity of rifles but most often used single-shot, muzzle-loading weapons that were reloaded after each shot.

The firearms of the Indians were often superior to those used by the whites. John Robertson reported that at Diamond Fork the Utes had a large number of “long range Enfield rifles,” better guns than the militia possessed. One warrior had a Henry rifle, a lever-action repeater. Christian Larsen said that this man, during the Circleville raid in November 1865, kept the whites at bay using this weapon. Andrew Christian Nielson stated that in the October 1865 raid on Ephraim, “We had very few guns and what we had were of inferior material” and “The Indians had better guns than we did.”33

The Indians also had enough ammunition to use it unnecessarily. During the June 1867 raid on Fountain Green, for example, skirmishers left behind engaged the whites for “two hours.” When the warriors realized they would fail to take all the livestock, they shot the animals.”34 In the night of July 21–22, 1867, a war party failed to steal stock near Parowan. Before leaving, “several of them got favorable po-

31 Gottfredson, Indian Depredations, Supplement, pp. 12–13. This is found in the 1969 edition. Also listed are five names of whites killed by Paiutes.
32 Miles Edgar Johnson, “Autobiography,” Special Collections, BYU.
34 R. N. Allred to Editor, Deseret News, June 12 and 19, 1867; and H. B. Kearnes to Brother Smith, June 9, 1867, Journal History. The quote is from Allred’s letter.
sitions at the mouth of the canyon and kept up a constant fire all the latter part of the night."35 It is unlikely the Utes would have squandered their ammunition had they none to spare.

The warriors could produce heavy rates of fire relative to their weapons. On September 21, 1865, men of the Sanpete militia were ambushed near Red Lake. The Indians overshot their enemies, but the rounds hit the lake behind them so rapidly the water seemed to "boil."36 On July 22, 1867, some men of Parowan were also ambushed. The warriors fired from only "40 yards" away so fast the shots seemed to come "like hail."37 Fire coordination by the Utes was often loose by contemporary standards. When the Indians opened fire to start an engagement, this fusillade was often described as a "volley" or a "crash," but there is little indication that fire was synchronized afterwards.38

The bows used by the warriors were powerful, lethal, and could be fired rapidly. Peter Gottfredson found an ox killed by Indian arrows that had penetrated its side to half of the shaft. Ute arrows were roughly 22 to 24 inches long. Seventeen-year-old Elizabeth Petersen was killed by an arrow near Ephraim on October 17, 1865. The tip went completely through her chest, protruding from the opposite side.39 The bow’s limitations included a restricted range and variable accuracy and effectiveness. Additionally, the relatively silent bow and arrow gave little psychological boost to the user—compared to the loud report of rifles—since noisy weapons tend to intensify emotions in battle. In the Salina raid of April 13, 1866, Emil Nielsen, a boy of eleven, was hit in the right arm and left side by arrows. He fell and his attacker, a "little Indian boy," tried to kill him by shooting arrows into his head. Emil was hit three times, but no shot penetrated his skull. A more effective use of arrows would have killed him.40

Near Ephraim on October 17, 1865, Yenewood (Jake Arrapeen) chased three whites fleeing in a wagon. Shooting at close range, he "emptied his pistol . . . and also shot several arrows . . . none of which took effect" until a swale in the road slowed the wagon. Only then did

35 Fish Diaries, July 21, 1867.
36 Gottfredson, Indian Depredations, p. 168.
37 Fish Diaries, July 22, 1867.
38 See N. O. Anderson as cited in Gottfredson, Indian Depredations, p. 171, for "volley" being used.
39 Gottfredson, Indian Depredations, p. 148; Martin Kuhre interviews as cited in Ephraim’s First One Hundred Years, p. 15. For information on the length of arrows see Smith, Ethnology, p. 109.
40 Emil Nielsen as cited in Gottfredson, Indian Depredations, p. 186; and H. H. Kearnes to George Albert Smith, April 15, 1866, Journal History. The quote is from Kearnes.
an arrow wound Charles Whitlock. Miles Edgar Johnson said Indians “crawled in and occupied the grove” by his house near Moroni at night in July 1865. When the dog made a “fuss” the intruders tried to kill it. Johnson heard the thump of arrows hitting the cabin and later “found the back of our house all feathered out with Indian arrows which were shot at our dog.” All of them missed.41

Stealing cattle was the main purpose of nearly all the attacks, and the warriors showed they were often desperate for food. Black Hawk stated the purpose of the October 17, 1865, raid on Ephraim to Soren

A. Sorensen. Three whites had been killed nearby, but Black Hawk befriended Sorensen because his mother “would frequently invite him to eat with us, and would give him almost anything he asked for.” Black Hawk told Sorensen the object of the raid was “to get some cattle.” After the fight at Diamond Fork John Robertson noted the Indians “had killed a beef and bivouacked with some of it and hung the rest out to dry” even though they were being pursued by the militia. In the night of April 21, 1866, Indians stole some sheep near Monroe but were so hungry they butchered one before leaving.

Reconnaissance probably provided the most information on the white settlements. Fritz Johnson saw “something moving . . . like a badger crawling across a gully.” He “waited and there was another creature crawling in the same direction as the other one had disappeared to.” “Now I knew they were Indians,” he reported, and they were “evidently scouting.”

Early in the war Utes may have received information from informers. The fear of this and the possibility of seemingly friendly Indians actually being hostile led a few whites to take harsh measures against them, including incarceration and killing. As a result, many Indians fled the area of military activities. On May 5, 1867, Daniel H. Wells reported, “there are no Indians to be seen in Sanpete and Juab Valleys.” This made it impossible for spies to send information to the hostile Indians at that point in the war.

The raiders made effective use of terrain to hide their movements and to discourage pursuit. Andrew Madsen reported that the Indians after “their attacks . . . were repeatedly . . . retreating to the mountains.” The high country of central Utah was well known to the Utes. According to Madsen,

numerous Pow-Wows were held by the various Indian Tribes and their camp fires could be seen upon the mountain sides, where they engaged in singing and dancing. At times their hideous sounds could be heard in the valleys below.

With the availability of water a prime consideration in locating white settlements, many communities were situated at the mouth of a

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42 N. O. Anderson as cited in Gottfredson, Indian Depredations, p. 172. The first quote is directly from Sorensen in Anderson’s account. The second is Anderson’s paraphrasing of Sorensen’s report.
46 Andrew Madsen, “History and Genealogy,” Special Collections, University of Utah.
canyon with a relatively large stream. This made them vulnerable to surprise attacks from the high ground often found nearby. Despite extensive efforts that included manned observation points, reconnaissance, and the interrogation of available Indians, the whites were never forewarned of a raid.47

The April 13, 1866, attack on Salina is an example of a large raid. Advancing with about 50 or 60 warriors, one group on foot, the other mounted, the Utes came out of the hills east of town. The men on horseback rode directly toward the settlement and then swept around it. This feint delayed action by the whites because they feared for the town’s safety. Without effective opposition, the renegades rounded up the livestock and hit any convenient target outside the community. They killed a man named Johnson from Fairview and young Chris Nielsen, whose brother, Emil, was wounded. The warriors intercepted three wagons, took their teams, and plundered them, making as much use of their contents as time allowed:

The Indians helped themselves to the contents of the wagons, feasted on the rations of the teamsters, strewed the wheat on the ground, allowing their horses to eat what they wanted, and trampled the remains under their feet: they also stripped the covers from the wagons.48

The whites were unable to rally fast enough to prevent the initial seizing of cattle, but the militia did resist the taking of stock up Salina Canyon. The resulting skirmish lasted for hours. The whites were hampered in fighting because “amunition [sic] was scarce.” The Utes used “8 or 10” men to drive off the stock while their remaining number kept the whites at bay. One militiaman was shot through the ankle and one horse of a white was killed.

Perhaps to demoralize or intimidate the whites, the Utes taunted them. “While others made light of the people White Horse Chief with others stood on a hill and called to us to come and get our cows as the children would soon cry for milk.” This challenge attracted some inconsequential fire on the “Chief,” and the renegades made good their escape with the cattle.49 The Utes used skirmishes and ambushes to

47 For the efforts by Ephraim see Ephraim’s First One Hundred Years, pp. 12–13. But the town was raided at least three times in the war; see ibid, pp. 13–15, and Gottfredson, Indian Depredations, pp. 169–76, 220, 287–88.
48 H. H. Kearnes to George A. Smith, April 15, 1866, Journal History.
49 Peter Rasmussen, Jr., “Life Sketch,” LDS Church Archives; H. H. Kearnes to George A. Smith, April 15, 1866, in the Journal History and Deseret News, April 24, 1866; and Emil Nielsen as cited in Gottfredson, Indian Depredations, pp. 185–86.
deter effective pursuit. At times a lone warrior could keep the whites at bay. At Gravelly Ford on June 11, 1866, “a solitary Indian” held off a group of

white cavalrymen, fully fifty strong, . . . [by] riding in an oblong circle, and firing as he reached the point nearest the enemy. [He] reloaded his rifle while on the home stretch and returning was ready for another shot.50

At times the Indians took great care in setting ambushes. In 1867 the whites of Glenwood who were building a fort outside the town came in the mornings to work on it. The Indians noticed this routine and occupied the edifice in the night of March 29. They “built breastworks of rocks in such places as they could not be readily observed” on high ground on the route between Glenwood and the fort. This was the only direct route because of

an extensive [sic] swamp which closes up to the mountains, for a considerable distance before crossing this point . . . .Thus fortified they were prepared at the fort, to receive with the instruments of death the unsuspecting workmen as they should come to resume their labors on that structure; and when once there, their retreat was completely cut off by the fortified ambuscade on the point.

But this clever trap was never closed because the Utes revealed their position on March 30 by firing on two men checking on stock.51

An effective ambush was sprung on April 12, 1865, when 84 whites pursued a war party up Salina Canyon. When they passed a narrow point a shot rang out, probably as a signal to start firing, and a fusillade followed. The militia was caught in a crossfire by the Utes who shot from above, hidden behind rocks, trees, and bushes. Andrew Madsen described their heavy rate of fire as “volley after volley.” Some warriors tried to secure the only avenue of escape but were foiled by a few whites who had fled the ambush and were in position to keep them from closing the trap.

An Indian on horseback was seen swinging his hands, probably to get his men to advance. Some whites fired on him, and he fell from his mount. In the following lull the militia retreated to a ridge down the canyon to “flank” the Indians. This move failed to turn the tide, and the whites left the scene suffering two killed and two wounded.

51 H. H. Kearnes to George A. Smith, March 30, 1867, Journal History.
The ambush was so well laid that one white survivor deemed their escape "providential" and stated that there could have been a "massacre equal to that of General Custer's."\(^{52}\)

The achievement was noteworthy. The only reports citing numbers of Indian raiders for the year of 1865 give the figures of 16 or 17. If this was the total force at the ambush, the Utes were outnumbered about five to one. This makes the rout of the whites and the threat of their annihilation most impressive feats.

An exception to the pattern of raiding communities to take cattle was the attack on the militia garrison at Thistle Valley (modern Indianola) on June 24, 1866. Militia posts had been established at several locations to provide rapid support in emergencies, and the position at Thistle Valley was designed to protect communications between Sanpete and Utah valleys. The garrison presented a threat to Indian movements in the area and was a promising target for attack. Charles Brown, out in the open when the Indians struck, was killed.\(^{53}\) While some warriors stole the militia's horse herd, a group of 28 kept the garrison at bay by rushing the camp, firing their rifles as they came. The whites rallied and stopped the Utes with a volley.

Taking the horses immobilized the whites. To leave the camp as infantry, outnumbered and unsupported, was to invite disaster. The militia sent two men for help to Mount Pleasant about nineteen miles away and tried to maintain their position until relief came. At first the Utes stayed in the trees, making the whites think they had left, but later renewed their attacks.

The Utes rode around the encampment, shooting from under their mounts using the bodies of the horses for protection, while others crawled towards the whites’ position. They hid in the grass and tried to pick off members of the militia, but their effectiveness was reduced by the fire directed at them. Between Indian forays the whites fortified their camp. They tried to create a solid perimeter by digging trenches and dropping the wagon wheels into them, thus lowering the vehicles. The remaining six horses were tied in the gaps. Each of these animals was wounded in the fight.

The ordeal lasted up to nine hours before aid from Mount Pleas-

\(^{52}\) Joshua W. Sylvester as cited in Gottfredson, *Indian Depredations*, pp. 133-35, 136-37; Austin Kearns as cited in ibid., pp. 135-36; and Madsen, "Genealogy and History." The quotes not credited to Madsen are by Sylvester.

\(^{53}\) This Charles Brown was not the Charles Brown who was present on May 26, 1865, in Thistle Valley when all six members of the Given family were killed by Indians. See Brown as cited in Gottfredson, *Indian Depredations*, pp. 141-43.
ant and Fairview arrived near dusk. The Utes withdrew after a brief attempt to turn back the relieving party. The besieged whites, low on ammunition, feared the Indians would get the upper hand after dark. The next morning the militia followed the trail of the renegades to Soldier Summit where "the Indians, resorted to their old tactics of separation and scattering in all directions and further chase had to be abandoned."

The fight at Thistle Valley was another close call for the whites in which a desperate situation nearly turned into a disaster. After immobilizing the militia by taking the horse herd, the Indians were free to engage and disengage as they desired. Their forays had induced the whites to use up their ammunition, leaving the Utes in a favorable position to destroy the garrison after dark. Moreover, the stealing of horses proved a double boon to the Utes by giving them more mounts and an additional source of food.

The whites at Thistle Valley justifiably feared the Utes after dark,


55 Smith, Ethnology, p. 32.
because they were skillful in moving and in fighting at night. The militia often posted nocturnal guards to warn of Indian movements. At “about two o’clock in the morning,” the night after the fight at Thistle Valley, Edwin Woolley, Jr., was on “picket guard” and “heard the clatter of horses hoofs on the trail” as the Utes passed. Fritz Leonard Johnson related the fear and confusion of being stationed in the darkness. Once he “panicked” when he saw an object. He “was sure it was an Indian crawling on all fours.” He fired but was too frightened to go out and examine it. In daylight he learned he had shot a badger.  

An ambush on April 22, 1866, showed how skillfully the Indians used the darkness. Aided by a bright moon 21 white men pursued a war party and found some stolen cattle near the fort of Marysvale. They decided to enter the town before moving against the Indians. The Utes, foreseeing this, hid in rabbit brush along the road. Then they took advantage of the psychological moment when the whites, feeling relieved to be entering the town, let down their guard. The warriors fired into their backs when they were about twenty-five yards from the fort. Two men were killed and two were wounded, while all the Indians escaped.  

But night operations could be thwarted. In the evening of July 21, 1867, Joseph Fish of Parowan saw Indians seize some cattle. Bravely, Fish rode into the group, learning their number (“about thirty”) and the direction they were heading. He left, gathered “eleven of the boys,” and intercepted the raiders at the mouth of Little Creek Canyon. The whites charged the herd full speed, firing whenever we could hear or see anyone. We gave a terrific yell which stampeded the herd, and the Indians took to the hills as quickly as possible without hardly stopping to return our fire.  

The warriors tried again that night to steal cattle, but the militia was reinforced and drove off the Utes once more.  

Such aggressive action by the whites often succeeded in foiling the Indians late in the war by forcing the Utes to leave the stock and flee. Yet the Utes’ resourcefulness allowed them to escape with few ca-

57 Gottfredson, Indian Depredations, pp. 193-95. The men who were killed were Albert Lewis and Christian Christensen.  
58 Fish Diaries, July 21, 1867.
The Ute Mode of War in the Conflict of 1865–68

The casualties. When 12 warriors seized cattle near Fountain Green on June 3, 1867, they were pursued by 45 militiamen. The raiders delayed these whites until militia reinforcements arrived. Then,

Finding themselves hard pressed they killed and wounded all the cattle, mounted fresh animals, driving only horses before them, and reached the canon [sic] before Col. Ivie came up . . . Ivie pursued the Indians about three miles into the mountains, finding that their jaded horses were unable to compete with the fresh horses the Indians had just mounted, they gave up the chase.59

The war’s length and cost led to excesses by both sides. The whites killed noncombatants, including women and children, on several occasions as did the Utes.60 But corpse mutilation was also a factor in how the Indians waged war. The warriors occasionally took the scalps of their victims and in other ways defaced their bodies. This was probably done for cultural reasons. Many Indians believed that damage to the remains of their enemies meant that these foes would be unable to use a complete body against them in the afterlife.

Of the 46 whites killed by Utes only a few were mutilated. After the ambush at Salina Canyon on April 12, 1865, the corpse of William Kearnes was found leaning against a rock with willows woven around it, presumably to keep wolves away. Kearnes was probably recognized as a former friend by the Utes and so his remains were protected. The body of Jens Sorensen found nearby was “horribly mutilated,” but it is uncertain whether the damage was done by animals or Indians.61

When Soren N. Jespersen was killed on October 17, 1865, near Ephraim, N. O. Anderson said, “it appeared that he had been fearfully tortured while yet alive.” Charles Whitlock (as corrected by Ezra Shoemaker) reported the condition of Jespersen’s body: “His hands and feet were chopped off and also the upper part of his head.”62 After the engagement at Diamond Fork on June 26, 1866, the body of John Edmundson was found. The Indians had “scalped him and also cut off one hand.”63 The most extensive butchery was inflicted on the corpses of three whites killed near Glenwood on March 21,

59 R. N. Allred to Editor, Deseret News, June 12, 1867; Deseret News, June 19, 1867.
60 For a discussion of such instances in the early part of the war see Winkler, “Circleville,” pp. 4–21.
61 Gottfredson, Indian Depredations, p. 137.
62 N. O. Anderson as cited in Gottfredson, Indian Depredations, p. 170; and Charles Whitlock corrected by Ezra Shoemaker as cited in ibid., p. 173.
63 Robertson as cited in Brimhall, “Autobiography.” See also William Greer to George A. Smith March 16, 1866, Journal History.
1867. "They were cut up and mangled in a most brutal manner."64

The vacating of communities by the whites has been considered a great Indian achievement. At least nine abandoned settlements were in the areas of Ute operations.65 These towns, maintained during the first year of the war, probably could have been preserved since the Utes were not waging a war in which taking and holding land played a major role. The decision to evacuate was part of an effort to consolidate forces and make defense more efficient. Although the Indians often fired on towns during attacks as a diversion, which certainly caused the whites to fear for their safety, no town was ever besieged.

The abandoned areas were of little immediate value to the Indians in controlling central Utah. In the short term, abandonment deprived the raiders of resources because the removal of stock eliminated a potential food source for the Utes. Moreover, the return of game animals to these ecologically damaged areas would have taken years. The remaining towns were consolidated, and each had a militia unit of at least 150 men. The decision to abandon small, exposed burgs early in the summer of 1866 was a master stroke by white officials and may be considered the turning point in the war.

The Utes were masters of hit-and-run tactics. Using terrain, timing, and their small numbers effectively, they always struck unforeseen and, early in the war, raided white communities almost at will. When pursued they kept their adversaries at bay through effective delaying actions and avoided heavy casualties by disengaging when necessary. But limited manpower kept the Utes from pressing their advantages. Most of the raids followed a similar pattern; however, the Indians were innovative and varied their tactics as needed to meet differing challenges from the whites. The warriors showed skill in harassing their adversaries and remained at large through three campaigning seasons. Nevertheless, a lengthy war of attrition was a hopeless undertaking. Inevitably, the Utes themselves were worn down and relinquished uncontested control of their ancestral lands to the whites.

64 H. H. Kearnes to George A. Smith, March 30, 1867, Journal History: "There was one man, his name was James P. Peterson, aged 30 years, and his wife Caroline A. Peterson aged 27 years, also, a girl named Mary Smith aged 16 years. The man had been shot and considerably mutilated, the woman was scalped and cut up in a most brutal manner, a portion of the lower part of her body was cut out and laid upon her face, the girl was also scalped and badly cut up, with a stick ran up about ten inches into her privates."

65 Fountain Green, Fairview, Moroni, Salina, Richfield, Glenwood, Monroe, Marys Dale, and Circleville. If the small hamlets like the "Wing" settlement near modern Birdseye were included the number would increase.